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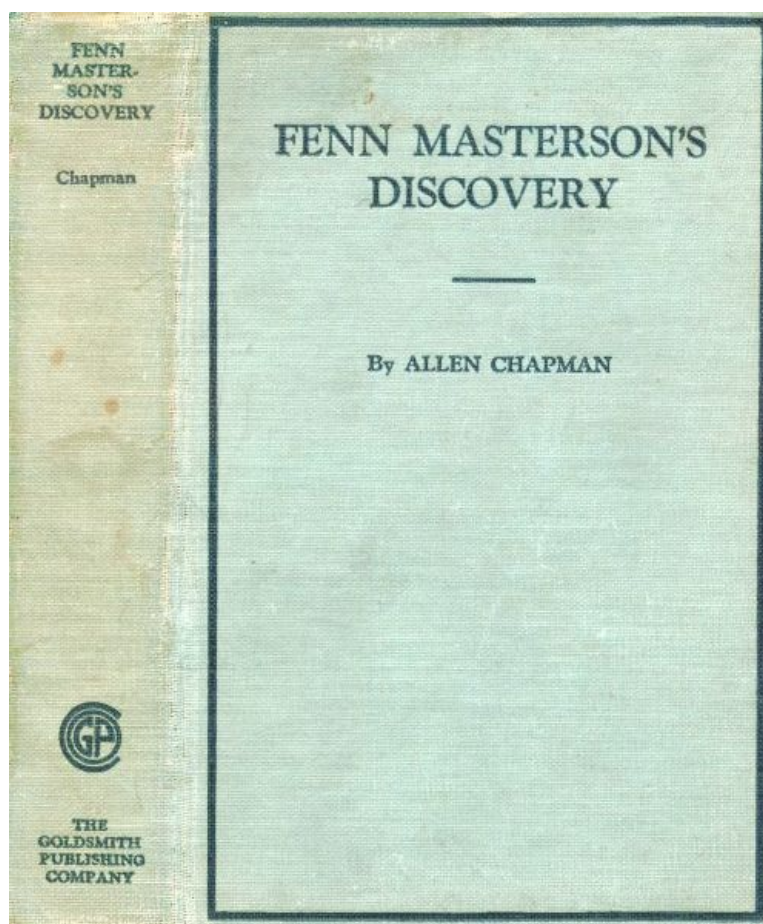
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FENN MASTERSON'S DISCOVERY

Or

The Darewell Chums
on a Cruise

BY

ALLEN CHAPMAN

AUTHOR OF "BART STIRLING'S ROAD TO SUCCESS," "WORKING
HARD TO WIN," "BOUND TO SUCCEED," "THE YOUNG
STOREKEEPER," "NAT BORDEN'S FIND," ETC.



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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. AN AUTOMOBILE ACCIDENT	1
II. A MYSTERIOUS CAVE	11
III. SAVING THE AUTO	22
IV. PLANNING A CRUISE	30
V. CAPTAIN WIGGS'S PROPOSAL	39
VI. IN PERIL	45
VII. AN ELEVATOR BLAZE	52
VIII. FENN HEARS SOMETHING	61
IX. OFF AGAIN	71
X. THE CHASE	78
XI. ON LAKE HURON	85
XII. NED GETS A FISH	92
XIII. CAUGHT IN THE LOCK	99
XIV. MYSTERIOUS STRANGERS	108
XV. A QUEER FIND	115
XVI. FIRE ON BOARD	123
XVII. A STRANGE VISION	133
XVIII. AN EXPLORING PARTY	140
XIX. FENN BECOMES ILL	147
XX. OUT ON A HUNT	155
XXI. THE CHINESE BUTTON	162
XXII. FENN'S MISHAP	171
XXIII. THE SEARCH	180
XXIV. FENN IS CAPTURED	188
XXV. AN UNEXPECTED MEETING	194
XXVI. FENN'S ODD DISCOVERY	202
XXVII. A TIMELY RESCUE	213
XXVIII. RUTH TELLS HER SECRET	220
XXIX. A BAFFLING SEARCH	230
XXX. THE DISCOVERY—CONCLUSION	239

FENN MASTERSON'S
DISCOVERY

CHAPTER I

AN AUTOMOBILE ACCIDENT

"Hello!" exclaimed Fenn Masterson, as he opened the front door of his home, in response to a ring, and admitted his chum, Bart Keene. "Glad to see you, Bart. Come on in."

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Bart, throwing a strap full of books into a corner of the hall, as if he cared very little for the volumes. "Why weren't you at school to-day, Stumpy?"

"Oh, I was a little hoarse this morning—"

"What are you now; a mule?" inquired Bart.

"No—Oh, hang it, you know what I mean—"

"Sure!" interrupted Bart. "You slept in a stable last night, and, when you woke up you were a little horse. I know."

"I had a little cold this morning," went on Fenn. "Mother made me stay home. Thought I was going into consumption, I guess. I'm all right now." [2]

"Gee, I wish my mother had made me stay home to-day," proceeded Bart. "The algebra lesson was fierce. We all slumped."

"What! You don't mean to say the professor floored Frank Roscoe?" and Fenn looked much surprised.

"Yes, and Ned Wilding, too. I tell you, Stumpy, it was a good thing you slept in that barn and became a little horse, or you'd have gone down to defeat on that problem about multiplying sixteen x, y, z's by the square root of the difference between—"

"Pooh! That's easy," declared Fenn. "I remember it."

"Easy? Here, let's see you do it!" exclaimed Bart, and he grabbed the bundle of books and proceeded to take out the algebra.

"Never mind—there's no hurry about it. I'll show you later," spoke Fenn. "Besides, I've got to take my cough medicine now. Come on up to my room."

"Cough medicine?" repeated Bart, with a reproachful look at his chum.

"Yes, cough medicine," answered Stumpy, seeing that his visitor rather doubted him. "Mom made me take it. It's awful nasty stuff, full of tar and horehound and pine—ugh! I hate it." [3]

"Moral, don't try to fool your mother and pretend you have a sore throat, when you don't want to go to school for an algebra exam.," said Bart solemnly.

"No, honest, I did have a sore throat this morning," declared Fenn. "It's all better now. I guess I don't have to take that medicine. But come on up to my room. I've just got a fine collection of minerals."

"Minerals?"

"Yes, I'm going to collect them now. I sent for a small case, of various kinds, and I'm going to add to it. There are lots of minerals in this section of the state."

"Let's see, the last thing you were collecting was Indian arrow heads," said Bart, in musing tones; "before that it was postage stamps, and before that, postmarks. Then, once, I remember, it was jackknives, and before that—"

"Oh, let up!" begged Fenn. "Are any of the other fellows coming over?"

"Before that it was butterflies," went on Bart relentlessly. "I guess your mineral collecting craze will last about as long as any of the others, Stumpy." [4]

"Well, all the others were too much trouble," declared Fenn, trying to justify himself. "It's no fun to be sticking stamps and postmarks in a book, and I had to chase all over the country after butterflies."

"To say nothing of getting on bad terms with half the boys in the school for trading them poor knives for good ones, when you had that craze," remarked Bart.

"Oh, I intend to make a fine collection of minerals," declared Fenn. "I'll not get tired of that. You see minerals are easy to get. All you have to do is to pick up stones as you walk along. You put them in your pockets and, when you get home, you look in the catalog, see what kind they are, so as to label 'em, and put 'em in one of the little numbered squares of the cabinet. Why, collecting minerals is fun. Besides, it's valuable information. I might discover—"

"Sure, of course. Oh, yes—you might discover a gold mine or a hole filled with diamonds!" interrupted Bart. "Oh, Stumpy, I'm afraid you're a hopeless case."

"Wait until you see my minerals," asserted the stout youth, as he led the way up to his room. "When are the other fellows coming over?"

[5]

"Oh, Ned'll be along right away. Frank Roscoe said he had to go on an errand for his father. They both are anxious to see what sort of a game you worked so's to stay home to-day. They might want to try it themselves."

The two chums were soon busy inspecting the case of stones which Fenn had bought. There were small samples of ore, spar, crystals and various queer rocks.

"There's a piece of stone I found out near the river," said Fenn, pointing to a fragment of a bright red color. "Maybe it's a new kind of ruby. I'm going to show it to a jeweler."

"It's red glass!" declared Bart.

"It is not!"

"I tell you it is! Look, it's a piece of a bottle. You can see where it curved for the bottom," and he pointed it out to Fenn.

"I guess you're right," admitted the collector, as he tossed the red object away. "Never mind, I'll get some good specimens yet. Hello, there's Ned's whistle," and he looked out of the window, which, as it was late in June, was wide open. "Come on up, Ned!" he called, "Bart's here!"

"Coming!" cried Ned. "Lower the drawbridge and raise the portcullis! Lord Mount Saint Dennis Morency Caldwell de Nois approaches!"

[6]

"Yes, I guess it is 'De Noise' all right," murmured Bart. "Since he's been studying French history he's been getting off such nonsense as that every chance he has."

"Greeting, fair and noble sirs!" cried Ned Wilding, reaching the door of Fenn's room, for, like the other chums, he had the run of the house, "greeting, most noble lords of the high justice, the middle and the low. I give thee greeting!"

"And I give thee that!" interrupted Bart, putting out his foot, and, with a sly motion, upsetting Ned as he was making a low, exaggerated bow.

"First down! Ten yards to gain!" he cried good-naturedly, as he arose, for Ned was a lively, quick-witted youth, full of fun, and never serious for more than a minute at a time.

"I hope that jarred some of the foolishness out of you," observed Bart.

Suddenly a head was poked in the open window, and a voice exclaimed:

"Gentlemen, allow me to introduce myself. I am the original and only genuine second-story burglar!"

"Frank Roscoe!" exclaimed Fenn. "How did you get there?"

"Climbed up over the porch," replied the newcomer. "I rang the bell until I was tired, and nobody answered."

[7]

"That's so, I forgot. Mother's out this afternoon and there's no one down stairs. But why didn't you do as Ned did, walk in? The door's not locked. I didn't hear you ring."

"I prefer this method of stealing into houses," replied Frank, a tall dark youth, as he bounded from the window sill into the room. "It's more romantic. Besides I needed exercise, and it was easy climbing up the porch pillar."

"Don't give us any romance," begged Bart.

"No, don't," advised Ned, rubbing his thigh where he had come down rather heavily. "The days of romance are dead."

"That's not the only thing that's dead in this town," put in Fenn. "Things are getting rather dull. We need some excitement to keep us awake."

The two newcomers soon learned the reason for Fenn's absence from school that day. They examined his cabinet of minerals and made more or less sarcastic comments about his new fad.

"Yes," went on Bart, after a pause. "I wish we could have some fun, as we did when we were off camping in the woods, last summer."

"And rescued Frank's father from that sanitarium," put in Ned.

[8]

"Well, we had a pretty lively time when you slipped off to New York, and the lodging-house keeper held you a prisoner, Ned," said Bart. "You had some romance then."

"Not the right kind," declared Ned. "I'd like some more fun such as we had when the King of Papricka tried to fool us."

"Sure! When we got carried away in the captive balloon," added Frank. "That was a time!"

"And do you remember when we fastened the ladder on the donkey's back, the night we were going to rescue Frank's father," suggested Fenn? "How he ran away in the woods?"

"Yes, and how it rained," put in Ned. "Gee, that was fierce!"

"But we had a good time," remarked Frank. "Father can never forget how much you boys did for him."

"It wasn't anything!" exclaimed Ned. "Say, do you remember when they thought we blew up the school with dynamite?"

"Do I? I should guess yes," replied Ned.

"Yes, and how Ned thought he was going to become a millionaire with that investment which made him a fugitive!" spoke Bart. "Oh, yes, we had good times then. But we don't seem to be having them any more. It's nothing but measly old algebra exams. that no fellow can pass. I wish —"

[9]

But what Bart wished he never told, for, at that instant there came from the street outside a series of sharp explosions, that sounded like a Gatling gun in full operation.

"What's that?" cried Fenn.

"It's an automobile!" replied Frank, who was nearest the window. "It's running away, too, from the looks of it. They've opened the muffler and are trying to reverse I guess! Something's wrong! There's going to be an accident!"

The other boys crowded up back of Frank to see what was going on. The street in front of Fenn's house sloped sharply down to a cliff at the end of the thoroughfare. Across the highway was a stout fence, designed to prevent any one from driving over the cliff, which was quite high. Toward this fence a big touring car, which, as the boys could see, contained an elderly gentleman and a young lady, was rushing at furious speed.

"Stop! Stop!" cried Fenn in desperation, thinking the man in the car did not know or realize his danger. "The street ends at the fence! You'll go over the cliff!"

[10]

As the auto whizzed past the house the girl in it gave one glance at Fenn. The youth thought her the most beautiful person he had ever seen, though there was a look of terror in her eyes.

"He can't stop!" shouted Bart. "Something's wrong with the machine!"

Indeed this seemed to be true, for the man at the steering wheel was frantically pulling on various levers and stamping, with his feet, on some pedals in front of him.

The young woman in the car half arose in her seat. The man, holding the wheel with one hand, held her back with the other. She gave a startled cry and, a moment later the auto had crashed through the fence, as though it was made of paper, and the front wheels disappeared over the edge of the cliff.

"Come on!" cried Bart. "We must go to their help!"

"I'm afraid they're dead," spoke Frank solemnly, as he quickly followed his chums from Fenn's house.

CHAPTER II

[11]

A MYSTERIOUS CAVE

Running at top speed the four boys hastened down the street toward where the automobile accident had occurred. Several other persons followed them.

"They've gone over the cliff!" cried Fenn.

"No, the rear wheels are caught on the edge!" declared Ned. "You can just see the back part of the car!"

"But the man and young lady must be pitched out! It hangs nearly straight up and down!" said Frank.

"I wonder if they could possibly be alive?" asked Fenn, as he hurried along, a little in the rear of the others, for, because of his stoutness, he was not a good runner. "I'll never forget how she looked up to me, as if she wanted me to save her."

By this time the chums had reached the broken fence that had proved so ineffectual a barrier to the cliff. They leaped over the shattered boards, accompanied by a number of men and boys.

"Gee! They're goners!" exclaimed a boy named Sandy Merton, peering over the edge of the cliff. "It's a hundred feet to the bottom!"

[12]

"I wonder what caught the auto?" said Bart. "Why didn't it fall?"

"A wire caught it," answered Fenn. "Look," and he showed his chums where several heavy strands of wire, which had been strung on the fence to further brace it, had become entangled in

the wheels of the auto as they crashed through. The wire was twisted around some posts and, with the broken boards from the barrier, had served to hold the car from going over the cliff. There it hung, by the rear wheels only, a most precarious position, for, every moment, it was in danger of toppling over.

"But where are the people?" asked Frank, as he peered over the edge of the cliff. "I can't see them?"

"They're all in pieces," declared a gloomy looking man. "They're broken to bits from the fall."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Bart. "Here, let me have a look!"

Lying flat on his face he peered over the edge of the precipice. Then he uttered a cry.

"I can see them!" he shouted. "They've landed on the ledge, not ten feet down. They're under some bushes!"

[13]

"Get some ropes, quick!" cried Fenn. "We'll haul 'em up before the auto falls on 'em!"

"No danger of that," declared Bart. "They're off to one side. I'm afraid they're badly hurt, though."

"Somebody go for a doctor!" urged Fenn.

"I will," volunteered Jim Nelson, who had the reputation of being the laziest boy in the town of Darewell. Perhaps he was afraid of being asked to help haul the auto back from the perilous position.

"Telephone for 'em!" called Frank, knowing Jim's usual slowness, and realizing that the lazy youth would welcome this method of summoning the medical men.

"Tell 'em to come to my house," supplemented Fenn. "We will carry the man and girl there."

"Good idea," commented Frank. "You've got more room than any of these houses near here," for, in the immediate vicinity of the cliff there were only small cottages, and some of them were unoccupied.

"But how are we going to get 'em up?" asked Fenn.

By this time a large crowd had gathered. Some had brought ropes, and there were all sorts of suggestions as to how the rescue should be effected.

[14]

"I'll get them; or at least I'll go down and put a rope around them, so they can be hauled up," suddenly declared Frank. "I know how to reach that ledge. There's not much danger. Where's a rope?"

Several were soon produced, some neighboring clothes lines being confiscated. It seemed that all the crowd needed was some one to give orders. In a few minutes, with a rope tied around his waist Frank was being lowered over the cliff. Willing hands let him down until he was on the ledge. Then, having fastened the rope about the form of the unconscious young woman, padding it with his coat, so the strands would not cut her, he gave the signal to haul up. There was a cheer as the body was laid gently down on the grass at the top of the cliff, and some one called:

"She isn't dead! She's breathing!"

It was harder work for Frank to adjust the rope about the man's body, as he was very heavy, but the lad accomplished it, and the crowd above hauled the unfortunate automobilist up. Then Frank was raised from the ledge.

"Carry 'em to my house," cried Fenn. "The doctors will soon be there if Jim hasn't forgotten to telephone for 'em."

[15]

On stretchers, improvised from pieces of the fence, the bodies, of which that of the girl alone seemed to contain life, were carried to Fenn's house. The crowd followed but, at the door a constable named Darby, at Fenn's orders, refused admittance to all save the three chums, and those who had borne the stretchers.

"The doctors will need room to work," declared Fenn, when there were murmurs at what was his right, to exclude the mob from his home. "I'm glad mother's out," he said. "This would scare her into a fit."

"The doctors are coming," said Jim, who came into the house a moment later, after the man and young woman had been laid on beds where Fenn directed. "I telephoned to all in Darewell, but only three were home."

"That ought to be enough," declared Fenn. "I hope they can save their lives. There doesn't seem to be any evidences of injuries."

The medical men, under the direction of Dr. Fanwood, the eldest of the practitioners, made hasty examinations of the two victims of the accident.

"I think we'll have to operate on the man," declared Dr. Fanwood. "We'll need several things from my office. Who can go for them?" and he looked at Fenn, whom he had doctored ever since Fenn was a baby, on the few occasions when that healthy youth needed medicine.

[16]

"We'll go!" offered Frank, Bart and Ned at once.

"I guess we can use all three of you," decided Dr. Fanwood. "Dr. Kyte and Dr. Feldon will need things from their offices. Now I tell you what to do, just take our horses and carriages, which are tied out in front, and drive after the things. That will be quicker."

Then, the three physicians having given the chums a list of what they needed, proceeded to get ready for the operation. The girl was in a semiconscious condition, but a hasty examination showed that the worst she was suffering from was shock. She could be left alone for a time.

While the medical men were preparing to attend to the man, Constable Darby kept guard in front of the house, before which it seemed as if half the population of Darewell was gathered. Jim Nelson was sitting in the front hall, ready to go on an errand if needed, but, on the whole, rather hoping that he would not be required to run. The hasty telephoning had been quite a strain on his lazy nature. Fenn, at the suggestion of Dr. Fanwood, remained in the room where the young lady was, to be at hand in case she recovered consciousness. [17]

"My, things have happened suddenly," thought Fenn, as he looked at the silent form on the bed. "We were just wishing for something like our old adventures again. This seems to promise a good beginning."

The four boys, who, because of their intimate association, and from the fact that they lived in the town of that name, were known as "The Darewell Chums," had been through some lively times together, as has been related in the previous books of this series. In the first volume called "The Heroes of the School," I related how the four took part in a peculiar mystery, and solved it to their satisfaction, though, at one time, when they went up in a balloon, and were captured by the enemy, it looked rather dubious for them. The boys were wide-awake lads, full of energy and resources, and they managed to free themselves from a difficult situation.

Their home town was on the Still River, which flowed into Lake Erie, and Darewell was a few miles from that great body of water, on which they often enjoyed themselves rowing or sailing. [18]

In the second volume of the series, "Ned Wilding's Disappearance," there was set down the story of what happened to Ned when he tried to do a little financial business on his own account. He went to New York, and there by some curious mis-chances, he had to hide, almost as if he had committed a crime. But, by the aid of his chums, and a poor lad whom they once befriended, Ned was rescued.

In the third volume, "Frank Roscoe's Secret," I told of a queer case of persecution. Frank and his chums went camping and Frank's manner, which had been not only strange but sometimes unaccountable, became still more curious and bewildering, for one of his good nature. His chums did not know what to make of him, and there was considerable worry on their part.

But it turned out that Frank was the one who had to worry, because of the danger to his father, whom he had always supposed was dead, but who turned out to be alive, though in captivity. How the boys discovered Frank's secret, and how they helped him to rescue his father was related in the book together with various other happenings during their encampment in the woods.

And now the Darewell Chums seemed to be in for another series of adventures, if Fenn was any judge. The young woman on the bed tossed and turned in the fever of a delirium. The lad became rather frightened, and was going to call one of the doctors, though he knew they must be very busy preparing for the operation. [19]

Suddenly the young woman sat up straight in bed. Her light jacket, which had not been removed, bore many dirt-stains, where she had fallen upon the ledge. She struggled to get it off. Fenn started to help her, thinking one of her arms might be broken. Suddenly she exclaimed:

"The cave! Oh, the cave! It was hidden but I can see it now! And the men! See, there are the men, digging, digging, digging! I must stop them! They will take all—"

She fell back upon the pillows.

"What cave? Where is it? Can I help you?" asked Fenn eagerly.

"The cave! They are in it!" exclaimed the young woman again. "The mysterious cave! If I could only find it! I must find it—my father—his wealth—search for the cave—I—he—"

"Yes, yes," spoke Fenn, advancing to the side of the bed. "Perhaps I can help you find it!"

He hardly knew what he was saying, so great had been the strain of the accident, and so strangely did the words of the young lady affect him. [20]

She opened her eyes, which had been closed when she was talking. A look of consciousness came over her face.

"Was I speaking?" she asked in different tones than that she had used before. "Did I say anything? What has happened? Where am I? Where is my father?"

"The automobile went over a cliff," explained Fenn. "You were hurt, and so was your father, but not badly, I hope. He is here. The doctors are with him."

"I must—Oh, let me go to him," and she arose from the bed. "What did I say just now?" she

demanded suddenly. "I know I was unconscious, but I was saying something."

"It was about a cave," replied Fenn.

"Oh!" she exclaimed in such a voice that Fenn was alarmed. "I was afraid so! Why did I do it? Forget it, please! Forget that I ever mentioned it! I don't know—"

She seemed about to say something more, but her face suddenly became pale, and she fell back on the pillows.

"Doctor!" cried Fenn, very much frightened.

"Ah, I'm just in time, I see," remarked Dr. Kyte, coming into the room at that moment. "I'll attend to her now, Fenn. She has only fainted."

[21]

CHAPTER III

[22]

SAVING THE AUTO

Fenn's brain was in a whirl. The manner of the girl, her strange words, her sudden fright when he had sought to recall to her what she had said, and her reference to a mysterious cave, all served to give the lad much to think about. Coming as it did, on top of the automobile accident, it added to the excitement of the day. He was glad, when he got down stairs, to find that his three chums had returned with the things for which the physicians had sent them.

"Well, were you playing nurse?" asked Frank.

"Say," declared Fenn earnestly, "I certainly was up against it. I had a delirious patient, who was talking about caves and strange men."

"Tell us," suggested Bart, and Fenn related what the girl had said.

"That's nothing," declared Ned. "She was talking in her sleep."

"No, it was delirium."

"Well, that's the same thing," retorted Ned. "It doesn't mean anything. She was all worked up over the accident. Probably she looked ahead, saw the fence, and got scared half to death. Then, when the auto went over the cliff, and she and her father were spilled out, it might have looked as if she was falling into a cave. That's all."

[23]

"I don't believe it," declared Fenn determinedly. "I think there is something back of her talk. She was only partly delirious. Besides, she knew she had been talking about a cave, for she asked me to forget all about it. There's something in all this, and don't you forget it. Some day I'll find out what it is."

"You're a regular mystery solver, you are, Stumpy," declared Ned.

"Fenn! Fenn!" exclaimed an excited woman, coming into the dining room where the boys had gathered to talk. "What has happened? What is the matter? Are you hurt? Was there an accident? Why is Constable Darby in front of the house, keeping the crowd back?"

"There was an accident, mother," said Fenn, "and a man and a girl who were hurt have been brought here. I told them to fetch them in. I thought you wouldn't care."

"No, of course not. Poor things! I'm so sorry! Are they badly hurt?"

[24]

"I'm afraid the man is, but the girl seems to be getting better, except that she fainted awhile ago," replied Fenn, and he briefly related what had happened.

Just then Dr. Fanwood came into the room, to ask Fenn to heat some water, and he remarked:

"It is not so bad as we feared. The young lady is suffering from nothing but shock and some bruises. The man, her father, has a bad wound on the head, but nothing serious. They will both be all right in a few days. It was a narrow escape."

"Who are they, Doctor?" asked Mrs. Masterson.

"I have not been able to question either of them," replied the physician, "but, from papers which we found in the man's pocket I take him to be Robert Hayward, of Bayville, Wisconsin. The young woman is evidently his daughter, Ruth, though what they can be doing so far away from home, in an automobile, I do not know."

"Is he dangerously hurt?" asked Mrs. Masterson.

"Well, it would be dangerous to move him for a few days, as complications might set in. If he could stay here—"

[25]

"Of course he can," interrupted Fenn's mother. "He and his daughter, too. We have plenty of room."

"I am glad to hear you say so," replied the doctor. "They will get well more quickly if they are kept quiet. Now I must go back to my patient."

He took the hot water Fenn gave him and left the room. The four chums and Mrs. Masterson discussed the recent happenings, and the crowd outside, learning from the constable that there was no one dead, or likely to die, went off to look at the auto which still hung over the cliff.

Mrs. Masterson rather ridiculed Fenn's idea that the girl's talk had a bearing on some mysterious happenings, and she was of the same opinion as Ned, that it was merely the raving of delirium. But Fenn stoutly clung to his own idea.

"You'll see," he declared.

The doctors left presently, and Alice Keene, Bart's sister, who was something of a trained nurse, was installed to look after Mr. Hayward. Miss Hayward declared she was not ill enough to be in bed, and wanted to look after her father, but Mrs. Masterson insisted that the young woman must consider herself a patient for several days, and declared that she would take care of her.

[26]

"Come on, boys," suggested Fenn, when the excitement had somewhat calmed down. "Let's see if we can't save the auto."

"I'm afraid if we disturb it the least bit it will go over the cliff," said Ned. "It's hanging on by its teeth, so to speak."

"We'll try, anyhow," decided Bart. "I'd like to help haul it back. Maybe we'd get a ride in it, after Mr. Hayward gets well."

"That's all you care about it," taunted Frank with a laugh.

"No, but if we do save it, I guess you wouldn't refuse a ride in it," retorted Bart. "It isn't often you get the chance."

"That's so," agreed Fenn. "But come on. If we wait much longer the crowd will get around it and, maybe, loosen the wire that holds it."

The four chums hurried to the scene of the accident. They found that the weight of the big car had stretched the wires so that the machine hung farther than ever over the edge of the cliff.

"It's going to be a hard job to save that machine," declared Ned. "How are we going to do it?"

"Let me think a minute," spoke Bart, who was usually fertile in devising ways and means of doing things.

[27]

"What ye goin' to do?" demanded Constable Darby who, having found his post as guard at the house an empty honor, had assumed charge of the machine. "What you boys up to now? You'd better move away from here."

"We're going to rescue Mr. Hayward's auto for him," declared Fenn with more assurance than he felt. "He wants it hauled back," he added, which was true enough.

"Wa'al, ef he wants it, that's a different thing," replied the constable, who evidently recognized that Fenn had some rights in the matter, since the injured persons had been carried to the lad's house.

"I guess we've got ropes enough," spoke Bart. "The next thing is to get some pulleys and find something strong enough to stand the strain. I guess that big oak tree will do. Who knows where we can get some pulleys?"

"There are some at our house," said Fenn. "The painters left them there when they finished the job last week. I can get them."

"Good!" cried Bart. "You get 'em, and we'll get the ropes in shape."

When Fenn returned with the pulleys he found that his chums had taken several turns of one of the ropes about a tree, that was to stand the strain of hauling the auto back on firm ground. The pulleys were arranged so as to give more power to the hauling force, and then, the cables having been cautiously fastened to the back of the auto, Bart gave the word, and half a score of boys assisted the chums in heaving on the rope.

[28]

There was a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull altogether, but the auto never budged.

"Once more!" cried Bart.

"Hold on!" a voice urged, and the boys, and others in the crowd saw a telephone lineman approaching.

"That wire holds the wheels!" he explained, pointing to where the wire from the fence was entangled in the spokes. "You fellows hold on the rope and I'll cut it for you!"

Drawing out a big pair of cutters he crawled under the rear of the auto, and, lying on his back, proceeded to sever the wire strands.

"Keep the rope taut!" urged Bart. "When the wire is cut there'll be a heavy strain."

The boys, and several men who had taken hold of the hempen cable, braced themselves. There

was a snap, as the cutters went through the wire.

"Look out!" cried the lineman.

There was a creaking of the ropes. A sudden strain came on them, so powerful, that those holding the strands felt the hemp slipping through their fingers.

"She's going over the cliff!" cried Bart. "Hold her, boys! Hold her!"

CHAPTER IV

PLANNING A CRUISE

Farther and farther over the cliff slid the heavy auto. The boys and men, holding the rope, were pulled slowly along, as is a losing team in a tug-of-war.

"Snub your rope, boys!" a voice suddenly called. "Snub her! That's the only way to hold her back! Take a half hitch around that stump, and you'll have her! She's got a little too much way on for you! Snub her! Snub her, I say!"

Bart gave one glance at the man who had called these directions. He saw a short, squatty figure, wearing a dark blue cap, with some gold braid on it. One glance was enough to show that the man knew what he was talking about.

Bart let go his grip of the rope. The auto slipped a little faster then, for there were not so many hands holding it. But Bart knew what he was doing. He grabbed the free end of the rope and, following the directions of the newcomer, who aided him, he took a couple of turns about a big stump. This "snubbed" or slowed up the progress of the ponderous car, and a moment later it came to a stop.

"Now you've got her!" exclaimed the squatty man. "She'll hold until you can get a couple of teams to haul her back. You can't do it alone. Too much steam needed!"

"That's where you're right, Captain Wiggs!" remarked Constable Darby. "I was jest a goin' t' tell th' boys that myself, but it's better t' have th' advice come from a regular sea-farin' person I s'pose."

"I'm no sea-faring person," replied the captain. "The Great Lakes are good enough for me, but those who cruise on them know a thing or two, even if they're not of the salt water."

"Your advice came just in time, Captain," said Ned, for the boys knew the commander of the steamer *Modoc*, which was one of the Great Lakes fleet of freight carriers, and occasionally tied up at Darewell.

"I should say it did," added Frank. "My arms are nearly pulled off."

"I'll go up the street and see if I can get a couple of men to bring their teams here and haul the auto up," volunteered Fenn. "I guess Mr. Hayward will pay them."

The others thought this suggestion a good one, and, in a short time Fenn returned with two men, who each drove two powerful horses.

The animals were hitched to the rope and, after a little pulling and hauling, under the direction of Captain Wiggs, who naturally took charge, the auto was hauled back to the street, not much damaged from the plunge over the cliff.

The crowd stood around for some time longer, looking at the touring car until Fenn had the men haul it to a barn near his house. The boys would have liked to have run it themselves, but, as they knew very little about cars, and as they were not sure of the condition of the machinery of this one, they decided the slower method of propulsion would be best.

In the morning there was a great improvement in the condition of Mr. Hayward and his daughter, Ruth. In fact Ruth could be up, Dr. Fanwood said, though she must not exert herself.

That afternoon after school the three chums wanted Fenn to go for a walk, but he made some excuse and hurried home. He found Miss Ruth, who looked prettier than ever he thought, sitting in the parlor in an easy chair.

"I don't believe I thanked you and your friends for what you did for my father and myself," she said, with a smile, as she held out her hand to Fenn.

"Oh, it isn't necessary—I mean we didn't do anything—" and poor Fenn became much confused. "I—er—that is we—saw the auto go over and we hurried out."

"Oh, it was awful!" exclaimed Ruth, "I thought I was going to be killed! It was terrible!"

"It was a lucky escape," murmured Fenn, sympathetically, wondering if the girl would make any reference to the cave she had raved about.

But she did not, and, after asking Fenn to bring his three chums, that she might thank them personally, she went back to her room.

"I wish I dared ask her about that mysterious cave," thought Fenn. "There's something back of it all, I'm sure. She acts as if she was afraid I'd find it out."

A few days later Mr. Hayward was able to be up, and after that his recovery was rapid. He explained to Fenn, and the boy's parents, that he was in the timber business, and had some mining interests. His daughter's health was not of the best, he added, and, in the hope of improving it, he had taken her on a long auto trip. They intended to go to Maine, and camp in the woods, and were on their way there when the accident happened. [34]

"I'm sure I can't thank you for all you have done for me," said Mr. Hayward, looking at Fenn and his parents. "Those other boys, too; my daughter tells me there were three of your chums who helped."

"Oh, we didn't do so much," murmured Fenn. "Anybody would have done the same."

"Yes, but you did it," replied Mr. Hayward. "I appreciate it, I can tell you. I wish I could show you how much. Perhaps I can, some day. I'll tell you what I wish you'd do; come out and see me. It's not so very far to Bayville, and we can show you some great sights there, I tell you. You could make the trip along the Great Lakes, and they're well worth seeing. My daughter and I would make you comfortable, I'm sure."

"It's very kind of you to give the boys that invitation," said Mr. Masterson. "I'm afraid it's too long a trip for them."

"Oh, nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. Hayward. "They can go by boat all the way. It's a fine trip."

"I'm sure you would enjoy it," said Ruth, smiling at Fenn.

"Then we'll go!" exclaimed Stumpy, with more energy than the occasion seemed to call for. [35]

"I wish you would," added Mr. Hayward, and then he and Mr. Masterson began a discussion of business matters.

A little later that evening Fenn, going in the parlor for a book, saw Ruth sitting there in the darkness.

"What's the matter?" he asked with ready sympathy. "Are you ill? Shall I call my mother?"

"No—no, I'm all right—I'll be all right in a little while. Please don't call any one," and the girl seemed much alarmed. "I—I was just thinking of—"

"Is there anything worrying you?" asked Fenn boldly, as the memory of what she had said in her delirium came back to him. "Can I do anything to help you? Is it about a cave?"

"Hush!" exclaimed Ruth, in such tones that Fenn was startled. "Don't speak of that. Oh, I don't know why I mentioned it. I was not myself! Forget it, please. It might cause a dreadful—Oh, I can't talk about it!"

She was whispering tensely, and she came close to Fenn. In the next room Mr. Hayward could be heard telling Mr. Masterson something about his large business interests.

"Don't let my father hear you," pleaded Ruth. [36]

"But perhaps I can help you," insisted Fenn.

"No—no one can—at least not now," she said. "Don't ask me. I must go now. Good-night," and she hurried from the room, leaving a much-puzzled lad behind. He forgot all about the book he wanted, so wrought up was he over what Ruth had said. He decided it would not be proper to question her any further, though he wanted very much to aid her if he could.

The next morning Mr. Hayward announced that he felt well enough to proceed. The auto had been repaired, and the gentleman and his daughter, bidding their hosts farewell, started off. They had decided to return home, as Ruth was so upset over the accident that a camping trip was out of the question.

"Now don't forget, I expect you boys out to visit me," called Mr. Hayward, as the four chums waved their hands to father and daughter when the auto puffed off. "Come early and stay late!"

"Poor girl," murmured Mrs. Masterson, as she went back into the house. "She seems worried over something, but I don't see what it can be, for her father is very wealthy, according to his talk, and she has everything she wants. Maybe she misses her mother. She told me she had been dead only a few years." [37]

But Fenn knew it was something about the mysterious cave that was worrying Ruth, and he wished, more than ever, that he could do something to aid her.

It was a week after this when, school having closed for the summer term, the four chums were gathered at Fenn's house. Frank, Ned and Bart had arrived at the same time, to find Stumpy absorbed in the pages of a big geography.

"Going to take a post-graduate course?" asked Bart.

"No, he's looking for Bayville, to see if he can't catch a glimpse of Ruth," spoke Ned.

"I was planning a vacation trip," replied Fenn, with dignity.

"A vacation trip? Where?"

"On the Great Lakes," answered Fenn. "I think it would be just the thing. I've been looking it up. We could go down the Still River to Lake Erie, and then to Lake Huron. From there we could visit the Straits of Mackinaw, and then, after a trip on Lake Michigan, go through the Sault St. Mary to Lake Superior. Then—"

"Yes, and then we could sail to Bayville and you could visit Ruth while we sat on the bank and caught fish!" interrupted Frank. "Oh, Stumpy, it's easy to guess what you are thinking about!"

[38]

CHAPTER V

[39]

CAPTAIN WIGGS'S PROPOSAL

Fenn had to stand considerable "jollyng" on the part of his chums, but, though he blushed and was a little annoyed, he took it in good part.

"You can talk about Ruth all you like," he said, "but, just the same, if you have any plans to beat a cruise on the Great Lakes, why—trot 'em out, that's all. We've got to go somewhere this vacation, and I don't see any better place, though I've looked through the whole geography."

"And the only place you could get to was Bayville," interrupted Ned. "It's all right, Stumpy. I agree with you, that it would be a fine trip."

"How could we make it?" asked Frank.

"Walk, of course," replied Bart, with a grin. "It's water all the way."

"Funny!" answered Frank, poking his sarcastic chum in the ribs. "I mean where could we get a boat?"

"Hire one, I s'pose," put in Fenn, who had been busy marking an imaginary cruise in lead pencil on the map of the Great Lakes.

[40]

"That would be pretty expensive," said Bart. "We're not millionaires, though we each have a little money salted away in the bank."

The boys discussed the proposed cruise for some time longer, but there seemed no way of going on it. To hire a steamer or motorboat for such a long trip was practically out of the question for them, and, with much regret they all admitted it could not be considered.

"Come over to-morrow night," invited Fenn, when his chums left that evening. "Maybe we can think of something by then."

The next afternoon Fenn, who had gone to the store for his mother, stopped, on his way back, at the public dock of the Still River, where several vessels were loading with freight for Lake Erie ports. There was much hurrying about and seeming confusion; wagons and trucks backing up and going ahead, and scores, of men wheeling boxes and barrels on board lighters and steamers.

"Port! Port your helm!" suddenly called a voice, almost in Fenn's ear, and he jumped to one side, to allow a short, stout man, with his arms full of bundles, to pass him. "That's it!" the man went on. "Nearly run you down, didn't I? Thought you were a water-logged craft in my course. Why, hello! If it isn't Fenn Masterson!"

[41]

"Captain Wiggs!" exclaimed Fenn, recognizing the commander of the *Modoc*.

"Looking for a berth?" went on the captain, as he placed his bundles down on the head of a barrel. "I can sign you as cleaner of the after boiler tubes, if you like," and he looked so grave that Fenn did not know whether he was joking or not. It was a habit the captain had, of making the most absurd remarks in a serious way, so that even his friends, at times, did not quite know how to take him. "Yes," he went on, "I need a small boy to crawl through the after boiler tubes twice a day to keep 'em clean. Would you like the job?"

"I—I don't believe so," replied Fenn, with a smile, for now he knew Captain Wiggs was joking.

"All right then," said the commander, with an assumed sigh. "I'll have to do it myself, and I'm getting pretty old and fat for such work. The tubes are smaller than they used to be. But I dare say I can manage it. Where you going?" he asked Fenn suddenly, with a change of manner.

[42]

"No place in particular. Home, pretty soon. Why?"

"I was going to ask you to come aboard and have a glass of lemonade," invited the captain. "It's a hot day and lemonade is the best drink I know of."

"Oh, I'll come," decided Fenn, for Captain Wiggs's lemonade had quite a reputation. Besides

there were always queer little chocolate cakes in the captain's cabin lockers, for he was very fond of sweet things, as Fenn knew from experience.

"Haven't saved any more sinking automobiles, lately, have you?" asked the commander, when Fenn was seated in the cabin, sipping a glass of the delicious beverage.

"No. Mr. Hayward has gone back to Bayville."

"Bayville? Is that where he lives?" asked Captain Wiggs.

"That's it," replied Fenn. "Why?"

"That's odd," mused the captain. "I'm going right near there, this cruise. You see I've got a mixed cargo this trip," he explained. "I've got to deliver some things at several lake ports, but the bulk of the stuff goes to Duluth. Now if you would only ship with me, as cleaner of the after boiler tubes, why you could go along."

"Could I?" asked Fenn eagerly.

"Sure."

"And—and could you take any other boiler tube cleaners, or—or any other help?"

"Well, I need a couple of lads to dust the coal," said the captain, so seriously that Fenn thought he meant it. "You see if coal is dusty it doesn't burn well," he added. "We have to dust off every lump before we can put it in the boiler. Now a couple of handy lads, who were quick and smart could—"

"Maybe you could use three," suggested Fenn, with a smile.

"Sure I could," spoke the captain. "That's it!" he added quickly. "You and your three chums! Why not? You four could come along, and, if necessary, you could all dust coal. We use a lot of it. Come on now, here's a proposal for you," and the captain smiled good naturedly. "You four boys come along and make the trip to Duluth with me."

"Would it—would it cost much?" asked Fenn, seeing a chance of carrying out the cruise he had planned.

"Not a cent. I tell you I'll use you boys in more ways than one. Dusting the coal is only a small matter. There is the smoke stack to be scrubbed, the dishes to be hand painted and the windows to be taken out and put in again."

"Do you mean it?" asked Fenn. "I mean, do you really want us on this trip, Captain Wiggs?"

"Of course I do. I sail in three days, to be gone a month or more. If you boys want to have a good vacation come along. Get the permission of your folks and let me know to-night."

"I will!" exclaimed Fenn, his brain whirling with the suddenness of it all. "I'll tell the other boys right away," and, not even pausing to thank the captain for the lemonade, he hurried up the companion ladder, out on the deck of the *Modoc* and, jumping to the dock, ran up the street as fast as he could go.

CHAPTER VI

IN PERIL

"Here's the stuff from the store, mom!" exclaimed Fenn, as he rushed into the house.

"What's the matter?" asked his mother anxiously. "Has there been an accident, Fenn?"

"Got to find the boys! Captain Wiggs! *Modoc*! Going on a cruise! Tell you later!" was what Fenn exclaimed in jerky sentences as he hurried down the side steps and out of the yard.

"Oh, those boys! They get so excited you can't do anything with them!" exclaimed Mrs. Masterson. "I wonder what they're up to now?"

If she could have seen her son and his chums, whom he met on the street, soon after his hurried exit, she would have been more puzzled than ever.

"Great news! Great!" yelled Fenn, as he caught sight of Frank, Ned and Bart approaching him. "We're going with Captain Wiggs to make a tour of the Great Lakes! Whoop! Hold me down, somebody!"

He grabbed Ned and Bart, each by an arm, and began whirling them around in a good imitation of an Indian war dance.

"Here! Let up!" cried Frank. "What's it all about? Who's killed?"

"Nobody, you ninny!" shouted Fenn. "We're going on the *Modoc*!"

"Who says so?"

"When?"

"How many of us?"

"Where?"

"Are we all going?"

All Fenn could do was to nod his head vigorously. He was all out of breath. As soon as he could get enough wind to talk, he rapidly explained what Captain Wiggs had said.

"Does he mean we're to work our passage?" asked Frank. "I don't know as I care to shovel coal, if that's what he means."

"I guess he was only joking about that part of it," answered Fenn. "I'm going, if I have to scrub the decks. It will be sport."

"That's right," chimed in Bart. "I don't mind working my way for the sake of the trip. When can we go?"

"Let's go down to the wharf and have a talk with him," suggested Ned, and they all agreed this was a wise idea. [47]

A little later they were in the large cabin of the *Modoc*, which, for a freight boat, was well fitted up.

Captain Wiggs repeated the invitation he had given to Fenn. The boys would be welcome to make the trip with him, he said, as long as their parents consented. They would need an outfit of clothing, with rough garments for stormy weather, which might be encountered.

"And we'll do anything we can to help you run the boat," added Bart, who felt that some return ought to be given for the captain's generosity.

"Well," replied the commander, in drawling tones, "I don't expect too much. But if you could manage to keep the door mats clean it would be a great help."

"Door mats—on a ship?" questioned Ned.

"Yes; of course," replied the captain, with an assumption of dignity. "You see the salt spray gets all over the deck, and if it's tramped into the cabins it makes the floors dirty. My steward is very particular about clean floors, and I thought that if you could help keep the mats clean, why it would make his work easier, and he wouldn't grumble so much. However, if it's too much trouble, why of course—" [48]

"Oh, we'll do it," hastily agreed Fenn, fearing that the trip might be called off. He did not quite know how to take the captain's remarks, for the commander had not the least suspicion of a smile on his face. After all, thought Fenn, it might be necessary to clean the door mats, and he resolved to do his share of it.

"Well, now that that's settled," went on the commander, as if a load had been taken from his mind, "we'll go into further details."

He then explained to the boys what they would need in the way of clothing and baggage, and he briefly described the trip. The duration of it was a little uncertain as he could not tell how long he would have to wait at Duluth, after unloading, before he could get a cargo to bring back.

"I guess I'll get you home safe in time to begin the fall term of school," he said, "and that ought to answer."

"It will," declared Ned. "It's mighty fine of you to ask us."

"Oh, I guess you'll be worth your salt," commented Captain Wiggs. "Besides attending to the door mats, I may expect you to look after the scuttle-butt, now and again." [49]

Fenn wanted to ask what the scuttle-butt was, but as the steward came in just then, to get some orders, the boys decided it was time to leave.

They promised to be on hand the day set for sailing, and then, with their minds full of the happy prospect ahead of them, they went ashore.

The parents of the lads offered no objection to their making the cruise in company with Captain Wiggs, who was well known in Darewell. In due time valises and trunks were packed and the four chums, the envy of their less-fortunate school companions, strolled down to the wharf and boarded the *Modoc*.

The steamer was a large one, and had good accommodations for passengers, though she seldom carried any. This time, besides the boys, there was only one man, who was making the trip for his health. He was Burton Ackerman, who lived in a small town not far from Darewell.

They found that their staterooms, which were of good size, adjoined one another. They put away their belongings, and then went up on deck. The *Modoc* had cast off, and was slowly gathering speed as it dropped down the river toward Lake Erie.

"Don't forget the scenery, boys!" called the captain, as he passed. [50]

"We won't," answered Ned, with a laugh.

The boys had often made the trip to Lake Erie, and there was little of novelty for them in this. But, when the steamer had gotten well out on the big body of water, they crowded to the rails, for they had never been out so far as this before.

"It's almost as good as an ocean voyage," exclaimed Bart.

"What are you thinking of, Stumpy?" asked Frank, noticing that his short chum was rather quiet.

"I know," declared Ned. "He's wondering if he'll see Ruth."

"Oh, you—" began the badgered one, when the attention of the boys was taken from tormenting their chum by several sharp blasts of the *Modoc's* whistle. There was an answering screech and Frank suddenly exclaimed:

"Look there, boys!"

They all looked. On the port side, bearing right down on them, and coming at full speed, was an immense grain barge. It appeared to be unmanageable, for the whistle was frantically blowing, and a man in the pilot house was waving his hand.

"Toot! Toot! Toot! Toot!" screamed the whistle of the *Modoc*.

[51]

"She's going to ram us!" cried Fenn. "We can't get out of the way in time!"

There was a confused jangling of bells from the *Modoc's* engine room, followed by more whistles, and then the steamer began to swing around. But still the grain barge came straight on. A collision seemed inevitable.

CHAPTER VII

[52]

AN ELEVATOR BLAZE

From somewhere Captain Wiggs reached the deck on the jump. He tore past the boys on the run, and fairly burst into the door of the pilot house, where the first mate was in charge.

"We'd better get ready to jump!" cried Frank. "It looks as if we were going to be cut in two."

"Grab life preservers!" shouted Ned. "Here are some back here!"

He turned to lead the way to where, under an awning, some of the cork jackets were hung in racks. Before he could reach them a peculiar shiver seemed to run over the *Modoc*.

"She's hit us!" yelled Bart. "Everybody jump!"

The boys made a rush for the rail, intending to trust to their swimming abilities rather than to chance remaining on the steamer after the grain barge had hit her.

But their plans were suddenly frustrated for, as they reached the rail, something that towered away above their heads loomed up, and the grain vessel came sliding along side of the *Modoc*, just as if the two craft were about to tie up together for loading purposes.

[53]

The grain barge only bumped gently against the side of the steamer. The shrill whistles ceased. The jangling bells were silent. By the narrowest of margins a bad collision had been avoided.

Out of the pilot house came Captain Wiggs, running along the rail until he came opposite the pilot house of the grain barge. Then, standing on a signal flag locker the commander addressing the man in charge of the vessel which had given them all such a scare, exclaimed:

"Say, what in the name of the Sacred Cow are you trying to do, anyhow? Don't you know how to steer, you inconsiderate slab-sided specimen of an isosceles triangle!"

"Sure I know how to steer," replied the man, who was as cool as the captain was excited. "I was steering boats when you was a baby. But I'd like to know how in the name of Billy Hochswatter's mud-turtle any one can manage a boat when the steam steering gear breaks just as another vessel gets in front of me."

"Oh, then that's different," replied Captain Wiggs, with an understanding of the difficulties of the situation.

[54]

"Yes, I guess it is," retorted the other.

"Why didn't you use the hand gear?" asked the commander of the *Modoc*.

"That got jammed just as they were swinging my boat around, and all I could do was to signal for a clear course."

"Well, I gave it to you, but I almost had to rip my engines off the bed plates to do it," retorted Captain Wiggs. "I reversed at full speed, and swung that wheel around until it looked like a

spinning top. Only for that we'd be on the bottom of the lake by now."

"That's right," agreed the other pilot. "You had your nerve with you. Well, as long as there's no damage done I s'pose you can go ahead. I'll have to lay-to for repairs."

"Um," was all Captain Wiggs replied, for he had not quite gotten over his scare, used as he was to narrow escapes from danger. Slowly the *Modoc* was backed away from the side of the grain barge, and, when at the proper distance, she was sent ahead again, the other craft coming to anchor.

"I hope I don't meet him again this voyage," murmured Captain Wiggs, as he walked up to where the four chums stood. "He's the most unlucky fellow I know. Something is always happening to his boats." [55]

"Who is he?" asked Ned.

"Captain Streitwetter. He's a German from Germanville. Did you hear him mention Billy Hochswatter's mud-turtle?"

"Yes," said Bart. "What did he mean?"

"That is a story," replied Captain Wiggs gravely, "which can only be told after the dinner dishes are washed. You'd better look after them," and with that he walked away.

"There he goes again!" exclaimed Frank. "You never know what he is going to say. I believe he's stringing us."

"I almost know it," retorted Fenn. "It's only a way he has, but the trouble is we don't know whether or not he wants us to do the things he says. I wonder if we had better do anything about the dishes?"

"Of course not," said Frank. "The cook sees to that."

"But maybe the cook is sick," insisted Fenn. "Captain Wiggs might want us to help."

"If I thought so I'd offer at once," put in Ned. "I used to do it at home, once in a while, to help out." [56]

"I'll go ask him," volunteered Fenn, and he started to find Captain Wiggs, when he was halted by seeing the commander step from behind a pile of boxes. The captain was laughing heartily.

"That's the time I had you guessing; didn't I?" he demanded. "Wash the dishes. Ha! Ha! Ho! Ho! That's pretty good!"

The boys, looking a bit sheepish, soon joined in the merriment at their expense, and the little pleasantries served to banish the nervous feeling that remained after the narrow escape from the collision.

"Billy Hochswatter's mud-turtle!" repeated the captain. "That's what Captain Streitwetter always says when he's excited. I don't believe there ever was such a person as Billy Hochswatter."

"I either," added Fenn.

"I must go down to the engine room to see if we suffered any damage," the commander of the *Modoc* went on. "You boys amuse yourselves as well as you can until dinner time. You don't have to peel the potatoes," he added with a wink.

"We'll have to get even with him, somehow," suggested Ned, when the captain was out of hearing. [57]

"How?" asked Bart.

"I haven't thought it out yet, but we must play some kind of a trick on him. He'll think the Darewell chums are slow if we believe all he tells us, and don't come back at him. Try and think up something."

"Good idea," commented Fenn. "We'll have the laugh on him, next time."

The day passed quickly, for there were many novel sights for the boys to see. Captain Wiggs was kept so busy, for there were some repairs needed to one of the engines, because of the sudden reversing, that the boys did not see him again that day. He did not appear at dinner or supper, and the steward said the commander was taking his meals in the engine room.

The *Modoc* was going along at less than her usual speed, but was making fairly good time.

"Well, I s'pose we might as well turn in, boys," suggested Fenn, about nine o'clock. "I believe that is the proper term aboard a ship."

"Yes, messmates," spoke Ned, assuming a theatrical attitude, "we will now seek our downy hammocks, and court 'tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep,' to arise in the glad morning, and 'you must wake and call me early; call me early, mother dear, for I'm to be Queen of the May, mother; I'm to be Queen of the May!'" [58]

"We'll call you 'loony,' instead of 'early,' if you get off any more of that nonsense," murmured

Frank.

"That's what," agreed Fenn. "You're not studying English Lit. and French history now, Ned."

"Very well, most noble gentlemen," went on Ned. "I shall obey you, right gladly, I ween!" and he made a dive for his stateroom before Bart, who made a sudden grab could lay hands on him.

The others soon turned in, and, in spite of their new and strange surroundings and beds, were soon sound asleep.

It must have been about midnight that Fenn was awakened by hearing a great tramping on deck. It was followed by confused shouts, and then came the jangling of the engine room bells. The *Modoc* seemed to increase her speed.

"I wonder if there's another collision coming?" he said as he sat up. He heard Bart moving in the next room, and presently Frank's voice was heard calling:

"Say, fellows, something's wrong."

The noise on deck increased, and it sounded as though several men were running to and fro, dragging ropes about. [59]

"I'm going up!" decided Fenn, jumping out of his berth and hastily pulling on his clothes. From the open doors of his chums' rooms he could see that they, too, were attiring themselves with little regard for how they looked.

Up on deck they hurried. As they emerged from the companionway their eyes were met with a bright glare.

"A fire!" exclaimed Ned. "The boat's afire!"

"Don't say that! Don't say that, young man, I beg of you!" besought a man, attired in his trousers and night shirt, as he approached Ned, who recognized him as Mr. Ackerman, the sick passenger.

"What is it?" inquired Fenn, who was right behind Ned.

"He said the ship was on fire," repeated Mr. Ackerman. "I can't stand it. I have heart disease. Excitement is bad for me. Do, please, one of you, go and find out how fast it is burning, and come back and tell me."

He sat down at the head of the companionway, as coolly as though he had asked to be informed which way the wind was blowing. Evidently he knew how to take care of himself, so as not to aggravate his malady. [60]

"The ship isn't on fire!" exclaimed Bart, crowding past Ned and Fenn.

"But something evidently is burning," insisted Mr. Ackerman. "I can smell smoke, and see the reflection of the blaze."

This was not strange, considering that the *Modoc* was in the midst of a cloud of vapor, and that bright tongues of fire could be seen close to her bow.

"It's a big grain elevator on shore that's burning!" exclaimed Frank. "See! There it is!"

As he spoke the smoke which enveloped the steamer was blown aside. The boys could then note that, during the night the vessel had approached close to shore. They were near a good-sized city, and, among the wharfs was a big building, built to hold grain in readiness to load on the lake steamers.

From the top of this flames were shooting high into the air, and the *Modoc* was approaching it at full speed.

CHAPTER VIII

FENN HEARS SOMETHING

"What's the matter? Can't Captain Wiggs stop the ship?" cried Fenn, for it certainly looked as if the *Modoc* was going to run, full tilt, into the flames, which were right at the water's edge, as the elevator was on the end of the wharf.

"Clang!"

The half speed bell sounded from the engine room. The steamer began to slacken speed.

"Clang! Clang!"

Two gongs. Stop the engines. The *Modoc* was going ahead under her own momentum only. Then another signal.

Under the stern of the steamer the water boiled and bubbled as the great screw was reversed,

[59]

[60]

[61]

to check the vessel's way. The jingling bell, following the signal to reverse, indicated to the engineer to back his machinery at full speed, and the big craft fairly quivered, so great was the strain of stopping her up short.

But they were master-hands aboard the *Modoc* and she swung broadside to a wharf as gently as a boy brings his toy boat to a stop. From the deck men leaped to the string piece, with great ropes in their hands, which they made fast to butts and piling. The steamer was tied up, so close to the burning elevator that the boys could feel the heat of it.

"What are you going to do, captain?" asked Mr. Ackerman, who seemed to have recovered from his nervousness, when he found the *Modoc* was in no danger.

"I'm going to help douse that fire!" cried the commander. "Lively with that hose, men! Lively now! Snatch her quick and I'll give you all the water you can handle!"

Several brawny deck-hands began pulling a line of hose over the side. Other men were lowering a big boat, into which the men with the hose jumped. The hose was unreeled after them as they pulled out on the lake, in front of the burning elevator.

"I'm afraid it's a goner," remarked Captain Wiggs, as a gust of wind sent the leaping flames licking along the surface of the water.

"How did it happen?"

"Whose place is it?"

"What are you going to do?"

Those were some of the questions which the boys asked Captain Wiggs. He answered them all, comprehensively.

"It's an elevator in which the owners of the *Modoc* are interested," he said. "I was to call there to-morrow for a load of grain. I was heading for the wharf, intending to tie up until morning, when I saw flames shooting out of the top of the shaft. I've got a powerful pump aboard, and I knew they didn't have any fire boat in town, so I speeded the *Modoc* as close as I could. I don't believe I can do much, but I'm going to try. I'm afraid the fire has too much start."

"Can we go ashore and watch it?" asked Ned.

"I guess so. Don't go too near, and be careful you don't fall off the pier. It's deep water all around."

Captain Wiggs hurried down to the engine room, for the men with the hose in the boat were now as close as they dared to go to the fire, and could use water.

"Come on, fellows!" cried Ned. "We don't often get a chance to see a big fire like this."

They leaped to the wharf, since no gang plank had been run out, and were soon hurrying along the pier to shore. The elevator was several slips or piers distant, and the boys would have to go ashore to reach it. As they ran on they could hear the big pump of the *Modoc* beginning to force water from the lake through the hose, the nozzle of which the men in the row boat directed at the fire.

In the street along the water front the four chums found a great crowd. Every one was hurrying to the blaze. Men were shouting, boys were yelling, and even women and girls had hurriedly dressed to come out to the conflagration.

"The whole block back of the elevator'll go, if they don't stop it pretty soon!" yelled a man as he passed on the run.

"Here comes the water-tower!" shouted several.

"Look out there!"

"Clear the way!"

An insistent clanging of a fire gong to the accompaniment of barking dogs told that some piece of apparatus was dashing along the street. The boys felt some one from behind thrust them to one side.

"Look out!" a policeman shouted in their ears. "Do you want to be killed?"

They shrank back, burying themselves in the crowd on either side of the way, just as the water tower, with the plunging horses foam-flecked and heaving, dashed by.

"They've sent for more engines from Frenchtown!" cried some one in the throng.

"They'll need all they can get."

"The warehouse'll go next!"

"They'd better use dynamite!"

"This shows we ought to have a fire boat!"

[62]

[63]

[64]

[65]

"This department don't know how to handle a blaze like that!"

Remarks of this nature kept floating to the ears of the boys as they hurried along, arm in arm, so they would not become separated in the press that was on every side of them.

Above the din sounded a shrill whistle, and a fire-engine, spouting sparks, with the stoker at the back, clinging to the rail with one hand, and with the other throwing soft coal on the glowing mass under the boiler, crammed his head out to see how much farther the panting horses had to run.

The blazing elevator was hidden from sight of the boys by several buildings that intervened, but by looking up they could see the lurid sky, and the smoke-laden air, in which glowed dull red sparks, like stars. Suddenly the crowd, of which the four chums formed a part, swung around a corner. Then a terrible, but vivid scene was presented.

[66]

On the end of a big wharf, with the black lake as a background, was the flaming structure. It stood out boldly, like a picture framed in ebony, illuminating itself by leaping, licking tongues of yellow fire, that seemed to tumble and toss—to twist and coil about like devouring serpents.

Up shot the flames—far above the slanting, narrow roof of the elevator. The windows shone out as though millions of candles had been placed in them. Through some casements, darting spears of fire glanced, as if to transfix anything in their path, not satisfied with what was within. The piles of grain made a dense smoke, and the peculiar structure of the building, like some immense chimney, gave a draught that seemed to doom the elevator to complete destruction.

At the foot of the building could be seen a dark mass of firemen, moving here and there. In spots it was illuminated by little spurts of flame, where the engines were puffing like mad to send the quenching water on the fiercely burning timbers.

"They'll never stop that fire!" shouted a man close to the chums. "The roof'll cave in soon!"

"Why don't they use the stand pipes in the elevator?" asked another man. "No engine they've got can throw water to the roof."

[67]

"The stand pipes are melted by now," was the answer. "They tried 'em, but it got too hot. There she goes!"

The flames seemed to make one final leap, as if to reach a higher point in the air than they had yet attained. There was a sound as though a great gun had exploded and the roof, blown off by the heated air inside, and by the gases generated from the burning grain, was scattered into a thousand pieces.

Then, as if satisfied that it had accomplished what it set out to do, the fire died down a little. The top stories of the elevator toppled in, and the mass seemed to crumple up. Owing to the packed heaps of grain it was burning slowly, now that most of the wood work was consumed.

"That's another blow to Hayward!" spoke a voice so close to Fenn's ear that the boy started in spite of himself.

"Hush!" cautioned a man, who was beside the one who had first spoken, "some one might hear you."

"No one knows what I'm talking about," was the answer. "I guess Hayward will be willing to talk business now. He can't stand many such losses as this, even if he does own most of Bayville. I understand he didn't carry much insurance on this grain, as it was stored for quick movement. Now, when I see him—"

[68]

The man stopped suddenly, for Fenn was looking right at him. Somehow the youth knew instinctively that he was talking about the Mr. Hayward who had been injured in the auto accident. What could it mean? Why was the speaker glad that the westerner had suffered a loss in the elevator fire? Fenn wanted to hear more.

But the man who had first spoken, said nothing further. He grasped his companion by the arm, and nodded toward Fenn. The other boys were still watching the fire, and were some distance away from Stumpy.

"Were you—" began the first speaker, looking at Fenn, when his companion suddenly drew him back among the crowd.

"Stop! Stop!" Fenn heard him whisper. "I must get hold of him and—"

There was some mystery here. Fenn vaguely felt it, but he could not tell what it was. There was a movement in the throng, and Fenn's chums were pressed back to where he stood.

"Here comes some more engines!" was the cry.

[69]

Additional steamers, summoned from an adjoining city, rattled up. The fire, which had died down, seemed to break out afresh, as the flames seized on new material.

"I tell you I'm going to find out about him!"

This was the voice of the man who had spoken of Mr. Hayward. Fenn glanced around. The fellow, who had a sinister face, was making his way toward him.

"Maybe they're thieves or pickpockets," thought Fenn. "I guess we'd better get out of here while we have the chance."

He leaned forward and grasped Bart by the arm.

"Come on!" he hoarsely whispered.

"What for?" inquired Bart. "The fire isn't half over."

"Come on," repeated Fenn earnestly. "I think Captain Wiggs may want us."

He was so insistent, and nodded in such a peculiar way that Bart realized something unusual was in the wind. Pulling Ned and Frank close to him, Fenn whispered:

"I think some pickpockets are trying to rob us. I've brought my money with me. Let's get out of here." [70]

The boys made a quick turn in the crowd, and worked their way to where the press was not so thick. Fenn led the way, looking back to see if the men were following.

They were. The man with the sinister face, and his companion, were trailing close after the boys.

"Come on!" cried Fenn, suddenly breaking into a run.

But the men were not to be so easily left behind. They, too, quickened their pace, and pursued the four chums, though what their motive was the boys could only guess.

CHAPTER IX

 [71]

OFF AGAIN

The boys soon found themselves mixed up in another part of the crowd, that had, apparently, come down a side street leading to the lake front. They had some trouble disengaging themselves from it, and, when they again had a fairly clear street to run through, they were some distance from the fire.

"Did we lose 'em?" asked Fenn, panting from the run.

"What? Who?" asked Frank, who did not exactly understand the cause for the sudden retreat.

"Those two—pickpockets," replied Fenn, not knowing exactly how to classify the strange men.

"Here comes a couple of fellows on the run," said Ned. "I guess they're still after us. Let's wait and ask what they want. They haven't any right to follow us."

"No, no!" urged Fenn. "Come on back to the steamer."

He seemed so much in earnest that his chums did not stop to ask questions, but increased their speed. Just as they reached the wharf, at the end of which the *Modoc* was tied, another fire engine, hastening to the elevator blaze, dashed by. [72]

There was a quick clanging of the gong, and a shrill screech from the whistle. It was instantly followed by a shout.

"The engine struck one of the men!" cried Frank, looking back. "He's knocked down! Run over I guess! Come on back!"

The boys hesitated. They did not want to leave an injured man, even if he and his companion had been pursuing them. The street, at this point, was deserted, save for the two strangers. The engine did not stop, the horses being urged on by the driver, who did not want to have the reputation of arriving last at the conflagration.

"Come on back and help him," urged Bart, who was always anxious to aid persons in distress, even if they were enemies.

The others hesitated. It was rather a risk, Fenn thought. But the problem was solved for them. The man who had been knocked down by the engine arose to his feet. Supporting himself on the shoulder of his companion he limped off up the street, and away from the boys.

"I guess he isn't badly hurt," remarked Ned. "He'll not chase us any more. That engine came along just in time." [73]

"Except I guess it's too late to help put out the fire," said Frank. "There can't be much left of the elevator."

"But what did we run for?" asked Ned. "Who were those chaps, Fenn?"

Fenn explained what he had heard, and expressed the belief that the men had some business enmity against Mr. Hayward.

"They seemed delighted that the elevator, containing his grain, burned down; or at least the one man did," he said. "Then, when they saw I was listening, though I didn't really intend to, they acted as though they wanted to get hold of me, and see why I was so interested. I thought they might be pickpockets, but now I don't believe they were."

"We must tell Captain Wiggs about it," suggested Frank.

"I don't believe I will," answered Fenn. "I don't want him to laugh at me, and I think he surely will if I suggest that the men chased us. He'll probably think we took two harmless citizens for burglars. No, I think the best plan will be to wait and see what turns up."

"I'll tell you what you can do," spoke Ned.

"What?" inquired Fenn.

"You can ask Captain Wiggs who owned that grain in the burned elevator. He'll know, as he was going to get a load there."

"Good idea," responded Fenn. "I will."

The boys were soon aboard the ship again. They found that the men in the rowboat had returned, as the side of the elevator nearest the lake had all burned away, and their hose was no longer effective. The fire was under control now, but was still blazing well. Enough engines had arrived to prevent it spreading.

"Well, this knocks my plans all askew," remarked the commander of the *Modoc*, when the boys came on deck. "I don't know where to get my grain, now."

"Did you say the same company that owned this steamer owned that grain?" asked Fenn, seeing a good chance to obtain the information he wanted.

"No, I said they owned the elevator," replied the captain. "The grain is a separate matter. I don't know whose that was. Whoever it belonged to won't get much good from it."

"Is there any way of telling who owned it?" asked Fenn, for he thought, even though the men had mentioned the name "Hayward," that it might be some other man than the one injured in the auto accident—some one else than the father of Ruth.

"Why, I can tell by looking at my order slips," replied Mr. Wiggs. "Why are you so interested?"

"I was wondering if it was any one I knew," answered Fenn, a little evasively, as he did not want to explain what had happened.

"Um—let's see," and Captain Wiggs who, followed by the boys had gone to the main cabin, began thumbing over the pages of a small book he took from his pocket. "'Proceed to'—no, that's not it—'take cargo'—um—no, it must be on the next page—Oh, yes, here it is. 'Get cargo of grain at Lakeville, from Robert Hayward Company.' That's it. The grain belonged to Robert Hayward—why—er—say, boys, that's the name of the man who was hurt back there in Darewell—he and his daughter Ruth—you know him—why, Fenn, he was at your house!"

"So he was!" exclaimed Fenn, his knowledge thus unexpectedly confirmed.

"Quite a remarkable coincidence!" went on the Captain. "Very strange! Well, strange things are always happening. You didn't hear what started the fire, did you?"

"I heard a policeman say it was spontaneous combustion," said Frank, "but they always give that as a cause, when they can't think of any other."

"I don't s'pose they'll ever find out," remarked the captain. "Well, I can't do anything more. We'd better turn in, although it's most morning. Soon as it gets daylight I'll have to hustle around and find out what I'm going to do."

Captain Wiggs was a very busy man the next day, sending messages to the steamer's owners to ascertain their wishes. The boys visited the elevator, in which great piles of grain were still smouldering, in spite of the tons of water poured on them. Fenn kept a lookout for the mysterious men, but did not see anything of them.

Captain Wiggs had to remain tied up at Lakeville until he received orders to proceed to the next port for a cargo that would be awaiting him there. The boys spent the time on shore, visiting various scenes of interest.

"Well, we're off again!" cried the commander, on the morning of the third day, as he came hurrying down the dock, waving a telegram in his hand. "Tying-up is no fun. You may get under way as soon as possible, Mr. Sidleton," he added to the first mate.

Steam was up, and, in a short time the *Modoc* was again plowing the waters of Lake Erie. Gradually Lakeville was left behind, and soon they were out of sight of land.

"Ding-dong! Ding-dong! Ding-dong! Ding-dong!"

A bell suddenly sounded, with queer double strokes.

"Eight bells!" exclaimed Captain Wiggs, as he arose from a deck chair where he had been sitting, to the boys. "Time for mess," and he led the way toward the dining saloon.

[74]

[75]

[76]

[77]

As he was about to descend the companionway he looked over the rail. Astern of the *Modoc* was a small steam yacht, coming on at a swift speed.

"That's queer," murmured the captain.

"What is?" asked Fenn, for the boys were privileged characters.

"That yacht," replied the commander. "She's been following us all the morning; ever since we left Lakeville. I wonder what the game is? Steward, bring me the glass," he called, and, when the binoculars were handed to him, the captain took a long look at the pursuing craft.

CHAPTER X

[78]

THE CHASE

For nearly a minute Captain Wiggs continued his observation of the on-coming boat. Then, laying aside the glass, he remarked:

"I can't make anything out of her. It's a strange boat. Never saw her on the lakes before. And they seem to have an uncommon interest in us. A couple of men on deck are taking turns in looking at us through a telescope."

"Two men?" asked Fenn, beginning to get excited.

"There are two on deck, but of course there must be more somewhere aboard," replied the captain.

"And has one of them a—a sort of mean looking face?" went on Fenn.

"Well, from what I can see of him through the glass, he doesn't look to be a very cheerful chap."

"I'll wager it's those men after us!" exclaimed Fenn, turning to his chums.

"What men?" inquired Captain Wiggs.

"The men who chased us when we were at the elevator fire," and Fenn told of the adventure.

"I wish you had mentioned that to me before," said the commander, looking grave. "This thing may be serious."

"Why? Do you think they are thieves?" asked Bart.

"There's no telling what they are," and the captain took another observation at the steamer in the rear. "You know the lakes are part of the dividing line between the United States and Canada. Often criminals from both countries find it to their advantage to conduct some of their operations on the water, and there are any number of questionable characters plying on this lake. I can't make out why those men should want you boys, or Fenn, more particularly, unless they think he may know something of their operations, and they want to stop him from talking."

"Well, they can't prevent me!" boasted Fenn.

"Don't be too sure," cautioned the captain. "Of course you have nothing to fear as long as you are with me, aboard the *Modoc*, but don't run any chances while ashore. Meanwhile those fellows have got to catch us first. They've got nerve, I must say, pursuing us as if they were government officers and we were smugglers."

[79]

[80]

"Do smugglers cross the lake?" asked Ned.

"They try to, and, sometimes they succeed. But I wish you boys would go down to dinner. I want to keep watch of this boat. When you finish, come up on deck, and you can stand guard, while I eat. We'll keep tabs on her then, and we needn't let any of the crew here know about it. It's just as well to keep matters a little quiet until we find out what it all means."

The boys did not linger long over their dinner, and were soon on deck again. They found Captain Wiggs gazing at the pursuing steam yacht through the glass.

"She's coming on," he said. "Seems to have plenty of speed, but I guess we can show her a little ourselves. I'll give orders to the engineer to increase our rate some. Then we'll see what happens. You keep watch, and let me know when I come back."

He handed the binoculars to Fenn, and went below. The four chums took turns looking at the on-coming craft. Presently they noticed that their own steamer was making faster progress through the water.

"I guess we'll leave 'em behind now," observed Frank.

"Then you've got another guess coming," responded Fenn. "They've put on more steam."

[81]

The other boat seemed to spurt through the waves that were piled up in front of her sharp

prow. She easily kept right after the *Modoc*, and even seemed to approach closer.

"I wonder what they'll do when they catch up to us?" asked Bart.

"Wait until they catch us," suggested Ned.

"Well, boys, how about it?" called Captain Wiggs, as he came on deck. "Have you polished up the anchor chain, as I asked you to. The regular polisher-boy is sick, and I'm short handed."

"You didn't tell us—" began Fenn, when a smile on the face of the commander warned him that it was only a joke.

"How is our friend, the enemy?" inquired Captain Wiggs, reaching for the glass.

"Well, we haven't lost her," replied Frank.

"So I see," observed the commander. "I think I'll have to try a little trick."

He went to the pilot house and soon the *Modoc* was sweeping away from her course in a long, graceful curve.

"There, now we'll see if they are following us, or whether they are just on the same course by accident, and are using us for pace-makers," remarked the captain, as he came back to where the boys were. [82]

In less than a minute the course of the pursuing vessel was also changed, and on she came, after the *Modoc*, the black smoke pouring from her funnel, testifying to the fact that the engine room force was piling on the fuel to make more steam.

"She's going to catch us or burst her boilers," remarked the captain, with a grim smile. "Well, we'll see. I made them show their hand. They evidently believe we're bound for the Canadian shore, and they think they have us outside the protection of the United States now, and can do as they please."

He hurried to the pilot house, and soon there were several signals of the engine room bells.

"We'll see if we can't get a few more knots out of her," observed the commander as he came back, and took a hurried look at the yacht astern. "I guess the *Modoc* has some speed left in her yet, even if she is only a freighter."

True, the big steamer did go faster, but so did the pursuing boat. The chase was leading straight toward Canada now.

"Can't seem to shake 'em off," murmured the captain, with a somewhat worried look on his face. "I've a good notion to lay-to, and see what they want." [83]

"I—I wouldn't," said Fenn.

"Why not?" asked the captain quickly. "You haven't done anything wrong; have you?"

"No, but—"

"Then I think I'll just ask them the meaning of this unwarranted chase. They haven't any right to keep after me like this, unless they're a government vessel, and they're not that or they would have shown their colors long ago. That's what I'll do. I'll stop!"

He turned toward the pilot house to give the order. Fenn took up the binoculars, which the captain had laid down, and looked through them at the strange steam yacht. He could make out the two men on deck, one of them—he with the sinister face—staring at the little knot of boys, who seemed, so unaccountably, to have become involved in a mystery.

Following the ringing of the engine room bells, the *Modoc's* speed began to slacken. Captain Wiggs came back to where the boys were and remarked.

"Now we'll see what will happen."

Hardly had he spoken than there sounded from the pursuing craft, which had not slackened speed, a shrill hissing. Then a white cloud appeared to hover over her. [84]

"She's broken a steam pipe!" cried the captain. "Too much pressure! I thought she couldn't stand it!"

The strange craft was almost lost to sight in the cloud of white vapor that enveloped her, while, from the midst of it, came excited cries.

CHAPTER XI

ON LAKE HURON

"Somebody's hurt!" cried Fenn. [85]

"Shouldn't wonder," replied Captain Wiggs, coolly. "There generally is when an explosion occurs in a boiler room."

"Aren't we going to help them?" inquired Frank.

"I'll give them any aid they need," said the commander. "We'll see how much the damage amounts to. I'll steam back toward 'em."

He gave the necessary orders, and soon the *Modoc* was slowly approaching the disabled craft. The clouds of steam had somewhat dispersed, but that something was wrong was evident from the manner in which men were hurrying about the deck of the recent pursuing yacht.

"I guess it wasn't as bad as I thought," remarked Mr. Wiggs. "They seem to have stopped the leak in the pipe. I hope none of the men are badly scalded. I'll offer 'em help, and they can take it or leave it. They've made enough trouble for me as it is." [86]

But the strange craft evidently did not desire any aid, nor did the commanders of it seem to court any investigation of what had happened. As the *Modoc* approached the other boat's whistle sounded, and then it slowly started off, like a lame dog running away from a fight with a superior antagonist.

"Had enough, eh?" remarked the captain. "I thought so. Well, I'm not sorry that I don't have to get to close quarters with them. It looks as if it was coming on to blow, and it's no joke to have to tow a disabled boat on Lake Erie in a storm."

Seeing that his proffered offer of help was declined Captain Wiggs changed the course back to his original one. As the other craft turned about, and steamed slowly away, Fenn watched through the glass, and the last thing he could see was the man with the ugly face, standing at the stern, gazing at the *Modoc* through a telescope.

"He'll know me next time, anyhow," thought Fenn, as he joined his chums, who were talking of the strange finish of the chase.

Discuss the recent happenings as they did, from all sides, the boys could not get at the bottom of them. No more could Captain Wiggs. But he soon found he had other things to think about than the chase which had ended so abruptly, for the weather changed suddenly, and there were indications of a heavy storm. [87]

"I'd like to make the Detroit River before the blow comes on hard," he remarked. "I've got a pretty heavy load aboard, and the *Modoc*, while she's a stanch craft, doesn't behave as well in a sea as she might. I've lost considerable time through that elevator fire, and stopping on account of those men chasing us, so I must make it up."

The steamer was sent ahead at full speed, but the storm developed faster than the captain had calculated so that, when still several miles from a good harbor, the wind suddenly swooped out of the west and soon there was a heavy sea running.

"Why, it's almost like the ocean," remarked Ned as, standing well forward, near the port rail, he looked across the lake and saw the big waves.

"You'll think so, if this keeps up," responded Captain Wiggs. "Lake Erie can kick up as pretty a storm as I ever want to see, and I've been through some hard ones, I can tell you. This is nothing to what it will be if the wind increases."

And that the wind intended increasing was evident from the way it howled over the big expanse of water, which was dotted with white-caps. Through the waves the *Modoc* labored, her powerful engines and screw sending her ahead gallantly, though she rolled and pitched in a way to make the boys think they were on an ocean liner instead of a lake steamer. [88]

It grew quite dark, partly because of the clouds that gathered, and because evening was approaching. Then the rain, which had held off for a while, came down with a suddenness that was almost like a cloud burst. Fortunately the boys, on the advice of the captain, had donned oil-skins, and they were protected, though sometimes it seemed as if the wind would drive the rain drops right through their garments.

"This is a terrible storm!" exclaimed Ned, as he held on to the rail and tried to peer ahead through the mist and blackness.

"Wait!" fairly shouted the captain. "You haven't seen any more than the beginning."

"That's enough for me!" cried Fenn, as he made his way to the companionway and went below. The other boys followed, as the commander said it was hardly safe on deck. The *Modoc* was now laboring amid the big waves. The lookout, scanning the waste of waters for a sight of land, could see nothing but blackness ahead. [89]

It did not seem quite so bad to the boys, after they were in the cabin, though they had to sit braced in chairs to avoid tumbling out when the vessel pitched and tossed, and it was quite a task to move about, for there was danger of bringing up against some piece of furniture, or the cabin partitions.

"An ocean voyage isn't in it with this," declared Ned. "It's great!"

"It may be, but it makes me feel sick," declared Fenn. "I'm going to lie down in my bunk."

This he did, saying he felt better when stretched out. The other boys followed his example, as the pitching was a little too much for them. They soon grew accustomed to it, however, and presently they noticed that the motion seemed less violent.

"We must have come to anchor," said Bart.

"More likely we're inside some harbor," declared Ned.

They went up on deck and found that, though it was still raining hard, the wind had died down a little, which made the boat ride easier.

"Where are we?" called Fenn, to Captain Wiggs, who was pacing the deck.

"Just entering the Detroit River," was the reply. "We'll tie up at Detroit for the night. How are you, boys?" [90]

"Better now," replied Ned.

As soon as the *Modoc* was well within the river the effects of the blow were no longer noticeable. In a short time the steamer was tied up at a dock and the boys turned in for the night.

Captain Wiggs had some business to transact in Detroit, and spent nearly all of the next day there, giving the boys a chance to go ashore and see some of the sights. They resumed their trip that evening, through Lake St. Clair, and proceeding without stop to Lake Huron.

Emerging well out upon this vast body of inland water, the boys, one bright morning, got a fine view of it.

"Isn't it—isn't it big!" exclaimed Fenn. "It's—it's simply—"

"Help him out, Ned," suggested Bart. "You ought to have some big adjectives on hand, left over from that last French history lesson. This is too much for Stumpy."

"It certainly is a lot of water," commented Frank. "I thought Lake Erie was big, but this seems to beat it."

The boys stood at the rail, absorbed in the contemplation of the beautiful scene before them. Captain Wiggs too, though he had viewed the lake many times, could not but admire the beauty of it as it sparkled in the morning sun. [91]

One of the men from the engine room suddenly appeared on deck, and, standing behind the commander, who was explaining something to the boys, waited until the captain had finished.

"Did you wish to see me?" asked Mr. Wiggs, turning to the man.

"Yes, sir. Mr. McDougall told me to ask you to step below, sir."

"What's the trouble?" for the man seemed a little uneasy.

"I don't know exactly, sir, but I think it's a leak."

"A leak?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. McDougall thinks some of the forward plates have started."

"It must have been the storm," commented Captain Wiggs, as he hastened below. "Yet it's a good while taking effect. I hope it isn't serious."

CHAPTER XII

NED GETS A FISH

"Hark!" exclaimed Bart. "What's that sound?"

"The pumps!" replied Fenn. "They've started 'em. It must be a bad leak. We'd better get life preservers."

"Don't get excited," counseled Frank coolly. "Wait until you see how bad it is. These steamers are all built with water-tight compartments, and it would take quite a hole to make one of them sink. The starting of a few plates wouldn't do it."

His words calmed his chums, and, when Captain Wiggs came on deck, a few minutes later, he announced that the leak was not a serious one, though it would be necessary to go ashore to make repairs.

It was found, on docking the *Modoc* that the repairs would take about a week, and this period the boys spent in making excursions on shore, in the vicinity of the town. They had a good time, and the delay did not seem very long because of the many interesting sights. [93]

They visited a large saw mill where the logs, that had been brought down the lake in big rafts, were cut up into lumber, and the foreman of the plant showed them the various processes through which the tree trunks went before they were turned out in the shape of boards, planks or timbers.

"Well, we'll start in the morning, boys," announced Captain Wiggs one night. "The *Modoc* is in good shape again, and we'll have to make good time from now on, because of our delays."

Early the next morning the vessel was under way again. Out on Lake Huron it steamed, plowing through the blue waters, under a sunny sky, while a gentle breeze stirred up little waves.

"Why don't you boys do some fishing?" asked Captain Wiggs, as he noticed the four chums sitting near the after rail, talking among themselves.

"We didn't know we could catch anything here," replied Ned.

"I don't either," was the captain's answer, "but you can't tell until you try. There is plenty of tackle aboard, and you might land something nice. There are fish in the lake—plenty of 'em. The thing to do is to catch 'em."

The boys needed no other invitation, and soon they had lines trailing over the stern of the ship, far enough away from the screw to avoid getting tangled in the blades. Mr. Ackerman, the sick passenger, who has improved considerably, also took a line, and joined the boys. [94]

"Let's see who gets the biggest fish," proposed Ned.

"Let's see who gets the first one," supplemented Bart. "That's the best test."

It did not look as if luck was going to be very good, for the lines had been over half an hour, and no one had had so much as a nibble.

"This is getting tiresome," spoke Ned, as he assumed a more comfortable position in his chair. Then he tied his line to his wrist, propped his feet up on the rail, and lounged back.

"Well, if that isn't a lazy way of fishing!" exclaimed Frank. "Why don't you sit up?"

"I will when I get a bite," replied Ned.

They resumed their waiting, with that patience which is, or ought to be, part of every angler's outfit. Suddenly Frank nudged Bart and pointed to Ned. The latter had fallen asleep in his chair.

"Let's play a joke on him," proposed Fenn in a whisper. "I'll tie him fast in his chair."

"No, let's pull up his line and fasten an old shoe, or something like that to it," proposed Frank. "He'll think he has a big bite." [95]

They started to put this plan into operation, when, as they were about to pull up Ned's line, they saw it suddenly straighten out.

"He's got a bite!" exclaimed Fenn.

"Yes, and a whopper, too," added Frank.

"Look at it!" cried Bart, as some big fish, at the stern of the boat, leaped out of the water and fell back with a splash.

Then the line about Ned's wrist tightened. He felt the pull and awakened.

"I've got him!" he cried. "I've got the biggest one!"

The next moment he went sprawling from his chair, while his arm was straightened out in front of him, for the strong line, to which a big fish was attached, was fairly pulling him along.

"Look out! He'll go overboard!" cried Mr. Ackerman.

Bart made one leap, and grabbed Ned around the waist. This saved the luckless youth from being pulled over the rail, but it did not release him from his predicament.

"Oh! Ouch!" cried Ned. "It's pulling my arm off!"

Indeed this seemed likely to happen, for the line was very strong, and the lad had tied it securely about his wrist. It could not slip over his hand, and the fish on the other end was tugging away for dear life. Doubtless it would have been glad enough to escape, but it was fairly caught, for as they afterward found, it had swallowed Ned's bait, hook and all. [96]

"Let go!" yelled Ned to Bart, who was clinging to his waist.

"If I do you'll go overboard!" replied Bart. He felt his chum slipping from his grasp. "Give me a hand here!" Bart called to Fenn and Frank.

They jumped to his aid, while Mr. Ackerman, in an excess of nervous fright, ran up and down the deck shouting:

"Captain! Captain Wiggs! Stop the ship! A shark has got hold of one of the boys!"

"What's that? What's the trouble?" asked the commander, hurrying up from the cabin.

"A shark has got Ned!" repeated the invalid.

"Shark? In Lake Huron?" replied the commander. "You're crazy!"

"Guess it must be a whale, by the way it pulls," said Bart.

"It's one of the big lake fish!" exclaimed the captain. "They're as strong as a pony. Wait, I'll cut the line!" [97]

"No, don't!" begged Ned, who, now that his three chums had hold of him, was in no danger of going overboard, though the thin, but tough cord, was cutting deep into his wrist, where he had foolishly tied it.

"Here, lend a hand!" called Captain Wiggs to a sailor who was passing. The man grabbed the line with both hands and soon was able, with the help which Frank and Fenn gave him, to haul in the fish. It seemed as if they really had a shark on the end of the line, but, when the finny specimen was gotten on deck, it was seen that it was not as large as the boys had imagined.

"Who would have thought it was so strong?" asked Ned, rubbing his chafed wrist.

"The speed of the boat had something to do with it," said the captain. "You were pulling on the fish broadside I guess, but it is a very strong species even at that. They're not often caught on a hand line."

"Are they good to eat?" asked Ned, wishing to derive some benefit from his experience.

"Some folks like 'em, but they're a little too strong for me," answered the captain. "However, I think the crew will be glad to get it?" and he looked questioningly at the sailor who had helped land the prize. [98]

"Yes, sir," replied the man, touching his cap. He took the fish to the galley, where the cook prepared it for the men's dinner. The boys tasted it, but did not care for the flavor.

"Aren't you going to fish any more?" asked the captain, as he saw Ned coiling up his line, after the fish had been taken away.

"That's enough for one day," was the boy's reply. "The other fellows can, if they like. My wrist is too sore."

"Lucky you didn't tie the line to your toe," said Frank.

"Why?"

"Because you'd probably be walking lame now, if you had. As it is you can't sign any checks for a while, I s'pose."

"Oh, you and your checks!" exclaimed Ned, in no mood to have fun poked at him.

"Moral! Don't go to sleep while you're fishing," said Bart.

"Well, I did better than you fellows did. You didn't get anything," retorted the fisherman.

CHAPTER XIII

 [99]

CAUGHT IN THE LOCK

Ned, at the suggestion of the captain, put some salve on his wrist, for the cord had cut through the flesh. Then he had Bart bandage it up. This done the boys resumed their seats near the after rail, and talked about Ned's exciting catch.

"I hope you don't try such a thing again," remarked Mr. Ackerman, as he came back from his cabin. "It's a little too much for my nerves." He sank down in a deck chair, and the boys noticed that he was quite pale. He seemed unable to get his breath.

"Would you mind—would one of you mind, reaching in my pocket and getting a bottle of smelling salts that I carry," he asked. "I think if I took a sniff I'd feel better."

"I will," volunteered Fenn, for Mr. Ackerman's hands hung limply by his side, and he seemed incapable of helping himself.

"Is this it?" asked Fenn, as he reached in the upper right hand pocket of the invalid's vest and pulled out a small bottle. [100]

"No—no," was the answer, half whispered. "That is my headache cure. I think it must be in the lower pocket."

Fenn replaced the headache cure and explored the lower right-hand vest pocket.

"Is this it?" he inquired, drawing up a small box.

"No, no—my dear young friend—those are my liver pills. Try again. I think it must be on the

other side."

He still seemed too weak to raise his hands. Ned was about to call Captain Wiggs, but Fenn made another try.

"I have it!" he exclaimed, pulling out a shining metal tube.

"No—no," said the invalid faintly, opening his eyes and looking at what Fenn held up. "That's my asthma cure. Try the next pocket, please."

"Say, he'll kick the bucket if Fenn doesn't find that medicine pretty soon," whispered Frank. "Guess I'll help him."

Fenn began a search of the lower left-hand vest pocket. He brought up a bottle, containing a dark liquid. Wishing to make sure he had the right stuff, he smelled of it, before asking Mr. Ackerman to open his eyes and look at it. [101]

"Is that it?" whispered Ned.

"Smells bad enough to be it," was Fenn's answer.

"No, no. You haven't got it yet," spoke the invalid, in peevish tones. "That is my heart remedy. I must kindly ask you to try again. I remember now, it's in my right-hand coat pocket."

Fenn replaced the heart cure and made one more attempt. This time he brought up a short, squatty, round bottle.

"That's it!" exclaimed the invalid joyfully, "Now, please hold it to my nose. Not too close."

However, he spoke too late, for Fenn had placed the open phial right under Mr. Ackerman's nose. The invalid gave one sniff, and then jumped from the chair as if he was shot.

"Wow! Ouch! Help!" he cried. "That's strong ammonia! I use it for hay fever. That's the wrong medicine! Oh! The back of my neck is coming off!"

He held his handkerchief to his face, the tears coming from his eyes because of the strong stuff.

"I remember now!" he managed to gasp. "I left my smelling salts in my stateroom. But I can get them now. I'm better—much better!"

"I believe he is," remarked Frank, when Mr. Ackerman had gone below. "Say, isn't he the limit, with his different kind of medicines?" [102]

"You shouldn't make fun of him," spoke Bart.

"Whew!" suddenly exclaimed the captain's voice. "I guess my invalid passenger must have been around here," and he breathed in the ammonia-laden air.

"He seems to be quite sick," said Fenn.

"Sick?" repeated the commander. "Say, I wouldn't want him to hear me, but he's no more sick than I am. He's only got a touch of hypochondriacism."

"Will—will he die soon of it?" asked Fenn.

"Die? I wish I had his chance of living," went on the captain. "I guess you don't quite understand. Maybe that word was too much for you. A person who has hypochondriacism has a little stomach trouble, and the rest is only imaginary. That's what Mr. Ackerman has. Every once in a while he takes a trip with me, for the sake of his health, he says, but I think it's to get away from working. Say, did he ask you to reach in his pocket for some medicines for him?"

"Yes," replied Fenn, "and I had quite a time finding it."

"I should think you would. He's a regular walking drug store. If he'd throw all his powders, pills and liquids away, and live out of doors, he'd be all right in a month. I'm not making fun of him, but I wish somebody would, some day. Maybe it would cure him." [103]

"He seemed pretty sick," ventured Bart.

"But he was lively enough when he smelled that ammonia I gave him by mistake," said Fenn.

"Ammonia?" questioned the commander, and the boys then told him what had happened. "Ha! Ho!" laughed Captain Wiggs. "That is the best joke yet! Ammonia! Oh my! I'll bet he was lively! Why, I can smell it yet!"

The little experience seemed to do Mr. Ackerman good, and it was several days before he complained again. Then he was seemingly as badly off as ever, taking some sort of medicine almost every hour. But the boys understood him now, and did not waste so much sympathy on him.

The *Modoc* steamed on, covering many miles over Lake Huron until, towards evening one afternoon, Captain Wiggs announced that morning would find them at the entrance of St. Mary's river, the connecting link between Lakes Huron and Superior.

"Can you boys stand a little jarring?" he asked, as they were in the main cabin, after supper. [104]

"Jarring? Why?" inquired Frank.

"Because we've got to jump the ship over St. Mary's falls, and we don't always make it the first time," was the answer, given with much gravity. "Often we miss and fall back, and it jars the ship up quite a bit."

"Oh, are we going through the 'Soo' canal?" asked Fenn eagerly, for he had been reading up about the Great Lakes, just before coming on the trip.

"That's the only way of getting around the falls," replied the captain. "I see you don't put much faith in my jumping story."

"We have to go through a lock, don't we?" Bart wanted to know.

"Yes," said Captain Wiggs, spreading a map out on the table, "we go through the canal, and lock, being raised up several feet, to the level of Lake Superior. If all goes well we'll be through the lock by noon to-morrow."

"Why do they call it the 'Soo' canal?" asked Ned.

"Because it is named after the falls," was the commander's reply. "The falls are called Sault Saint Marie, and that word which is spelled 'S-a-u-l-t' is pronounced as if it were spelled 'S-o-o.' It is a French word, and means a leap, or water-fall. So you see when you say 'Sault (Soo) Saint Marie' you are really saying 'St. Mary's Waterfall.' The canal, and the city located along it, both take the name of the falls."

[105]

The boys were up early the next morning to catch the first glimpse of the canal, lock and falls. It was some time before they reached them, however, and, when they did arrive at the canal, they found several vessels ahead of them, and had to wait their turn for entering the lock.

They had a fine view of the surrounding country and the falls of St. Mary's, spanned by a big railroad bridge. When they approached the lock, they saw that the canal was there divided by two walls of masonry making two locks and enclosing a space that was laid out like a little park, with grass plots and trees. Along the edges of the retaining walls, which were very wide, many persons were walking.

At last it was the turn of the *Modoc* to enter the lock. She steamed slowly ahead, and an empty grain barge was also sent in at the same time, the lock being large enough for two vessels.

When the craft were in, the immense gates were closed behind them. The *Modoc* and the grain barge were now shut up in something like a box of masonry, with water for a bottom, and the sky for a top. The boys watched the men open the water-gates that let in a flood of liquid that swept in from Lake Superior, through the long canal.

[106]

Slowly the two vessels began to rise. The water boiled and bubbled, churning into foam as it forced its way in. It seemed as though it was protesting at being made to hoist the ships, instead of being allowed to course on to the mighty ocean.

Up and up went the great craft, being lifted as easily by the powerful water, as though some giant hand had reached down from the sky and was elevating them. A few feet more and they would be able to steam out on the upper lever of the canal, and thence into Lake Superior.

Suddenly a rope, that held the grain barge from drifting too close to the forward gates, parted. The churning of the water sent the clumsy craft ahead, and, in a moment the bow was caught under one of the heavy beams of the gate. As the water was still lifting, the nose of the craft became depressed, while the stern rose. Then the barge swung over against the *Modoc*, and a projection on it caught against the latter craft.

The barge was now held down, bow and stern, while, from beneath, it was being lifted by an irresistible force of water. The barge careened to one side, and the *Modoc* began to heel over.

[107]

"Shut off the water!" cried Captain Wiggs, who saw the danger. "Shut her off, quick, or we'll be stove in!"

CHAPTER XIV

[108]

MYSTERIOUS STRANGERS

Under the forward gates, and through openings in them, the water was still bubbling and foaming, seeking to establish a level with that on the other side of the barrier. Lower and lower sank the bow of the barge, for it was held fast on the beam. The *Modoc* heeled over more and more.

"Shut off the water!" again cried the captain.

Then the attendants at the lock were made aware that something was wrong. Orders were shouted; men ran to and fro. With immense levers they shut the flood gates, and, slowly and sullenly, as though cheated of its prey, the bubbling subsided.

"We must pull the barge back!" cried one of the lock men, running up along the cement wall.

"No, don't do that," advised Captain Wiggs, as he stood on the bridge of his vessel, while the boys, who were much alarmed by the impending accident, had joined him, for they were permitted the run of the ship. [109]

"Why not?" asked the man. "We've got to free her from that gate beam."

"Yes, but if you pull her out from under the edge of that beam suddenly, she's sure to bound up, and then she'll come slap-bang against the side of my craft. Besides, I think she's held so tight that you can't pull her back."

"What shall we do?" asked the man, recognizing that Captain Wiggs knew what he was about.

"Let the water out from the rear gate," was his suggestion. "That will lower my vessel and the barge gradually. They'll assume their right positions, and no damage will be done. Then you can raise us again, and be sure no more ropes break. I don't want an accident like that again."

The captain's advice was followed. When the water ceased coming in the forward gate, the men ran to the rear one and opened the valves there. Out rushed the imprisoned fluid, boiling and bubbling at a great rate. Slowly the two big vessels began to sink. The barge swung away from the *Modoc* and then, a little later, when the water had fallen sufficiently, the bow was released from the projecting beam. The two crafts were now in the same positions they had been in when they first entered the lock. [110]

Men hastily fastened heavier ropes to the barge, and took several turns about strong bits, so the ship could not again drift into danger. Then the flood was once more allowed to enter the lock.

Again the vessels rose, and this time, without mishap, they were floated to the higher level of the canal. The forward gates were opened and out toward Lake Superior steamed the *Modoc*, followed by the slower grain barge. The boys looked around them, being able to get a better view now, as they were some distance higher, being on a level with the top of the falls, off to their right. They saw a long string of vessels, some waiting to enter the locks to proceed east, while others were coming west.

"That was a narrow escape," remarked Bart, when the ship was again proceeding along.

"Yes, we seem to be sort of up against lots of hard luck this trip," remarked the captain. "I think you boys must be responsible."

"How?" asked Fenn, for the captain looked serious.

"Why, you're regular Jonahs. If there were any whales in these waters I'd try the experiment of throwing one of you overboard, to see if I couldn't change my luck." [111]

"I'd be willing to jump over and take a swim," volunteer Ned. "It looks nice and cool in there, and it's hot up here."

It was a warm July day, and the weather was humid and unpleasant.

"Maybe when we get further out on Lake Superior, and come to some good place to tie up, I'll give you a chance to take a dip," responded the commander. "I'd like one myself."

"Ned must take care not to go to sleep, or he'll be carried under by a big fish," suggested Fenn, taking precautions to get beyond the reach of his chum's arm.

The *Modoc* touched at a port of call that afternoon, and Captain Wiggs found awaiting him a message which changed matters so that he did not have to be in any hurry to conclude his voyage.

"This will give us a chance to lay-to, and go ashore," he said to the boys. "You might as well have a good time while you are on this cruise. No telling when you'll get another."

It was a day after this, one of the hottest that the boys ever remembered, that the *Modoc* came to anchor off shore, near a little bay, on the edge of which, and about three miles away from where they laid-to, was a good-sized town. [112]

"Now for a swim!" exclaimed Ned. "Can we take the boat and go ashore, captain?"

The desired permission being given, the four chums were soon rowing toward where they saw a sandy beach, that seemed to be put there on purpose for bathing. They hauled the boat up on shore and soon were disporting themselves in the water.

"Oh, this is something like!" exclaimed Fenn, as he proceeded to float with nothing but his face out of the water.

"Yes, you look just like a baby crocodile," replied Frank.

"I do, eh?" asked Fenn, diving suddenly and coming up under Frank, whom he ducked unceremoniously.

"Here! Quit-erurgle-gurgle!" called the luckless one, as he sank out of sight.

Then the boys began to play tricks on each other, had impromptu races and diving contests, and enjoyed themselves to the limit in the cool water.

"Let's dress and go on a little exploring trip," proposed Fenn, after they had spent an hour in the lake. "We've got time enough before we have to go aboard."

[113]

His suggestion was well received, and soon the four chums were strolling back from the lake, through the dense woods that bordered it. They had not gone far before Frank, who was in advance, suddenly halted. He motioned to the others to approach silently, and they joined him on tip-toe.

"What is it?" asked Ned.

Frank pointed through the bushes. Beyond the screen of the underbrush the boys could see a road. It did not seem to be much traveled, but what attracted their attention was a big automobile, drawn back, and almost hidden in the thicket.

"The machine's been abandoned," was Bart's opinion. "It is probably broken."

"Hush!" cautioned Frank, and not a moment too soon, for, at that instant two men stepped cautiously out of the bushes near the auto. One of them produced a telescope, and pointed it at the lake, which was just visible through the trees.

The boys looked at the man. He seemed a rough sort of fellow, with an unpleasant face. He was poorly dressed, and the lads noticed that, standing against a tree near him, was a rifle.

But it was a sight of the man's companion which caused the boys to stare again and wonder. For the second man was a Chinese, though he wore American clothes. Under his hat, however, could be seen the tell-tale queue.

[114]

The white man handed his Celestial companion the telescope, and murmured something to him, evidently in Chinese. The other replied and applied the glass to his eye. No sooner had he done so that he uttered an exclamation, and began jumping about.

The other man snatched the glass and took a look. Then they both talked very excitedly, pointing to the lake and then at the auto.

"I wonder what they can be up to?" whispered Fenn.

At that moment he stepped on a loose branch. It broke with a sharp report, and the Chinaman and the white man glanced to where the boys were hidden.

"Come on!" exclaimed Frank. "They may come after us!"

CHAPTER XV

[115]

A QUEER FIND

Off through the woods ran the Darewell chums, and it needed but a moment's listening to tell them that the two mysterious men were after them.

"Hurry!" called Frank to Fenn, who, because of his natural inability, was not able to run as fast as could the others. "Come on, or they'll catch you!"

"I don't see—what we've done—that we—should run," panted the stout youth. "These woods—are free. Why haven't we—a right to walk in them?"

"This is out west and they do things differently from what they do where we come from," responded Bart, looking back. "Evidently those men didn't want to be observed."

"Are they coming?" asked Ned.

"No," replied Bart, pausing in his race, "they seemed to have stopped in that little clearing we just passed through."

"The Chinese is trying to induce the white man to come back," said Frank.

[116]

This was the case for, as the boys watched, they saw the pig-tailed Celestial grasp his companion by the arm, and, pointing toward the lake, fairly pull him back along the path they had come.

"They must be interested in some boat," suggested Fenn. "Say, fellows," he added hastily. "I'll bet I know what it is."

"What?" inquired Bart, as he stooped over to pick a lot of burdock burrs from his trousers.

"These men have something to do with the two who chased us back at the elevator fire. I'll bet they're part of the same gang, and they're trying to work some trick on the *Modoc*! We ought to hurry back and tell Captain Wiggs!"

"Oh, you're 'way off!" declared Frank. "I don't believe these men even know those who chased us."

"Then who are they?" demanded Fenn.

"I don't know," said Frank. "Evidently they are interested in some boat they expect from across the lake. That is very evident from the way they acted; looking through the telescope, and all that. Perhaps they have mistaken our vessel for the one they are looking for."

"No," remarked Bart. "I noticed when the Chinese pointed the glass he aimed it in a different direction from that in which the *Modoc* lies." [117]

"Then what boat are they expecting?" asked Ned.

"That's too big a question for me," replied Bart. "It certainly is a queer thing to see a Chinese and a white man in such close company, off here in the woods."

"And then the auto," put in Fenn. "What do you suppose that's for?"

"It's part of the same game," was Frank's opinion.

"Well, I don't know that it's up to us to discover it," went on Fenn. "It's about time we got back to the ship, anyhow. Come on. We'll keep on this way, and fetch around to the beach in a circle. Then we'll not run across those two queer men."

The boys advanced, laying their course as best they could. Now and then, through the trees, they could get a glimpse of the lake, and they knew they were going in the right direction.

They came to a little gully, in a dense part of the woods, and had to descend into it, to get across, as it extended for quite a distance in either direction. Frank led the way, half slipping, half sliding down the sides. As he reached the bottom he gave a startled cry that alarmed his companions. [118]

"Hurt yourself?" asked Bart.

"No, but look what I've found!"

"A gold mine?" inquired Ned, with a laugh.

"Part of a clothing store," replied Frank. "Look!" and he pointed to where, behind a clump of trees, was a large pile of men's clothing, hats, shoes, coats, vests, trousers and shirts.

"That solves the mystery!" exclaimed Fenn.

"How?" asked Bart.

"Why there's been a big robbery! The men have hidden their booty in the woods, until they have a chance to carry it away. Those two men we just saw are members of the gang. They're keeping a look-out until their boat comes and then they'll take the stuff away. Yes, that's it!"

"I believe Fenn's right," declared Ned.

"Do you?" asked Frank quietly. "Then how do you account for the fact that all the garments are old? There's not a new one among 'em, not even the shoes. You can see for yourself."

The boys looked more closely at the garments, which were arranged in piles, with canvas coverings tossed to one side, as though they had been protected from the weather, and recently opened. They did not touch the things, but it did not need a close inspection to show that Frank was right. The garments were all old ones. [119]

"If there was a robbery it must have been of a second-hand store," went on Frank, "and that's not likely. Besides, see here," and he pointed a little farther off, where a heap of Chinese clothing lay on the ground.

"Well, if this doesn't beat the Dutch!" exclaimed Bart. "What do you make out of that?"

It was a strange find. First to come across a Chinese and an American, in excited conversation in the depths of the woods, and then to discover a pile of clothes, such as are worn by white men, close to a heap, evidently discarded by a band of Celestials, was sufficient, as Bart said, to beat not only the Dutch, but the French, English, German, Spanish and a few other nations.

The boys went closer to the garments of the Celestials. These clothes, as did the others, exhibited unmistakable signs of wear. But they were not piled in orderly heaps; instead, being tossed carelessly together, as if they were no longer of any service.

"Isn't this a regular Chinese puzzle?" remarked Ned.

"I believe they are Chinese smugglers!" chorused Fenn and Bart. [120]

"That's what," said Frank. "Those two men we saw were evidently the look-outs, watching for the boat load to arrive. When the travelers from the Flowery Kingdom land, they are brought here, to this secluded place, and here they take off their blouses and wide pants, and put on old American clothes. Old ones, so they attract no attention. I'll wager that's the solution to this Chinese puzzle."

"But where do the Chinamen come from?" asked Ned. "We're a good ways from China."

"From Canada," answered Frank. "I remember reading lately about a lot of Chinese who were taken into Canada from the Pacific coast. They were brought by rail to a place on Lake Superior about opposite here, and smuggled into this country in boats."

"That's right," agreed Bart. "I read how one boat load, which the smugglers were bringing over, was caught in a storm, and all the Chinese drowned."

"But why do they bring them over?" asked Fenn, who was usually too full of fun, or too interested in some girl, to pay much attention to current events.

"Why, there's a United States law against letting any more Chinese come in," explained Frank. "The only way they can get in is to smuggle here. It's easy to get them into Canada, and then, if they can make a trip across the lake, and land in some secluded spot, they're all right, if they're not discovered, and that is no easy matter, as the Chinese all look so much alike." [121]

"Then that white man we saw must have been one of the agents engaged in smuggling," said Bart. "I've read they have a regularly organized company, and get good money from the Chinese whom they smuggle over. The pig-tailed chap with him, was evidently a helper or interpreter, who was on hand because the boat was expected."

"That's why they were looking across the lake with a telescope then," ventured Fenn. "Say, it's as clear as daylight now. I wonder if we couldn't stay and see 'em land?"

"Not much!" exclaimed Frank. "The chances are the plans are all off, for the time being. That white man will suspect we were spying on him, and when they ran back that time, I guess it was to signal to the boat not to land. We must have given them quite a scare."

"But what was the auto for?" asked Ned, who liked to go into details, and who always wanted to know the why and wherefore of things. [122]

"I guess it was to take the Chinese to some place where they could stay until it was safe to venture out," said Frank. "Sometimes they have to jump around pretty lively, I imagine, especially if the government detectives get after them."

"Perhaps we'd better go and tell Captain Wiggs what we have discovered," suggested Fenn. "He may want to notify the authorities."

"Good idea," commented Bart. "Come on."

As the boys started to leave the little gully where the clothing was hidden, they heard a noise behind them. Turning quickly they saw the white man and Chinese, as they broke through the underbrush.

"They're after us!" exclaimed Fenn in a hoarse whisper.

CHAPTER XVI

FIRE ON BOARD

But this time it proved to be the other way about. The two mysterious men, at the sight of the boys, dived back into the woods again, and showed no desire to come to closer acquaintance with them. Instead of taking after the four chums, the men acted as though they feared pursuit.

"They're running away from us!" exclaimed Frank. "I guess we haven't anything to fear from them."

Suddenly, through the forest, there sounded a shrill steam whistle.

"What's that?" asked Ned.

"Captain Wiggs, signalling to us," replied Frank. "I guess we've stayed in the woods too long. Come on."

"Maybe it's the smugglers' boat," suggested Fenn.

"I guess not," Frank remarked. "They've been signalled to keep off. That was the *Modoc's* whistle. I recognized it." [123]

Frank's words proved correct, for, when the boys reached the shore, they again heard the signal, and saw steam coming from the whistle pipe of the vessel on which they were cruising.

"Look there!" exclaimed Frank, pointing off to the left. The boys glanced in the direction, and saw a boat. From the funnels black smoke was pouring, as if every effort was being made to get up steam. "That's the smugglers' craft, very likely," the lad went on. "She's making fast time away from here."

Captain Wiggs listened gravely to what the boys had to tell him. He agreed with Frank, that the

smugglers of Chinese had tried to make a landing, but, evidently, had been frightened off.

"What will they do now?" asked Ned.

"Change the landing place to some other locality," replied the captain. "Up or down the coast. Up, I should say, seeing the way that steamer's headed," and he pointed to the craft, with the black smoke hanging like a cloud over it. The vessel was almost out of sight.

"What will they do with the clothes?" asked Bart.

"Oh, they'll take 'em along. Probably that's what the two men came to get, when they saw you and ran away. It's a well organized business, this Chinese smuggling, and there is a lot of money in it—for the agents. They are probably saying all kinds of mean things about you, for breaking up their plans."

[125]

"Then I hope they don't catch us alone off in the woods, sometime," remarked Fenn. "That Chinese didn't look like a very pleasant fellow to meet after dark; especially if he had a grudge against you."

"I think you've seen the last of 'em," declared Captain Wiggs. "If I thought it worth while I'd notify the government authorities, but, by the time I could get a message to 'em, the smugglers will be miles away. There's no telling where they'll land next time. The steamer will hang around the coast, until it gets a signal all is clear. Then the pig-tails will be dumped into a boat, rowed ashore, and the vessel will scoot off for another load in Canada."

The anchor was broken out, hoisted, and soon, under a good head of steam, the *Modoc* was proceeding over Lake Superior at a fast rate, for, though he carried no perishable freight, and had no special date of arriving at Duluth, Captain Wiggs believed in doing what he had to do as quickly as possible.

[126]

That night Fenn, who was not sleeping as soundly as he should, in consequence of having eaten too much supper, was awakened by hearing a peculiar buzzing noise. At first he could not locate it, and then, after sitting up in his bunk, he decided it came from the stateroom adjoining his, and which had no occupant this voyage.

"It sounds like a hive of bees," he said to himself. "I wonder if the captain can have any in there."

Then the absurdity of such an idea was apparent to him, and he smiled at his notion. Still the buzzing continued, growing louder. Fenn was wide awake now.

"Maybe something is wrong with the ship," he reasoned. "That sound might be water coming in through a leak. I think I'll tell the captain."

He got up, and, moving about his stateroom, in search of his trousers and slippers, he knocked a glass out of the rack.

"What's that?" called Frank, who was a light sleeper.

"It's me," replied Fenn.

"What's the matter? Sick?"

"No, but I heard a funny sound, and I want to find out what it is. Maybe the boat's sprung another leak."

[127]

"Oh, you're dreaming," commented Frank. "Go back to bed."

"Well, you come in here and listen, if you think I'm dreaming," retorted Fenn.

Frank jumped out of his berth and came into his chum's room. The buzzing had increased in intensity, and Frank had no difficulty in hearing it.

"What did I tell you?" asked Fenn, in triumph.

"It is a queer sound," admitted Frank. "What's in that next room?"

"Nothing, that I know of. I passed it this morning, the door was open, and it was empty."

"Then let's have a look," suggested Frank, stepping out into the passage.

"Maybe you'd better—maybe it's a—" stammered Fenn.

"Well, what?" demanded Frank. "Are you afraid?"

"Maybe it's an infernal machine those smugglers put aboard," went on Fenn. "It sounds just like one."

"How do you know how an infernal machine sounds?" asked Frank.

[128]

"Well, I mean like I've read of their sounding."

"Oh, that's different. But this is no such thing. Besides, how could the smugglers get one aboard? They haven't been near the ship."

This was, of course, unanswerable, and Fenn followed Frank into the corridor, and to the door

of the stateroom, whence sounded the peculiar buzzing noise. As they stood outside the portal it could be heard more plainly.

"Here goes!" whispered Frank, turning the knob.

Both he and Fenn started back in surprise, at the sight which greeted them. There, sitting in a steamer chair, in a big red bath robe, was the invalid, Mr. Ackerman. On the bunk in front of him was a small box, from which extended cords, terminating in shining metal tubes, which he held in his hand. The buzzing was coming from the small box.

"Oh, boys, I'm glad to see you!" exclaimed the man who thought he was sick.

"What's the matter?" asked Frank, in some alarm.

"I'm taking a current of electricity, from my medical battery," was the answer.

[129]

"Electricity?" repeated the two chums, in questioning accents.

"Yes, from the battery. You see I couldn't sleep, and I often find a current of electricity is beneficial. I did not want to awaken Captain Wiggs with the buzz of my machine, for it makes quite a noise, so I brought it into this empty stateroom. I hope I didn't disturb you."

Mr. Ackerman did not wait for the boys to answer. Instead he continued:

"But I'm glad you came in. I want to take a stronger current, and it goes better if I have some one to share it with me. If you will be so kind, you can each take one of the tubes in your hand, and I will take hold of your other hands. Thus we will form a circle, with me in the center. I think I shall be able to get a current then, that will cause me to go to sleep."

The boys were a little apprehensive, for, though they had taken electric "shocks" at school, during the experiments, they did not care for the amusement. However, they did not like to refuse, so, rather gingerly, Fenn grasped one handle, and Frank the other. Mr. Ackerman then did something to the battery which made it buzz louder than ever.

[130]

"All ready," he announced, as he grasped Fenn's right hand in his left and Frank's left in his right.

The instant that he did so it seemed as if the trio had been hit by something. They all doubled up, the arms of the boys and the invalid jerking like the legs of a frog.

"Ow!" cried Fenn.

"Let go!" called Frank.

But there was no need for any one to let go. With an exclamation of great astonishment, Mr. Ackerman jerked his hands from the involuntary grip of the boys'. That at once broke the circuit, and the current ceased to have any effect. The machine was still buzzing away, however.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" murmured the invalid. "I meant to turn on the weak current, and I turned on the strong one! Did you get bad shocks, boys?"

"Did we!" exclaimed Fenn. "Say, it feels as if I had eaten some strong horse-radish by mistake."

"It seems as if a mule kicked me," remarked Frank, rubbing his arms.

"I'm very sorry," apologized Mr. Ackerman. "I really did not intend that. I hope you believe I did not." He seemed quite distressed over the happening.

[131]

"That's all right," spoke Fenn, good-naturedly. "We know it was an accident."

"Rather a fortunate accident, too," went on the invalid. "My nerves are much calmer now. I really think I shall be able to go to sleep. I must have taken the right kind of a current without knowing it. I'll do it the next time I find myself too wakeful."

"Please excuse us from helping," begged Frank, with a smile. "It's a little too much."

"Oh, no, I wouldn't think of shocking you again," said Mr. Ackerman as he began to take the battery apart for packing. "I shall take the current alone. But there, I must not talk or I shall be awake again. I must hurry and get to sleep."

"Isn't he the limit!" exclaimed Fenn, when he and Frank were back in the stateroom again. "He thinks that was fun for us."

The electrical treatment appeared to improve the sick man, for, the next day he was much better, and even laughed and joked about the night's experience.

The *Modoc* continued on her course, putting many knots behind her, and the boys were more and more delighted with their cruise, which every day revealed to them new beauties of scenery.

[132]

One afternoon, when they were within a day's travel of Duluth, Captain Wiggs, who was sitting on deck with the four chums, arose suddenly and began to sniff the air.

"What's the matter? Is the cook burning the steak?" asked Fenn.

"Something's burning," answered the commander, with a grave face.

A moment later a sailor, much excited, came rushing up on deck.

"Fire in the forward hold, sir!" he called.

CHAPTER XVII

[133]

A STRANGE VISION

Captain Wiggs was not built on speed lines. He was short and squatty, and inclined to be fat. But the way in which he hustled about as soon as he heard what the sailor said was sufficient to qualify him to enter a go-as-you-please race of almost any kind.

With a few jumps he was at the companionway leading below, and, as he went the boys could hear him call out:

"Ring the fire alarm! Every man to his station! Someone tell the pilot to slow down! Signal to the engineer to get the pumps in gear!"

Nor were the members of the crew slow to carry out the commander's instructions. One man rang the automatic fire alarm, that sounded in every part of the vessel. Another hurried to the bridge, where he delivered the message about stopping the boat. The *Modoc* at once began to lose way and, a moment later, the vibration from the engine room told the boys that the pumps had been started.

[134]

"Let's go below and see if we can help," suggested Bart, and the four chums went down in a hurry. They found men dragging lines of hose forward where little curls of smoke began coming from an open hatchway.

"Drown her out, men!" cried the captain. "It'll be all day with us if the flames get loose in that dry freight!"

Several of the men, dragging the snaky lines of hose, dropped down into the hold. They called for water, and the captain signalled for it to be turned on. The flat hose bulged out like a snake after a full meal, and a splashing sound from below told that the quenching fluid was getting in its work.

"Can we do anything?" asked Fenn, as he saw Captain Wiggs taking off his coat and donning oil skins.

"Not now, I guess. You might stand by for orders though. There's no telling into what this will develope."

It was getting quite smoky below, and the hold, down into which the commander had disappeared, was pouring out a volume of black vapor.

"Tell 'em to send another line of hose!" came a voice from below, and Fenn hurried to the engineer's room with the order.

[135]

Several men sprang at once to obey. The hose was unreeled from a rack on the partition, and run out to the hold. Then the engineer started another pump, that had been held in reserve.

There were now three lines of hose pouring water on the flames, which the boys could not see. That the blaze was not succumbing so quickly as had been hoped for, was evident by the shouts and excitement that came from the depths of the ship.

"Tell 'em to give us more water!" yelled the captain to the boys waiting above.

Frank rushed with the order, glad to escape the smoke, which was momentarily growing thicker.

"Tell him he's got all the water I can give him!" shouted the engineer, above the noise of the clanking machinery. "One of the pumps has gone out of commission!"

Frank shouted what the engineer had said to Captain Wiggs, below in the darkness.

"Then we've got to batten down the hatches and turn live steam into this hold!" was what the commander called back. "Tell him to get up a good head!"

Frank did so. When he returned Captain Wiggs was just making his way out of the hold. He was black, and smoke-begrimed, while he dripped water from every point of his yellow garments.

[136]

"Is there any danger?" asked Ned.

"There always is with a fire aboard a ship," answered the commander. "But I think we'll be able to hold her down if we get plenty of steam. Come on up, men," he added, and the sailors scrambled up. They looked more like colored, than white men.

Captain Wiggs acted quickly. When the last man was up, the hatches, or coverings to the hold, were fastened down, and tarpaulins, wet with water, to make them air tight, were spread over

the top. Then, from pipes which ran into the hold from below, and which were for use in emergency, jets of live steam were blown into the compartment.

This, the commander knew, would penetrate to every nook and corner, reaching where water could not, and would soon quench the flames.

"Now, all we can do is to wait," said the captain, as he sat down, for he was almost exhausted.

That was the hardest part of all. When one can be busy at something, getting out of danger, or fighting a fire that can be seen, the nervous fear is swallowed up in action. But to sit and wait—wait for the unseen steam to do its work,—that was very trying. [137]

Still there was no help for it. Captain Wiggs looked to the other part of the cargo, seeing that there was no danger of that taking fire. The forward hold was separated from the others by thick bulkheads, and there was little chance of the fire breaking through. The hull of the *Modoc* was of steel, and, provided the fire did not get hot enough to warp any of the plates, there was small danger to the ship itself.

"We'll have to head for shore, in case it becomes necessary to break out the cargo," decided the captain, as he went on deck. "Come on, boys. We can do nothing now, and we want to get some of this smoke out of our lungs."

The course of the ship was changed. Captain Wiggs got out his charts and looked them over.

"Where will we land?" asked Fenn.

"Not much of anywhere," was the reply. "There is no good harbor this side of Duluth, but I've got to do the best I can. There is a little bay, about opposite here. There's no settlement near it, but I understand there's a good shore, and I'm going to make for it, in case this fire gets beyond my control."

Urged on by all the steam the engines could take, though much was needed for the fire, the vessel plowed ahead. [138]

"Land ho!" called the lookout, and the captain, taking an observation, announced they were close to the bay of which he had spoken. When it was reached it was found to be a secluded harbor, with nothing in sight on the shores of it save a few old huts, that appeared to be deserted.

"Not a very lively place," commented the captain. "Still, it will do all right if we have to land the cargo."

The anchor was dropped and then all there was to do was to wait for the fire to be extinguished.

The boys remained on deck, looking at the scenery about them. Back of the bay, rising almost from the edge of the water, were a series of steep cliffs, of bare rock for the most part, but studded, here and there, with clumps of bushes and small trees, that somehow, found a lodgement for their roots on little ledges.

"It's a lonesome sort of place," remarked Fenn. "Not a soul within sight."

Hardly had he spoken than there was seen on the face of the cliff, as if by a trick, the figure of a man. He seemed to come out, as does a magic-lantern picture on a sheet, so quickly did he appear where, before, there had been nothing but bare brown rock. [139]

"Look!" exclaimed Fenn, pointing.

"A Chinaman!" exclaimed Bart. "One of the smugglers!"

The boys jumped to their feet, and approached closer to the ship's rail, to get a better view.

As they did so the Chinese vanished as though the cliff wall had opened and swallowed him up.

CHAPTER XVIII

AN EXPLORING PARTY

"Well, what do you think of that?" asked Fenn, in surprised accents. "Did he fall down?"

"Doesn't look so," answered Frank. "I wonder if we really saw him, or whether it was a sort of day dream?"

"Oh, we saw him all right enough," said Bart. "He looked to me just like the Chinaman we saw in the woods that day."

"Just what I was going to remark," put in Ned. "I wonder if there are any more men up on that cliff?"

"What's the matter, boys?" asked Captain Wiggs, approaching at this juncture. They told him

[137]

[138]

[139]

[140]

what they had seen.

"I don't see anything very surprising in that," replied the commander. "Probably he has a laundry up there, and he was out looking for customers." And the commander winked at the other chums, who joined in a laugh at Fenn.

"That's all right," announced the discomfited one. "But I'll wager there's something queer back of all this. Do you know anything about this locality, captain?" [141]

"Not a thing, and I wish I knew less. I'd never be here if it wasn't for the fire. And I must take a look now, and see how our steam bath is affecting it. I guess—"

"Look there!" suddenly cried Fenn, pointing to the cliff, at the base of which the lake waves were breaking.

They all looked. There, on the face of the wall of rock, apparently supported by nothing, stood four men, two of whom were Chinese, dressed in the characteristic costume of that nation. The others were white men. They were close together, near a little clump of bushes, that sprang slantingly out from the surface of the cliff.

"More of 'em, eh?" murmured the captain. "I wonder if they'll answer a hail?"

He put his hands, trumpet fashion, to his mouth, and was about to call out, when a surprising thing happened.

As the boys watched the men seemed to grow suddenly smaller. They fairly went down out of sight, vanishing as completely as though they had sank into the cliff.

"Well, I never saw such a queer thing!" exclaimed Ned. "They acted just like a Jack in the Box, when some one shuts the lid." [142]

"That expresses it exactly," admitted the captain. "It is a queer thing. I think it will bear looking into. I wonder if they haven't something to do with the Chinese smugglers."

"That's what we thought."

"I believe I'll go ashore and have a look," decided the commander of the *Modoc*. "The government detectives ought to be told of what's going on out here in this lonely place."

Captain Wiggs would have carried his plan out, but for the fact that an inspection of the hold showed the fire in the cargo to be smothered. The steam had done the work effectively and there was no more danger. Instead of having to remain in the secluded bay for some time, ready at any moment, when danger threatened, to break out the cargo, the commander found himself able to proceed to Duluth.

This he decided on doing at once, as the exact extent of the fire-damage could not be ascertained until he reached a port where he could unload.

Accordingly all plans of making any examination of the strange actions of the queer men were abandoned and, steam having been gotten up in the main boilers, the engines were started and the *Modoc* was once more under way. [143]

As they left the little bay the boys kept close watch of the cliff, but there were no signs of life upon the brown wall of rock. If the men were somewhere within a cave on its surface, they did not show themselves.

"I wonder if we'll ever solve that mystery?" inquired Bart, of no one in particular, as the four chums paced the deck.

"I'm going to," announced Fenn, decidedly.

"Yes, you're going to do a lot," returned Ned, with a laugh. "You were going to collect minerals, but I haven't seen you stowing any away lately, for your collection."

"That's so, I forgot all about 'em," admitted Fenn. "I've got lots of time, though. You can't get any minerals out here," and he motioned to the expanse of water that surrounded them. "But I'm going to look into this Chinese business, though."

"How?" asked Frank. "We're going farther and farther away every minute."

"That's all right. We can come back," announced Fenn.

"I thought you were going to Bayville to see Mr. Hayward, and—er—Miss Ruth," went on Bart. "Especially Ruth." [144]

"Well, I may yet," replied Fenn. "Bayville isn't so far from here. In fact it's within a short distance of where we anchored in that bay."

"How do you know?"

"I asked the captain," replied Fenn. "I was thinking of taking a boat and rowing there, if we'd stayed long enough."

"But how do you figure on getting there now?" asked Ned.

"I'm coming back, after we get to Duluth," was the answer. "Captain Wiggs has got to remain there for some time, and I don't see what there is to keep us. It's a city, and we've had enough of city life for a while. I was going to propose that, after we'd been there a couple of days, we go off on a little side trip, coming back in time to go home on the *Modoc*."

"Good idea!" exclaimed Bart. "We could go on a little camping expedition."

"That was my idea," added Fenn. "We've got enough money with us to hire a tent and a small outfit, all we'll need for a week or so. We've been camping in the woods before, and we know how to take care of ourselves. This cruising business is fine, but it's too lazy a life to suit me."

"No, I s'pose we haven't had any excitement since we started," commented Frank sarcastically. "There was the elevator fire, those men chasing us; Ned nearly being pulled overboard with a fish; getting caught in the lock; the steamer on fire and the queer men on the cliff. Oh, yes, we've lived a very quiet and sedate life since we left home, Oh, yes, exceedingly quiet." [145]

"Well, I mean—Oh, you know what I mean," said Fenn. "We need more action—the kind we'll get if we go off on a trip by ourselves."

"That's right," agreed Ned. "I'm with you, Stumpy. The sooner the quicker."

"When do we get to Duluth?" asked Bart.

"Very soon now," answered Captain Wiggs, who, coming up behind the boys, overheard the question. "I suppose you are all ready to enter port?" and he looked quizzically at the boys.

"Ready. How do you mean?" asked Fenn.

"Why you can pass the quarantine regulations, I suppose? Let me look at your tongues!"

The boys were so surprised that, hardly knowing what they were doing, they stuck them out for the captain's inspection.

"Bad, very bad," he murmured. "I'll have to attend to this at once." And he laughed heartily.

"Sold again!" exclaimed Frank, as he drew in his tongue. "I thought we were going to get even with him." [146]

"So we are," declared Bart. "If not now, on the trip home. We owe him another one now."

They were soon busy getting things in shape to go ashore and, when the *Modoc* tied up at a big wharf, they were all ready to go to the hotel the captain had recommended, there to stay a couple of days, until they could start on their little exploring expedition.

The captain had offered no objection to this, and had told them the best route to take.

"But you must be back in time to sail with me on the homeward trip," cautioned the captain, mentioning the date and time he expected to start. "I'll not wait for you, remember. The *Modoc* suffered very little damage from the fire. Less than I feared and there will be no delay."

"We'll be here on time," Fenn assured him.

The boys spent two busy days preparing for their side trip, and, bright and early one morning, they took a train that was to convey them to a little settlement, whence they were to start for a jaunt through the woods, carrying their simple camping outfit with them.

CHAPTER XIX

 [147]

FENN BECOMES ILL

"Well, now, what's our program?" asked Frank when the four Darewell chums were in the railroad train, speeding through the outskirts of Duluth. "I s'pose Fenn will make a bee line for Bayville and see Ruth."

"I intend to go there, not only to see Ruth, but to see her father," announced Fenn coolly. "It's no more than right, is it? He invited us to come and see him, if we ever got out this way, and here we are. It would be mean not to pay a visit."

"Oh, yes, Stumpy," remarked Ned. "We know just how you feel about it," and he laughed, whereat Fenn blushed, for he was rather sensitive concerning his liking for young ladies.

"Leaving Mr. Hayward out of it, what do you intend to do, after we've got our camp established?" asked Frank, looking at Fenn, with whom this idea had originated.

"I'm going to see what those men were doing on the cliff," was the decided answer. "Maybe they were Chinese smugglers. If they were—" [148]

"Yes, if they were I s'pose Stumpy will climb up there single handed, make 'em all prisoners, and then write a half-dime novel about it," put in Bart.

"Not exactly," answered Fenn. "I don't see what's to hinder me giving information to the government, though, about the smugglers, if that's what they are. I understand there's a reward for that sort of information, and I could use a bit of spare cash as well as any one."

"That's so!" exclaimed Ned. "I didn't think about that. I'm with you, Stumpy."

"You'll want half the reward, I guess," interjected Bart.

"Sure," said Ned. "Who wouldn't? Why can't we all go in on this thing?"

"Of course we can," declared Fenn. "We'll go camping somewhere back of that cliff, and then we can—"

"Hush! Not so loud!" suddenly cautioned Frank. Then, bending his head closer to his chums, as they were sitting in two seats facing each other he added: "There's a man a couple of seats back who's been watching us pretty sharply ever since we began talking this way. I don't like his looks."

[149]

"Where is he?" asked Fenn in a whisper.

"Don't look now," replied Frank, making a pretense of pointing out the window at a bit of scenery. "He's staring right at us. It's the man with the light hat, with a white ribbon band on, whom I mean. You can size him up as soon as he turns his head."

The boys cautiously waited for an opportunity, and took a quick inspection of the man Frank had indicated. He was a total stranger to the four Darewell lads, as far as any of them knew, but it did not take long to disclose the fact that the man was much interested in them.

He watched their every move, and, when any one of them spoke, the fellow tried to catch what was said. The man seemed like an ordinary traveler, and, except for a peculiar cast in one eye, was not bad looking.

"Let's change our seats," suggested Fenn, when the train had proceeded some miles farther, and the car was not so full. "We want to talk, and we can't be whispering all the while."

They moved farther away from the man with the cast in his eye, and were once more discussing their plans, when Frank again noticed that the man was listening. He, too, had moved up several seats, and, under pretense of reading a paper, was straining his ears for whatever the boys said.

[150]

"Let's go into the other car," proposed Fenn. "If he follows us there we'll tell the conductor."

But the man evidently did not care to run any more risks and the boys were not further annoyed.

"I wonder who he was?" asked Ned. "Perhaps he had something to do with the smugglers."

"Oh, I guess he was just some fellow more interested in the business of other persons than in his own," replied Frank. "I hope we didn't talk too much, so that he'll know what we are going to do."

"That's so, he might go and give information to the government, and get that reward," announced Fenn. "I wish we'd been more careful!"

"Well, I guess he'll have his own troubles finding that cliff," was Bart's opinion. "We didn't mention any special place. Our secret is safe enough."

After further consideration of what they had said the boys agreed with this view. As they were now almost alone in the car they talked freely, deciding on what to do when in the woods.

They had brought a small sleeping tent with them, some guns which they had hired and a limited supply of food. As they were going to be within reach of small settlements, villages or, at the worst, scattered farm houses, they calculated they could, from time to time, buy what they needed to eat.

[151]

They had made a careful study of a map of the country they intended to utilize as part of their vacation trip, and decided on a place to camp that was not far from where they had observed the queer actions of the men on the cliff. It was also within a short distance of Bayville, where, as has been said, Mr. Hayward and his daughter lived.

They left the train at a station, near the foot of a small mountain, on the slopes of which they were to pitch their tent. Their baggage and supplies was piled up on the platform and, Frank, surveying it, exclaimed:

"Oh, dear, I wish we had that mule we used when we were rescuing my father. He could carry a good deal of this stuff, and we wouldn't break our backs."

"Aw, don't mind a little thing like that!" advised Bart. "Why it's not far, and we can make two trips if necessary."

They decided this would be the best plan, and, taking what they could carry, they set off into the woods, the station agent agreeing to look after what baggage they left behind, until they came back for it.

[152]

The weather was fine, and the air, in that northwestern region, was clear and bracing.

"I could carry twice as much as this," announced Ned, as he walked along, balancing his load on his shoulder.

"Here, take mine then!" cried Frank quickly.

"Not to-day," retorted Ned with a laugh. "I was only figuratively speaking."

They picked out a good camping place, and, as they had brought the tent with the first load, they set that up.

"Now for the rest of the stuff, and we'll be in good shape for the night," remarked Bart. "Come on, fellows. Why, Fenn, what's the matter?" he asked quickly, as he noticed the stout youth seated on a log.

"Me? Nothing. I'm all right."

"No, you're not. You're as white as a sheet of paper," went on Bart. "Don't you feel well?"

"Sure. I'm all right. I guess I walked a little too fast; that's all."

"Well, take a good rest before you make the second trip," advised Ned.

"No, I'll tell you what we'll do," proposed Frank. "We three can easily carry what stuff is back there at the depot. Let Fenn stay here and rest, and we'll go back for it. Besides, we ought to leave somebody on guard," he added quickly, fearing Fenn might object to anyone doing his share of the work.

[153]

"Oh, I'll be all right in a minute, fellows," said Fenn, trying to smile, but making rather poor work of it. "It's the heat, I guess."

"It is hot," agreed Bart.

"You go ahead and I'll catch up to you," proposed Fenn. "I'm feeling a little better now."

"No, you stay here and we'll fetch the rest of the stuff," repeated Frank, and he insisted on it, with such good reason, also pointing out that if any tramps came along they might steal the tent, that Fenn consented to remain on guard. In fact he was very glad to do so, as he felt a curious sensation in his head and stomach, and he was not a little alarmed, as he had never been seriously ill.

"I hope he isn't going to be sick," observed Bart, as the boys started back to the station. "We'll have to give up our camp if he is."

"Oh, he'll be all right," asserted Ned, confidently. "It was only the heat and the walk."

"I hope so," rejoined Frank.

[154]

But when the boys returned with the remainder of the camp stuff two hours later, they found an unpleasant surprise awaiting them.

In the tent, stretched out on some hemlock boughs which they had cut before leaving, they found poor Fenn. He was very pale and his eyes were closed.

"He's asleep," whispered Ned.

Frank entered softly and placed his hand on Fenn's head.

"He's got a high fever," he said, with alarm in his voice. "Fellows, I'm afraid Fenn's quite sick."

CHAPTER XX

[155]

OUT ON A HUNT

Frank's announcement seemed to strike a cold chill to the hearts of Ned and Bart. Sickness was something with which they had seldom come in contact, and they did not know how to proceed.

"I suppose we'd better get a doctor," ventured Ned.

"Where?" inquired Frank as he came from the tent. "There isn't one within five miles—maybe farther."

"Haven't we any medicine?" asked Bart. "I thought you said you brought some along."

"So I did," replied Frank. "Stuff for burns, cuts and stomach aches, but I don't know as it would be safe to give him anything when he has a fever."

"Have you got anything for a fever?" inquired Ned.

"Yes, some of those little, white tasteless pills, that come in small bottles. Homeopathic remedies they call 'em. I'll read the directions."

At that instant Fenn murmured something.

[156]

"He's talking!" exclaimed Frank, listening at the flap of the tent.

"Water, mother. Give me a drink of water," spoke the sick boy.

"He thinks he's home," said Ned.

"Here, I'll get him a drink, and you read the directions on that bottle of pills," directed Bart. "Maybe we can give him some."

Fenn drank thirstily of the spring water Bart carried in to him, scarcely opening his eyes, and, when he did, he did not know his chum.

"The smugglers!" exclaimed the now delirious youth. "We'll catch 'em! Don't let Ruth fall into the cave. Look out!"

The boys were much frightened, especially Ned and Bart. Frank, from the experience he had had with his father, knew a little more than did the others about cases of illness. He read what it said on the bottle of pills and decided it would be safe to give Fenn several of the pellets.

"Now, we'd better get the camp in shape for night," said Frank. "We've got to stay here until morning, no matter what happens. We can't move Fenn until he's better."

"Maybe he'll not get better," remarked Ned, rather gloomily.

"Oh, cut out such ideas," advised Frank. "He'll be all right. Probably his stomach is upset. Now hustle around and get a fire going. I want some hot coffee, and so do you. Then we'll all feel better, after a bit of grub." [157]

Once Bart and Ned had something definite to do they did not worry so much about Fenn. Frank took a look at him, now and then, in the midst of the work of making the camp.

"He's asleep," he announced after one inspection. "I think his fever's going down some."

"That's good," commented Bart, his face losing some of its worried look.

The boys ate a hasty supper and then made a more comfortable bed for Fenn. The tent was big enough for all four to stretch out under it, but the three chums decided they would take turns sitting up, in order to administer to the sick lad.

Frank gave him some more medicine during the night, and, by twelve o'clock, Fenn was somewhat better, though he still had a fever.

It seemed that morning would never come, but, at length, there shone through the forest a pale, gray light, that turned to one of rosy hue, and then the golden sunbeams streamed through the trees.

"Thank goodness the night's gone," exclaimed Ned, who had the last watch. "It seems as if we'd been here a week, instead of a few hours." [158]

"How is he?" asked Bart of Frank, who had assumed the rôle of doctor.

"No worse, at any rate," he said, as he felt of his chum's head.

"Do you think we ought to get a physician?"

"I think we'll see how he is to-day," answered Frank. "If he doesn't get any worse I believe it will work off. I'll give him some more medicine."

There must have been some virtue in the pills, for, by noon, Fenn's skin was much cooler, and he had began to perspire, a sure sign that the fever was broken. His mind, too, was clear.

"What's the matter? What happened?" he asked. "Was I sick?"

"I guess it was a little touch of sun-stroke," replied Frank with a laugh. "How do you feel?"

"Pretty good, only weak. I'm hungry and thirsty."

"That's a good sign. I guess we can fix you up."

Fenn made a fairly good meal on canned chicken and some biscuits which Ned concocted out of a package of prepared flour.

"I think I can get up now," announced the sick youth, as he finished the last of his meal.

"No you don't!" exclaimed Frank. "I'm the trained nurse in charge to-day, and you stay in the tent until night, anyhow." [159]

Fenn wanted to disobey, but he found he was weaker than he thought, so he was glad to stretch out on the blanket, spread over the fragrant hemlock boughs. He was so much better by night that the boys were practically assured he was out of danger. They felt correspondingly happy, and prepared as fine a meal as they could in celebration of the event.

Fenn ate sparingly, however, and then fell off into a sound, healthful sleep. His three comrades took turns during the night watch, but there was nothing for them to do, save, now and then, to replenish the camp fire.

The next day Fenn was so much better that he insisted on getting up, but he did not have much ambition to do things.

"We'll go hunting, as soon as you are able," announced Frank, after breakfast. "Our pantry isn't very well stocked."

"Don't wait for me," urged Fenn. "Go ahead. I can stay in camp, and look after things while you three are gone. I'll take my turn at hunting a little later."

At first the boys would not hear of this, but, after Fenn pointed out that they must have stuff to eat, they agreed to go hunting the next day, leaving him alone in camp, if it was found, by morning, that he was well enough. [160]

Fortunately this proved to be the case and Ned, Frank and Bart, carrying the guns they had hired in Duluth, started off, cautioning Fenn to take care of himself, and not to wander away from the tent.

"We'll be back as soon as we have shot something to eat," promised Bart.

It was rather lonesome in camp for Fenn, after his chums had left. At first he sat in front of the tent, watching the antics of some squirrels who, emboldened by hunger, came quite close to pick up crumbs. Fenn scorned to shoot at them.

"I think I'm strong enough to take a little walk," decided the youth, after an hour or so of idleness. "It will do me good. Besides, I want to get a line on just where that cliff is, on which we saw the queer men."

He started off, and found he had regained nearly all his former strength. It was a fine day, and pleasant to stroll through the woods.

Fenn wandered on, aiming for the lake, which was some distance away from where the tent was pitched. Suddenly, as he was going through a little glade, he heard a noise on the farther side of the clearing, as though some one had stepped on, and broken, a tree branch. Looking quickly up he saw, half screened by a clump of bushes, two Chinamen, and a white man. [161]

The odd trio, whose advance had alarmed Fenn, stopped short. Then one of the Celestials muttered some lingo to the other. An instant later the three drew back in the bushes, and Fenn could hear them hurrying away.

"I'm on the track of the smugglers!" he exclaimed. "I'm going to follow them and see where they go! I must be nearer the cliff than I thought."

Off Fenn started, after the three men. If he had known what lay before him he would have hesitated a long time before doing what he did. But Fenn did not know.

CHAPTER XXI

 [162]

THE CHINESE BUTTON

Game was not so plentiful in the woods about the camp, as the three chums had hoped. Frank, Ned and Bart tramped along, keeping a close watch for anything that would promise to restock the larder, but, for some time, the most they saw, were numbers of small birds—too small to shoot.

"Why can't we scare up a covey of partridges?" asked Ned, rather disgustedly, after they had been out an hour or more.

"Why don't you wish for a herd of deer, or a drove of bears, that is if bears go in droves," suggested Bart. "You want things too easy, you do."

"I don't care whether they're easy or not, as long as there are some of them," retorted Ned. "I'd like to hear how this gun sounds when it's shot off."

"Hark! What's that?" exclaimed Bart, looking up as a sudden whirring noise was audible in the air over their heads.

The boys looked up, and, to their surprise, saw a big flock of wild ducks, flying quite low. It was rather early in the season for them, as they learned later, but they did not stop to think of that. Without further words, they raised their guns and blazed away. [163]

"Hurrah! We got some!" yelled Ned, as he saw several of the wild fowl tumbling earthward.

"The other barrel!" exclaimed Frank. "We may not get another chance, and we'd better kill enough to last us a week."

They fired again, and killed several more of the ducks. They found the birds to be in fairly good condition, though they would be fatter later on.

"They will make fine eating!" remarked Bart, as he held up a string of the wild fowl. "Maybe

Fenn won't like to set his teeth in a nice browned piece of roast duck."

"Providing he is well enough to eat it," added Ned.

"Oh, he'll be well enough," was Frank's answer. "But I'd like to get something else besides duck."

"Well, we've got plenty of time yet," suggested Bart. "Let's go a little farther."

Slinging their game over their shoulders, and reloading their guns, the boys once more started off. They had not gone far before a commotion in a clump of underbrush, just ahead of where Ned was walking, startled the lad into sudden activity. [164]

"Here's something!" he called in a hoarse whisper.

"Yes, and it's liable to come out and shake hands with you, and ask how you like the weather, if you yell that way again," remarked Frank. "Don't you know any better than to call out like that when you're hunting?"

"I couldn't help it," whispered Ned. "I saw something big and black. I think it's a bear."

"A bear! Where?" cried Bart in a whisper, cocking his gun.

"Go easy," advised Frank. "We stand a swell chance of killing a bear with these light shotguns. Where is it, Ned?"

The boys were all speaking in low tones, and had come to a halt in a little circle of trees. All about them was thick underbrush, from the midst of which had issued the disturbance that caused Ned to exclaim.

"There it is!" he said, grasping Frank by the arm, and pointing toward something dark. At that moment it moved, and a good-sized animal darted forward, right across the trail, in front of the boys, and, an instant later was scrambling up a tall tree as if for dear life. [165]

"Fire!" cried Ned, suiting the action to the word. He aimed point-blank at the creature, but, when the smoke cleared away, there was no dead body to testify to his prowess as a hunter.

"Missed!" exclaimed Ned disgustedly. "And it was a fine chance to bowl over a bear cub, too."

"Bear cub?" repeated Frank. "Take a look at what you think is a bear cub."

Frank pointed to the tree, up which the animal had climbed. There, away out on the end of a rather thin limb, it crouched, looking down on the boys—a huddled bunch of fur.

"A raccoon!" exclaimed Bart. "You're a fine naturalist, you are, Ned. Why didn't you take it for a giraffe or an elephant?"

"That's all right, you'd have made the same mistake if you had seen it first," retorted Ned. "I'm going to have a shot at it, anyway."

He raised his gun, but the raccoon, probably thinking now was the opportunity to show that he believed in the old maxim, to the effect that discretion is the better part of valor, made a sudden movement and vanished.

"See!" exclaimed Ned triumphantly. "He knew I was some relation to Davy Crockett. He didn't exactly want to come down, but he had some business to attend to in another tree." [166]

"That's an easy way of getting out of it," remarked Bart, "but I'll wager you would have missed worse than I did if you had shot."

"Oh, come on and stop scrapping!" exclaimed Frank.

"We're not scrapping," retorted Ned. "Only I say I'm as good a shot as he is."

"You can prove it, by shooting at a mark, when we get back to camp," suggested Frank. "Just now we're out hunting, not trying to decide a rifle match."

But word seemed to have gone through the woods that three mighty boy hunters were abroad, and all the game appeared to have gone into hiding. Tramp as the chums did, for several miles, they got no further sight of anything worth shooting at.

"I guess we'll have to be content with the ducks, and go back," remarked Frank, after a somewhat long jaunt in silence. "Fenn may be lonesome waiting for us."

"I know my stomach is lonesome for something to eat," returned Bart. "The sooner some of these ducks are roasting, or stewing or cooking in whatever is the quickest way, the better I'll like it." [167]

"All right, let's head for camp," agreed Ned, and, having picked out their trail, by the help of a compass they carried, they were soon journeying toward where their tent was set up.

"I hope Fenn is all right," remarked Frank, as they trudged onward.

"All right? Why shouldn't he be?" inquired Bart.

"Well, I was a little worried about leaving him alone."

"Why Fenn is able to take care of himself," declared Ned. "Besides, what's there to be afraid of?"

"I don't know," admitted Frank. "But suppose another spell of fever should suddenly develop, and he was all alone? It wouldn't be very nice."

"Well, he was as anxious to have us go as we were to start off," remarked Bart.

"I know it, but still, I can't help feeling a little anxious."

"Oh, he'll be all right," declared Bart, confidently. "He'll have a good fire ready for us, coffee made, and all we'll have to do will be to clean these ducks and put them to roast."

"I hope so," replied Frank.

[168]

The boys, in the excitement of the chase, had gone farther into the woods than they had anticipated on starting out. Consequently it was later than they expected when they got to where they saw landmarks that told them they were near camp.

"It's only about half a mile farther now," remarked Bart.

"Give a yell," suggested Ned. "Fenn will hear it and know we are coming."

The three chums united their voices in a loud hallo; and, when the echoes had died away, they listened for an answering cry. None came, and the woods were silent, save for the noises made by birds flitting here and there in the branches of the trees.

"He didn't hear us," said Ned. "Try again."

"Maybe—maybe he isn't there," suggested Frank, in a low voice.

"Of course he is!" declared Ned. "Maybe he's asleep."

"I guess he didn't hear us," suggested Bart. "The wind is blowing the wrong way. Let's yell again."

Once more they shouted, but with no effect. There came no answering hail.

"Come on!" called Frank, increasing his speed. The boys spoke but seldom during the remainder of the tramp to camp. When they came in sight of the tent they strained their eyes for a sight of their chum. He was nowhere to be seen.

[169]

"Probably he's inside, lying down," spoke Ned.

It needed but a glance within the canvas shelter, to show that Fenn was not there. In the gathering dusk Frank gave a hasty glance about the locality. The embers of what had been the campfire, were cold. There was no sign that Fenn had been there recently, or that he had made any preparations to receive his chums.

"He must have gone off in the woods and forgotten to come back," suggested Bart. "Maybe he went hunting on his own account."

"If he had, he'd have taken his gun," replied Frank, pointing to where the weapon stood in a corner of the tent.

"Then he's out for a walk," declared Bart.

"He's staying rather late," commented Frank. "I hope—"

Frank did not finish his sentence. Suddenly, he darted forward and picked up something off the ground.

"What is it?" asked Bart.

For answer Frank held it out on the palm of his hand. It was a small object and the two boys had to bend close to see what it was. They saw one of the peculiar brass buttons that serve to hold the loops with which a Chinese blouse is fastened.

[170]

"A Chinese button!" exclaimed Bart, in a whisper.

"The Chinamen have been here!" added Ned.

"It looks as if the smugglers had Fenn," said Frank solemnly. "They must have sneaked in here and carried him off!"

CHAPTER XXII

[171]

FENN'S MISHAP

Fenn had not gone very far, in pursuit of the two Chinamen and their white companion, before he became aware that he was not as strong as he thought he was. In his legs there was strange

trembling, and his head felt dizzy.

"I guess I was sicker than I imagined," he said to himself, as he kept doggedly on. "But I'll trail 'em. I'm going to find out where they are staying, how they get to the cliff, and what it's all about."

Ahead of him Fenn could hear the trio making their way through the underbrush. They seemed to be following some trail, as there was a faintly-defined path through the woods at this point.

"They must be preparing to smuggle in a shipload of Chinese," thought Fenn. "Probably it's the same gang we scared off farther down the lake. They've come up here. Oh, if I had some way of sending word to a government detective, I could catch 'em in the very act! But, if I can find out where the landing place is I can show the officers how to get to it. That is, if they don't take the alarm and skip out. They must know me by this time."

[172]

The trail was becoming more difficult to follow. It still led toward the lake and Fenn was sure he was on the right track. Already he had visions of what he would do with the reward money, after he had given his chums their shares.

"Whew! But I'm getting tired!" exclaimed the lad, after making his way through a particularly thick bit of underbrush. "I wish some of the fellows were along to take up the chase. I wonder if they're going much farther?"

He paused a moment to rest, and listened intently for a sound of the retreating footsteps of those ahead of him.

"Why," he exclaimed, after a second or two. "I can't hear them!"

There were no sounds save those made by the birds and small beasts of the forest.

"They've distanced me!" Fern exclaimed. "I couldn't keep up with them! Now I've lost track of them! What shall I do?"

He was trembling, partly from excitement, and partly from nervousness and weakness. A mist seemed to come before his eyes. He looked about him and saw, off to the left, a little hill.

[173]

"I'll climb that, and see if I can catch a glimpse of them," he said, speaking aloud. The sound of his own voice seemed to bring his confidence back to him. His legs lost their trembling and he felt stronger.

Up to the summit of the hill he made his way, finding it a more toilsome climb than he had imagined. He reached the top. Below him, stretched out like a narrow ribbon of gray on a background of green, was the little trail he had been following, and which had been taken by the three men. It wound in and out among the woods, extending toward the lake, a glimpse of the shining water of which Fenn could just catch.

Something moving on the trail caught his eye. He looked intently at it, and, the next moment he exclaimed:

"There they are! They're hurrying along as if a whole band of detectives was after them, instead of me alone. Now to see if I can't catch up to them."

He gave one more look at the two Celestials and the white man, who, every moment were nearing their goal, and then, hurried down the other side of the hill, to cut across through the woods at the foot, and so reach the trail.

[174]

Fenn had not gone more than a dozen steps when suddenly, having made a jump over a large boulder in his path, he came down rather heavily on the other side, in the midst of a clump of ferns.

There was a curious sinking of the ground, as though it had caved in. Fenn felt himself falling, down, down, down! He threw out his hands, and tried to grab something. He grasped a bunch of fern, but this went down with him.

"Help! Help!" he instinctively called, though he knew no one was within hearing, save, perhaps, those three strange men, and he did not believe they would help him if they did hear his calls for aid.

Fenn was slipping and sliding down some inclined chute that seemed to lead from the summit of the hill, into the interior of the earth. It was so dark he could see absolutely nothing and all he could feel around him were walls of dirt.

They seemed strangely smooth, and he wondered how he could slide over them and not feel bumps from rough stones which must surely be jutting out here and there from the sides of the shaft down which he had tumbled.

He put out his hands, endeavoring to find something to grasp to stay his progress, and then he discovered the reason for his smooth passage.

[175]

The walls of the curious slanting tunnel, in which he had been made an involuntary prisoner, were composed of smooth clay. Down them water was slowly dripping, from some subterranean spring, making the sides as smooth and slippery as glass.

Fenn tried in vain to dig his fingers into the walls, in order to stay his progress, but he only ran the risk of tearing his nails off, and he soon desisted. All he could do was to allow himself to be carried along by the force of gravity, and the incline of the tunnel was not so great as to make his progress dangerous.

"It's the stopping part I've got to worry about," thought poor Fenn. "I wonder what's at the end of all this?"

Suddenly, as he was sliding along, feet foremost, in the darkness, his outstretched right hand came in contact with something that caused him to start in terror. It was a round, thin slimy object, that seemed stretched out beside him.

"A snake!" he exclaimed. "I've fallen into a den of serpents!"

He drew his hand quickly away, fear and disgust overpowering him for a moment. Then the thing seemed to be at his left hand. This time, in spite of himself, his fingers closed around it. [176]

"A rope! It's a rope!" he cried aloud, as he vainly tried to catch hold of it and stay his sliding downward. But the rope slipped from his fingers, and his journey down the curious shaft was unstayed.

"This must have been dug by men," thought Fenn. "I'll wager the smugglers had something to do with it. Why, maybe it's one of the ways they land their men. That's it! I must be sliding right down into the lake. They use the rope with which to pull themselves up the slippery tunnel."

This idea seemed feasible to him, and he made further efforts to grasp the rope, in order that he might stop and pull himself up, instead of being carried on into Lake Superior.

For that this was to be his fate he now feared, since, as near as he could tell, the tunnel sloped in that direction. But though he occasionally felt the rope, first on one side of him, and then on the other, he could not get a sufficient grasp on the slippery strands, covered as they were with clay, to check his progress.

"I guess I'm doomed to go to the bottom," he thought. "If I only fall into deep water it won't be so bad. I can swim out. But if I land on the rocks—" [177]

Fenn did not like to think about it. In fact his heart was full of terror at his strange situation, and only his natural courage kept him from giving way to despair. But he was filled with a dogged determination to save himself if he could, even at the end.

Though it has taken quite a while to describe Fenn's queer mishap, it did not take him long to accomplish it. He was slipping along at considerable speed, being shunted from side to side as the tunnel widened or narrowed, but, on the whole, being carried onward and downward in a fairly straight line.

Suddenly the blackness was illuminated the least bit by a tiny point of light below and in front of him. It looked like an opening.

"There's daylight ahead," thought the boy. "That must be where the fresh air comes from," for he had noticed that the tunnel was not close, but that a current of air was circulating through it. Fenn was wrong as to the source of this supply, as he learned later, but he had little time to speculate on this matter, for, much sooner than he expected, he had reached the spot of the light.

He saw, suddenly looming before him, an opening that marked the end of the tunnel. The shaft gave a sharp upward turn and Fenn was shot up and out, just as are packages that are sent down those iron chutes from the sidewalk into store basements. [178]

A moment later the boy, covered with mud from head to foot, found himself on a narrow ledge on the face of a cliff overlooking Lake Superior. He lay, partly stunned for a moment, and blinking at the strong light into which he had come from the darkness of the shaft.

Below him rolled the great lake, on which he and his chums had so recently been sailing in the *Modoc*. Fenn arose to his feet, and gave a glance about him.

"It's the same place!" he murmured. "The same place where we saw the men who so mysteriously disappeared! I'm on the track of their secret!"

He looked at the ledge on which he stood. It was long and narrow, and, not far from where he was, he saw a partly-round opening, that seemed to be the mouth of another shaft, leading straight down.

"Well, more wonders!" exclaimed Fenn, walking toward it. As he did so, he was startled to see the head of a man emerge from the second shaft. The fellow gave one look at Fenn and then, with a cry of warning to some one below, he disappeared. [179]

Fenn, startled and somewhat alarmed, hesitated. He was on the brink of an odd discovery.

THE SEARCH

Following the finding of the Chinese button, and Frank's conclusion that the smugglers had carried Fenn off, the three chums, back in camp, startled by the terror the thought gave them, stood looking at each other for several seconds. They did not quite know what to make of it.

"Do you really think the smugglers have him?" asked Ned, of Frank.

"Well, it certainly looks so. Fenn is gone, and this button is evidence that some Chinese have been here."

"But might not Fenn be off in the woods somewhere, and the Chinese have paid a visit here while he was away?" asked Bart.

"Of course that's possible. But I don't believe Fenn, sick as he was, would remain away so long."

"Couldn't that brass button come from some other garment than one worn by a Chinaman?" inquired Ned.

"It could, but for the fact that it has some Chinese characters stamped on the under side, where the shank is," and Frank showed his chums the queer marks, probably made by the Celestial manufacturer. "Then, here's another bit of evidence," and he pointed to the ground.

[181]

Ned and Bart looked. There, in the soft earth, they plainly saw several footprints, made by the peculiar, thick-soled sharp-pointed shoes the Chinese wear.

"They've been here all right," admitted Bart in a low voice. "What's to be done about it?"

"I think we ought to see if we can't find Fenn," declared Ned. "We ought to follow and see where these Chinese footsteps lead. Maybe Fenn is held a prisoner."

"That's what we ought to do," agreed Frank. "However, it is too late to do anything much now. It will soon be night. I think we'd better get something to eat, sleep as much as we can, and start off the first thing in the morning. Maybe we can trail the smugglers by following the Chinese footprints, and, in that way, we may find—Fenn."

Frank hesitated a bit over his chum's name, and there was a catch in his voice. The other boys, too, were somewhat affected.

"Oh, we'll find him all right," declared Ned, confidently, to cover up the little feeling he had manifested. "If those smugglers have him, why—we'll take him away from them, that's all."

[182]

"That's the way to talk!" exclaimed Frank. "Now let's get some grub. What did we shoot all these ducks for?"

The chums soon had a meal ready, but, it must be confessed, the ducks did not taste as good as they expected they would. However, that was more because of their anxiety over Fenn, than from any defect in the birds or their cooking.

Morning came at last, after what the three Darewell boys thought was the longest night they had ever experienced. They only slept in dozes, and, every now and again, one of them would awake and get up, to see if there were any signs of the missing Fenn.

"Poor Stumpy," murmured Ned, on one occasion, when a crackling in the underbrush had deluded him into the belief that his chum had returned, but which disturbance was only caused by a prowling fox. "Poor Fenn! I hope he's in no danger!"

If he could have seen Fenn at that moment he would have had good reason for expressing that hope.

"Now for the trail!" exclaimed Bart when, after a hasty breakfast, the three boys, shouldering their guns, were ready to start. "Which way, Frank? You seem to have run across the track of these smugglers, and it's up to you to follow it. Lead on."

[183]

"I guess we'll have no difficulty in following the trail as far as it goes," remarked Frank. "When a Chinaman goes walking he leave a track that can't be duplicated by any other person or animal. Lucky it didn't rain in the night, for what tracks there are will still be plain. And we don't have to worry about a crowd walking over the place where they were. We're not troubled by many neighbors in these woods."

They started off with Frank in the lead, and he kept a careful watch for the Chinese footprints. At first they were easy to follow, as the ground was soft, and the queer cork-soled shoes had been indented deeply in the clay. But, after a time, the marks became so faint that, only here and there could they be distinguished.

Then it became necessary for Frank to station one of his chums at the place where the last step was seen, and prospect around, considerably in advance, until he picked up the next one.

"If we had a hound we wouldn't have all this trouble," he said.

[184]

"But, seeing as we haven't, we'll have to be our own dogs," retorted Ned. "I guess we can manage it."

They followed the footprints of the one Chinaman for a mile or more, and then they came to an end with an abruptness that was surprising, particularly as the last one was plainly to be seen in a patch of soft mud.

"Well, he evidently went up in a balloon," announced Bart.

"It does look so, unless he had a pair of wings in his pocket," supplemented Ned.

Frank went on ahead, looking with sharp eyes, for a recurrence of the prints. He went so far into the woods that Bart called to him.

"Do you think he jumped that distance?"

"I don't know," replied Frank. "I'm going to look—"

He stopped so suddenly that his chums were alarmed and ran forward to where he was. They found him staring at some marks in the earth, and the marks were those they sought—the footprints of the Chinese.

"How in the world did he ever get over that space without touching the ground?" inquired Ned. "He must be a wonder, or else have a pair of those seven-league-boots I used to read about in a fairy book, when I was a kid." [185]

"Look there!" exclaimed Bart, pointing up to a tree branch overhead.

"Horse hair!" exclaimed Ned. "I didn't know a horse could switch his tail so high."

"Horses nothing!" retorted Bart. "That's hair from the queue of a Chinaman, or I'll eat my hat!"

"But what's it doing up in the tree?" demanded Frank.

"That's how he fooled us," replied Bart. "He thought some one might trail him, and when he got to a good place, he took to the trees. They are thick enough here so he could swing himself along from limb to limb, and, after he covered twenty-five feet or more, he let himself down. It was a good Chinese trick, but we got on to it. His pigtail caught in a branch. I guess it hurt him some."

"Yes, here are his footsteps again, as plain as ever," said Frank, pointing to where the queer marks were to be seen.

"But, say, we've forgotten one thing," said Ned suddenly.

"What?" asked Bart.

"We haven't looked for Fenn's footprints. All along we've been paying attention to only the marks made by the Chink. Now where does Fenn come in? This Chinese fellow couldn't carry him; could he?" [186]

"Not unless the Chink was one of the gigantic Chinese wrestlers I've read about," admitted Bart. "That's so, Ned. We have forgotten all about Fenn's footprints."

The three boys looked at each other. In their anxiety at following the trail of the queer marks they had lost sight of the fact that they wanted a clue to Fenn, as well as to the smugglers.

"I suppose we'd better go back to camp and begin all over," suggested Ned.

"No," decided Frank, after a moment's thought. "Let's try these prints a little longer. Maybe they'll lead us to some place where we can get on Fenn's trail."

The others agreed to this plan, and, once more, they took up the search. They had not gone far before Frank, who was again in the lead, called out:

"Here we are, fellows! This explains it!"

Ned and Bart hurried forward. They found that Frank had emerged upon a well-defined trail, that led at right angles to the one they had been following. But, stranger than that was what the trail showed. [187]

There, in plain view, were the footprints of two Chinese and the unmistakable mark of a white man's foot.

"There were two parties of smugglers!" exclaimed Ned.

"Either that, or one member of the single party made a cut through the woods, came to our camp, and then joined the others right here," said Frank.

"Still, I don't see anything of Fenn," remarked Bart.

"No? What's that?" demanded Frank quickly, pointing to footprints, quite some distance back of the others.

"Fenn's! I'll be jiggered!" cried Bart. "I can tell them by the triangle mark, made with hobnails that he hammered into the heels of his shoes, after we decided to come on this trip. He said that would prevent him slipping around on deck."

"Those are Fenn's footsteps all right—unless some one else has his shoes," declared Ned. "Come on! We're on the right trail at last." And the boys hurried forward, hope once more strong

CHAPTER XXIV

[188]

FENN IS CAPTURED

For several seconds after he had observed the man's head disappear down the hole in the ledge, Fenn waited. He wanted to see if the fellow had gone for reinforcements, or had retreated. After a minute or two Fenn decided that the man was as much frightened as he himself was.

"I'll take a look down that hole," he decided. "I'm not in very good shape for visiting company," he went on, with a look at his clay-covered clothes, "but I don't believe those chaps are very particular. I wonder what I'm up against? This is a queer country, with holes in the ground almost at every turn, leading to no one knows where."

He advanced toward the shaft, down which the man had vanished, and, as he reached the edge, he saw that it contained a ladder.

The ladder was made of tree trunks, with the branches cut off about a foot from where they joined on, leaving projections sticking up at a slight angle, and making a good hold for the hands and feet.

[189]

"Well, I s'pose I'm foolish to do this all alone, and that I had better go back to camp and get the boys," murmured Fenn, as he prepared to descend. "But, if I do, the smugglers may escape, and I'll lose the reward. There must be an opening at the bottom of this shaft that leads right out on the lake shore. When the boats land the smuggled-in Chinamen, they are probably taken up this shaft, then through the one I slid down, and so into the woods, and from there they are spirited wherever they want to go."

He looked into the shaft, and listened intently, but could hear no sound. He was surprised to see that the opening, leading down to he could only guess where, was dimly lighted, seemingly in a natural manner. But his wonder at this ceased when, having gone down a little way, he noticed that the walls of the shaft were pierced, in the direction of the lake, with small openings, through which light came.

The shaft, he then saw, was either a natural one, or had been bored, straight down the cliff, and at no great distance from the perpendicular face of it. The sides seemed to be of soft rock, or hard clay, and the tree-trunk ladders were fastened up against the walls by long wooden stakes, driven in deeply. There were several tree trunks, one after another, and from the smoothness of the jutting prongs it was evident that they were often used.

[190]

Down Fenn climbed, stopping every now and then to peer through the ventilating and light holes. He caught glimpses of the great lake, that lay at the foot of the cliff, toward the bottom of which he was descending in this strange manner.

"Queer I don't hear or see anything more of those men I was chasing," mused the boy as he paused a moment opposite one of the air holes to get his breath. "I wonder what became of the two Chinese and the white chap? Then there's that man who stuck his head up out of this hole. He looked like a miner, for his hat was all covered with dirt. That reminds me, where's my hat?"

Instinctively he looked about him, as though he would find it hanging on one of the prongs of the tree-trunk ladder, which might answer as a hat rack. Then he laughed at himself.

"I remember now," he said. "It flew off when I fell through that clump of fern into the hole I thought led to China. Guess I'll have to make my bow without my hat."

He glanced below him. It seemed as if he was at the last of the ventilating openings for, further down, there were no glimmerings of daylight, which was fast waning. Then, as he looked, he caught the flickering of a torch, not far down. It waved to and fro, casting queer shadows on the walls of the shaft, and then the person holding it seemed coming up the ladder.

[191]

"Now there's going to be trouble," thought Fenn. "We can't pass on this thing. Either he's got to wait until I get down, or I'll have to go all the way back to the top. I wonder if I better yell to let him know I'm here? No, that wouldn't be just the thing. I'll try to slip around between the wall and the ladder, and, maybe, he'll pass me."

Fenn proceeded to put this rather risky plan into operation. Holding on by both hands to one of the projecting branches he endeavored to swing himself around. The man with the torch was coming nearer and nearer.

Suddenly Fenn's hold slipped. He tried to recover himself but without avail. The next moment his hands lost their grip and he went plunging down into the darkness below, faintly illuminated by the smoking torch. Then he knew no more.

When Fenn came to his senses it was only with the utmost difficulty that he could recall what had happened. He had a hazy recollection of having been in some dark hole—then a light was seen—then he slipped—then came blackness and then—

[192]

He tried to raise himself from where he lay, and a rustling told him he was reclining on a bed of straw. By the light of a torch stuck in the earthen wall of what seemed to be a cavern, Fenn could make out the shadows of several men, grotesquely large and misshapen, moving about. From the distance came a peculiar noise, as of machinery.

Fenn's brain cleared slowly, though from the ache in his head, he knew he must have had quite a fall. He raised himself on his elbow, and gradually came to a sitting position. He drew a long breath, and started to get up.

As he did so, he felt some one place his hands on his chest, and push him back, not rudely, but with enough firmness to indicate that he was to lie down. Instinctively he struggled against what seemed to him a dim shape in the half-darkness.

"Lie down," a man's voice commanded. "You'll be all right in a little while. You had quite a fall."

"What's the matter? Where am I? Who are you?" asked Fenn.

"That's all right now, sonny," was the reply in such soothing tones, as one sometimes uses toward a fretful child. "You're in safe hands."

[193]

"Has the kid woke up?" called a voice from the blackness beyond the circle of light cast by the torches.

"Yes," answered the man who had made Fenn lie down.

Following the words there was a sudden increase in the illumination of the cavern, and Fenn saw a big man approaching, carrying a torch. With him were several others. One of them had a rope.

"Are you—are you going to make me a prisoner?" asked Fenn, his heart sinking.

"That's what we are."

Just then another man flashed a torch in the boy's face. No sooner had he done so than he called out:

"Great Scott! If it isn't the very kid I chased!"

Fenn glanced quickly up and saw, standing before him, the man with the sinister face—the man who had pursued him at the elevator fire. Beside him was a man with a peculiar cast in one eye, and Fenn knew he was the fellow who had listened to the conversation of the chums in the railroad car.

CHAPTER XXV

[194]

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING

Along the trail, which they had thus suddenly come upon, fairly ran Frank, Ned and Bart. Now that they were sure Fenn was ahead of them, though they could not tell how long since he had passed that way, they were anxious to find their chum as soon as possible.

"It looks as if Fenn was chasing the Chinese and the white man, instead of them being after him," suggested Ned.

"Unless they are leading him with a rope," remarked Frank. "In that case he would be marching behind."

"Well, I'll bet they'd have a fine time making Fenn march along with a rope on him," said Bart. "He'd lie down and make 'em drag him. That would be Fenn's way."

"Unless he's too sick to make any resistance," replied Frank, who seemed to take a gloomy view of it.

"Well, there's no good wasting time talking about it," declared Bart. "What we want to do is to find Fenn. Then we'll know exactly how it was."

[195]

"That's right; save our breaths to make speed with," added Ned.

Though the boys were not lagging on the trail, they increased their pace until they were going along at a dog trot, which carried them over a considerable space in a short time, yet was not too tiring. They caught occasional glimpses of the marks left by the feet of the Chinese and the white man, as well as prints of Fenn's shoes.

"There they go, up that hill!" exclaimed Ned, who, for the time being, was in the advance.

"Who? The men?" called Bart quickly.

"No, the footprints. Come on," and he led the way up the little hill, up which Fenn had hurried the day previous, with such disastrous results. Fortunately the pace was beginning to tell on Ned, and, as he reached the summit, and started down the other side, he slowed up. It was to this

circumstance that he avoided stepping right into the hole of the shaft, down which Fenn had taken that queer-sliding journey.

"Look here!" yelled Ned, so excitedly that his two companions fairly jumped up to gain his side, thinking he must have come upon either Fenn or one of the men. "Somebody has fallen down that hole!"

[196]

That was very evident, for the fresh earth on the edges, the scattered and torn clumps of fern, and the general disturbance about the mouth of the pit, showed that all too plainly.

"See!" suddenly exclaimed Bart. "There's his hat!" and, turning to one side he picked it up from the ground, where it had fallen when poor Fenn took his tumble. "This shows he was here."

"We were sure enough of that before," said Frank, "but it certainly does seem to indicate that Fenn went down there. I wonder whether he fell, or whether those men thrust him down?"

Bart threw himself, face downward, close to the edge of the hole. He looked carefully at the marks on the edges. Then he got up and began looking about in a circle. Finally, he walked back some distance down the hill.

"I have it!" he finally announced.

"All right, let's have it and see if we agree with you," spoke Ned.

"Fenn came up this hill all alone," declared Bart. "If you had looked closely enough you could see that the footprints of the Chinese and the white man go around the base of the hill to the right. Probably they made a turn, when Fenn wasn't looking. He thought they went up the hill. He hurried after them, and stepped right into this trap. Probably it was covered over with leaves or grass, and he couldn't see it, until it was too late. That's my theory."

[197]

"And I believe you're right," declared Frank. "It sounds reasonable."

"Then the next question is; what are we going to do about it?" inquired Ned. "No use standing here discussing what happened, or how it happened. What we want to do is to get busy and rescue Fenn."

"That's the way to talk," declared Frank.

"Wait a minute," suggested Bart. Once more he got down close to the hole, and peered into the depths.

"See anything?" asked Ned.

"There a way to get down," replied Bart, after a moment.

"How; a ladder?"

"No. Ropes. See, there are cables fastened to the sides of this shaft, and it looks as if they had been used several times."

Bart reached down and got hold of a clay-covered rope, one of those which Fenn had tried so vainly to grasp.

"That's funny," remarked Frank. "Looks as if this was a regular underground railway system."

[198]

"I'll bet that's what it is," cried Ned. "This must be one of the means whereby the smugglers get the Chinamen ashore. Why didn't we think of it before? Let's go down there. We can easily do it by holding on to the ropes."

"It's too risky," decided Frank. "There's no telling what is at the bottom."

"But we've got to save Fenn!" exclaimed Bart, who rather sided with Ned.

"I know that, but there's no use running recklessly into danger. We can't help him that way. If he's down that hole, or in the hands of the smugglers, we can do him more good by keeping out of that pit, or away from the scoundrels, than we can by falling into their hands. Fenn needs some one outside to help him, not some one in the same pickle he's in."

Frank's vigorous reasoning appealed to his chums, and, though they would have been willing to brave the unknown dangers of the hole, they admitted it would be best to try first some other means of rescuing their chum.

"Let's prospect around a bit," proposed Frank. "Maybe we can find some other way of discovering where this hole leads to. The lake can't be far away, and if we can get down to the shore we may see something that will give us a clue."

[199]

"All right, come on," said Bart, and the Darewell chums started down the hill, in the direction of Lake Superior.

As they emerged upon a bluff, which overlooked the vast body of water, they came to a pause, so impressed were they, even in their anxiety, with the beautiful view that stretched out before them. Under the bright rays of the morning sun the lake sparkled like a sheet of silver.

"I wish we were all safe together again, aboard the *Modoc*," remarked Ned, after a moment's pause.

"Same here," echoed Bart. "But, if we're—"

He was interrupted by a sound off to the left. Gazing in that direction the boys saw, coming along the trail toward them, a man and girl. Something about them seemed familiar.

"Mr. Hayward!" cried Ned.

"And his daughter!" added Frank, in a lower voice.

"Well! Well!" exclaimed the man, whose lucky escape from the automobile accident in Darewell, had led to the boys' acquaintance with him. "If here aren't my young friends, the Darewell Chums, come to pay me a visit! I'm very glad to see you, but I thought there were four of you." [200]

"So there are, father," interrupted Ruth. "Where is Fenn?" she asked, turning quickly to the three boys. "Is he ill—didn't he come with you?"

"He's lost!" replied Frank. "We're hunting for him."

"Lost?" repeated Mr. Hayward. "How? Where?"

Frank briefly related what had happened since they had started from Darewell on the cruise to Duluth.

"Well I never!" exclaimed Robert Hayward. "That's a great story! And the last trace you have of him is down that hole?"

"The very last," answered Ned, looking at Ruth, and not blaming Fenn for thinking she was pretty.

"This must be looked into," declared Mr. Hayward. "Lucky I happened to be out here with my daughter. You see I live several miles from here, but to-day, Ruth and I decided to take a little trip. I—I wanted to look at some land I—some property I am interested in out here. I was on my way to it when I saw you boys."

The man seemed to have a curious hesitation in his manner and his words, and Ruth, too, appeared under some strain. But the boys were too anxious about their comrade to pay much attention to this. [201]

"Come on!" suddenly called Mr. Hayward.

"Where are you going, father?" asked Ruth.

"I'm going to find Fenn Masterson. I think I have a clue that will help us," and he strode forward, followed by his daughter and the wondering boys.

CHAPTER XXVI

 [202]

FENN'S ODD DISCOVERY

Mutual surprise showed on the face of Fenn, as well as on the countenance of the man who made this surprising announcement in the cave, where we have left that rather unfortunate youth. The boy, who had been prepared to meet a band of Chinese smugglers, now saw before him the mysterious person, who appeared to have some interest in the affairs of Mr. Hayward, and who seemed to be pleased that misfortune should overtake the man who had recovered from the auto accident near Fenn's house.

"Well, how'd you get here?" asked the man gruffly, advancing closer to the captive, and holding his torch to throw the light on Fenn's face.

"Slid part way, and climbed the rest," answered the lad, who decided to remain as cool as possible under the circumstances.

"Humph! Well, I reckon you know where you are now?"

"I haven't the least idea, except that I'm under ground." [203]

"Yes, and you're liable to stay here for some time. You'll find, before I get through with you, that it isn't healthy, out in this country, to pay too much attention to the business of other folks. I'll pay you back for spying on me. I thought I'd gotten rid of you some time ago, but I see you're still after me."

"I'm not after you," answered Fenn. "I didn't expect to see you down here. Nor am I spying on you. You're mistaken."

"Weren't you trying to hear what I was saying—the night of the fire—aren't you in the employ of Robert Hayward?" demanded the man, asking his questions too quickly to permit of any answer.

"I'm not employed by Mr. Hayward, though I know him, and he is a friend of mine," declared Fenn. "I wasn't intentionally listening to what you were saying that night, but, when I found you were an enemy of Mr. Hayward, I wanted to know more about you."

"How do you know I am his enemy?" asked the man.

"From the way you talked. Besides, why did you chase after me, and try to catch us on the *Modoc*?" [204]

"That's something for me to know, and for you to find out," replied the man, with an unpleasant laugh. "You're too wise, you are."

"Maybe I'll find out more than you want me to," retorted Fenn.

"No danger. I'm going to put you where you can't do anything for a while, and, after you've cooled down a bit, I'll think of what to do next. Tom, come here," he called.

A big man approached, and, at a nod from the fellow of the sinister countenance, gathered Fenn up in his arms, in spite of the resistance the lad made. Fenn soon found it was useless to struggle, so he remained quietly in the grip of the burly chap.

"Take him to the inner cave," directed the man, whom the others addressed as Dirkfell, "and then come back. We need you in getting this last load out. After that we'll take a rest."

Fenn tried to see where he was being carried, but it was almost impossible in the darkness. There were several flickering torches, stuck in the earthen walls of the cavern, here and there, and, by the glimmers of them, the youth could see men hurrying to and fro. Some carried picks and others shovels, while some bore boxes that seemed to be very heavy. [205]

"I wonder what sort of a place I've gotten into," thought Fenn. "Maybe it's—yes, I'll bet that's what it is—a gold mine!"

For a moment the thought of this made his heart beat strangely fast. Then cooler reason came to him, and he recalled that the region around Lake Superior contained no gold, though there were mines of other minerals, some quite valuable.

This train of thought was interrupted by the sudden stopping of the man who was carrying him, as though he was a baby. The fellow stooped down, kicked a door open with his foot, and, the next moment Fenn found himself in a small cave, lighted by a lantern hanging over a rough table, around which several chairs were drawn.

"Here's where you stay until the boss tells you to come out," fairly growled the man.

Fenn did not reply, and the fellow withdrew, taking care, as the lad noted, to lock the door after him. No sooner was the portal closed, than Fenn began an inspection of the place. He took the lantern and held it close to the door. It was made of heavy planks, and the fastening seemed to be on the outside. As for the remainder of the cave, the walls were composed of hard clay, or harder rock. The place was a sort of niche, hollowed out from the larger cavern. [206]

"Well, I seem to be in a pickle," observed Fenn grimly. "That comes of prying too much into other people's affairs, I s'pose. No help for it, however. I'm here and the next question is how to get away. I wish the boys were with me—no, I don't either. It's bad enough to be here myself, without getting them into trouble.

"I guess they'll be surprised when they get back to camp and find me gone. I wish I'd left some sort of a message. They won't know where to look for me."

But Fenn did not give his chums credit for their energy. The prisoner made a circuit of his dungeon, and concluded there was no way, at present, of getting out. He readily got rid of the rope that fastened his arms behind him.

"I will just take another look at that door," mused Fenn, when, having completed his tour of inspection, which did not take him long, he again found himself in front of the portal. He held the lantern up as high as he could. "If I stood on a chair I could see better," he reasoned. He got one of the rough pieces of furniture, mounted it, and, was just raising the light up to the top of the door when his hand slipped and the lantern fell, smashing the glass, and extinguishing the wick. [207]

"Hu!" exclaimed Fenn, standing on the chair in the darkness. "Lucky it didn't explode and set fire to the oil. I'd been worse off then I am now."

He was in total darkness, and was about to get down off the chair, and grope his way back to the table, when a gleam of light, showing through a crack in the door, attracted his attention.

"Somebody is coming," he said. "Maybe they're going to let me out. Or, perhaps, they heard the lantern fall."

But, as he looked, he saw that the gleam was not made by a torch or lantern being carried by someone approaching his dungeon. Instead it came from several torches stuck in the wall of the main cave.

And, by the light of these torches Fenn made an odd discovery. Several men were digging in the sides of the cavern, loosening the clay and soft rock with picks and shovels. They were piling the material in boxes which were loaded into a car, that ran on a small track, and were hurried

off, to some place that the boy could not see.

As he watched he saw Dirkfell approach, and, by signs and gestures, for Fenn could not hear at that distance, the man urged the laborers to work faster. [208]

"They're mining," thought Fenn. "It must be valuable stuff, too, or they wouldn't take out such small quantities. And they must be working in secret, or they wouldn't take all the precautions they do, to remain hidden. There's something queer back of all this, and I'd like to see what it is."

Fenn applied his eye closely to the crack in the door. He could see the men gathered about a cavity in the cavern wall, on which they were working, and, from the way in which they pointed at something the boy believed they must have come upon a rich deposit of whatever ore they were mining.

"I wish I was out of this place!" exclaimed Fenn to himself. "If I had the boys here to help me I'll bet we could escape, and then there'd be a different story to tell."

"There must be an opening, somewhere," he reasoned. "That air comes from under the door. It's fresh, so there must be some communication directly with the outer air, from the big cave."

He stretched out flat on his face, and put his eyes as close as he could to the bottom of the portal. He saw light beneath it, and, jumping up, exclaimed: [209]

"That's it! I see a way to get out. But I must wait until the men have gone!"

An idea had come to Fenn. The floor of the small cave he was in, was of earth. Between it and the bottom of the door, was quite a space. If he could enlarge this space, it might be possible for him to crawl under the door, and this he resolved to attempt, as soon as it would be safe.

He felt in his pocket to see if his knife was there, and his heart beat more rapidly as his fingers closed on the handle. It contained a large, strong blade, and he thought he could do his digging with it. But it would be necessary to wait until the men got out of the way, and, if they worked in two shifts, this would not occur.

Anxiously Fenn waited. Every minute seemed an hour as he sat there in the darkness, now and then kneeling down to peer under the door, to see if the men had gone. But, every time, he saw them at their queer operations, or taking something from the walls of the cave.

He fell into a doze, to be awakened by the entrance of some one into his apartment.

"Where's the light?" asked a voice Fenn recognized as belonging to the man who had carried him in. [210]

"It fell and broke," he answered.

"Humph! Well, I'll bring another. The boss didn't give no orders to leave you in the dark. Here's some grub. It's supper time."

"What day is it?" asked Fenn.

"Thursday. Why?"

The boy did not answer. He knew, however, that he had been in the cave a much shorter time than he supposed. It was the evening of the same day he had started to follow the smugglers. Now he appeared to have lost track of them, but he was in the power of a gang as bad, if not worse.

The man brought another lantern, and also some water. The food was coarse, but Fenn ate it with a good deal of relish.

"Guess you'll have to sleep on the table," the man went on, as he threw some blankets down. "There's no bed in this hotel," and he laughed.

But Fenn was too busy thinking of his plan to escape, to care about a bed. He hoped, now that it was night, the men would stop working. And, in this, he was not disappointed. Some one called a signal through the cavern, and the men, dropping their tools, and taking their torches with them, filed out of sight of the boy, watching from beneath the door. [211]

He wanted to begin his digging at once, but concluded it would be safer to postpone it a while. He was sure it must have been several hours that he waited there in the silence. Then, taking an observation, and finding the outer cavern to be in blackness, he commenced to burrow under the door, like a dog after a hidden rabbit.

The big blade of his knife easily cut into the soft clay, and, working hard for some time, he had quite an opening beneath the portal. He tried to squeeze through, but found he was a bit too big for it.

"A little more and I can slip out," he whispered to himself.

Faster and faster he plied the knife, loosening the earth, and throwing it back with his hands. Once more he tried and, though it was a tight squeeze, he managed to wiggle out.

"Now!" he mused. "If I don't run into anybody I can get to the foot of the shaft, and go up that ladder. Guess I'll take the light."

He reached back under the door, and got hold of the lantern, which he had placed near the hole, slipping it under his coat so that the gleams would not betray him. Then, remembering, as best he could which way the man had carried him, he stole softly along, on the alert for any of the miners.

[212]

He had not gone more than a dozen feet, and had just turned a corner, which showed him a straight, long tunnel, that, he believed, led to the foot of the shaft, when, to his consternation, he heard a noise. At the same time a voice called:

"Hey! Where you goin'?"

Fenn resolved to chance all to boldness. Taking the lantern from under his coat, that he might see to run through the cave, he sprang forward, toward what he believed was the shaft down which he had come on the tree-trunk ladder.

"Stop! Stop!" called someone behind him, but Fenn kept on.

CHAPTER XXVII

[213]

A TIMELY RESCUE

Fenn's fear, and his fierce desire to escape from the cave, lent him speed. Forward he went, faster than he had ever run before. Suddenly there loomed up before him a dim, hazy light, but it was the illumination from the sun, and not from an artificial source.

"It must be morning!" the boy thought. "I worked at that hole all night. But how is it that the sun shines down the shaft? I didn't believe it could. There's something strange here!"

All these thoughts flashed through his mind while he ran on, intent on distancing his pursuer, who was close behind him. Fenn could hear the man's footsteps. Once more the fellow shouted:

"Hey! Stop! You don't know where you're goin'!"

"I don't, eh?" thought Fenn. "Well, I guess I do. I'm going to get away from you, that's where I'm going."

The dim light became plainer now. Fenn could see that it came through an opening in the cave; an opening that was close to the ground. Clearly then, this could not be the shaft down which he had come. He was puzzled, but he kept on.

[214]

He threw away the lantern, for he did not need it any longer to see where to go. Several other voices joined in the shouts of alarm, and in urging Fenn to stop. He did not answer but kept on.

"If I can once get outside they'll not dare to carry me back," the lad reasoned. "It's only a little farther now."

He was panting from the run, for the exertion, following his illness, and the experience he had gone through, was too much for him. He felt that he could go no farther. Yet he knew if he halted now the men would get him, and he feared for the consequences that might follow his attempt to escape.

"Oh, if only some of the boys were here!" was his almost despairing thought. "If ever I needed help I do now!"

The light was so good now that Fenn could distinguish the sides of the cave. He saw that he was running along a straight tunnel, quite high and wide, but which narrowed, like a funnel, as it approached the opening toward which he was speeding.

"I wonder if there's room for me to get out?" he thought. "And I wonder where I'll be when I get out?"

[215]

"Hold on! Hold on!" yelled the man back of Fenn. "You'll get hurt if you go any farther!"

"And I'll get hurt if I go back," whispered Fenn, pantingly.

"Stop! Stop!" cried another voice which the lad recognized as Dirkfell's. "Come back! I'll not harm you!"

"He's too late with that promise," Fenn thought.

A few seconds later he was at the opening of the cave. He fairly sprang through it, finding it large enough to give him passage standing upright. He leaped out, so glad was he to leave behind the terrors of the dark cave, and the mysterious men, who seemed so anxious to keep him a prisoner.

"Free!" Fenn almost shouted as he passed the edge of the opening. He was about to give an exultant cry, but it was choked on his lips.

For the opening was on the sheer edge of a cliff, without the semblance of a foothold beyond it,

and below it there sparkled the blue waters of Lake Superior!

Fenn felt himself falling. He was launched through the air by his leap for liberty, and, a moment later, the lake had closed over his head! [216]

Meanwhile Mr. Hayward, followed by his daughter, Frank, Bart and Ned was hurrying along, bent on discovering and rescuing Fenn. True, they did not know where he was, but Mr. Hayward had a clue he wished to follow. As he hastened along, he told the boys what it was.

"My daughter and I have been sort of living in the woods for the past week," he said. "We have taken auto trips as far as the machine would go, and then have tramped the rest of the way. I want to see how my land is. It is some property I bought a good while ago, and which I never thought amounted to much. But I have a chance to sell it now, and I may dispose of it.

"I was looking along the lake shore, the other day, for some of my land extends out there,—and I saw a boat, containing some Chinese and a white man. It was being rowed up and down the shore, and I thought, at the time, the men acted rather suspiciously. They seemed to be waiting for something to happen. I was too busy to pay much attention to them, but I believe now that they were part of that smugglers' band you speak of."

"Why didn't you tell the police, father?" asked Ruth. "To think of poor Fenn being captured by them." [217]

"We are not sure he is captured by them, Ruth," said Mr. Hayward. "At any rate I'm going to the point on shore near where I saw the boat. It may be there is a tunnel running from that place on the hill, where Fenn disappeared, right down to the lake. In that case we may find some trace of him there. This region used to be worked by some ancient race, I understand, who dug deep into the earth after certain minerals and ores. There are several tunnels, shafts and queer passages through the hills and along shore, I have heard; shafts that used to give access to the mines. They have long been abandoned, but it is just possible that the smugglers may have discovered and utilized them."

"Maybe they're hiding in a cave, somewhere, now," suggested Ned, "and perhaps they have Fenn a prisoner."

"Oh dear! Isn't it dreadful!" exclaimed Ruth, with a shudder. The other boys could not help wishing she was as anxious about them as she was over Fenn. It made up, in a great measure, for all he was likely to suffer, Bart thought. He looked closely at Ruth. She seemed strangely excited, as though she feared some nameless terror. [218]

"This way!" called Mr. Hayward, leading the little party of rescuers through a short cut, and down a sloping bank to the shore of the lake. "Here we are. Now the boat, when I saw it, was right opposite that little point of land," and he motioned to indicate where he meant.

At that instant Bart saw something black bobbing about on the surface of the lake.

"What's that?" he cried, pointing to it.

"A boat!" exclaimed Ruth. "There is the boat now, daddy!"

"It's too small for a boat," replied Mr. Hayward. "It's a man! It's some one in the lake!" he added excitedly. "And he's about done for, too! I'll swim out and get him!"

Before any of the boys could offer, or indeed make any move, to go to the rescue, Mr. Hayward had thrown off the heaviest of his clothing and plunged in. With powerful strokes he made for the black object, which, as the others could see, was a person making feeble efforts to swim ashore.

With anxious eyes the three chums and Ruth watched the rescue. They saw Mr. Hayward reach the bobbing head, saw him place an arm about the exhausted swimmer, and then strike out for shore. [219]

A few minutes later the man was able to wade. In his arms he carried an almost inert bundle.

"I got him, boys!" he called.

"Who?" asked Ruth.

"Fenn Masterson! I was just in the nick of time. He was going down for the final plunge," and with that he laid the nearly-unconscious form of Fenn down on the sandy shore.

CHAPTER XXVIII

RUTH TELLS HER SECRET

"Quick! We must hurry him to a doctor!" exclaimed Ruth, as she bent down over Fenn. "Will he die, daddy?" [220]

"I think not. He'll be all right in a little while. But we'll take him to our house. Lucky the auto is not far away."

"I'm—I'm all right," gasped Fenn, faintly. "I was just tired out, that's all. I didn't swallow any water. There—there seemed to be some sort of a current setting against the shore, and—I couldn't make any headway."

He sat up, looking rather woe-begone, soaking wet as he was, and with some of the red clay still clinging to his clothes. Mr. Hayward was hastily donning his outer garments over his wet things.

"I'll have the auto around in a jiffy!" he exclaimed. "Lucky it's summer, and you'll not take cold. Just rest yourself, Fenn, until I come back, and we'll have you all right again."

"But how in the world did you ever get into the lake?" asked Ruth, as her father hurried away. [221]

"I jumped in."

"Jumped in!" repeated Bart. "How was that?"

"Now we mustn't ask him too many questions," interrupted Ruth. "He's not able to answer."

"Oh yes I am," replied the lad who had been through rather strenuous times in the last few hours. Thereupon he briefly related what had happened since his chums left him to go hunting, ending up with his unexpected plunge into the lake. In turn Bart told how they had searched for him, and how, having met Mr. Hayward and his daughter, the hunt was brought to such a timely ending.

"But what were those men taking out of the cave?" asked Frank, when Ruth had gone down the shore, along which a road ran, to see if her father was returning.

"That's what we've got to discover," answered Fenn. "I think there's a valuable secret back of it. We'll go—"

But further conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the auto—the same big touring car that had so nearly come to grief in Darewell. The four boys got in, Fenn was wrapped in a lap robe, to prevent getting chilled on the quick ride that was to follow, and the car was sent whizzing along an unfrequented road to Mr. Hayward's home, several miles away. [222]

The three chums wanted to ask Fenn all sorts of questions about his experiences, but Ruth, who constituted herself a sort of emergency nurse, forbade them.

"You'll have time enough after he has had a rest," she said. "Besides, he's just gotten over a fever, you say. Do you want him to get another? It looks as though he was."

And that was just what happened. When the auto reached Mr. Hayward's home Fenn was found to be in considerable distress. His cheeks were hot and flushed and he was put to bed at once, though he insisted, with his usual disregard of trifles that concerned himself, that he was "all right."

A physician was summoned, and prescribed quiet, and some soothing medicine.

"He has had a severe shock," he said, "and this, on top of his former attack of fever, from which he had barely recovered, has caused a slight relapse. It is nothing dangerous, and, with careful nursing he will be all right in a few days."

"Then, I'm going to take care of him," declared Ruth. "It will be a chance to pay back some of his, and his folks' kindness to me and my father. Now mind, I don't want you boys to speak to Fenn unless I give you permission," and she laughed as she shook her finger at the chums to impress this on them. [223]

Fenn, under the influence of the medicine, soon fell into a deep sleep, which, the pretty nurse said, was the best thing in the world for him.

"I guess we'd better go back to camp," proposed Bart. "All we brought away from there are the guns, and some one might come along and steal the other stuff, which isn't ours."

"That's so, those smugglers are still around I suppose," added Ned. "We had better get back, I think."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," declared Mr. Hayward good-naturedly. "You're going to be my guests, or I'll be very much offended. We've not got such a fine place as some, but you're welcome to what there is. If things were different—but there, I want you to stay."

He seemed affected by something, and his manner was so queer that the boys could not help noticing it. Ruth, too, appeared embarrassed, and, at first, Bart and his chums thought it might be that she was not prepared for company, since, as her mother was dead, she had the whole care of the house, though there was a servant to help her. But her invitation, which she added to that of her father's, assured the boys that they would be very welcome. [224]

"You can't rough it so much as you could out in the woods," said Ruth, "but I think you'll like it here. We have a motor boat, and you may wish to run it on the lake."

"A motor boat!" exclaimed Bart. "That settles it! We stay!"

"But what about our camp stuff?" asked Frank.

"I'll send a man to gather it up and ship it back to Duluth," said Mr. Hayward. "There's no need of you going back there at all. I'll be glad to have you stay. We're a little upset on account of—"

He stopped suddenly, and glanced at his daughter, who did not appear to be listening to what he was saying. But she heard, nevertheless, as was shown by her next remark.

"Oh, dad means some of the servants have gone," quickly explained Ruth. "You see we had too many," she went on. "I decided we could get along with one, for I want to help do the work. I must learn to be a housekeeper, you know," and she blushed a little. "We're not upset a bit, daddy. You see, I'll manage."

It seemed as though something sad was worrying Mr. Hayward, but, he soon recovered his usual spirits, and got the boys to give him directions for shipping back their camp stuff. [225]

"Now, I'll look after it," he said, as he prepared to leave the house, having changed his wet garments for dry ones. "I have some other matters to attend to, and I may not be back until late. I guess you can get along here. You can pretend you're camping out, and, if you get tired of that, Ruth will show you where the motor boat is. Only, don't upset," and, with that caution, he left them.

The three chums decided they would try the boat at once, and, Ruth, having ascertained that they knew how to run one, showed them where the launch was kept in a neat boat-house on the shore of Lake Superior.

"Don't be gone too long," she said. "You can't tell what will happen to Fenn."

"I guess he couldn't be in better hands," said Frank, with a bow.

"Oh, thank you!" exclaimed Ruth, with a pretty blush.

"That'll do you," observed Bart, nudging Frank with his elbow. "I'll tell Fenn when he gets well."

Ruth returned to her patient, after urging the three chums to be back in time for dinner. She found Fenn awake, and with unnaturally bright eyes. [226]

"You must go to sleep," she told him.

"I can't sleep."

"Why not?"

"I'm thinking of something."

"What about?" she asked with a little laugh. "About all the wonderful adventures you had?"

"Partly, and about that cave. It's the same one."

"The same one? What do you mean?"

"The same one you talked about when you were at our house. The mysterious cave, where the men were at work. I see it all now. It's the same cave! There is some secret about it! Tell me what it is. Don't you remember what you said? You wanted to find the cave, but couldn't. I have found it!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Ruth. She drew back as if frightened. "Oh!" she cried again. "Can it be possible. It seems like a dream! Can it be my cave?"

"Tell me about it," suggested Fenn, for even his illness could not deter him from trying to solve the mystery.

"I am going to tell you a secret," answered Ruth. "It is something I have told no one. You know my father is—or, rather he was—quite wealthy. He owned considerable property, and was counted a millionaire. But lately, through some misfortune, he has lost nearly all his wealth. I suspect, though I do not know for sure, that some wicked men have cheated him out of it. But he does not know that I am aware of his loss. He has kept it a secret and he tries to keep up when he is with me, but I can see the strain he is under. He does not want me to suffer, dear daddy! But I don't mind. I don't care for money as long as I have him. [227]

"He thinks he can get his wealth back again, and so he has been making all sorts of sacrifices in order that I may continue to live here, in the same style we used to. But I found out about it. I discharged all the servants but one, to save money, and I am economizing in other ways."

"But about the cave," insisted Fenn.

"It sounds almost like a dream," went on Ruth. "One day, when I was walking through the woods around here, just before daddy and I took that automobile trip East, I was on a ledge of the cliff, about opposite where you were in the lake to-day. That particular ledge is not there now, as a landslide carried it away, but it was quite large, and easy to get to, when I was on it. I was after some peculiar flowers that grew there. [228]

"As I was gathering them I saw an opening in the cliff, and I could look right into a large cave. I was so surprised I did not know what to do, and, much more so, when I saw several men at work. They seemed to be taking stuff out—valuable stuff, for they were very careful with it. I must have

made some noise, for one of the men came to where I was looking in.

"He was very angry, and tried to grab me. I drew back, and nearly toppled off the ledge into the lake. Then the man threatened me. He said if I ever told what I saw something dreadful would happen to me.

"I was much frightened, and hurried away. I was going to tell my father of what I had seen, but the memory of the man's threat prevented me. The thing got on my mind so I was taken ill. Then came the automobile trip and the accident. But I could not forget the cave. It seemed like a bad dream, and it followed me. I did not know I had mentioned it in my delirium at your house, until you told me. Then I was frightened lest something happen to you, as well as to myself, and I begged you never to refer to it. But I could not forget it. All the while I kept wondering who those men were, and what they were taking out. I thought perhaps they might have found gold. Of course it was foolish, and, sometimes I think it was all only a bad dream. Only it is not a dream about poor daddy losing all his money."

[229]

"And it isn't any dream about that cave!" exclaimed Fenn, sitting up in bed. "It's real. There are men in it taking out something I think is valuable. They are doing it secretly, too. I don't know who it belongs to, but we'll soon find that out. By some curious chance I have discovered the same cave you looked into. I'll take you to it, and we'll see what those men are digging out. I'm going to get right up and go back there. I'm all right! We must go before the men take all the stuff! Where are the boys? Tell them to come here and help me dress."

"No, no!" exclaimed Ruth. "The doctor said you must be kept quiet!"

"I'm going to go back to that cave!" declared Fenn, and, getting out of bed, clad in a big bath robe, he began to hunt for his clothes, which, however were not in the room, having been taken to the laundry to be pressed.

"Mary! Mary!" called Ruth to the servant. "Telephone for the doctor. Tell him Fenn is delirious!"

CHAPTER XXIX

[230]

A BAFFLING SEARCH

Fenn sat down rather suddenly on hearing Ruth make that announcement. He grew calm.

"All right," he said, good-naturedly, "there's no use alarming you. I'm not delirious. I never felt better in my life. That sleep I had was fine. My fever is all gone. But, go ahead, if you want to. Send for the doctor. I don't mind. I know what he'll say, and then I can go and hunt for that cave."

"Oh, Fenn, are you sure you're all right?" asked Ruth, much reassured by the cool manner in which the boy spoke.

"Sure. Here, feel of my pulse. It's as slow as yours."

Ruth did so, and, having had some experience in cases of illness, she realized that Fenn's fever had gone down.

"You do seem better," she acknowledged. "However, I think it would be a good thing for the doctor to see you. I don't want you to run any chances."

[231]

"All right," agreed Fenn.

The physician came again and said that, much to his surprise, Fenn's illness was not as alarming as had at first appeared.

"Can't I go out?" asked the lad, not telling what for.

"Hum—ah—er—um—well, it's a little risky, but then—well, I guess you can," and, after much humming and hawing the medical man gave his consent and left, shaking his head over the perverseness of those who were always in a hurry.

"Now send up my clothes, please," begged Fenn, when the doctor was safely away. "We'll solve the mystery of that cave in jig style."

"Hadn't we better wait for the other boys?" suggested Ruth. "Besides it's nearly dinner time, and you ought to eat something."

"Good idea," declared Fenn, but, whether it was the one about eating, or waiting for the boys he did not say.

Frank, Bart and Ned were rather late getting back from the motor boat ride, but they had such a good time that no one blamed them. Mr. Hayward also returned, and it was quite a merry party that gathered about the table. That is all except Mr. Hayward. He seemed to be rather worried over something, and, at times, was rather distracted, his thoughts evidently being elsewhere.

[232]

"What's worrying you, daddy?" asked Ruth, after a while.

"Nothing, my dear. Why?"

"You're not eating at all."

"I'm not very hungry. But come, we must go with Fenn and see if we can't help him locate that cave. I don't imagine we shall find anything of any account. Most likely the men were engaged in working an abandoned mine from which the prehistoric inhabitants took everything of value. Perhaps the men were those Chinese smugglers. I have telephoned word to the Government authorities about them, and some detectives may arrive any minute."

"Those men were not smugglers," declared Fenn. "They were taking something valuable from that mine, and they were so secretive about it that I'm sure they had no right to the stuff."

"Well, we'll soon see," declared Mr. Hayward.

"Where are we going to begin?" asked Bart.

"Let's go up to that hole, where we found Fenn's hat, and work down," suggested Ned.

"That's no good," declared the lad who had made the queer passage. "That chute only comes out on the ledge, where the main shaft begins. If we could get to the ledge we'd be all right." [233]

"I think we can get there without crawling or sliding down that dark, roped passage," said Mr. Hayward. "But I was going to suggest that we take the motor boat and cruise along near where we picked Fenn up. If we found the opening in the cliff, from where he jumped, it would be easier. It is rather difficult to get to the ledge."

"I think that's the best idea," remarked Frank.

"May I go with you, daddy?" asked Ruth, a bright flush of excitement coming into her cheeks.

"Maybe I can find the—" She stopped suddenly.

"I'm afraid not. There might be danger," said her father, not noticing her last remark.

"I'm not afraid."

"I wouldn't," said Fenn quickly. "Those men that I saw, didn't have any weapons, but they might be ugly customers, just the same."

"I think you had better remain at home, my dear," decided the girl's father, and, somewhat against her will, she consented, after a whispered conference with Fenn.

The others were soon in the motor launch, and were cruising along the lake shore, as near as possible to where Fenn had leaped into the water. Narrowly they scanned the face of the cliff, for a sight of the opening from which Fenn had jumped. They went up and down for half a mile, in either direction, but there was no sign of it. [234]

"Are you sure you jumped out of a hole, Stumpy?" asked Bart.

"Sure. I remember catching just a glimpse of that point of land before I went under water."

"Then the opening into the cave ought to be somewhere near here," remarked Mr. Hayward, bringing the boat to a stop.

Once more they scanned the cliff, going as close to shore as they could. There appeared to be no break in the surface of the palisade.

"I guess we'll have to try the ledge," announced Mr. Hayward. "We can go down that tree-trunk ladder, but it's more risky than this way."

He was about to head the craft for a landing place, in order to begin the tramp through the woods, to a point whence the ledge could be reached, when the attention of all in the motorboat was attracted by something happening on shore. From the bushes dashed a Chinaman, his pig-tail streaming in the wind. Behind him came a man, with a revolver in his hand. [235]

"Stop! You almond-eyed scare-crow!" he exclaimed. "I'm not going to hurt you!"

But the Chinaman only ran the faster. Suddenly the man raised his revolver and fired in the air. The Celestial stopped as though he had been shot.

"I thought that would fetch you!" shouted the man, and, a moment later, he had the handcuffs on the representative of the Flowery Kingdom.

"That's one of the smugglers!" cried Fenn. "The police must be after them!"

"What's the trouble?" asked Mr. Hayward, of the white man, as the boat neared shore.

"Chinese smugglers," was the short answer. "We got the whole crowd a while ago, just as they were landing a boat load in a secluded cove. But are you Mr. Hayward?"

"I am."

"I was told to look out for you. I understand you gave the information that led to the capture."

"I did, but these boys here told me of it. They're to get whatever reward is coming."

"Oh, there's a reward all right. This fellow got away when we were bagging the rest. I had a hard chase after him, and I wanted to catch him, as he's one of the ring-leaders. But what are you doing here; on the lookout for some more of the Chinks?"

[236]

"No, we're searching for a queer cave where Fenn, one of these boys here, was kept a prisoner. There have been some strange goings on in these parts, and I'd like to get at the bottom of them. I thought maybe the smugglers had a hand in it."

At the mention of the cave, concerning which Mr. Hayward gave the government officer a few details, as Fenn had related them to him, the Chinese captive seemed suddenly interested. When Mr. Hayward told how they had so far, conducted a baffling search, for the entrance, the Celestial exclaimed:

"Me show you."

"What does he mean?" asked Mr. Hayward.

"Blessed if I know," answered the officer. "What's that, John?"

"Me show hole in glound. Me know. Clum that way," and he pointed a short distance up the lake.

"Do you suppose he knows where the entrance is?" asked Mr. Hayward.

"Shouldn't wonder," replied the detective. "Those Chinks know more than they'll tell. Probably he knows the game is up, and he may think, if he plays into our hands, he'll get off easier."

[237]

"That's lite!" exclaimed the Chinese with a grin. "Me turn state's evidence. Me know. Me show you."

"I guess he's an old hand at the game," commented the officer. "Probably it wouldn't be a bad plan to follow his advice. Wait, I'll summon a couple of my men, and we'll go along. No telling what we'll run up against."

He blew a shrill signal on a whistle he carried and soon two men emerged from the woods on the run. They did not appear surprised to see their chief with the prisoner, and at a word from him they got into the motor boat, the handcuffed Celestial meekly following.

"Now, John, which way," asked the detective, who introduced himself as Mr. Harkness.

"Up by bluushes," replied the Chinese, pointing to a clump which grew on the cliff. "Hole behind bluushes, so no can see. Smart trick. Me know."

"I believe he does," commented Mr. Harkness. "I'll unhandcuff him, and he can show us," and he removed the irons from the almond-eyed chap.

The motor boat was put over to where the Chinaman indicated. It came to a stop at the foot of a sheer cliff, right under the clump of bushes, which grew about thirty feet up from the surface of the water.

[238]

"How in the world are we going to get up there without a ladder?" asked Fenn. "We should have brought one along."

"Here ladder!" suddenly exclaimed the Celestial, who, at a question from one of the officers gave his name as Lem Sing. "Me get ladder."

Lem Sing took hold of a stone that jutted out from the face of the cliff. He pulled on it, and it came out in his hand. To it was attached a strong cord, extending up somewhere inside the cliff, Lem Sing gave a vigorous yank, and something surprising happened.

The clump of bushes vanished, and, in their place, was a round hole.

"That's where I jumped from!" exclaimed Fenn.

But this was not all. Down the cliff, out of the hole in the face of it, came tumbling a strong rope ladder, being fastened somewhere inside the hole.

"That how up get!" exclaimed Lem Sing, with a grin. "Now can up-go!"

"Sure we can 'up-go'!" exclaimed Mr. Harkness. "Come on, boys," and he began to ascend the ladder, which swayed rather dangerously.

CHAPTER XXX

[239]

THE DISCOVERY—CONCLUSION

The others followed, one at a time, leaving one of the detectives in charge of Lem Sing.

"Now, Fenn, lead the way," called Mr. Hayward.

"I guess they've all gone," said Fenn. "There don't seem to be any of the miners here, now."

Hardly had he spoken when, turning a corner in the shaft, the party came upon a curious scene. In a big chamber, the same one which Fenn had viewed from the crack in the door of his small prison, there were half a score of men, working by the light of torches, digging stuff from the walls of the cave, and carrying it out in small boxes.

"Here they are!" shouted Fenn. "This is the place, and they're at work!"

"To the shaft!" shouted some one. "They're after us!"

There was a hurrying and scurrying to escape, and, before the detectives or Mr. Hayward could make any move to capture the men, they had all disappeared. [240]

"Come on!" cried Mr. Harkness. "Show us the way to the shaft where the ladder is, Fenn! Maybe we can nab some of 'em."

"It isn't worth while," declared Mr. Hayward. "These men were evidently afraid of being caught, but, from what I can see, they were not doing anything unlawful."

"No," admitted Mr. Harkness. "We caught the last of them when we got Lem Sing. But what were these men digging?"

"I'll take a look," answered Robert Hayward.

Suddenly he gave a cry, as he took some of the soft earth in his fingers.

"Say, this is almost as good as a silver mine!" exclaimed Mr. Hayward. "This stuff is in great demand! It's used by chemists, and they can't get enough of it."

"Lucky for the man who owns this land," commented Mr. Harkness. "But I don't see that it concerns us. Guess I'd better be going."

"Why, man, this is my land!" suddenly exclaimed Mr. Hayward. "I own a big tract in here, but I believed it was worthless, and I was about to sell it very cheap. Now—well, say, you couldn't buy it! My fortune is made again!"

"Boys," he went on, a little more soberly, "you don't know it, but I've been in quite a hole lately. The house where I live was about to be sold for a mortgage. But my daughter never knew. She—" [241]

"Yes, she did," interrupted Fenn. "She knew all about it, and she was trying to help you!"

"She did? You don't mean it!"

Then Fenn explained; telling of Ruth's strange remarks while in a delirium at his house, her unexpected discovery of the cave, the man's threat, her long silence under fear of it, and her desire to aid her father to recover his wealth.

"Well, this gets me!" exclaimed Mr. Hayward. "Ruth is a girl that's hard to beat."

They went to the foot of the shaft, where Fenn had come down, but there were no men to be seen.

"Let them go," suggested Mr. Hayward. "I've got all I want, and I must hurry and tell my daughter the news, bless her heart!"

"It was all Fenn's good luck," declared Ruth, when the story had been told. "You ought to reward him, daddy."

"Reward him! Well, I guess I will. And the other boys, too. Nothing is too good for them."

The Chinese smugglers were punished for their attempt to break the United States immigration laws, and the Celestials they tried to land were sent back to Canada. [242]

Lem Sing had planned the trick so that by pulling on the rope the bushes dropped back out of sight, and the ladder came down. The miners used this device to send away the valuable clay, and it was by this queer hole that the men on the cliff so mysteriously appeared and disappeared when the boys were watching them from the deck of the *Modoc*.

The two Chinamen and the white man, whom Fenn had followed, were the advance party, looking to see if the coast was clear for a landing which had once been unintentionally frustrated by the boys, and, the visit of the one Chinese to the camp was only to discover if the lads were detectives, which Lem at first feared. While Fenn was following the men, one had slipped behind him and gone to the camp, to see if it was deserted. It was this fellow who had dropped the button which gave Frank, Ned and Bart their clue.

"But what I can't understand," said Fenn, "is why that man Dirkfell should chase us the night of the fire, and pursue us in the steam yacht. Do you know him, Mr. Hayward?"

"Dirkfell!" exclaimed the gentleman. "I should say I did, to my sorrow. It was through business dealings with him that I lost all my wealth. He held the mortgage on this house, and was about to buy that land, under which the cave is located. He has long borne a grudge against me—a grudge for which there is no excuse, for I never injured him. When he heard of my loss in the elevator fire I presume he could not help saying how glad he was. Then, probably, when he saw you [243]

looking at him so sharply, Fenn, he imagined you must be some agent of mine. He was evidently in fear of being found out in his secret mining operations under my land, and that was why he made such an effort to catch you, even following the *Modoc*. I understand now, why he was so anxious to get possession of this land that I considered worthless. But I beat him at his own game, thanks to you and your chums."

"And your daughter did her part," said Fenn, "for she saw the cave first."

"Of course she did, God bless her."

"I don't understand how the Chinese smugglers and the miners both used the cave and the secret entrances," said Frank.

"I didn't until I had a talk with the detectives," said Mr. Hayward. "The Chinese used the cave a long time before Dirkfell was aware of what valuable stuff was in it. He and his gang worked in harmony with the Celestials." [244]

"Are they going to try to catch him?" asked Fenn.

"No, it's not worth while, since they have broken up the smuggling gang. I guess Dirkfell will not show himself in these parts soon again."

Nor did he, or any of his gang. The boys spent a week with Mr. Hayward. Then they started back to Duluth, to join Captain Wiggs.

They found the *Modoc* ready to sail, and they were warmly welcomed by the commander.

"Well, we've certainly had some strenuous happenings this trip," observed Frank. "I don't think we'll have such lively times again." But he was mistaken, they did have plenty of adventures, and what some of them were I shall relate in another book, to be called "Bart Keene's Hunting Days."

THE END

Transcriber's Notes:

Punctuation and spelling inaccuracies were silently corrected.

Archaic and variable spelling has been preserved.

Variations in hyphenation and compound words have been preserved.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FENN MASTERSON'S DISCOVERY; OR, THE DAREWELL CHUMS ON A CRUISE ***

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