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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SIX RIVER MOTOR BOAT BOYS ON THE ST. LAWRENCE; OR, THE LOST CHANNEL ***



The wave caught the *Rambler* broadside, and in an instant she was beached high and dry on the bar.

THE SIX RIVER MOTOR BOAT BOYS ON THE ST. LAWRENCE

OR

THE LOST CHANNEL

By HARRY GORDON

AUTHOR OF
"The River Motor Boat Boys on the Mississippi"
"The River Motor Boat Boys on the Colorado"
"The River Motor Boat Boys on the Amazon"
"The River Motor Boat Boys on the Columbia"
"The River Motor Boat Boys on the Ohio"

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THE SIX RIVER MOTOR BOYS ON THE ST. LAWRENCE

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THE SIX RIVER MOTOR BOYS ON THE ST. LAWRENCE.

[CHAPTER I—A MYSTERIOUS VISITOR](#)

It was dark on the St. Lawrence River at nine o'clock that August night. There would be a moon later, but the clouds drifting in from the bay might or might not hold the landscape in darkness until morning. The tide was running in, and with it came a faint fog from the distant coast of Newfoundland.

Only one light showed on the dark surface of the river in the vicinity of St. Luce, and this came from the deck of a motor boat, anchored well out from the landing on the south side of the stream, fifty miles or more from Point des Montes, which is where the St. Lawrence widens out to the north to form the upper part of the bay of the same name.

The light on the motor boat came from an electric lamp set at the prow, six feet above the deck. It showed as trim and powerful a craft as ever pushed her nose into those waters.

Those who have followed the adventures of the Six River Motor Boat Boys will not need to be told here of the strength, speed and perfect equipment of the *Rambler*. The motors were suitable for a sea-going tug, and the boat had all the conveniences known to modern shipbuilders. She had carried her present crew in safety up the Amazon to its source, down the Columbia from its headwaters, through the Colorado to the Grand Canyon, and down the Mississippi from its source to the Gulf of Mexico.

All these trips had been crowded with adventure, but both the boys and the boat had proved equal to every emergency. At the conclusion of the Mississippi journey, the boys of the Six River Motor Boat Club had decided to explore the St. Lawrence river from the Gulf to Lake Ontario.

The *Rambler* had been shipped by rail to a point on the coast of New Brunswick, and the remainder of the journey to St.

Luce had been made by water along the treacherous coasts of New Brunswick and Quebec. A fresh supply of gasoline had been taken on just before night fell, and on the approach of daylight the boys would be on their way up the stream.

Although it was early August, the night was decidedly cold, and Clayton Emmett, Alex Smithwick, Julian Shafer, and Cornelius Witters, the four boys who had embarked on the trip, were sitting snugly around a coal fire in the cabin. They were sturdy, healthy, merry-hearted lads of about sixteen, all from Chicago, and all without family ties of any kind so far as they knew. They had been reared in the streets of the big city, and had become possessed of the *Rambler* by a series of adventures which the readers of the previous volumes of this series will readily recall.

The night grew darker as it grew older, and a strong wind came up from the bay, bobbing the *Rambler* about drunkenly. Clayton Emmett—always just “Clay” to his chums—arose from his chair after a particularly fierce blast from the wind and approached the cabin door.

“Don’t open that door!” shouted Alex Smithwick. “We’ll be sent smashing through the back wall if you do. This night makes me think of a smiling summer day in Chicago harbor,—it’s so different!”

“Company!” Clay answered, excitedly, “We’re going to have company. Listen!”

“Yes,” laughed Jule Shafer, “I’ve got a flashlight of any one rowing out to us to-night. The river is too rough for a rowboat.”

“Now you look here, Captain Joe,” Clay went on, “don’t you go start anything!”

This last remark was made to a white bulldog of sinister aspect which had arisen from a rug in a corner of the cabin and now stood at Clay’s side, growling threateningly. Joe wagged a stumpy tail in acknowledgment of the advice, but dashed out, snarling, as Clay opened the door and gained the deck.

“All right; go to it!” Alex laughed, as the door closed behind the two. “Stick out on deck a spell and the wind will do the rest.”

Case Witters—he was never anything but “Case” to his friends—went to the door and looked out through the blurred glass, wiping the inside of the panel with his sleeve in order to get a clearer view.

“What’s coming off?” demanded Jule.

“I hope we’ll be able to get away on one trip without some one butting in,” suggested Case.

“Say, now, look at Teddy,” cried Jule, springing to his feet.

“Teddy” was a quarter-grown grizzly bear. He had been captured on the Columbia river, and had been a great pet of the boys ever since. He now rose from the rug which he had occupied in company with Captain Joe, the white bulldog, and shambled over to the door, against which he lifted a pair of capable paws in an effort to get a view of the deck.

“Rubberneck!” called Alex, digging the cub in the ribs.

“You know what you’ll come to if you talk slang!” Jule grinned. “You’ll have to wash dishes for a week. We all agreed to that, you know,” he added as Alex wrinkled a freckled nose and pointed to the bear cub still trying to look out.

“Why don’t you let him out?” he asked. “If the wind blows his hide off, we’ll make a rug of it. What is Clay doing?”

Case did not reply to the question. Instead, he opened the door, swinging it back with a bang, and both boy and bear ran out on deck. The first thing Teddy did was to sit up on his hind legs and box at the wind, which ruffled his fur and brought moisture to his little round eyes. Boxing was one of the accomplishments taught him by the boys, and he took great pride in it.

Alex closed the door and, with Jule at his side, stood looking out on deck. Clay, Case and the two pets stood at the prow, gazing down on the river.

Directly the top of a worn fur cap made its appearance above the gunwale of the boat, followed almost immediately by the head and shoulders of a man. Then Alex and Jule both rushed out of the cabin.

“He must be a peach, whoever he is, to come off to us in a canoe over that rough water to-night!” Alex cried. “I want to see that boat of his.”

The boat in which the stranger had put off was rocking viciously in the stream, and it was some seconds before he could secure a footing which promised a successful leap for the deck. When at last he came over the rail, the boys saw a heavily-built man with thin whiskers growing out of a dark face. His eyes were keen and black, and the hair hanging low down on his wide shoulders, was black, too, and straight.

Holding his boat line in one hand, in order that the craft might not drift away, he searched with the other hand in the interior pockets of a rough Jersey jacket for a second, and then brought forth a sealed package which he handed to Clay. As the boy took the package, the man who had delivered it sprang, without speaking a word, to the railing, hung for a moment with his feet in the air above the bobbing canoe, dropped, and was almost instantly lost in the darkness.

Leaning over the railing of the boat, wide-eyed and amazed, the four boys stood for a moment trying to pierce the line of darkness beyond the round circle of the prow light. Nothing was to be seen. The boat had come and gone in the darkness. The packet in Clay’s hands was the only evidence that it had ever existed. Alex was the first to speak.

"What do you know about that?" he shouted.

"They must have fine mail facilities on the St. Lawrence!" commented Case.

"That was only a ghost!" Jule asserted, with a wink at Alex. "That letter will go sailing up in the air in a minute."

Clay opened the packet so strangely delivered and unfolded a crude map of a country enclosed between two rivers. These rivers, after running close together for a long distance, spread apart, like the two arms of a pair of tongs, at their mouths, making an egg-shaped peninsula which extended far into the main river. Back from the river shore, on this rude drawing, a narrow creek cut through the territory between the two rivers, making the peninsula an island.

Below this rude drawing of the rivers and the peninsula was another of an old-fashioned safe resting high up in a niche in a rocky wall. The face of the wall was cross-hatched, to show that it was in the shadows.

Below the drawing of the safe, were these words:

"At last! Follow instructions. Success is certain. Map enclosed. Point straight to the north."

The boys gathered closely around Clay, standing under the brilliant prow light, and examined the paper, passing it from one to another with questioning glances.

"I guess," Alex said, "that we are drawing somebody else's cards."

"Well," Case suggested, "that's a queer kind of a hand to come out of the night."

"Perhaps," Jule observed, "they present travelers on the St. Lawrence with these little souvenirs just to excite interest."

"Point straight to the north," repeated Clay. "I wonder what that means."

"I'd like to know what any of it means," Alex asserted. "It looks to me like some one was butting in."

"Well," Case remarked, "we have started out on every trip with a mystery to unravel, and here we go again, loaded up with another."

"You bet we have!" laughed Alex. "We harvested gold on the Amazon, caught murderers on the Columbia, found a secret treasure in the Grand Canyon, and chased pirates on the Mississippi, but this is the only real Captain Kidd mystery we have struck yet."

"What shall we do with it?" asked Clay, rattling the paper.

"Throw it in the river and be on our way," proposed Case.

"Suppose," Alex grinned, "there should be a barrel of money in that safe they've made a drawing of. If there is, we want to get it."

"I think we'd better be going on, just the same," Case said. "I'm for dumping this map thing into the river and forgetting all about it."

"Aw," Alex cut in, "that would be throwing away all the fun. I want to go to this 'North,' wherever it is. There may be something funny doing there."

Captain Joe, who had been sitting at the prow, watching the boys with an intelligent interest, now passed back to the cabin, leaped upon the low roof, and bounded to the after deck. The boys heard him growling threateningly for a moment, and then he came back.

Teddy, the cub, arose from the place where he had been lying, sniffed at the gunwale of the boat for an instant, and walked into the cabin.

"What's the matter with our menagerie to-night," demanded Alex. "There seems to be something in the air."

"What do you see, Captain Joe?" asked Clay. "If it's a man, and he's got a letter, you go get it. Some other fellow may be wanting us to go South, or East, or West."

As Clay ceased speaking, the splash of a paddle came faintly from the darkness to the West.

"Here comes R. F. D. postman number two," shouted Alex.

As the boys listened, the splashing of the paddle came louder for a moment, then ceased entirely.

"Hello, the boat!" Alex cried. "Have you got a letter for us?"

No answer came back. There was now a break in the clouds, and the moon shone sharply down upon the swirling river, but only for an instant.

"There he comes!" cried Jule.

But the moonlight was gone, and the sound of the paddle was gone, and just at the edge of the circle of light which came from the prow, an Indian canoe glided, phantom-like, down the stream and disappeared.

CHAPTER II—A TREACHEROUS GUEST

"Do you suppose that is the fellow Captain Joe caught prowling around the stem of the boat?" asked Jule as the canoe disappeared down the river.

Captain Joe answered the question by trotting up to the prow and snarling at the disappearing canoe.

"Now, what do you think he wanted here, anyway?" asked Alex.

"Possibly he just dropped down to see if we were ready to start north," Case observed with a yawn.

"It looks to me," Alex said, "that we have struck a storm center of some kind, and I'm going to bed and think it over.

"I'm glad you're going to bed," Clay laughed, "for you get lost whenever we leave you on watch."

"But I always find myself!" answered Alex, with a provoking grin.

It was finally arranged that Case should stand guard that night, and the others prepared for sleep. The bunks were let down in the cabin, the prow light was switched off, and directly all was dark, save when the moon broke out from a bank of wandering clouds.

Sitting well wrapped at the door of the cabin, shortly before midnight, Clay once more heard the sweep of a paddle or an oar. He arose and went to the prow.

Off to the right, on a point of land below St. Luce, a column of flame was beckoning in the gale from the gulf. Only the flame was to be seen. There was neither habitation nor human figure in sight under its light. While the boy watched, a signal shot came from the east.

Then an answering light came from the north, and a ship's boat, four-oared and sturdy, passed for an instant under the light of the moon and was lost in the darkness.

The rowboat had passed so close to the *Rambler* that the watching boy could have seen the faces of the occupants if they had not been turned away. For a moment he had feared that it was the intention of the rowers to board the *Rambler*, but they had passed on apparently without noticing the boat at all.

After following the boat with his eyes for an instant, he switched on the prow light and turned to the cabin to awaken his chums. Here was a new feature of the night which must be considered.

As he turned toward the cabin, a white package lying upon the deck caught his eye. It had not been there a moment before, so the boy naturally concluded that it had been thrown from the row boat. He lifted it and, going back under the prow light, opened the envelope and read.

"Don't interfere with what doesn't concern you. Go on about your business, if you have any. Life is sweet to the young. Do you understand? Be warned. Others have tried and lost."

The puzzled boy dashed into the cabin with the paper in his hand.

"Look here, fellows!" he shouted, pulling away at the first sleeping figure he came upon, "R. F. D. postman number two has arrived. Here's the letter he brought."

He read the message aloud to the three wondering boys, sitting wide-eyed on their bunks, and handed the paper to Clay.

"What about it?" he asked.

"I reckon," Alex observed with a grin, "that we're going to be arrested for opening some one else's mail."

"Don't you ever think this letter wasn't intended for us," Jule declared.

"And now," Case said, "I suppose we'll have to give up following the orders given in the first letter. We're ordered off the premises. See?"

"Not for mine," Alex cried. "You can't win me on any sawed-off mystery! I want to know what this means."

After a time the boys switched off the prow light, turned on the small lamp in the cabin, and sat down to consider seriously the events of the night. While they talked, the clouds drifted away, and the whole surface of the river was flooded with moonlight. The flame on the south bank was seen no more. It had evidently been built as a beacon for the men in the ship's boat.

After a time, Captain Joe, who had been sitting in the middle of the deliberative circle in the cabin, raced out to the deck. The boys heard him growling, heard a conciliatory human voice, and then a quick fall.

When the boys switched on the prow light and gained the deck, they found Captain Joe standing guard over a slender youth who had evidently fallen to the deck to escape being tumbled down by the dog. They gathered about waiting for him to speak—waiting for some explanation of his sudden appearance on the motor boat. Captain Joe seemed proud of his capture, and remained with threatening teeth within an inch of the boy's throat.

"Say, you!" shouted Alex. "Did you come by parcel post? We've been getting letters all right, but no such packages as

this.”

“Looks to me like he must have come in a parachute,” Jule suggested. “Where’s your boat, kid?” he added.

The visitor smiled brightly and sprang alertly to his feet. He looked from face to face for a moment, smiling at each in turn, and then pointed to a light canoe bumping against the hull of the *Rambler*.

He was a lad of, perhaps, eighteen, slender, lithe, dark. His clothing was rough and not too clean. His manner was intended to be ingratiating, but was only insincere.

“What about you?” demanded Alex. “Do you think this is a passenger boat?”

“A long time ago,” replied the visitor, speaking excellent English, “I read of the *Rambler* and her boy crew in the Quebec newspapers. When I saw the boat here to-night, I ran away from my employer and came out to you. I want to go with you wherever you are going.”

“You’ve got your nerve!” Alex cried.

“Oh, let him alone,” Case interposed. “We’ve had a stranger with us on every trip, so why not take him along?”

Alex took the speaker by the arm and walked with him back to the cabin.

“Say,” he said then, “this fellow may be all right, but I don’t like the looks of his map.”

“You’ll wash dishes a week for that,” Case announced. “You’re getting so you talk too much slang. Anyway, you shouldn’t say ‘map’—that’s common. Say you don’t like his dial.”

“Oh, I guess I’ll have plenty of help washing dishes,” Alex grunted. “But what are we going to do with this boy?” he added.

Clay now joined the two boys in the cabin and asked the same question.

“It is my idea,” he said, “that the appearance of this lad is in some way connected with the other events of the night.”

“What did you find out about him?” asked Clay.

“He says his name is Max Michel, and that he lives at St. Luce,” was the reply.

“Well,” Clay decided, “we can’t send him away to-night, so we’ll give him a bunk and settle the matter to-morrow.”

“I just believe,” Alex interposed, “that this boy Max could tell us something about those two boats if he wanted to.”

“I notice,” Case put in, “that he’s paying a good deal of attention to what is going on in the cabin just now. He may be all right, but he doesn’t look good to me.”

Clay beckoned to Jule, and the two boys entered the cabin together, closely followed by Captain Joe, who seemed determined to keep close watch on the strange visitor.

“How long ago did you leave St. Luce?” asked Clay of the boy.

“An hour ago,” was the answer. “I rowed up the river near the shore where the current is not so strong and then drifted down to the motor boat. I called out to you before I landed, but I guess you did not hear.”

Alex, standing at the boy’s back and looking over his head, wrinkled a freckled nose at Clay and said by his expression that he did not believe what the boy was saying.

“Did you see a light on the point below St. Luce not long ago?” continued Clay.

The boy shook his head.

“There are often lights there at night,” he said. “Wreckers and fishermen build them for signals. But I saw none there to-night.”

“What about the four-oared boat that left St. Luce not long ago?” Clay asked. “Do you know the men who were in it?”

“I didn’t see any such boat,” was the reply.

“Well, crawl into a bunk here,” Clay finally said, “and we’ll tell you in the morning what we are going to do.”

The boy did as instructed, and was, apparently, soon sound asleep. Then the boys went out to the deck again and sat in the brilliant moonlight watching the settlement on the right bank.

There is a railway station at St. Luce, and while they watched and talked, the shrill challenge of a locomotive came to their ears, followed by the low rumbling of a heavy train.

The prow light was out, and the cabin light was out, and the cabin was dark now, because when the boys had sought their bunks, a heavy curtain had been drawn across the glass panel of the door. From where the boys sat, therefore, they could see nothing of the interior of the cabin.

Five minutes after the door closed on the stranger, he left his bunk and moved toward the rear of the cabin. Against the

back wall, stood a square wooden table, and upon this table stood an electric coil used for cooking. Above the table, was a small window opening on the after deck.

The catch which held the sash in place was on the inside and was easily released. The boy opened it, drew the swinging sash in, passed through the opening, and sprang down to the deck.

Reaching the deck, the visitor, as though familiar with the situation, ran his hand carefully about his feet feeling for a closed hatch. He found it at last and, lifting it, peered into the space set aside for the electric batteries and the extra gasoline tanks.

Reaching far under the planking, he found what he sought—the wire connecting the electric batteries with the motors. Listening for a moment to make sure that his motions were not being observed, he drew a pair of wire clippers from a pocket and cut the supply wire. Only for the fact that the lights on the boat were all out, this villainous act would at once have been discovered. As it was, the boys remained at the prow believing the visitor was still asleep in his bunk.

This act of vandalism accomplished, the boy dropped softly over the stern into his canoe, still trailing in the rear of the motor boat. Once in the canoe, he laid the paddle within easy reach and propelled the boat along the hull of the *Rambler*, toward the prow with his hands. Once or twice discovery seemed to the boy to be certain, for Captain Joe came to the gunwale of the boat and sniffed suspiciously over the rail.

Once, Clay left his place at the prow and looked over into the stream, but the moon was in the south and a heavy shadow lay over the water on the north side, so the dark object slipping like a snake to do an act of mischief reached the prow unseen.

At that moment the boys left the prow and moved toward the cabin door. In another instant they would have entered and noted the absence of their guest, but Alex paused and pointed to lights moving in the village of St. Luce.

“There’s something going on over there,” he said “and I believe it has something to do with what we’ve been bumping against. There’s the letter from the canoe, and the warning from the boat, and the boy dropping out of the darkness on deck, and the signal lights, and now the stir in the village. Some one who wishes us ill is running the scenes to-night, all right.”

While the boys stood watching the lights of St. Luce, Max caught the manila cable which held the motor boat and drew his canoe up to it. Cutting the cable, strand by strand, so as to cause no jar or sudden lurching of the boat, he left it slashed nearly through and, leaving the strain of the current to do the rest, worked back through the shadow and struck out up stream.

Standing in the door of the cabin, the boys felt the boat sway violently under their feet, then they knew from the shifting lights in the village that they were drifting swiftly down with the current. Clay sprang to the motors, but they refused to turn.

Case hastened to the prow and lifted the end of the cable. There was no doubt that it had been cut. Clay made a quick examination of the motors and saw that the electrical connection had been broken. Then Jule called out in alarm that they were drifting directly upon a rocky island.

CHAPTER III—ARRESTED FOR PIRACY

The *Rambler*, drifting broadside to the current, threatened to strike full upon a rocky promontory projecting from the island which lay in the course of the boat. In vain Case tugged at the tiller ropes. There was no steerage way, and the boat was beyond control.

“It looks like the last of the *Rambler!*” Case cried as the boat drifted down. “The rock ahead will cut her in two if we strike it.”

But there was a current crossing the rocky point from north to south, and the boat, catching it, was drawn away, so that in time, she came, stern first, to the curve of a little channel into which the waters drew. For a moment, the prow swung out, and the possibility of a continuation of the vagrant journey was imminent.

However, before the sweep of water turned the prow fairly around, Alex was over the gunwale, clinging with all his might to the broken cable. Clay and Jule were at his side in a moment and, half swimming, half stumbling, quite up to their chins in the cold water, they held the boat until the current swept it farther over on the sandy beach that bordered the cove.

“There you are!” shouted Alex, wading, dripping, from the river. “The next time I take a trip on the *Rambler*, I’m going to wear a diving suit. I’m dead tired of getting wet.”

“You’re lucky not to be at the bottom of the river!” Clay announced.

The rowboat, which lay upon the roof of the cabin, was now brought down, a cable was taken out of the store room, and the *Rambler* firmly secured to a great rock which towered above the slope of the cove.

The boys stood for a moment looking over the surface of the river, still bathed in moonlight, then Alex rushed into the cabin and brought out a field glass.

“What I want to know just now, is who cut that cable,” he said.

"That's easy," Jule replied. "It was the innocent little boy who had read all about the *Rambler* in the Quebec newspaper."

Alex swept the river with the glass for a time and then passed it to Clay.

"There he goes," he said, "away up the river, heading for St. Luce! That's the boy who disconnected the electricity and cut the cable. That's the boy who we will even up with when we catch him, too."

"And you're the boy who'll wash dishes for a week for talking slang!" Jule taunted.

"I'd wash dishes for a month if I could get hold of that rat," answered Alex, angrily. "He came near wrecking the *Rambler*!"

"Well," Clay said, "we may as well be getting the motors into shape. We can't stay on this island long."

"If we do, there's no knowing what will happen," Jule suggested. "We've had two letters and a runaway to-night and the next thing is likely to be a stick of dynamite."

"Say, suppose we repair the electric apparatus and get away from this vicinity right now," suggested Case, "I don't like the looks of things."

"Now, look here," Alex cut in, "I'm ready to get out of this section, but do you mind what the first letter said about going north? Now that means something. If the first letter hadn't told us to go north, and the men who threw the second letter hadn't believed that we were obeying instructions, we wouldn't have been interfered with. Now, there's a friendly force here, and a hostile force. The friendly people may be mistaken in our identity, but that doesn't alter the fact that the hostile element is out to do us a mischief."

"I'd like to find out what it is the friendly force expects us to do. If we can learn that, we'll know why the hostile force is opposing us. And so, it looks to me that instead of running away, we would better find out what is wanted of us. How does that strike you, fellows? Isn't that deduction worthy of Sherlock Holmes?"

"All right," Clay declared, "I'm willing to investigate, but we mustn't spend all our time looking into one mystery, for if we have the same luck we had on other trips, we are likely to come across several more before we go back to Chicago."

"I'd like to know," Case said, as they brought up an extra anchor and a new cable, "why we were dumped on this island."

"To get us out of the way, probably," Jule commented. "They undoubtedly expected to steal or wreck the *Rambler*."

"But the *Rambler*," Alex laughed, "has the luck of the Irish, so she's still able to travel."

The island upon which the boat had been cast, lay only a short distance from the south shore of the river. In fact, at low water, when the tide was out, it might have been possible to pass to the mainland on dry ground.

Its location was not more than two miles below the little landing at St. Luce. In fact, as the boys afterwards decided, it must have been from this island that the signal flame had burned early in the evening.

Working busily on the repairs, the boys did not notice the arrival upon the island of two roughly dressed fellows, who landed from a small boat and who took great pains to keep rocky elevations between themselves and the cove where the boat lay.

"I wonder," Jule asked, sitting down on the prow after a struggle with the new cable, "whether the stories I have read about wreckers along the St. Lawrence are true."

While the boys discussed the possibility of wreckers working along the stream, one of the two men clambered to an elevation which was in turn hidden from the cove by a higher one and waved a red and blue handkerchief toward the shore.

The tide was now running out, and the channel between the island and the mainland swirled like a mill-race. This, however, did not prevent the launching of a boat from the shore, the same being manned by four men. They edged along the shore and then, passing boldly into the current, landed on the island at a point east of the cove. There they secreted their boat and moved on toward the place where the boys, all unconscious of their presence, were repairing the damages wrought by their treacherous guest.

It was Captain Joe who gave the first intimation of the presence of others on the island. He sprang from the boat, paddled through the shallow water between the hull and the shore, and set out for the elevation where the man who had signaled had been standing.

The boys heard a cry of pain, a shout of anger and a pistol shot, and then Captain Joe came running back to where the *Rambler* lay.

"What was it you said about wreckers?" Case asked with a startled look. "No beast or bird fired that shot!"

"I was only wondering," Jule answered, "whether there are really wreckers at work along the river. That's the answer!"

"Well," Clay said, "we'll get on the boat to talk it over! In the meantime, we'll be putting space between the *Rambler* and this island. If ever a wrecker's beacon told where to lure a boat to be plundered, that flame we saw on the island told our sneaking guest when to cut the *Rambler* loose!"

The boys hastened on board and Clay ran to the motors. At that instant, four men made their appearance on the ledge above the cove, beckoning with their hands and calling out to the boys that they had something of importance to say to them.

"They look to me like triple-plated thieves," Alex commented, "and I wouldn't be caught on an island with them for a farm."

Captain Joe seemed to approve of this decision, for he stood with his feet braced, growling furiously at the beckoning men.

"Boat ahoy!" one of the men cried. "We have a message for you."

"All right," Case answered, "you may send it by wireless."

"But it is important!" came from the man.

During this brief conversation, the motors were slowly drawing the *Rambler* out of the sandy cove, the electric connection having been made, and the men were rapidly approaching the shore. The boat moved slowly, for the keel was dragging slightly in the sand, and the wreckers, if such they were, stood at the water's edge before the craft was more than a dozen yards away.

Directly, all appearance of friendship ceased, and the men stood threatening the boys with automatic guns.

"Run back!" one of the men cried, "or we'll pick you off like pigeons!"

The boys had already taken their automatic revolvers from the cabin, and now, instead of obeying the command of the outlaws, they dropped down behind the gunwale and sent forth a volley not intended to injure, but only to frighten.

Apparently undismayed by the shots, the outlaws passed boldly down the shore line seeking to keep pace with the motor boat as she drew out of the cove. Every moment the motors were gaining speed. In another minute, the *Rambler* would be entirely beyond the reach of the outlaws.

Apparently hopeless of coercing the boys into a return, the outlaws now began shooting. Bullets pinged against the gunwale and imbedded themselves in the walls of the cabin but did no damage.

A tinge of color was now showing in the east. Birds were astir in the moving currents of the air, and lights flashed dimly forth from the distant houses of St. Luce. Against the ruddy glow of the sky, a river steamer lifted its column of smoke. Observing the approach of the vessel, the outlaws redoubled their efforts to frighten the boys into instant submission.

However, the *Rambler* was gaining speed, and the incident would have been closed in a moment if the connection made between the batteries and the motors had not become disarranged. In the haste of making the repairs, the work had not been properly done.

The propeller ceased its revolutions and the boat dropped back toward the cove. Evidently guessing what had taken place on board, the outlaws gathered at the point where it seemed certain that she would become beached.

Understanding what would take place if the motor boat dropped back, the boys fired volley after volley in order to attract the attention of those on the steamer. There came a jangling of bells from the advancing craft, and she slowed down and headed for the point. The outlaws fired a parting volley and disappeared among the rocks.

The steamer continued on her course toward the little island, but paused a few yards away and the boys saw a rowboat dropped to the river. The *Rambler* continued to drift toward the beach she had so recently left and the rowboat headed for that point.

Fearful that the boat would again come within reach of the outlaws, Clay and Case now rushed to the prow, and threw the supply anchor over just in time to prevent a collision between a nest of rocks and the stern of the boat.

The outlaws were now out of sight, and the boys felt secure in the protection of the steamer, but directly the situation was changed, for a show of arms was seen on board the rowboat, and the boys were suddenly ordered to throw up their hands.

"You fellows are nicely rigged out—fine motor boat, and all that," one of the men in the boat shouted, "but the days of river pirates on the St. Lawrence are over. You are all under arrest."

"Gee whiz!" shouted Alex. "Is this what you call a pinch?"

"It is what we call a clean-up," replied one of the men in the boat, rowing up to the *Rambler*. "We've been watching for you fellows, and now we've got you."

"And what are you going to do with us?" asked Clay restraining his anger and indignation with difficulty.

"We're going to take you up to Quebec and put you on trial for piracy!"

"That'll be fine!" Jule commented.

The boys tried to smile and make light of the situation as the four men from the steamer boarded the *Rambler*, but they all understood that it was a very serious proposition that they were facing.

CHAPTER IV—CONCERNING A LOST CHANNEL

The men from the steamer took possession of the *Rambler* impudently, acting like ignorant men clothed with small authority. The boys were ordered to the cabin and the door locked.

"We left our manacles on board the *Sybil*," one of the men announced, "or we'd rig you out with some of the King's jewelry."

"We'll overlook the slight for the present," Case flared back, "but you be sure and bring the jewels at the first opportunity."

"You'll get them quick enough," snarled one of the men. "Three days ago we received notice that you were coming, and we've been watching for you ever since. You came along just in time to be nicely trapped."

"Do you mean that you were watching for the *Rambler*?" asked Clay, lifting his voice in order that he might be heard through the glass panel of the door. "I'd like to have you tell me about that."

"No one knew the shape you would come in," was the gruff reply. "We only knew that a band of pirates and wreckers who had been luring vessels on the rocks along the bay was preparing to visit the St. Lawrence. Perhaps you will tell me where you stole this fine boat?"

"They must have a big foolish house in this province," Alex taunted, "if all the King's officers are as crazy in the cupola as you are."

"Let them alone," urged Clay. "No use in talking to men of their stripe. Wait until we get to the captain of the steamer."

The sailors continued to question the boys, resorting now and then to insulting epithets, but the lads sat dumbly in the cabin until the arrival of Captain Morgan, in charge of the steamer *Sybil*. To express it mildly, they were all very much elated at the appearance of Captain Morgan, who unlocked the cabin door, called them out on deck and greeted them pleasantly. They all wanted to shake hands with him.

"It seems," Clay said to the captain, as the latter motioned to the sailors to move up to the prow, "that your men have captured a band of bold, bad men. It was a daring thing for them to do!"

The captain laughed until his sides shook, and the men, gathered on the forward part of the deck, scowled fiercely, to which the captain paid no attention at all.

"Perhaps there is an excuse for the men," Captain Morgan finally said, suppressing his laughter. "We heard firing as we came up the river, and wreckers are known to be about."

"If you have any doubt as to the presence of wreckers," Clay explained, "just send your ruffians over on the island. The men who did most of the shooting are there. They may also be able to find the ashes of the signal fire the outlaws lighted."

"That will be good exercise for them," Jule cut in, "and perhaps they won't be so brave when they find they haven't boys to deal with."

"Do you mean to tell me that the wreckers are now on the island?" asked the captain. "If they are, we may yet be able to make a capture."

"They were on the island just before you came up," Clay answered, "and I presume they are there yet. We'll help you take them."

The captain laughed and looked critically at the slender, well-dressed youngsters, then his eyes turned to the white bulldog and the bear, now sniffing suspiciously at his legs.

"It seems to me," he said, "that I have heard of this outfit before! When I came aboard I thought I recognized the name of the *Rambler*. This menagerie of yours settles the point. You brought Captain Joe, the dog, from Para, on the Amazon and Teddy, the cub, from British Columbia."

"You've got it," Alex cried, "but how did you come to know so much about us? We rather expected to get away from our damaged reputations up here," he added with a wink and a grin.

"You have long been famous in these parts," the captain answered, "Ever since the *Rambler* came riding up to the Newfoundland coast on a flat car. It is a wonder that my men did not recognize you."

"I don't believe they can read," laughed Alex. "Suppose you send them over on the island to see if they can recognize some of the outlaws."

One of the sailors approached Captain Morgan, saluted, and pointed to the narrow channel between the island and the mainland. The sun was now shining brightly in the sky, and the whole landscape lay bright under its strong and rosy light. Half way across the channel, its rays glinted on splashing oars, and from the shore came hoarse commands.

"There are men leaving the island, sir," the sailor said. "Perhaps we did get hold of the wrong fellows."

"I should think you did," laughed the captain, "but there may be time to correct the error. Signal to the steamer for more men, and drift down in your boats. You may be able to capture some of those outlaws, and," he added with a smile as the sailor turned away, "don't forget that there is a reward offered for every one of them."

"Perhaps we'd better go with the men," suggested Case. "We aren't anxious to get where there's shooting going on, but we need the money."

"I prefer," the captain replied, "that you come on board the Sybil with me. I'll have the cook get up a fine breakfast, and you boys can tell me all about your river trips. I have always been interested in such journeys and have long planned to take one myself."

The boys readily agreed to this arrangement, Alex declaring that it would save the washing of at least one mess of dishes, and all were soon seated in the captain's cosy room.

"I'll wait here an hour," Captain Morgan said, "to give my men a chance to gather in some of the rewards, but after that I must be on my way. We shall be late now, on account of this delay."

The boys briefly described their river trips on the Amazon, the Columbia, the Colorado and the Mississippi, and were rewarded with a breakfast which Alex admitted was almost as good as he could cook himself.

"And now," Clay said, as they all stood on the deck, watching the sailors returning empty-handed from their quest of the outlaws, "I wish you would tell me what all this rural free delivery business we've encountered means. We've been puzzling over it all night."

As he spoke he handed the first letter—the one delivered by the mysterious canoeist—to the captain, who smiled as he looked at it.

"I'll tell you about that," he said. "There is a man over in Quebec who claims that he owns about half of the province under a grant of land made to Jacques Cartier in 1541 by Francis I. of France. This grant, or charter, he claims, was confirmed to his family, the Fontenelles, in 1603 by Samuel de Champlain, who was sent to Canada by de Chaste, upon whom King Louis XIII. had generously bestowed about half of the new world.

"Fontenelle claims that all the kings and presidents of France from 1541 down to the present time have confirmed this grant so far as certain mineral and timber properties are concerned. For years Fontenelle has been trying to gain possession of the original charter brought to this country by Cartier, but has never succeeded."

"Would he secure a large amount of property if he found it?" asked Alex. "How did it ever become lost?"

"It disappeared from Cartier's hands," was the reply. "It is believed that the recovery of the original charter would make the Fontenelles very wealthy, especially as the family jewels, worth millions of francs, are said to have been lost with the important document."

"I think they had their nerve to send family jewels to America in 1541," Case cut in. "Might have known they would be lost."

"You must remember," Captain Morgan replied, "that for years during and following the reign of Francis I. the protestant persecutions kept France in a turmoil. It was hinted that the Fontenelles did not favor these persecutions and that the jewels were shipped to the new world for greater safety. What I am telling you now, remember, is only tradition, and not history. To be frank with you, I will say that I don't believe it myself. It is too misty."

"It is interesting, anyway," Clay declared, "and I'd like to hear more about it, but tell me this—why should the Fontenelles, or their agents, send this letter to us? And why should they send it, if at all, in so mysterious a manner?"

"I have heard," Captain Morgan replied, "that an expedition for the recovery of this original charter was being fitted out at Quebec. Your boat may have been mistaken for the one carrying the searchers."

"Searching in this wild country?" questioned Alex. "Where do they think this blooming charter is, I'd like to know?"

Captain Morgan took the crude map into his hands and pointed to an egg-shaped peninsula reaching out into the St. Lawrence between the mouths of two rivers.

"There is said to be a lost channel somewhere in that vicinity," he said, "and tradition has it that the papers and the jewels were hidden on its shore. The searchers, for years, have been in the hope of finding this lost channel. They have never succeeded."

"Then we're almost on the ground," cried Jule. "Where do we go to reach this peninsula? We might be lucky enough to find this channel."

"It doesn't exist," smiled Captain Morgan. "Every inch of that country has been gone over with a microscope, almost, and there is no lost channel there. At least, it can't be found."

"There is one on the map, anyway," Alex observed.

"Well," Clay laughed, "we have been mixed up with some one else's affairs on every one of our river trips, and we may as well keep up the record, so I propose that we spend a few days looking for this lost charter and these family jewels."

The boys all agreed to the proposition, and even Captain Morgan seemed to gain enthusiasm as they talked over their plans.

"I wouldn't mind being with you," the captain said, "but of course, I can't go. However, if you keep on across the river, straight to the north, you'll come to the egg-shaped peninsula. Keep to the right of it, and you'll enter a broad river. This map shows you where the lost channel is claimed to have existed. Go to it, kids, and good luck go with you!"

"Now then that point is settled," Clay smiled, taking the second letter from his pocket, "tell us what this means."

Captain Morgan looked over the paper carefully before making any reply. His face clouded and an expression of anger came to his eyes.

"The fact of the matter is," he said, "that for two hundred years the Fontenelles have met with opposition in their search for the lost channel. Some of the land claimed under the charter is now held by innocent purchasers who believe their title to be perfect.

"There is no doubt that such might come to a fair understanding with the Fontenelles if the charter should ever be found, but it is alleged that an association has been formed by the wealthier persons who are interested to defeat any attempt made to discover the charter. They claim, of course, that with the charter in their possession the Fontenelles would be able to make their own exorbitant terms."

"I knew it!" Alex cried. "We are in between two hostile interests again! It always happens that way. But we like it!"

"I have been thinking," Captain Morgan went on, "that the men who attempted to wreck the *Rambler* are not river pirates at all, but men sent here to obstruct, as far as possible, those in search of the lost channel. It certainly looks that way."

"Well," Clay remarked, "they haven't got any motor boat, and we've got one that can almost beat the sun around the earth, so we'll just run away from them. In an hour after you leave here, we'll be in the east river looking for the channel which is said to have connected it in past years with the one paralleling it on the west."

The sailors who had been searching now reported to the captain that no strangers had been seen by them on the island, and it was agreed that the outlaws, whether wreckers or men employed to obstruct the search for the lost channel, had taken to the south shore. Captain Morgan shook the boys warmly by the hand as they parted.

"If you say any more about your plans," he said, "I'll be going with you. Already I can sense the smoke of your campfire, and smell the odor of the summer woods. There are fine fish up in those rivers, boys, great shiny, gamy things that fight like the dickens in the stream and melt like butter in the mouth."

"We'll send you out some," promised Clay, and the steamer's boat carried the boys back to the *Rambler*.

The needed repairs were soon accomplished, and when night fell the motor boat lay under a roof of leaves in a deep cove on one of the rivers behind the egg-shaped peninsula. Just above the anchorage the water tumbled, from a high ledge. The boys had no idea of remaining on board that night, so they built a roaring campfire on shore and stretched hammocks from the trees.

"Right here," Clay said as the moon rose, "right about where we are sitting, there may be a lost channel!"

"That's all right," grinned Alex, "but I don't see myself getting very wet sitting on it."

"I don't blame any old channel for getting lost in this wild country," Case contributed. "We'll be lucky if we don't get lost ourselves. Hear the owls laughing at us!"

"I've been listening to the owls," Clay said, "and I have concluded that they are fake owls. If you'll listen, you will hear signals."

The boys listened for a long time, and then above the rush of the river and the murmur of the leaves in the wind, came a long, low call which seemed to them to be a very bad imitation of owl talk.

CHAPTER V—TEDDY GIVES AN EXHIBITION

"There is one sure thing," Clay said, as the boys listened, "and that is that we have got to watch the *Rambler* to-night. I propose that we take down the hammocks and go back to our bunks."

"It's a shame to sleep in that little cabin," Alex protested, "when we've got the whole wide world to snore in. Suppose you boys remain here on shore, and let me stand guard on the boat."

"That will be nice!" Jule laughed. "Alex always gets his soundest sleep when he's on guard."

"Don't you worry about me," Alex said, "I'll keep awake, all right. Besides, I want to hear the owls talk."

"I think we would better all go back to the *Rambler*," Clay advised. "We can anchor her farther out in the stream, leave one on guard, and so pass a quiet night. It looks risky to leave the boat where she is."

"Perhaps that's what we ought to do," Alex agreed, giving Jule a nudge in the ribs with his elbow. "Who's going to stand watch?"

"I will," Case offered. "I'll sit up until daylight, and then you boys can get up and catch fish for breakfast."

"I want a fish for breakfast two feet long," Alex declared. "I'll catch it and cook it in Indian style. That will be fine!"

"How do you cook fish a la Indian?" asked Case.

"Aw, you know," Alex replied. "First, you get your fish; then you dig a deep hole in the ground and fill it full of stones.

Then you build a roaring fire on the stones. Then you wrap your fish up in leaves and put it on the hot stones and cover it up. Then, if you want it to cook quick, you must build a fire on top. They sell fish cooked in that way at two dollars an order in Chicago."

"Cook it any way you want to," Clay said, "only don't muff it the way Case does when he tries to make biscuits. We'll be hungry."

Taking down the hammocks, the boys moved back to the *Rambler*. Clay, Alex, and Jule, after listening in vain for a time for more signals from the woods, finally went to their bunks, leaving Case sitting on the deck, across which a great tree on the east bank threw a long blur of shade.

Clay and Jule were soon sound asleep, but Alex lay awake listening. There was a notion at the back of his brain that the signals heard had been treated too lightly. He knew that Clay, always active and ready for any emergency, considered the party secure in midstream, but he was by no means satisfied that the best steps for the protection of the boat had been taken.

After a time he arose, dressed himself, and softly slipped out on deck, leaving the rest sleeping in the cabin.

"It isn't morning yet," Case said, speaking out of the shadow. "Why don't you go back to bed? You'll be sleepy tomorrow."

"Have you heard any more owl talk?" asked Alex.

"Not a line," replied Case. "Go on back to bed."

Alex did go back to bed, but could not sleep. Presently the long-expected owl-call came from the north, and then Teddy rubbed his soft nose against the boy's hand.

"What do you want, old man?" whispered Alex. "Does that hooting warn you of danger, too?"

The cub put his paws upon the edge of the bunk and tried to answer in bear talk that it did.

"All right," Alex said, "I'll just go out and see about it."

When he reached the deck for the second time, Case stood at the gunwale listening. The call came again from the woods.

"Now you hear it, don't you?" asked Alex, scornfully. "I reckon you fellows would sit around here and let those wops carry off the boat."

"Well, haven't they got to show up before we can do anything to them?" asked Case reproachfully. "I guess they have."

"I'd like to know what they are doing," Alex wondered, "and I just believe I could sneak out and learn something about it. It makes me nervous, waiting here for them to get in the first blow."

"If I had a house and lot for every time you've been lost on our river trips," Case grinned, "I'd own the biggest city in the world. You go back to bed, or I'll get Clay out here to tie you up."

Teddy now came sniffing where the two boys stood, and, lifting his paws to the gunwale, looked over in the forest.

"See that!" Alex exclaimed. "Even the bear knows there is something wrong on! If you'll keep that twirler of yours still for a little while, I'll go and see what it is."

"You're the wise little sleuth!" Case declared. "Go on back to bed and dream that you're Nick of the Woods."

"Tell you what," Alex said, "we'll tie a line to the rowboat, and I'll row ashore, then you pull the boat back, and I'll creep out in the thicket and see what I can discover. I believe those outlaws will gather around the campfire. Anyway, they're foolish if they don't."

"If you take my advice," Case said, "you won't go, but if you insist on it, I'll draw the boat back, for our own protection."

Very reluctantly, then, Case assisted in getting the boat into the river, found a long line to attach to the prow, and helped the boy away on his journey. He felt guilty for aiding in the adventure.

Alex landed in a thicket almost straight west of the *Rambler*, and at once secreted himself. No signals had been heard for some moments, and the boy believed that he had reached the shore without attracting attention. Case drew the boat back and sat waiting.

Alex remained perfectly still in his hiding-place for some moments. There was only the noises of river and forest. To the west, the embers of the campfire made a faint red glow in the moonlight.

Just as the boy was about to move out of the thicket, he heard a heavy splash in the river, followed by words of command and entreaty from Case. The splashing continued, and presently the bushes at the edge of the stream were moved by an entering body.

"That's Captain Joe!" thought Alex. "He's always ready for a run in the woods. I suppose I ought to send him back."

But it was not Captain Joe that thrust a wet nose into Alex's hand. It was Teddy, the bear cub, and his greeting was so friendly and sincere that all thoughts of sending him back to the boat vanished from the boy's mind. Teddy shook the

water from his coat like a great dog, and cuddled up to the boy as if thanking him.

"You're a runaway bear," Alex whispered to the cub, "and I ought to send you back, but I'll just see if you know how to behave in the kind of society I am going to mix with. Will you be good?"

Teddy declared in his best bear talk that he would be good, and the boy and the cub lay in the thicket, still listening, for a long time before moving. Then Alex crept toward the campfire.

When he came to a considerable rise in the center of the ground between the two streams, he found that the ground was broken and rocky. It seemed to him that a great crag had formerly risen where he stood, and that some distant convulsion of nature had shattered it.

To the south, between the rivers and at no great distance from the egg-shaped peninsula, ran a long, rocky ridge. Making his way to this, he secreted himself in the shadow of a boulder and settled down to watch and listen.

After a time Teddy grew impatient at the inactivity thus forced upon him, and began moving restlessly about.

"Bear!" warned Alex, "if you make any more racket here, I'll send you back to the boat. We're supposed to be sleuthing!"

Teddy evidently did not like the idea of being sent back to the boat, or of keeping still either, so he almost immediately disappeared, notwithstanding Alex's efforts to detain him by main force. The boy called to him in vain.

"Now," thought Alex, "the cub has gone and done it! He'll thrash around in the woods and scare my outlaws away. I wish I had tied him up on the boat. I might have known he would make trouble."

The boy waited a long time, but the cub did not return. Now and then he could hear him moving about in the thicket.

"He's just laughing in his sleeve at me!" complained the boy. "I wish I had hold of him!"

Directly a sound other than that made by the bear came to the ears of the listening boy. Some one was creeping towards his shelter. He could see no one, for the shadows were thick at the point from which the sounds proceeded, but presently, he heard a voice.

"They went back to the boat," some one said gruffly.

"That's all the better for us," another spoke.

"I don't know about that," the first speaker said.

"Why, we'll just cut her out and take boys and boat and all."

"That's easier said than done," was the reply. "Those boys are no spring chickens. They have guns and they know how to use them."

"Well," the other chided, "it isn't my fault that they went back to the boat. If you hadn't been giving your confounded signals, they would have slept by the fire and everything would have been easy."

Alex listened with his heart beating anxiously. There was no longer any doubt that the right construction had been placed on the signals which had been heard. The outlaws who had attacked them in the cove were now on the peninsula, ready to make trouble.

While the boy listened for further conversation, a rustling in the thicket at the base of the cliff told him that Teddy, the cub, was still in that vicinity. He chuckled at the thought which came to him.

"I wish I had the little rascal here," he mused. "I think he might be able to do something in the line of giving those fellows exercise! I wish I could get over to him."

The boy started in the direction of the sound, but paused when he heard one of the men saying:

"Where are the others?"

"Down on the river shore," was the reply.

"Then what is all that noise?" demanded the other.

"I don't hear any noise," was the surly reply.

"There is some one moving in the bushes."

"Then it must be one of the boys," Alex heard, "and I think we had better investigate. It would be luck to catch one of them."

"It wouldn't be any luck for me to be caught," thought Alex, "and so I'll just make a sneak back to the boat. I've learned all I wanted to know, anyway."

He started away, but almost at his first motion a stone became detached from the ledge at his side and went thundering down toward the spot from which the voices had proceeded.

"There!" one of the men cried, "I told you there was some one here."

Together the men immediately rushed to the spot where Alex lay hidden. They rustled through the bushes without any attempt at concealment, scrambling up the acclivity with the use of both hands and feet.

As they advanced another rustling came from the left, and Alex saw Teddy on the way back to his side. The moon, creeping farther to the south, found an opening in the dense foliage above the ledge, and threw a long shaft of light upon the exact spot where Alex lay, revolver in hand, waiting for the expected attack.

He moved out of this natural limelight hastily, but as he did so another figure entered it. Advancing swiftly, the men who had discovered the location of the boy, saw him disappear and saw the new figure which came upon the scene. They stopped instantly.

To their excited imaginations Teddy, standing somewhat above their heads, seemed to be at least nine feet high! Evidently trying to propitiate Alex for running away from him, the cub set about practicing all the stunts the boys had been teaching him for months.

Standing upon his hind legs, he extended his paws in a boxing attitude and pranced about, as he had been taught to do, in all the attitudes of the prize ring. The hair on his neck and back seemed to bristle with anger. His little round eyes, bright in the moonlight, twinkled viciously!

The men who were watching this trained exhibition, held their breaths in terror. They expected to be attacked by the animal immediately. Directly, they began backing slowly away. Then Teddy broke into his pet amusement, a whirling half-dance and they turned and ran, stumbling down the declivity, brushing through the briars and clinging vines of the thicket, and finally disappearing in the shadows farther upstream!

It did not take Alex long to find his way to the cub.

"You certainly are enough to scare the life out of a stranger," he said, addressing the bear. "If you don't mind, now, we'll go back to the boat. We've got news for the boys, at any rate."

But Teddy was not inclined to go back to the close cabin. He wanted a longer run in the woods. Before Alex could seize the collar which had been placed about his neck, he was away again. Alex pursued him for some distance, and then turned back toward the boat.

When he reached the shore and called softly to Case to row the boat over to him, there was no answer from the craft, as the rush of the river drowned his voice, but a most unexpected one came from the shore back of him. He turned quickly to see the barrel of a gun shining in the moonlight. He reached for his own weapon, but a hand caught his wrist and held it, as if in a grasp of iron.

"All right, kid," a harsh voice said, "if they don't want you on your boat, we'll give you a home on ours. We've got the snuggest little craft upstream you ever saw. You're welcome to it, only it may be dangerous for you to try to get away or make any noise!"

CHAPTER VI—CAPTAIN JOE TAKES A PRISONER

Case waited patiently a long time for the return of his chum. When it came near midnight he decided to awaken Clay and inform him of the situation. The latter was out of his bed instantly.

"He shouldn't have gone," the boy said, anxiously. "There is no doubt that he is in trouble of some kind. I'm sorry for this!"

"Well, he would go," Case urged, "and he promised to go only to the shore and look around. Just after he left, Teddy splashed off the boat and ran into the thicket. I presume the two are together."

"Of course they're together," said Clay, "That is, if Teddy hasn't been discovered and shot. That is likely to happen."

"What shall we do?" asked Case anxiously.

"It isn't much use to go into the thicket after him," Clay decided. "There is plenty of moonlight here, it is true, but the foliage must make it very dark in the forest. It would be like looking for a special pebble on the beach to try to find him now. We'll have to wait."

"Perhaps Teddy will come and bring us news," suggested Case. "I have known him to do such things. He's a wise little bear."

There was no more sleep on board the *Rambler* that night. With the first flush of dawn Clay and Jule were abroad in the forest, leaving Case on watch. Although they searched patiently for a long time, no trace of the missing boy could be discovered.

Here and there were tracks which must have been made by Teddy, but it was not certain that the two had been together. After a time the boys returned to the bank of the river just above the location of the *Rambler*. There they found where a boat had been drawn up to the bank.

"I don't see how they ever got a boat by us," Clay argued, "but they certainly did, for they couldn't have got here first. They must have sneaked up the east shore in the shadows and landed above the *Rambler*. Are you sure that no boat

passed down after Alex left?" he asked of Case. "One might have drifted down without making much noise."

"I was awake every minute of the time," Case insisted, "and no boat passed down. When the moon swung around to the south, the whole river was illuminated. I would have seen any craft that passed."

"Then it is certain that the intruders are still up river, perhaps above the falls, and I am afraid that Alex is where they are. That little rascal is always getting lost! He should have remained on board."

"Yes, he gets lost," admitted Case, loyally, "but he always comes out on top in the end. There wouldn't be any fun if Alex and Teddy were not always getting into trouble. It sort of keeps things moving!"

"Well," Clay concluded, "the place to look for the boy is, as I said before, upstream. Now, the question is, shall we take the *Rambler* up?"

"I am afraid the motors would declare our presence," Case observed, speaking from the deck of the boat, "and, besides, we couldn't go very far on account of the falls, so, perhaps, we would better go up as far as we can in the rowboat, making as little noise as possible."

"And what's the matter with putting Captain Joe on shore?" asked Jule. "He may be able to point out the spot where the men left the river. Anyhow, it won't do any harm to try."

"That's a good idea," declared Clay, "and I'll go along with him."

"I'm afraid you'll find it pretty rough walking along that bank," Case suggested, "for the country is rocky and leads up to the plateau above the falls, and small streams may run in from the peninsula. You might have to swim when you wasn't climbing hills."

"I'll try it a short distance, anyway," Clay answered, "and you, Case, remain on board and let Jule row up in the boat."

This arrangement was carried out, and in a short time, the little boat was moving upstream, with Jule pulling cautiously at the oars. Clay found the bank a difficult one to ascend. He was obliged to wade through small creeks and climb rocky heights, but he kept steadily on his way, with Captain Joe at his heels.

At last, they came to a creek which ran into the river at the foot of the falls. On the south side of this creek, for some distance in, was a level, grassy plateau, and here Captain Joe picked up the scent they were looking for. The south bank showed that a boat had recently been drawn up there.

Disregarding, for the time being, all commands from the boy, the dog raced up the small stream, and finally disappeared in a thicket.

Clay hesitated, undecided as to whether he ought to follow the dog at once or return to notify Jule of his discovery and secure his assistance.

He had already lost sight of the dog, so he concluded that he might as well return to Jule. This he did, and in a short time, the boat was anchored at the mouth of the creek, and the boys were pressing on into the thicket. Captain Joe was nowhere in sight.

"They certainly are on this side of the creek," Clay reasoned, "for they couldn't very well make progress on the other side unless they traveled in an aeroplane."

There were no tracks to follow, no indications of any one having passed that way recently, but the boys kept pluckily on, listening now and then for some sign from the dog.

"If he finds Alex," Jule declared, "he'll make a note of it, and we'll hear a racket fit to wake the dead."

"And that will warn the outlaws of our approach," said Clay in a discouraged tone of voice. "Perhaps we did wrong to bring the dog."

"You may be sure Captain Joe will give a good account of himself," Jule said confidently. "He may make a racket, but it's dollars to apples that they won't catch him."

In a short time the clamor the boys had been expecting came from the forest beyond. Captain Joe was barking and growling and, judging from the commotion in the copse, was evidently threshing about.

"That's a scrap," Jule declared. "Perhaps he has caught one of the men. If he has, I hope he's got him by the throat."

Pressing into the interior of the forest, the level grassy plateau having long since disappeared, the boys finally came to a small cleared glade and discovered the cause of Captain Joe's enthusiasm.

Teddy, the cub, was standing with his back to the hole of a giant tree inviting the dog to a boxing match. Captain Joe's clamor indicated only delight at the meeting with his friend.

Before showing themselves in the glade, the boys looked in every direction for some indication of the outlaws, but there was no sign of human life anywhere near them. No noise, save the cries of the creatures of the air and the jangle.

"You're a fine old scout, Captain Joe," whispered Clay as he finally advanced into the glade. "You notify everybody within a mile of us as to our location, but you don't do a thing to help us find Alex."

At mention of the lost boy's name, Teddy dropped down from his antagonistic attitude, and, thrusting a soft muzzle

against Clay's hand, moved away to the west.

"The cub has more sense than the dog," Jule exclaimed. "Captain Joe makes a noise, and Teddy does the piloting. Do you suppose he knows where Alex is?" he added.

"It seems to me that he is trying to tell us something," Clay replied. "Anyway, we may as well follow him."

Teddy, who was an especial favorite of Alex's, and never lost an opportunity of following him about, appeared to know exactly where he was going, for he maintained a steady pace for half an hour or more, keeping to the south shore of the creek for a time and then crossing on a fallen tree to the opposite bank.

"Now," said Clay, "we ought not to follow close behind the cub. He makes as much noise as a freight train going up a steep grade, and we'll be sure to be seen if the outlaws are anywhere about."

"Perhaps he will go on alone," Jule suggested.

"In that case, we can skirt his track and remain hidden. That ought not to be very difficult in this broken country."

Teddy turned about with an inquiring glance as the boys left his side, but soon proceeded on his course. Fearful that Captain Joe would indulge in another demonstration of some kind, the boys kept him with them, Jule keeping a close hold on his collar.

"This doesn't seem much like a river trip to me," Jule grinned as they passed over rocks, sneaked through miniature canyons and threaded thickets alive with briars and clinging vines. "Seems more like an overland expedition to the north star."

"There is one compensation," Clay added humorously. "Alex will get good and hungry—and serve him right at that."

"Huh!" Jule declared, "Alex is always hungry anyway."

Teddy now quickened his pace so that the boys had great difficulty in following him. He ran with his nose to the rough ground, his short ears tipped forward, for all the world like a hound on a scent.

"Look at the beast!" Jule laughed. "Acts like he was a hound after foxes. That's some bear, Clay."

"So far as I know," Clay answered, "he's the only cub that ever did a stunt like that. Still, he's only exhibiting the advantages of an early education, for he has long been trained to follow us."

After a short time the boys, advancing up a ledge and then into a little gully, came upon Teddy lying flat on the ground, his nose pointing straight ahead. When they came to him Captain Joe pulled fiercely to get away, his nose pointing straight to the north.

"I guess," Jule panted, holding to the dog with all his strength, "that they have located Alex. If you'll take charge of this obstreperous animal for a while, I'll sneak ahead and have a look."

Clay finally succeeded in quieting the dog, and Jule pushed on up the gully. At the very end, where the depression terminated in a wall of rock, he saw a faint column of smoke. A closer approach revealed a small fire of dry sticks with something cooking in a tin pail over the coals.

Jule stopped and considered the situation seriously.

"Now, I wonder," he thought, "why Teddy didn't make a fool of himself by rushing right up to Alex. I don't believe he's scared of the men, and, to tell the truth, I don't see any men to be frightened at. Alex seems to be there alone. Wonder why he doesn't run."

The reason why Alex didn't run was disclosed in a moment. The boy's hands were tightly bound across his breast and a strong rope encircled his ankles. For a moment there was no one in sight save the boy, then a roughly dressed man came into view carrying an armful of dry wood for the fire. Jule heard both the dog and the cub protesting at being kept away from the fellow, and saw the man turn sharply about.

Then there came another revelation. With bound arms swinging out, and bound feet kicking violently, Alex was ordering the two animals away. Well trained as they were, they protested while they obeyed.

"Is that that bear of yours, again?" Jule heard the man asking. "If I wasn't afraid of attracting attention, I'd put a bullet into him. Call him up here and keep him quiet while I gather more dry wood. The boys will be here in an hour or so and will want breakfast."

"That settles it," whispered Jule. "If the boys are so far away that they won't be back in an hour or more, they won't find any cook when they return. If I have my way, the cook will be tied up."

"All right," Alex said in reply to the fellow's order, "I'll call him up and keep him quiet after you go away. He's been used to polite society and doesn't like you!"

The man snarled out some surly reply and disappeared. Jule was at his chum's side in a moment. The ropes were cut, and the two boys were speeding back to where Clay had been left.

There was a little scene of congratulation, and then Captain Joe, growling fiercely, leaped forward. The man who had gone in search of wood must have heard the noisy greetings of the boys, for he came running back to the fire. The boys saw him throw a hand back for a weapon, heard an exclamation of anger, and knew that the dog was springing at his

throat.

The struggle was a short one, for the man who had been attacked had not succeeded in reaching his revolver. When the boys reached the scene the man was black in the face and the dog was shaking him viciously by the neck.

"Captain Joe seems to know who his friends are!" Alex shouted.

"If we don't break his hold in a minute, the man will be dead," Jule exclaimed, dancing excitedly about, "and we're not out to commit murder."

When the clutch of the dog was finally released, the man lay back, panting, on the ground. An examination of his injury showed that it was not serious, his throat having been compressed rather than torn.

In a moment the man sat up and glared about with murder in his protruding eyes. Seeing the dog still watching him, he gave him a vicious kick and came near inviting a repetition of the attack.

"I'll kill that dog!" he shouted.

"No, you won't!" laughed Alex. "We're going to take that dog out of this blooming country. We're going to tie you up so you won't over-exert yourself while in your present weakened condition, and streak it for the motor boat. We've had enough of this blooming election precinct."

This program was carried out so far as moving back toward the motor boat was concerned, but when, after a long, hard journey, they came to the place in the river where the *Rambler* had been left, it was nowhere to be seen. Satisfied that Case had not proceeded up the river—the falls would have prevented a long run up—they all entered the rowboat and passed on down toward the St. Lawrence.

"Talk about getting lost!" grinned Alex. "Case has gone and lost the boat!"

CHAPTER VII—CASE HAS HIS DOUBTS

As may well be imagined, Case was waiting impatiently on board the *Rambler* while the events described in the last chapter were taking place in the forest. It is one thing to face a desperate situation in the company of helpful friends. It is quite another to consider a grave peril alone, especially when chums are in danger.

Several hours passed, and Case heard nothing from the wanderers in the forest. Then an unexpected visitor arrived. The boy saw an Indian canoe paddled swiftly up the river.

He had not had a good chance to observe the visitor who had cut the cable, thus bring about the meeting with the steamer people, but it was his opinion that the canoeist was none other than the boy who had given his name as Max Michel. He anxiously awaited the arrival of the craft.

"If that is Max," he thought, "he certainly has a well-developed nerve to come back to the *Rambler* after doing what he did."

In a short time the canoe, coming steadily upstream, touched the hull of the motor boat, and its occupant clambered alertly to the deck. Case stood for a moment regarding him with disapproval, no welcome at all in his face. The boy approached with a confident smile.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Case.

"I came," was the quick reply, "because I have news which may interest you. I know you have good reason to doubt my friendship, but I hope you will listen to me. It will be in your interest to do so."

"News of my friends?" asked Case quickly, forgetting in the impulse of the moment that the boy's information was more than likely to be misleading. "Have you seen any of the boys to-day?"

"No," was the slow reply, "but I have heard from them. They crossed the peninsula early this morning, were lured into a boat passing down a parallel stream, and must now be somewhere on or near the St. Lawrence."

"How do you know all this?" demanded Case half-angrily.

"Ever since the night I cut your cable," Max began, "I have been more than ashamed of myself. I was ordered to do the work, and believed that there was nothing else for me to do except to obey. I was not far from St. Luce yesterday when you boys went aboard the *Sybil*. The steamer touched at St. Luce and I afterwards heard the captain telling a friend of meeting you. Then I decided to return to you, if you were still in this vicinity."

"And so you come here and tell me a fairy tale about my chums?" Case exclaimed. "You don't expect me to believe a word you say, do you?"

"And yet it is the truth," Max insisted. "I was up this morning early, paddling across the St. Lawrence, for I knew from the Captain's conversation that you were over here. Not long ago I came upon a boat leaving the river to the west. From the man who was rowing, I learned that your friends had been attacked and captured."

Case still doubted. He did not like the look in the eyes of the boy. He remembered the treacherous act which had sent the disabled *Rambler* drifting down the St. Lawrence. He thought fast for a moment and then asked abruptly:

"Will you tell me what your interest is in this matter?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Why did you cut our cable?"

The boy hesitated a moment, glanced casually over the west bank of the stream and then lowered his eyes to the deck.

"I was ordered to do so," he said in a moment.

"Ordered to disable our motors and cut our cable?" demanded Case indignantly. "Don't you know that you might have been the cause of our death? Is everything you have told me to-day just as true as the fairy tales you told us that night? You may as well be frank."

Again the boy hesitated. To Case it seemed that he was listening for some sound or signal from the shore.

"Will you tell me," continued Case, "who it was that ordered you to cut our cable and disable our motors?"

The boy shook his head. His manner was now anxious and uneasy, and Case turned his own eyes toward the shore which was being watched so closely.

"I can't give you the name of my employers," the boy finally said.

"Then tell me this," insisted Case. "Why did the men who ordered you to do the work want it done?"

"I don't know," was the brief reply.

"I presume," Case went on, "that you would have destroyed the *Rambler* with a stick of dynamite if you had been told to do so."

"I wouldn't have committed murder," was the quick reply.

"Now let us get back to your story of to-day," Case said. "Who was it that told you of the capture of my chums?"

"I can't tell you that."

"Was it one of your employers?"

"It was not."

"Was it a man with whom you are acquainted?" asked Case.

"I never saw him until to-day," he replied.

"How did he come to speak to you of the boys at all?"

"He mentioned that he had seen three boys evidently under a restraint in a boat with three men farther up the stream."

"So the boat held three men and three boys? Anyone else?"

"He did not mention any one else."

"And the six people were the sole occupants of the boat, were they?"

"That is what the man told me."

"Before you concocted this story," Case declared scornfully, "you ought to have jogged your memory a trifle. You saw Captain Joe and Teddy on board the *Rambler* the night you cut our cable. Why didn't you add to your story and say that the dog and the bear were with the three boys?"

"The man I saw said nothing to me about the dog and the bear," Max insisted stubbornly. "I had only a moment's talk with him."

"And then you came directly to the *Rambler* to tell me of the incident?"

"I came directly to the spot where I believed the *Rambler* would be," was the answer. "Of course, I didn't know exactly where you were, but Captain Morgan said that when you left him it was your intention to ascend this stream. I was lucky in finding you."

"And now," Case asked, with a scornful smile on his lips, "what do you expect me to do under the circumstances? What would you advise?"

"I thought," replied Max, "that you would go down the river, and make your way to the mouth of the other stream."

"Why do your employers want me to leave my present location?" asked Case. "Do they want the boys to come out of the forest and find the *Rambler* gone? Is that what you were sent here for?"

"Oh, well," Max exclaimed, "if you don't believe what I say, and won't take advantage of the honest information I have given you, I may as well be on my way."

He moved toward the gunwale of the boat, as he spoke and began untying the line which held his canoe to the *Rambler*. Case stepped forward and laid a detaining hand on his shoulder.

"Just a moment," the boy said. "You are not going to leave the *Rambler* until my chums return, and perhaps not then."

"Do you mean that you intend to keep me prisoner?" flashed Max.

"That is just exactly what I mean to do," Case responded. "I don't know what your object in coming here really is, for I believe that as a prevaricator, you have Ananias backed off the board. I dislike to use the shorter and uglier word, Max, but you certainly are the greatest liar I ever came across. You'll stay here until we know more about you."

"You'd better do a little thinking before you keep me here," Max threatened. "You are making a lot of trouble for yourself."

"I'll have to risk that," Case replied. "Have you got any weapons about your person? If you have, give them up."

Max shook his head angrily.

"If I had had a weapon," he declared, "you would have known all about it the minute you laid a hand on my shoulder."

"Will you promise to remain on the boat without attempting to escape if I leave you your liberty?" Case asked.

"I will promise nothing!" was the ugly reply.

"All right," Case said.

There was a rush and a little struggle, but in the end, Max was overcome and stowed away bound hand and foot in the cabin.

Leaving his prisoner there, foaming with rage and searching a limited vocabulary for words to express his feelings, Case went out to the prow of the *Rambler* and sat down to think over the situation.

"That boy," he mused, "was sent here to induce me to take the *Rambler* out of this place. Why?"

The boy considered the problem for a long time. He was hoping that some of his chums would make their appearance. He disliked very much to take the *Rambler* away from the place where they had left it, and still there might be a grain of truth in what Max had said.

The day was bright and still. The deep green foliage of the forest shone and shimmered in the sun. There were birds in the air, and here and there timid creatures of the jungle came out to the stream to drink and peer with questioning eyes at the stranger who had invaded their leafy retreat. There were no signs of human life anywhere except on board the *Rambler*. The continued absence of the boys seemed unaccountable.

"Well," the boy decided, presently, "I'll take a chance on a visit to the St. Lawrence. It won't take long to run down, swing up to the other end of the peninsula and investigate the west stream. If the boys come back while I am gone, they'll probably hear the motors clamoring and know that I am not far away. Still, I don't think they'll come."

Case was slowly reaching the uncomfortable conclusion that the boys had, indeed, been overcome by the outlaws. In that case, his first act ought to be to secure help. If he returned to the St. Lawrence, he might meet a friendly captain who would be willing to assist him in the rescue.

So, with this idea in his mind, the boy drew up the anchor, started the motors to popping and headed the *Rambler* down stream. The boat proceeded at full speed, and soon the arm of the bay which closed in behind the peninsula came in view.

Anchored there, in a sheltered cove on the north shore of the river, was a trim little launch. Case could see four men moving about in the cockpit at the rear of the little trunk cabin. He immediately directed the *Rambler* toward the craft and hailed across the water. He was answered promptly.

"Is that the *Rambler*?" was asked.

"The *Rambler* it is," answered Case. "Are you looking for her?"

"Not especially," was the reply. "We were told that you were here by Captain Morgan, whom we saw up the river."

"Come aboard," invited Case, and in a few moments two bright-looking young men ascended from a small boat to the deck of the *Rambler*.

"I am Joseph Fontenelle," one of the young men said, "and this is my friend, Sam Howard. We were just going up the river when we saw you coming down. Are you alone on board?"

"My friends are somewhere back in the forest," Case explained, certain that it was safe to trust the visitors. "I seem to have lost them."

"Then we have probably arrived just in time," Fontenelle went on. "As you probably know from my name, we are here on the old search for the charter. Captain Morgan, I am told, related the story to you. For myself, I have little faith in the quest, but father insists that I make a try to solve the mystery every summer. This is my third visit to what we call Cartier island. I expect to make them annually as long as father lives."

"You have no faith in the story of the lost charter and the missing family jewels?" asked Case.

"Oh, they were lost, without doubt, and possibly in this country, but there is no clew whatever to their whereabouts."

Case was wondering if the Fontenelles had a copy of the crude map which had been so mysteriously brought to the *Rambler*. He was wondering, too, if it would be safe for him to tell this youthful representative of the French family all that he knew of the two communications and the attacks which had been made on the *Rambler*. The question was virtually settled by Fontenelle himself.

"I am told," the young man said, "that you boys were placed in peril by being mistaken for us."

"We had a scrap with river pirates, if that is what you mean," Case replied, "and Captain Morgan helped us to get away from them."

"I'm afraid," Fontenelle went on, "that the men you term 'river pirates' are pirates only for the purpose of this occasion. We have always been opposed in our quest for what father calls the lost channel."

"Opposed everywhere in your searches?" Case asked, "or opposed only when you come to this section?"

"Opposed only in this vicinity," answered Fontenelle, gazing keenly at the boy. "I see what you mean," he added. "At least, your inference is that those who are opposing us really know more about the location of the charter and the jewels than we know ourselves, and that they believe them to be here."

"That is the way it seems to me," Case answered, "still if they think they know that the property sought for is in this vicinity, their knowledge fails when they try to put their hand upon it. They can only hope for success in case of your failure, and so they oppose your every effort."

"That is the way in which we look at it," Fontenelle replied. "In fact, father is positive that the search for the charter goes steadily on in this vicinity throughout most of the year."

"Last year, we had quite a merry picnic with a scout sent up to obstruct our search, and one of our men was seriously wounded. Our enemies are certainly becoming desperate, and if, as you say, your chums appear to be lost in the forest, we ought to be getting up there to look after them. They may be sorely in need of help."

"I thank you for your offer of assistance," Case replied, "and it is my opinion that we can't get back there too quickly. Come over here and look through the cabin window," he continued, "pointing through the glass panel to where he had left Max lying bound on the bunk."

Then the look of amusement vanished from the boy's face, and he opened the door and passed quickly into the cabin. Max was nowhere to be seen. He had disappeared as completely as if the hull of the *Rambler* had opened and dropped him into the stream. The ropes with which he had been tied lay on the floor, but the boy was gone.

The open window at the rear of the motor boat, told the story. In answer to Fontenelle's looks of inquiry, Case briefly told the story of Max's visit and capture. The young man pondered a moment and then said:

"I don't believe the boys have been captured at all. The chances are that they are still in the forest, probably looking for the boy who disappeared last night."

"This boy Max, if your description tallies with my recollection, has appeared in the game before to-day. He is a wharf rat at Quebec, and is being used by these outlaws to further their treacherous ends. I wish we had found him here."

As the boys passed out on deck, the barking of a dog came from up the river. There was no mistaking the voice. It was Captain Joe, and he was deploring the absence of his floating home. Case smiled happily at the sound, and then his face grew serious, for gunshots followed the echo of the dog's voice.

CHAPTER VIII—THE DISCOVERY OF MAX

Case hastened to put the *Rambler* under motion, and, with Fontenelle and Howard still on board, headed her into the current. At a signal from Fontenelle, the launch *Cartier* drew up her anchor and followed.

To Captain Joe's vicious barking was now added the surly voice of the bear cub, so the boys knew that the animals were not far away. In fact, as they paused to investigate the ugly nose of the bulldog was pushed through the curtain of shrubbery at the edge of the stream, and Teddy leaped snarling into the water.

Fontenelle greeted the approach of the animals to the boat with shouts of laughter. Even in their haste to reach the boat, the animals could not avoid snapping and striking at each other, playfully. No more shots were heard, but presently a great tramping in the undergrowth came at the point where Joe and Teddy had made their appearance, indicating human presence there. All on board the *Rambler* anxiously awaited the appearance of those who were struggling in the jungle.

"Would the menagerie run away and leave the boys in captivity?" asked Fontenelle, as the bulldog and the bear cub were assisted, streaming, to the deck. "They seem to have had a long run."

"Indeed, they would not," replied Case. "If Clay and the others were tied up in the woods, Captain Joe and Teddy would be there with them. No, it is my opinion that it is Alex making all that racket in the brush. He's a noisy little chap, and particularly troublesome when hungry."

The next moment proved Case's reasoning to be correct, for the undergrowth parted again and the three boys appeared on the bank.

"Ship ahoy!" Alex shouted, wrinkling his freckled nose. "Do you want to take on passengers?"

"I hope," Case called back, "that you fellows haven't gone and lost the rowboat. And where is the two-foot fish you were going to bring for breakfast? I don't see it anywhere."

"Well," Jule called out, as the *Rambler* edged toward the bank, "if we have lost a boat, you seem to have found one."

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

Jule pointed, and Case went to the gunwale of the *Rambler* and looked down upon the fragile canoe in which Max had paddled up the river.

"I didn't know that we were towing it," he said, "but its presence here accounts for Max getting away without being seen or heard. He never stopped to get his boat, and may be swimming under water yet, for all I know. I hope he's clear down at the bottom."

"No danger of one of those wharf rats getting drowned," Fontenelle laughed. "I have seen them remain under water for what seemed to me to be five minutes, and Max is some riverside boy."

"Shoot the canoe over," cried Clay, "and we'll come aboard."

"Where's your boat?" demanded Case.

"Well, you see," explained Clay, "when we missed the *Rambler*, we started for the St. Lawrence by the water route, but when ruffians on the bank began shooting, we tied up the boat and took to the thicket."

Case released the line and sent the light canoe spinning over the surface of the river. Clay caught the rope deftly and one by one the boys paddled over to the motor boat. Alex threw himself down on the deck and gazed imploringly up at Case.

"I expected," he said whimsically, "that you'd welcome me on the bank of the river with a pie!"

"The next time you get us into trouble," Case laughed, "I'll meet you on the bank of the river with a club."

The three boys were presented to Fontenelle and Howard and then preparations for breakfast were begun.

"Alex got taken prisoner up in the woods," Jule grinned. "We cut him loose and tied up the cook. We were thinking of getting breakfast there, but we preferred fish and pancakes to lead and gunpowder, so we made a run for the boat."

"Is the cook tied up yet?" asked Case.

"I reckon they cut him loose in about ten minutes," Alex replied, "for they seemed to be about three steps behind us all the way to the river, but they didn't catch us."

"Do you think we would better go back after the rowboat?" Case asked, as the boys sat down to a breakfast of bacon, eggs, pancakes, beans and hot coffee. "We ought not to loose it."

"Look here," Jule said. "We've been sowing rowboats over the world for a year or two. We lost two on the Amazon, one on the Columbia, two on the Colorado and had three smashed on the Mississippi. Now, I think we'd better go back and get this boat."

"All right," Alex grinned. "You go on back and get it."

"Well, don't you ever think I can't," Jule replied. "I can sneak up there and swipe that boat from under their noses. But you needn't think I'm going to set out as long as there is anything here to eat."

While the boys took breakfast, the situation as explained to Case by Fontenelle was described to them, and after a time Case beckoned Clay away to a corner of the cabin and asked him a question over which he had been puzzling ever since the arrival of Fontenelle.

"Now you understand the situation," Case said, "and I want you to answer this question right off the handle. I've decided it half a dozen ways, but I have been fortunate enough so far to keep my mouth shut."

"What is the question?" asked Clay.

"Wait," Case said. "I'll make a little explanation first. These Fontenelle people have only the legend of the lost channel and the loss of the charter and the family jewels in this section. They haven't a single clew which tells them to look in any special spot first.

"So far as I can make out, young Fontenelle and his friends come down here every summer, in answer to the demands of the elder Fontenelle, for a sort of a vacation. So far as I can make out, they have never honestly searched for the lost channel. In fact, the young man has doubts of its existence. Now, what I want to know is this."

"Why didn't you say so before?" asked Clay with a smile. "I know what your question is. You want to know if we ought to show Fontenelle the map which was brought to the *Rambler* so mysteriously."

"Aw, of course, you could guess it after I had stated the case fully," Case declared. "But you haven't told me what you think about it. Ought we to give Fontenelle the map?"

"Well," Clay answered, cautiously, "the map doesn't belong to us. It wasn't intended for us. It was handed to us by a man who evidently believed that he was turning it over to Fontenelle."

"Yes," Case said, "it does look as if the map belongs to Fontenelle, but look here! He doesn't believe in this search. It is my idea that he doesn't even care whether he secures the lost property or not. He won't consider the matter seriously if we give it to him. He'll just laugh and poke it away among a lot of old papers and that will be the end of it."

"You are undoubtedly right," Clay answered.

"Now," Case went on, "we've had enough trouble with these outlaws to arouse my fighting blood. Besides, I'd like to have a look at that lost channel. Lost channels appeal to me, you know! I'd give a lot to find it. Why not keep the map and go on with the search?"

"But the other fellows would be searching, too, and the whole event would deteriorate into a big summer outing," Clay insisted.

"All right, then," Case suggested. "Suppose we go on up the river to Quebec, and Montreal, and the Thousand Islands, and then come back after these fellows have gone home, and find that channel."

"That listens pretty good to me," Clay answered. "I am willing to go on at once if it is a sure thing that we come back, but I don't want to sneak away from these fellows after they have started the fight."

"That shows courage, all right enough," Case added, "but I'd rather hunt for this lost channel with these toughs on the wharf at Quebec, and," he added, more seriously, "that's where I think they'll be by the time we get back here. They won't stay here long after Fontenelle goes away."

"Very well," Clay replied, "if Jule and Alex are willing, we'll be on our way this afternoon."

This understanding having been reached, the two boys went back to their guests, while Jule went ashore in the canoe.

"Now, watch the little rat," Alex laughed. "He'll tie that boat up and blunder through the briers, when he might paddle up the stream close to the bank without taking any chances."

But Jule did nothing of the kind. He kept on up the stream in the canoe. Presently he rounded a bend and disappeared from sight.

In a short time Fontenelle and his friend left the *Rambler* with the understanding that the two crews were to meet in the evening if the boys did not sail away in the afternoon. As a matter of fact, as the reader already knows, the boys had decided to leave before the parting took place, but they did not care to be urged to remain and join in the summer vacation picnic which was sure to follow.

They had started out for a trip covering the whole length of the St. Lawrence river from the Gulf to Lake Ontario, and were determined to cover the course before shipping their boat back to Chicago.

In less than an hour Jule was back with the rowboat, having seen nothing of the outlaws.

"They probably thought the whole Canadian navy was coming after them," Alex said, pointing from the *Rambler* to the *Cartier* and back again. "Looks like we were coming out in force."

In the middle of the afternoon the boys notified Fontenelle of their intention to proceed on their journey, and the *Rambler* passed on up the St. Lawrence.

It was a golden day in summer, the waters sparkled and danced in the sunlight, and the shipping passing to and fro on the river made a pleasant picture of marine life. The boys enjoyed the situation thoroughly.

"I have always had a longing to visit Quebec," Clay said as the boat headed for a little cove to avoid the wash of a giant steamer, "and I propose that we spend two or three days there looking over things."

"That suits me," Alex cut in. "When we get there, I'll go down on the docks and find that boy Max. And when I find him, there'll be one wharf rat less on the docks."

"You better keep away from the docks," warned Case. "You'd get lost on South Clark street between any two blocks you could name."

"Well, I always find myself again," Alex declared.

"Yes, you do," Case jeered. "The last time you got lost, it took two boys and a bear and a bulldog to find you. And I don't think you are worth the trouble at that!"

The boys immediately had a friendly struggle on the deck, in which Teddy and Captain Joe promptly mixed.

That night the boys arranged for another campfire on the north bank of the St. Lawrence. They put up their hammocks, anchored the boat close inshore, and prepared for a long sleep.

"If there isn't any lost channels or charters from French kings or strayed family jewels hiding about here," Jule commented, "we'll certainly enjoy ourselves in this camp."

Nothing came to disturb them during the night. They watched the procession of craft of all descriptions on the river until nine o'clock, then went to sleep with a danger signal swinging from the prow of the *Rambler*. They were early astir in the morning and on their way upstream.

There was no need of haste, yet the boys seemed to enjoy themselves most when the boat was in motion, so they plowed slowly up the river until night, enjoying the wild scenery and stopping now and then at a little settlement. That was the first of many days of uninterrupted pleasure on the most extensive water system of the North American continent.

On the second night, they made another camp with only Captain Joe and Teddy standing guard. Alex was out after fish early in the morning, and at six o'clock he served one of his long-wished for fish a la Indian breakfasts.

Just before nightfall, they came within sight of Quebec and moored at a pier a short distance down the river.

"Now," laughed Case, "if any treasure seekers or outlaws or river pirates appear to us during the night, we'll call the police. We've had trouble enough for one trip."

"I'm going to sleep ten hours every night until we get to the Thousand Islands," declared Jule. "I'm hungry and sleepy most of the time."

"And we'll come back down the rapids, won't we?" asked Alex.

"You bet we will," replied Clay. "We'll come down like a shot."

"We'll need to," Jule suggested, "because we'll lose time in the canal going up."

There was no open campfire or swinging hammocks for the boys that night. The city of Quebec twinkled its myriad lights from plateau and cliff, and the boys were not sure of whom they might meet during the dark hours. They cooked their supper early in order to make an evening trip in the lower part of the city.

"I wonder," Case said, as, leaving Jule and Clay on board, he started away with Alex, "what the man who delivered the map to us is thinking about concerning his mistake now. He might have been paid to deliver that document to Fontenelle, and the error may make him trouble."

"And I was just thinking," Alex put in, "what the fellows who delivered the warning to us are thinking concerning themselves. They wasted a lot of ammunition and lost a good many hours' sleep on our account."

"Perhaps we'll find out all about it when we go back to find the lost channel," Case suggested. "Do you know," he added, "I'm looking forward to that lost channel stunt with a good deal of enthusiasm."

"Do you really think there's a lost channel there?" asked Alex.

"There is something in it," Case asserted. "Men don't draw maps entirely on imagination."

"Then why don't the men who drew the map go and tell Fontenelle all about it?"

"He tried to tell him all about it when he delivered the map to us, but as you know, the map reached the wrong hands."

The boys walked the streets, comparing them unfavorably with those of Chicago, until nearly ten o'clock and then turned to go to the boat. When they came to the river front again, Alex stopped suddenly and caught Case by the arm.

"Look there," he whispered, "What do you know about that?"

"About what?" asked Case, puzzled.

"Don't you see him down there at the head of the pier?" asked Alex, nodding his head in that direction.

"I guess you're the boy that's got loose packing in his head to-night," laughed Case. "What do you see?"

"What do I see?" repeated Alex. "That's Max, the wharf rat, the cable cutter, the motor destroyer. Shall we go and get him?"

"Go and get him?" repeated Case. "He'd have a flock of wharf rats around us in about two minutes."

"Well," Alex insisted, "we'd better stay here and see where he goes, anyway. If we can locate the fellow now, we can go after him any time."

"Then I guess we can go after him any time," Case chuckled, "because he's heading for that eating house with the tin fish sign in front of it."

"Then here we go for the tin fish," Alex declared, and in five minutes, they were seated at a little table in an alcove separated only by a heavy cloth curtain from the main room of a third-rate French restaurant.

When a waiter appeared they gave their orders and sat watching the main room through the folds of the curtain.

"There!" Alex finally said in a whisper. "He's coming in."

"Yes," grunted Case, "and he's got a dozen wharf rats with him. I guess they've got us in as neat a trap as one boy ever set for another!"

CHAPTER IX—A BUSY NIGHT IN QUEBEC

"I don't understand," Alex said, peering through the curtain, "why he should want to do anything to us. Perhaps he won't notice us at all."

"Don't you ever think he won't," grinned Case. "Didn't I truss him up like a hen in the cabin and threaten to arrest him, and didn't he declare that he would shoot me if he ever got a chance? Don't you believe he'll let us get out of here without trouble!"

"Oh, well," Alex replied, "if he starts anything we'll get out all right in spite of him, and in spite of his wharf rats."

"I've got an idea," Case said, watching the collection of roughly-dressed boys sitting about a table in the other room, "that that kid has been waiting in Quebec for us."

"What shall we do, then," Alex asked still in a whisper. "Shall we make a break and get out right now?"

"We may as well wait and see what takes place," Case answered. "This is a pretty tough joint, I guess, and some one may start something. In that case, we can get out while they are beating each other up."

The lunches ordered were now brought by the waiter, and the boys fell to, although, as may well be imagined, without much appetite. Max sat with his face turned toward the curtain, evidently trying to discover whether his enemies were using the alcove. He had seen the boys enter the restaurant, but was not quite certain as to which room they had seated themselves in. His face was watchful and vicious.

Half an hour passed and the situation did not change, then Alex plucked Case by the sleeve, motioning toward the outer door.

"We may as well move," he said. "It is getting late, and the streets are now growing more unsafe every minute because of such night prowlers as you see out there. If we've got to fight, we may as well begin."

But it was not necessary for them to start the engagement, as Max came to the alcove directly and drew the curtain roughly aside. The boys remained in their seats, grinning up at him, but their hands under the cover of the table grasped their automatics.

"Hello!" Alex said presently. "We never expected to meet you here."

"Oh, I had an idea you'd be along," Max said with an ugly frown.

"Come on in and set down," Case urged with a chuckle. "I'd like to have you tell me why you disappeared so suddenly."

"That's a nice question to ask!" Max snarled. "You tie me up like a pig in the cabin and then wonder why I get out of your clutches!"

"You had a little swim for it, didn't you?" asked Case.

"Yes," was the reply, "and I'll make you sweat for every drop of water I swallowed during that long dive. I'll show you a thing or two!"

"What was there in that job for you, anyway?" asked Alex. "We've got a new manila cable charged up to you."

"Mark the bill down on ice," snorted Max, "and lay the ice on the stove. You did me dirt there and I'm going to get even!"

"Go as far as you like," said Case. "We are here to answer all questions."

Max, who had been standing in the entrance to the alcove, with the curtain half over his shoulder, now turned and beckoned to the rough-looking boys gathered about the table he had just left.

"Friends of yours?" asked Alex as the others gathered about the alcove. "They look as if they might be."

The boys outside now began jostling each other roughly, as if preparing to start a fake fight among themselves. That, as Alex and Case well knew, is an old, old trick in the underworld. Whenever an enemy is to be attacked, it is common practice for the assailants to start a fight among themselves, being certain that their enemies are dealt most of the blows. Many an apparently innocent bystander has been murdered in that way.

The proprietor of the place came rushing out of an inner room as the toughs hustled each other back and forth and timidly remonstrated with them. It was evident that he stood in fear of the gang. The boys saw that no help might be expected from him.

At last one of the toughs received a blow which, apparently, forced him inside the alcove, then the whole crowd rushed in, swarming over Alex and Case like the wharf rats they were. The boys drew their revolvers, but did not fire. Instead they sprang to the top of the table and used the handles of their weapons to good purpose.

In the meantime the proprietor was running back and forth from the alcove to the door and from the door to the alcove, urging the boys to act "like little gentlemen," and at the same time shouting for the police. But no officers made their appearance.

The weight of humanity on the table upon which the boys were standing now brought it down with a crash to the floor.

The situation was becoming serious, and the boys were preparing to use their guns when an unexpected event occurred.

The night being warm, the street door was wide open, but a little crowd had gathered about it. Disturbances were frequent in that place, however, and none of the onlookers seemed inclined to interfere.

As they stood looking, a heavy body catapulted against their shoulders, and the next moment the heavy body of a white bulldog leaped over their heads into the room.

The toughs in the alcove, who had just settled down to a steady pommeling of the boys with their bare fists, turned for an instant as sharp claws clattered over the floor, and some of them stepped aside. Then Captain Joe leaped atop of the struggling mass and began a vigorous exercise of his very capable teeth.

In a second the whole place was in confusion. Patrons rushed out from other rooms, the proprietor appeared from behind the desk bearing a revolver. There was an inrush from the street, and then two pistol shots sounded. As the acrid smell of powder smoke seeped into the air, there was a rattle of glass and the two ceiling lights were extinguished.

Save for the uncertain light from incandescents in the other alcoves, the place was now in darkness, except for the illumination which came in from the street.

Cries, shouts and epithets of the vilest character rang through the place. Long before the light of the gas jets could be turned on, the boys and the dog were out on the pavement, making good progress toward a policeman in uniform, who appeared under an arc light not far away. The officer held up his heavy night stick as the boys approached him.

The sound of running feet came out and in a moment the officer and the two boys were surrounded by the wharf rats who had been in the restaurant. The officer promptly drew a revolver.

"What's doing here!" he demanded. "Who did that shooting back there?"

"These two boys did it!" Max promptly explained, pointing at Alex and Case. "They shot out the lights and robbed the till!"

The officer put up his revolver and his night stick, seized Alex and Case by the shoulders, and started off up the street, the toughs following at his heels. There was a patrol box on the next corner and the boys attempted no defence of their conduct until this was reached. As the policeman turned the key he glanced quickly from one face to the other.

"What have you boys got to say for yourselves?" he asked.

"We'll tell that to the judge," replied Alex.

"Come, now, don't get gay!" the officer said. "You don't look like boys who would be apt to get into a scrape like that."

The boys were so pleased at having escaped from the restaurant with whole heads that they did not much mind the arrest. In fact, just at that moment the officer was about the most welcome person who could have made his appearance, with the exception of Captain Joe, of course.

The dog now stood close by the patrol box showing his teeth and asking Alex for permission to take the officer by the leg.

"We haven't robbed any tills lately!" Alex said, wrinkling his freckled nose at the officer.

"Lookout!" one of the boys shouted from the crowd. "That bulldog will get you, officer. He chewed up two boys back in the restaurant.

"Good old Captain Joe," exclaimed Alex, patting the dog on the head.

The dog did not for a moment lose sight of a spot on the officer's thigh, which seemed to invite attack.

"Is that your dog?" asked the policeman.

"Sure, that's our dog," answered Alex.

"And what did you say his name was?"

"Captain Joe."

The officer released his hold on the boys and leaned against the patrol box. The police wagon was now in sight, racing down the street with a great jangling of bells, and the crowd around the officer began to thin. They had evidently seen that wagon before.

"Say, Mr. Officer," Alex said, "why don't you grab a couple of those boys? They are going to be witnesses against us, you know."

The officer made no reply, but reached down and patted Captain Joe on the head, an action which the dog strongly resented.

"Did you say the dog ate a couple of wharf rats back there?" asked the officer, turning to the diminishing crowd.

"You bet he did!" half a dozen voices cried in chorus. "He's a holy terror."

"I've got a hole in my leg you could push a chair through," one of them shouted. "Arrest him!"

The police wagon now backed up to the curb and the boys stepped inside followed by Captain Joe.

"Here!" questioned the man in charge of the wagon, "are you going in with us, off your beat, and are you going to arrest the dog? He looks like a hard citizen!"

"Not a bit of it!" answered the officer. "He chewed up two wharf rats back there, according to all accounts, and I'm going in to tell the sergeant, and to ask the captain to give him a medal. If he had only killed them, I'd try to get him on the pension list."

"Say," Case remarked, "you seem to be an all-right policeman. I guess you know that bunch back there."

"Every officer in the city knows that bunch," replied the policeman. "When they're not in the penitentiary, they're making trouble for the force. They ought to get a hundred years apiece."

"What will we get for shooting out the lights?" asked Alex.

"So you did shoot out the lights!"

"We didn't do anything else," declared Alex.

"Say, Mr. Cop, you've seen terriers go after a rat in a pit, haven't you?" asked Case. "Well, that's just the way that gang went after us. We'd be dead now if Captain Joe hadn't run away from the *Rambler* and followed us."

"There!" cried the officer clapping Alex on the back, "I've been trying to think of that name ever since I saw the dog. We've got pictures of this dog and the *Rambler* and a grizzly bear called Teddy pasted up in the squad room. We cut them out of newspapers six months ago when you boys were somewhere out on the Columbia river."

"On the Colorado river," corrected Case. "We found Teddy Bear in a a timber wreck on the Columbia, and he never had his picture taken until we got to San Francisco."

"Is the *Rambler* down on the river now?" asked the officer, and Case nodded. "Because, if it is," the policeman went on, "some one had better be getting down there! The wharf rats will eat it up before morning, plank by plank!"

"How are we going to get down there if you lock us up?" asked Case.

"You may not be locked up," was the reply.

CHAPTER X—THE MENAGERIE IN ACTION

After the departure of Alex and Case from the *Rambler*, Clay and Jule drew out the two mysterious messages they had received and studied them over carefully.

"What do you think about this lost channel proposition?" asked Jule.

"If a channel ever went through the neck of land as shown by the map, that section must have been visited by an earthquake," Clay laughed. "There isn't a sign of a channel there. Instead, there's a great high ledge of rock crossing the peninsula, just where the line shows the channel ought to be. It is my private opinion that no water ever crossed that peninsula. There must be some mistake in location."

"The men who made the map might have drawn the line indicating the channel in the wrong place," Jule suggested.

"Well," Clay concluded, "we'll have a look at it when we go back, but what I can't understand is why the map should have been given to the wrong party. If a man had such a map in any way accurate, he would have presented it to Fontenelle in person and demanded a stiff price for it."

"It looks that way to me!" Jule agreed.

There was a volume in the cabin of the *Rambler* descriptive of the St. Lawrence river from the gulf to Lake Ontario. This the boys brought out and studied diligently until a late hour.

At last Clay arose, yawned, and looked at his watch.

"I wonder why Alex and Case don't return!" he asked. "It can't be possible that that little scamp has gone and lost himself again, can it?"

"Just like him!" snickered Jule. "If I had a dollar for every time he's been lost I'd have all the money I will ever need."

"That's pretty near the truth!" Clay agreed. "However, we've got Captain Joe and Teddy left with us to help look him up."

He leaned back in his chair and whistled to the dog, but no Captain Joe made his appearance. Teddy came shambling into the cabin and held out a paw, suggesting sugar. Clay glanced up at Jule with puzzled eyes.

"Isn't the dog out on deck?" he asked.

The boy hastened out and returned in a moment with the information that the bulldog was nowhere in sight.

"Have you seen him since Alex and Case left?" Clay asked.

"He was here quite a spell after they went away, but he didn't seem contented. All the time I was on deck he was walking back and forth looking longingly over into the city."

"Then he's followed the boys," Clay agreed. "We won't see him again until they return. The only wonder is that Teddy didn't go with him."

"We'll have to get steel cages made for our menagerie," Jule proposed. "We can't keep a single member of our happy family on the boat when Alex is away. No one else seems to count with them."

The boys were not inclined to sleep, so they sat watchfully in the cabin with the electricity off. Spears of light came from warehouse offices on the pier, and far up the street a great arc light made the thoroughfare almost plain to the eye as day. The roar of night traffic in the city and the wash of the river drowned all individual sounds, and the boys sat in what amounted to silence so far as any noises directly on the boat were concerned.

Somewhere along toward midnight, when they had about given up hope of the immediate return of the boys, there came a quick jar, and the boat swayed as if under the foot of a person mounting the deck.

"There they are, I reckon!" Jule shouted, passing to the cabin door which was open to admit the cool breeze of the night.

Clay stepped forward, too, but paused in a moment and drew Alex back. A crouching figure was now discernible on the prow, and Clay reached for the switch which controlled the lamp there.

With his hand almost to the switch Clay stopped and turned back to where Jule stood, searching his bunk for an automatic which had been placed there. Then the boat swayed again, and there were three figures on the deck instead of one. The light from the street showed only bare outlines. The whole scene was uncanny.

"I don't know what to make of this," Clay whispered. "Shall we turn on the light, or shall we begin shooting right now?"

"If we turn on the light," Jule whispered back, "they'll see us. At present, they undoubtedly believe the boat to be deserted."

"I think they'll run if we turn on the lights," Clay suggested, softly. "They're probably river thieves looking for plunder."

The men on the deck now grouped together, evidently whispering, and trying to decide upon some course of action. In the faint light, they seemed to be hulking, heavily-built men, and the boys were not anxious to come into close contact with them.

"It may be just as well," Clay finally decided, "to remain quiet for a short time and see what they intend to do."

"That's easy," Jule whispered, "they intend to steal the boat."

"A good many other people have tried to steal this boat," Clay responded, "but we still seem to be in possession of it!"

After standing for a minute or two near the prow, the intruders moved stealthily toward the cabin. The door was open, but all was dark inside. As they slouched forward, their footsteps made no sound upon the deck.

"Shall we shoot to kill?" whispered Jule. "I'm tired of having the scum of the earth always attempting to rob us."

"I'd never get over it if I should kill some one," Clay replied. "We'd better frighten them away and see that no more get on board to-night."

As he spoke, the boy reached for the switch and turned it. Greatly to his amazement, the prow lamp remained dark. In some strange manner the intruders had disconnected the wires or broken the globe. The click of the switch seemed to have reached their ears, informing them that some one was on board.

They rushed toward the cabin and came solidly against the door which was quickly shut, almost in their faces. The lock rattled sharply under the assault of a muscular hand, and the whole front of the cabin quivered and creaked under the weight of a burly body.

"Open up here!" shouted a gruff voice. "Open up, or we'll break the door down. We knew you were here all the time!"

"This begins to look serious," whispered Clay. "We may have to shoot."

"Say the word," Jule suggested, "and I'll make the front of the cabin look like a sieve, and every bullet will count, too."

"I'd like to aid in the capture of a couple of those fellows," Clay said, "and I wonder if one of us couldn't get out of the rear window, jump over on the pier, and call the police. Such ruffians ought not to be at liberty."

"All right," Jule whispered. "You go, and I'll stay here and talk to them until you get out. I can keep them amused all right."

While this short conversation had been in progress the pounding at the door had continued, and now something heavy, like a timber or a very heavy foot, came banging against the panels.

"Just a minute more," one of the midnight prowlers shouted, "and we'll break this door down and get you boys good!"

Clay moved to the rear of the cabin, drew in the swinging sash, and stepped lightly out on the after deck. The lights along the river front were fewer now, and the windows of the warehouses, illuminated an hour before, were dark. A roaring wind was blowing up the river, and the wash of the waves was rocking the *Rambler* unpleasantly.

In all the long street in sight from the pier there was no sign of a uniformed officer. Clay did not know how far he would have to run to find one, so he decided to remain where he was for a time and, if necessary, perhaps attack the intruders from the rear.

Crouching low on the after deck, he could hear Jule talking to the outlaws, and smiled as he listened to the boy's attempts to interest them.

"If you break down that door," he heard Jule say, "you'll have to pay for it! That door cost money."

A volley of oaths and river billingsgate followed the remark, and blows which fairly shook the cabin came upon the sturdy panels.

While Clay sat listening, half resolved to make his way over to the pier and fire a few shots over the heads of the ruffians, a figure dropped lightly on the deck at his side and Teddy's soft muzzle was pressed against his face. He stroked the bear gently.

"I don't blame you for getting out of there, Teddy," he said. "They'll wreck the boat if we don't do something pretty soon. What would you advise, old chap?" he added whimsically.

Teddy sniffed the air in the direction of the pier and clambered clumsily up to the top of the cabin.

"I wouldn't go up there if I were you," Clay advised.

Teddy continued his way over the roof and finally came to the forward edge. Clay raised his head to the level of the roof and watched him. As he did so a round circle of light sprang up at the head of the pier, flashed toward the river for a moment, and died out. The next moment a sound of some one stumbling over a bale of goods reached his ears. Then the light flashed out again, and the pounding on the cabin door ceased.

"Now I wonder," Clay pondered, "if that isn't Alex and Case! They usually have their searchlights with them, and Case is always stumbling over something. It would be fine to have them appear now!"

Directly a finger of light shot down the pier, and under it a white body swung toward the boat. Clay crawled back through the window and approached the door, where Jule was still standing with his automatic in his hand.

The pounding had now ceased entirely, the men evidently having been warned by the light. It seemed to Clay that the unwelcome visitors were now crouching in the darkness ready to attack any one who might attempt to come on board.

"Just wait a minute," whispered Clay in Jule's ear. "Just you wait a minute, and there'll be something pulled off here! If I'm not mistaken, this drama is going to shift to a comedy in about one minute."

"I don't understand what you mean by that," Jule declared. "What new deviltry are those fellows planning?" he added.

"In just about a second you'll see," Clay repeated. "The only wonder is that Captain Joe hasn't pulled off his stunt before this."

"Captain Joe isn't here," replied Jule doubtfully.

Then the boat swayed frightfully, tipping toward the pier. There was a heavy thud on deck, and cries of fright and pain, followed by another thud.

"Captain Joe isn't here, eh?" shouted Clay unlocking and opening the door. "Just look at that mess out there."

The white bulldog was mixing freely with the intruders, who seemed to be devoting their best energy to getting off the boat. There was a struggling, cursing, growling mass in the middle of the deck, and then from the roof of the cabin leaped another combatant!

Seeing the dog mixing with the pirates, and evidently believing that some new game was in progress, the cub leaped fairly into the midst of the struggling mass! If the men had been frightened before, they were now wild with terror. It seemed to them as if the bear had dropped from the clouds. They felt his teeth and claws, and the rough hair of him appeared to bristle like the quills of a porcupine.

Frightened beyond all measure, rendered more desperate still by the onrush of the boys from the cabin, the outlaws finally succeeded in breaking away and springing to the pier. As they did so, they nearly fell over Alex and Case who were making all haste to ascertain the cause of the excitement on the *Rambler*.

In a moment, however, they were up and away, clattering like race-horses up the pier.

CHAPTER XI—THE CREW TAKES A TUMBLE

When Alex and Case reached the deck of the *Rambler*, they found Clay and Jule leaning against the gunwale laughing hard enough to split their sides. A searchlight in the latter's hand revealed Captain Joe and Teddy standing by the cabin

door, looking around as if inquiring what it all meant.

"Well," Alex said, producing his own searchlight, "if there's anything funny going on here, you'd better be passing it round."

"Where have you been?" demanded Clay the next moment.

"Been?" repeated Alex. "We've been up in the air!"

"That's no fairy tale, either," Case cut in. "We've been arrested, and released, and attacked, and pommeled, and now we strike some kind of a minstrel show. What's been going on?"

"You've been arrested, have you?" laughed Jule, paying no attention to the question. "Any old time you go away from this boat and don't get into trouble, I'll wire the news back to Chicago. What did you get pinched for, and how did you get away?"

"We got pinched because of Max," replied Alex, "and we got out of it because we came upon a white policeman. We escaped from Max's cronies because Captain Joe butted in and chewed up a few. That's some dog, that is."

"And he came back here and helped you out, too, it seems," Case said. "I should think he was some dog!"

"And Teddy helped, too," Clay laughed. "We had a show here for a little while that was worth the price of admission."

"It didn't look funny to me," Jule protested. "I was scared stiff most of the time."

After Alex and Case had replaced a broken globe on the prow light, told the story of their adventures, and explained that the chief of police had requested the privilege of looking over the boat in the morning, the boys moved the *Rambler* to a slip farther down the river and went to bed, Jule remaining on watch for the remainder of the night. The day had been a busy one and they were all tired.

Alex was out first in the morning, poking along the water front in the canoe which Max had deserted. After a time Clay came out of the cabin of the *Rambler* and called to him.

"Got a fish, Alex?"

Alex shook his head.

"The fish won't bite my hook this morning!" he shouted back.

"Well," Clay returned, "there's a gudgeon up on shore that evidently wants to get hold of your hook, and you with it."

Alex turned quickly and looked up the slip at the foot of which the canoe lay. He was just in time to see Max and another boy about his size disappearing behind a collection of goods' boxes.

"Why didn't you shoot him?" Alex called out to Clay. "You saw him first. He ought to be shot for what he did last night."

Captain Joe now came out on the deck, yawning and stretching, and elevated his fore feet to the gunwale of the boat. Clay patted him on the head and pointed to the goods' boxes behind which Max had disappeared.

"Do you think, Captain Joe," he said to the dog, "that you could go and get a wharf rat this morning? I think there's one behind that pile of boxes. You better go and see, anyway."

Of course the dog did not understand all that was said to him—although the boys sometimes insisted that he did—but he did know what the pointing finger meant. He was over the gunwale in an instant, tearing up the side of the slip, barking and growling as he went.

"You'll get that dog killed yet," Alex called out to Clay. "That wharf rat of a Max is just like a snake. You don't want to get near him unless you step squarely on his head."

Both boys whistled return orders to the dog, but he would not come back. He seemed to remember that an old enemy was near at hand and turned the corner of the heap of boxes with a vicious snarl.

The next moment, Max appeared at the top of the heap, fending off the dog with a board he had ripped from a box.

"Call off your dog!" he shouted. "I want to get my canoe. You get out of it, kid, and leave it tied to the slip."

"If you live long enough to see me give you this canoe," Alex laughed, "you'll be older than Noah before you die, and have whiskers forty feet long."

"I'll set the police on you!" threatened Max.

"You tried that last night," grinned Alex.

"Come on down here," urged Clay. "I'd like to know what kind of a penitentiary you received your early education in."

"You'd like to have me come down there, wouldn't you?" sneered Max. "You think you've got the police on your side, don't you? But I know a couple of detectives that will fix you, all right. You needn't think I'm going to let you run away with my canoe."

"How'd you get up the river so quickly?" asked Clay. "Did you dive in east of the peninsula and swim under water to Quebec?"

"Oh, I got up on a steamer, all right," was the reply, "and I've been here waiting for you ever since."

"Do you happen to have a sore head this morning?" taunted Alex. "You must have got a bump or two last night."

"You'll get two for every one I got," Max shouted, angrily. "Are you going to give me that canoe? I'm going to have it, you know."

Alex deliberately paddled the canoe over to the *Rambler*, secured it with a light line, climbed to the deck, and set the motors in motion. Max yelled out a few threatening sentences and disappeared.

"We may as well be going up to the old pier," he said, "for this dandy chief of police I discovered last night will be down to see us before long. He's a right good fellow, that chief is."

"You better hold up a minute," Jule announced,

"Captain Joe is still behind those boxes. If Max could capture him, he'd have him in all the dog fights in Quebec."

But Max was at this time taking to his heels up the street which ran down to the slip; and Captain Joe soon made his appearance, looking very much discouraged. He was taken on board, dripping with water, and Teddy received quite a bath by approaching him too suddenly. The bulldog enjoyed that.

The chief of police made his appearance soon after the boys had partaken of breakfast, and sat down to talk over the events of the preceding night.

"This boy, Max," he explained, "is one of the queerest customers we have anything to do with. He lives in the streets, apparently without money or friends, and yet he frequently appears at a swell hotel handsomely dressed and with plenty of money in his pockets. He seems to have been well educated, as you have probably noticed from his conversation."

"He talks like a graduate," admitted Clay.

"Yes, and he's one of the sharpest little chaps in the city. We are certain that he has had a hand in several bold robberies, yet it has up to this time been impossible to convict him. He is usually defended by first-class criminal lawyers, and his wharf rat companions seem to be very desirable witnesses for him."

"Isn't it possible," asked Clay, "that the boy lives along the river front for some well defined, perhaps criminal, purpose of his own?"

"I've often thought of that," answered the chief, "for he always takes great pains to make friends of the creatures of the underworld. Now and then he disappears from the city for a few days, or weeks, but always comes back to his old haunts."

"Of course," Clay said, "you are familiar with the Fontenelle land claim and the story of the lost charter and the missing family jewels?"

"Oh, yes," answered the chief, smiling tolerantly, "every man, woman and child in Quebec knows all about the Fontenelle case. Old man Fontenelle is almost a monomaniac on the subject of the lost charter. He has spent thousands of dollars searching for it and claims that he would have discovered it long ago only for the active and criminal opposition of men who might lose heavily if it came again into his possession."

"And the story of the lost channel?" asked Clay.

"There is a queer story of a lost channel," the chief laughed, "but I'm afraid that it will always be a lost channel."

"But Fontenelle is continually trying to locate it," suggested Clay.

"Yes, but he has no more idea where to look for it than a child in a cradle. There is a place down the river where he thinks it might once have existed, but he has no clues of any kind."

"Hasn't even a map?" asked Clay, resolved to know exactly, as far as possible, what knowledge the Fontenelles had of the lost channel.

"No, not even a map," answered the chief. "I tell you that the family has absolutely nothing to go by. Young Fontenelle, who is making most of the searches now, only goes out to please his father and to give his friends a pleasant summer vacation."

And so the crude map which had been so mysteriously delivered to the boys was an entirely new element in the case! Who had drawn it, who had connived at its delivery, who had supplied the information buried in the legends of more than three hundred years!

Clay puzzled over the matter while the chief chatted with the other boys, but could reach no conclusion. Again he was tempted to reveal to an outsider the existence of the map, and again he forced himself to silence when the words were almost on his lips.

"I shall be laughed at if I say anything about the map," he mused. "The chief will tell me that many a joke has been played on the Fontenelles, and that this was intended to be another. He will tell me that the *Rambler* was mistaken for

the *Cartier*, and that there is no mystery, but only fraud, connected with either one of the messages we received that night."

"You spoke of the Fontenelle claim in connection with the strange conduct of this boy Max," the chief finally said to Clay. "Why did you do that? Can you see any possible connection between the two?"

Then Clay told of the boy's appearance on the *Rambler*, referring also to the fact that he had been accompanied, apparently, by men who sought to seize the *Rambler* after it had been beached.

"And Fontenelle claims that these men were not river pirates at all," Clay went on, "but says they are ruffians sent out to prevent his making a thorough search of the district where his father believes the lost channel to have been. In that case, this boy Max might in some way be connected with the enemies of the Fontenelles."

"That is very true," answered the chief, "and I'll keep my eye on him after this, although I don't take much stock in this lost charter business, at all."

After a pleasant hour the chief shook hands with the boys and departed. Then the *Rambler* was headed upstream again. The boys had had enough of Quebec during that one night.

Thirty miles or more up the St. Lawrence from Quebec, the Jacques Cartier river enters the St. Lawrence from the north. The boys sighted the mouth of the stream just before twelve o'clock. At the same moment they saw a river steamer coming down toward them. The steamer was large for one plying above Quebec, and, fearing that the wash from her propeller would make trouble for the *Rambler*, they edged over to the mouth of the entering stream, in front of which lay a great, partly submerged sand bar.

The steamer came down, whistling and ringing, and the boys signaled for her to pass off to the right. Apparently scornful of so small a craft, the pilot kept her headed directly down stream in a course which would have brought about a collision with the motor boat.

The boys swung away toward the sand bar, trusting to good luck to keep them clear of it.

Just as she came opposite the bar, the helmsman of the steamer did what he should have done before, turned the prow sharply to the south. A wall of water from the stern of the boat came sweeping down upon the *Rambler*.

It caught her broadside, and in an instant she was beached high and dry on the bar, lying with her keel exposed and the furniture and fixtures in the cabin and store rooms rattling about like hailstones in a blizzard.

Tumbling heels over head, catching at the gunwale, scrambling away so as to be beyond reach of the boat if she should go over farther, the four boys, the bulldog and the bear brought up on the hot, dry sand.

Alex sat up, brushed the sand from his eyes, felt tenderly of a peeled nose, and shook his fist at the departing steamer.

"You might come back here and pull us off," he shouted.

The people on the steamer gathered at the rail for a moment to laugh and joke at the plight in which they had left the boys, and then evidently forgot all about it.

"Now, what do you think of that?" cried Jule. "We're thrown out of water for the first time in the history of the *Rambler*. Do you suppose she's busted up much, Clay?"

"Aw, you couldn't bust her up with a cannon," shouted Alex. "We've probably lost some provisions, but this river will feed us all right."

As for Teddy and Captain Joe, they turned astonished eyes at the boat which they had never seen in exactly that position before and started to clamber back on board. Teddy shambled clumsily up on deck, but Captain Joe, evidently changing his mind, returned to the hot sand and lay down.

In a moment a great crash came from on board the motor boat. Then Teddy came rolling down the incline of the deck hugging close to his breast with two capable paws, and taking many a bump in order that he might save his burden, a two quart can of strained honey.

"That stream," Alex said, "will be just about large enough to clean up the bear after he has finished with that stolen honey."

"That ain't no stream," said Jule, "That's the lost channel."

Teddy ran away to a distant part of the bar to eat his honey in peace, and the boys ruefully watched the river in hope of rescue.

CHAPTER XII—RIVERMEN WITH A THIRST

"A lost channel and a lost boat! Still if we didn't have adventures just like this, we'd be contented to remain on the South Branch in Chicago," said Case. "It wouldn't have been any fun if we had passed up the St. Lawrence without getting dumped on the sand."

"Say, kid," Jule said, pointing to Alex, "do you think you can swim over to the shore?"

"Swim over yourself!" advised Alex. "What do you want me to swim over for?"

"To get timber to block up this boat so you can cook dinner," laughed Jule. "We can't live on the sand which is here—that's a pun, eh?"

"What have we got for dinner?" Clay asked, ignoring the pun. "Perhaps I'd better go aboard and look over our larder."

"If you want to know where I'm going to get my dinner," Alex observed, "just look down into the river. Those fish look pretty good to me, and I'm hungry enough to eat a whale."

"If the time ever comes when you're not hungry," Case cut in, "the sun will rise in the west. You're empty to your heels."

"And I'm glad of it, too," Alex shouted back. "But what I want to know," he continued, "is how we're ever going to get off this bar."

"If we stay right here," Case advised, "some boat will come along and pull us off. You don't have to do anything unless you want to."

But at that moment there were no boats in sight. Instead, a great raft of hewn timbers with a rough shanty in the middle of it came drifting down. Half a dozen river men ran to the edge of the float and eyed the *Rambler* keenly. They seemed amused at what had happened.

"Ship ahoy!" one of them called.

"Give us a rope," Jule shouted.

"Got anything on board?" the man called back.

"What do you mean by anything?" Jule asked.

"Oh, anything under a cork!" answered the other.

"Row over here with a couple of cases and we'll pay you for them," said another voice.

"What do you take this for, a floating saloon?" asked Alex.

"That's what!" came back over the water. "If you don't send over something, we'll come and get it."

"Now that's a nice proposition," Case said to Clay. "Here we get turned almost bottom-side up on a sand bar, and a lot of wops think we're bartenders and have whiskey to sell."

"We ought not to let them on the bar at all," Alex advised. "If they get here and can't find what they want, they're liable to take anything they can get their hands on. I'm for pulling out the guns and spattering a little lead over the water."

"Are you going to send it over?" called the man from the raft.

"Go take a drink out of the river!" advised Jule.

"I'll show you whether we will or not!"

All this time the raft had been drifting down stream, and the *Rambler* had, of course, remained stationary. As the man uttered this implied threat, he cast off the line of a boat, motioned to two men who stood near, and the three entered and began rowing toward the sand bar.

"We'll overtake you in a half an hour," the man who had done most of the talking from the raft called out to his companions, "and we'll bring back something cheering if it is to be had on that boat."

"About the only thing you'll get on this boat," Case shouted, "will be bullets. If you don't sheer away, you'll get a volley right now."

The men stopped rowing and backed water as the boys drew their automatics and stood in a row at the edge of the bar.

"Aw, come on kids, give us a couple of cases and we'll go on our way. We're going to get it anyhow."

"There isn't a drop of intoxicating liquor on board," Clay assured the man. "This is not a bumboat. We're just boys out on a pleasure trip."

"That's what they all say!" roared a husky brute from the fast disappearing raft. "Go on, Steve, and get the goods."

"You bet I will!" answered the raftsman, and again the men bent to their oars. Clay fired a warning shot and the boat paused again for a moment.

"Will you send us a case?" shouted the leader of the boat party.

"Send you a case of cartridges!" laughed Alex.

Two of the men now turned to the oars in order to keep the boat from drifting farther down, while the leader sat close to their seat, saying something to them in a low tone. The two oarsmen were shaking their heads, but the other was

beating one hand against the other vigorously.

"I know," the boys heard him say, raising his voice as he became excited "that that is the same boat, and that these are the same boys. You remember what I told you when I came up the river on a fast boat and hired out on the raft!"

The boys could not hear the reply, but presently the leader's voice sounded again above the wash of the river. He was evidently under great excitement, and was speaking rapidly and vehemently.

"There is more value in that motor boat," he said, "than there is in the whole raft. What does it matter if the timber does float down without us? We've got a boat and can put up any old yarn that comes to mind."

The rowers still seemed to object to the plan the leader seemed to be urging, and finally the boat was allowed to drift down with the current.

"This old world is a pretty small place after all," Clay remarked as the stern of the rowboat disappeared around a little bend. "If you don't believe it, just consider the events of this trip. We meet Max on the river and he laps over on us at Quebec. We meet outlaws on a rocky island three hundred miles away, and they show themselves at the mouth of the Jacques Cartier river."

"And we're likely to meet them again, unless I'm very much mistaken," Case warned. "I don't believe they went down after the raft at all."

"What was that you said about swimming over to the shore?" asked Alex.

"To get a fish for dinner," Jule cried.

Alex dashed into the cabin, tumbled about in the wreckage for a short time, and came out clad only in a bathing suit.

"I'm going to swim to shore all right," he said, "but I'm not going over there to get a fish for dinner."

"If you see one, catch him by the tail," Case shouted as the boy entered the water.

Alex wrinkled a bruised nose in the direction of the sand bar and dived under, to reappear on the shore line a couple of seconds later.

"Now, what do you think that little monkey is after?" asked Jule.

Captain Joe and Teddy seemed to be asking themselves the same question. At any rate, they decided to go and see, and both were soon in the water. The boys saw Alex race up a sandy bluff and disappear in a thicket.

Here and there on the other side of the river were scattered houses, but he seemed to pay no attention to these. The animals trotted after him and soon all were out of sight. The boy was gone only a short time and when he returned on board and dressed his face looked anxious.

"Do you know," he said, "those fellows never went down the river at all. They dropped down under the bend and landed. If we don't get off this sand bar this afternoon, we'll have to sit up all night waiting for trouble."

"Then we'll get off this afternoon," Case observed. "I'm so constituted that I have to have my sleep regularly."

"Keep me awake nights if you want to," laughed Alex, "but don't let me go hungry! I was reared a pet and can't stand it."

There were now various crafts in sight on the river, but none came near the bar. Signals made by the boys met with no response.

"They are a suspicious lot of fellows," Clay decided.

After several vessels had passed without paying any attention to the shouts and signals of the boys, they gave up trying to secure immediate assistance and devoted themselves to the preparation of dinner—to the great joy of Captain and the eminent disgust of Teddy, the cub, who had certainly eaten too much honey.

The cabin was indeed in bad shape, standing at an angle of about thirty degrees. Many of the dishes were broken, and some of the food which had been cooked in the morning lay in a messy heap on the floor.

However, the boys managed to boil coffee and cook eggs, and so, with bread and butter and canned food, they made a very good meal.

"Now, what are we going to do?" asked Jule. "We can never get this boat off alone, and the vessels on the river won't help us."

"I wonder if the tide doesn't come up here?" asked Clay.

"If it does, it was not far from high tide when we struck the sand bar," Jule replied, "and the situation will grow worse instead of better."

"Let's get out our shovels and dig a canal to the river," Case suggested. "We can't play any Robinson Crusoe stunt here very long."

"And the bold, bad men from the raft will be down on us to-night if we stay," Alex added, "so I'm for doing anything to

get off the bar.”

The boys were actually preparing to dig a trench across the bar when a steamer to which they called more as a matter of form than with any expectation of receiving assistance, turned toward their side of the river and slowed down.

“Hello, there, boys,” came a voice from the bridge. “You must have been having a head-on collision with a sand bar.”

“Why,” Clay exclaimed, “that’s Captain Morgan! What was it I was saying about this being a pretty small world?”

“Right you are, Captain,” called Case. “We’re up against it all right. Can you send us a line?”

“Certainly,” answered the captain. “I’ll have you out of that in no time.”

And he did! The line was sent in a rowboat, attached to the prow of the *Rambler* and slowly, steadily, so as not to strain the timbers or produce cracks in the hull, the motor boat was drawn from her uncomfortable position, practically uninjured. Clay was soon grasping the captain by the hand. The other boys shouted their greetings and remained on board to tidy up the *Rambler*.

“Young man,” Captain Morgan said, “if I had a hundred boys, and the whole mess of them, combined and individual, got into as many scrapes as you four kids do, I’d keep them under lock and key!”

“You’d miss a lot of fun if you did,” said Clay.

“When you get a hold of a nice, choice mess of boys, like the *Rambler* crew, you want to give them plenty of room and fresh air. They’ll come out all right!”

“You do, at any rate,” admitted the captain. “Let’s see,” he added, “what was it you were going to find when I left you? A lost channel or something like that? You didn’t find it, did you?”

“We found a scrap, and a lot of ruffians, and a friend,” Clay replied, “and that’s all we did find, but we haven’t given it up.”

“And that’s all you ever will find,” declared the captain. “There may be a lost channel somewhere in the world. In fact, there is one on the New York side up near the big lake, but I’m afraid you are wasting your time. Why don’t you come on down the river with me?”

“That would never do,” Clay replied. “When we left the delta of the Mississippi, we promised ourselves that we would look over every inch of the St. Lawrence, and we’re going to do it. We’re going to Lake Ontario and then back to find the lost channel. And after that, we’re going to return to Ogdensburg and ship the *Rambler* to little old Chicago. That is, unless we decide to sail up the lakes.”

“Well, good luck to you,” said Captain Morgan, as Clay passed down the side of the *Sybil*. “If I get tangled up with a lost channel anywhere, I’ll send it to you by parcel post. Why, you boys can make a lost channel easier than you can find one.”

“But it wouldn’t be half so much fun,” Clay said, stepping into the rowboat. “We’re having lots of sport on the St. Lawrence all the same!”

CHAPTER XIII—A MEETING AT MONTREAL

As Clay was being rowed back to the *Rambler*, one of the sailors called his attention to three men standing on the shore of the river not far away from the intersecting stream. They stood looking down at the *Rambler* for a short time, and then disappeared around the angle of a bluff.

“Perhaps those men want to be taken off,” suggested the sailor.

“They need their heads taken off,” Clay observed. “I am certain from what I overheard that one of the men was with the outlaws down the stream. They left a timber raft here, as I believe, for the sole purpose of attacking us in the night and trying to get our motor boat away from us.”

“I should imagine from the build of the boat,” the other observed, “that they would have to do some pretty fast traveling if they caught the *Rambler* now that she is free. She must be a speedy boat.”

“She certainly is,” Clay replied. “She’s built like an ocean-going tug.”

After Clay landed on deck the boys held what they called a council of war. They were not exactly looking for trouble, still they did not like the idea of sailing off upstream and leaving the outlaws unpunished.

“They bunted into us,” Alex insisted, “and we ought to do something to them. If they take their boat and row down after the timber raft, I’d like to follow them in the *Rambler* and tip them over.”

The others felt in about the same way, but it was finally decided to go on up the river to Montreal, remain there for a couple of days, and so pass on to the great lakes.

“If we can keep Alex in the boat at Montreal, we’ll be doing a good job,” Jule said. “He’s been lost in about every city we’ve come to, and I think he ought to be locked in the cabin just as soon as we touch the pier. It isn’t safe to turn him loose at night.”

"All right," Alex agreed, "you may lock me up any old night when I want to sleep. That will keep me from standing guard."

The boys anchored in a cove that night, well out of the wash of passing steamers, and in the middle of the following afternoon, saw the spires of Montreal. They gazed at the great mountainous bluff which lies above and beyond the city with wondering eyes. There battles had been lost and won. The flags of France and Great Britain had in turn floated over the city from the heights they saw.

The boys decided that night to spend the whole of the following day in the historic city. They came to anchor in a slip some distance from the town itself, and, for a wonder, passed an undisturbed night.

Early the following morning Clay and Jule set out to view the sights, it being understood that Alex and Case were to have their freedom in the afternoon. At first the two boys kept to the river front, examining the vessels they saw, and wondering if their fate would ever lead them to all the countries the craft represented.

As they turned away from the water front, Jule lifted his face and sniffed the air enjoyably.

"Do you know," he said, "this is the first place I've struck for several days where the scent of the lost channel hasn't been in my nostrils."

"You've got so you can smell the lost channel now, have you?" grinned Clay. "That may be a good thing for our future use."

"I can't smell the channel," Jule replied, "but I can scent the danger of it. Say, boy," he added, "We're going to have trouble when we go back to dig up the Fontenelle charter."

"We came out for adventure, didn't we?" asked Clay.

"Oh, I'm not kicking," Jule exclaimed. "If I get mine, you'll get yours, too. The only way to have any fun in this world is to go where the fun is. You can't meet with adventures by staying in bed at home."

As the boys proceeded up the street, an officer in uniform standing on the corner beckoned to them.

"Say, boys," he said, "do you know those two men just behind you?"

The boys turned and looked back.

There were many moving figures and faces in the street, but none which attracted the especial attention of the lads. They looked inquiringly at the policeman, who stood with a puzzled expression on his face.

"Which two men?" asked Jule.

"Why," replied the officer, "the two men who have followed you for the last four blocks, stopping when you stopped and going on when you advanced. I came up the street on the other side just behind you, and couldn't help observing what was going on."

"Now," said Clay, turning to Jule, "what do you think about having lost the scent of the lost channel?"

"I begin to smell it in the air right now," was the reply.

The policeman looked at the two boys inquiringly.

"What do you know about the lost channel?" he asked.

"Not a thing!" replied Jule. "There isn't any lost channel."

"Then I've been hearing a lot about nothing lately," smiled the officer. "Somehow, the newspapers have been full of it lately."

"Did they say anything about that scrap we had on an island below Quebec?" asked Case. "We haven't seen a paper lately."

"They said something about four boys being attacked, down the river, and a great deal about a quest for a lost channel," replied the policeman.

"And about a scrap in Quebec?" asked Jule.

"Sure," said the officer. "That made half a column. Are you boys from the *Rambler*? If so, where is the boat?"

"We're from the *Rambler* all right," Clay replied, "and it looks as if some of our friends from down stream are still after us. Can you describe the men you saw following us? What do they look like?"

"Just tough riverside characters," answered the officer. "That is how I came to notice them closely. Such people are rarely seen as far up in the city as this. They prefer the lower dives."

"We had trouble with some men from a raft back here a little ways," Jule explained, "and these may be the fellows. Anyway, we're going to look out for ourselves and thank you very much for having called our attention to the incident. We'll be careful."

The policeman went down the street, swinging his club, and the boys turned and faced each other with questions in their eyes.

"What's coming off here?" Jule asked.

"Seems to me like a game of tag," Clay replied. "From the moment we left the deck of the *Sybil*, across the river from the egg-shaped peninsula near St. Luce, we have been It. Some one has been after us night and day. Now, what are we going to do about it?"

"I could tell you better if we knew whether the men referred to by the officers are the enemies of the Fontenelles or just plain river pirates seeking to seize the *Rambler*. What do you think?"

"So far as that is concerned," Clay replied, "it makes but little difference. They all give us trouble, and I propose for once that we run away from them. I'm more in love with the river than the men we're likely to meet on it, so we'll get to the quiet spots."

"Do you mean that we ought to go back to the *Rambler* right now and cut Montreal off our visiting list?" asked Jule.

"In my judgment, that is what we ought to do."

Jule faced about instantly and started toward the river.

"Come on then!" he said. "I'm game for it!"

The boy had turned under the impulse of the moment without sensing that he was on a crowded pavement in the heart of a big city. As he swung about, he almost bumped noses with a pedestrian who, in company with another, had been walking only a couple of yards behind him.

The man was clothed in the garb of a waterside character, but it was very plain to the boy that the costume had been assumed for the purpose of disguise. His complexion was smooth and clear, his eyes keen and penetrating, and his whole manner and attitude proclaimed education and native refinement. For an instant Jule and the man stood looking each other squarely in the eyes.

"Step aside, lad, step aside," said the disguised man, in a voice far from unpleasant. "Don't be blocking the way."

"Is this your street?" demanded Jule willing to continue the conversation in order that he might have a more prolonged view of the man opposite him. "If it is, you better take it with you when you go on."

The man Jule was watching so closely seemed to understand that he was under suspicion, and, seizing his companion by the arm, the two passed on together, turning their heads now and then to watch the progress of the boys down the street.

"Did you see that?" asked Jule as the boys stepped along.

"Did I see what?" asked Clay. "I heard a voice, that's all!"

"That was Sherlock Holmes in disguise. Did you catch on?"

"Not than I am aware of!" laughed Clay. "What about it?"

Jule explained what he had observed in the man against whom the pressure of the crowd had brought him, and Clay agreed that the man he had heard speak in a remarkably pleasant tone had not been following them by accident.

"Those two men," he said, "are the fellows the policeman referred to."

"But why should men like those be following us?" asked Jule. "Why, he looked like a banker, or a lawyer, or a preacher. And what did he have that kind of a rig on for? It's mighty funny."

"You may search me," Clay answered. "The incident only confirms the opinion expressed not long ago that we ought to get out of this city immediately. Alex and Case can take their outing in some other town."

The boys walked swiftly down the street for a couple of blocks, turned into a side thoroughfare, called a taxi, and were driven swiftly back along a parallel street for two blocks.

There they dismissed the cab, at the corner of the main street, and walked along looking for the two men they suspected of hostile intentions.

In the middle of the first block they came upon them, walking slowly, and peering to right and left, as if anxiously searching for some one.

"That settles it!" Clay said. "We'll go back to the *Rambler* and disappear. Once we get started, there isn't a boat on the river that can catch us. We'll fool these fellows for once."

When the story of the morning had been told to Alex and Case, they rather wanted to remain in the city, just "to get a line on the fellows," as Alex explained, but they finally consented to an immediate departure.

That night the *Rambler* lay at anchor at the mouth of a small creek on the south side of the St. Lawrence river. Just above them lay a wooded island, occupied at this time by a colony of vacationists.

The *Rambler* had fought her way through the canal, and now lay only a short distance below the border of Lake St. Frances.

The boys built a roaring fire on shore and cooked supper there, but made no arrangements for sleeping out of doors. The blaze brought several people from a little settlement not far away, and the boys rather enjoyed their company. After a time Clay whispered to Jule:

“Stick your nose up in the air, kid, and see if you can get a scent of the lost channel in this crowd!”

“Nothing doing!” Jule answered with a grin.

“Now we’ll see whether there is or not,” Clay said.

He turned to an elderly gentleman who sat by his side and asked:

“I have heard that there is a lost channel on the American side just this side of Lake Ontario. Is that true?”

“Yes,” said the man with a smile, “and I have heard that there is a lost channel down below Quebec, too. And I read in the newspaper that you boys were in search of it. Is that so?”

Clay faced Jule with a smile on his face.

“Whatever we do,” he said, “we can’t escape the lost channel.”

CHAPTER XIV—AN OLD FRIEND APPEARS

“How did this channel get lost?” Alex asked with a whimsical smile.

“Well,” replied the other, “I don’t believe there is a lost channel. You may go down the St. Lawrence river, up one side and down the other—and I’ve been over every inch of it—and you can’t find any place for a lost channel, unless you locate it at a headland which was once an island. In that case, there might be a lost channel. But the charts of the river for two hundred years show no such change in conformation.”

“That seems to be conclusive,” Clay suggested.

“Conclusive? Of course it is, but you can’t make this man Fontenelle believe it. Now, look here, stranger,” he went on, “I’ve read what the newspapers say about you, and I know that you intend to go back there and look for that lost channel. Is that right?”

“It seems to me that the newspapers are advertising us pretty thoroughly,” Clay observed. “Every one seems to know all about us.”

“Of course!” assented the older man. “You boys and your boat are about as well known on this river, by reputation at least, as Lawyer Martin, and he’s been doing a heap of traveling up and down lately. Why, Lawyer Martin was right here the very day the Quebec newspapers printed the story that you boys were going to find the lost channel. He read the story and jumped.

“Yes, sir! He jumped like a man going to locate an oil claim. I rowed him out to the first steamer that came along, and heard him offer the captain a big wad of money if he would gain time on the trip to Quebec.”

“Do you think the story about the lost channel had anything to do with his sudden departure?” asked Clay.

“Yes, sir. Yes, sir,” was the reply. “He didn’t tell me what he suspected or feared, but he hurried away to find out what was going on just the same. And he hurried away right soon.”

“Is he in any way interested in the Fontenelle charter?” asked Clay.

“Interested?” repeated the other. “I should say he was! Why, he’s the lawyer for all of us fellows who will be turned off our farms if the charter should be found and sustained.”

“I see,” said Clay, “I see!”

“Now,” whispered Jule, giving Clay a nudge in the side, “we’ll find out who the disguised man was. It might have been this Lawyer Martin.”

“What kind of a looking man is Mr. Martin?” asked Clay.

“Mighty nice looking fellow,” was the reply. “Shows breeding and culture all the way through, just like a thoroughbred horse shows what he’s got in him. His face is as white as a woman’s and his eyes are as clear as a girl’s!

“He neither drinks nor smokes, and he is about the best play actor you ever saw on the stage. Put a river man’s rig on him and he looks like a river man.

“Dress him up like a preacher, and you’d think he had the bible by heart. He’s been in our schoolhouse many a time on his trips here, showing the boys and girls how to conduct a commencement exhibition. Oh, he’s mighty popular all along the river!”

Another nudge and whisper from Jule.

"Blonde or black?" the boy suggested.

"I think I know the man," Clay went on, following the lead again. "He has very black eyes, hasn't he? And a nose with a little hump on it, and a wide, straight mouth and thin lips."

"No, sir. No, sir," was the reply. "He's got light hair and blue eyes, and a straight nose, and a mouth that isn't wide nor straight. Mighty handsome man, is Lawyer Martin. We all like him up here!"

"And you will lose your farm if this charter is found and sustained?" asked Clay. "You and many of your neighbors?"

"That's what they say," replied the other, "though, of course, it will depend upon what young Fontenelle says about it."

"The courts might not sustain the charter," suggested Clay.

"Oh well, we're not worrying about it," was the reply. "We're leaving the whole case to Lawyer Martin."

As the night advanced the residents left the campfire and returned to their homes, while the boys sought their bunks on board the *Rambler*.

"What was it some one said about a small world?" asked Clay. "Who was it that said that a face once seen was sure to cross our paths in future years? Was it the same man who said that a note of music once struck revolves around the earth for countless millions of years, never ceasing, never reaching mortal ears, but making its way through space forever?"

"Hold on!" Alex cried. "Come down from the stars if you want to talk to us."

"Well," Clay went on, "every person we have met at our stopping-places has been seen or heard of at the next stopping-place. We meet a disguised man on the street at Montreal. We come to a campfire by the riverside, miles above the city, to learn why he was disguised, and why he was following us. As we have said several times lately, this is a pretty small world. The man you meet to-day may walk in your path forever!"

The boys were astir early in the morning. They cooked breakfast on the shore, watched by inquisitive boys and girls, and then proceeded upstream. They passed beautiful Lake St. Frances long before noon, and just as night fell tied up at a lower pier at Ogdensburg. As soon as supper had been eaten, Alex and Captain Joe started away together.

"Here, where are you boys going?" asked Clay. "I say boys because Captain Joe has more sense than Alex," he added, turning to the others. "At least Captain Joe doesn't get lost very often."

"Right over here on the river front," Alex replied, "is where the Rutland Transit Company boats dock. Those boats are fresh from Chicago, and I'm going over to see if I can get a drink of Lake Michigan water!"

"If you go over there with that dog," Case declared, "the sailors will steal him. That dog is about as well known in Chicago as Carter H. Harrison. He's had his picture in every one of the Chicago newspapers."

"All right," replied Alex. "If they catch him and take him back to Chicago, they'll have to take me with him."

The boy took his departure, accompanied by the dog, and the others sat down to a quiet evening in the cabin. They had had several pleasant days and many thrilling adventures on the St. Lawrence river.

There remained now only about a hundred miles of travel, Lake Ontario being only that distance away. But included in that hundred miles were all the beautiful islands, great and small, which have made the St. Lawrence river famous.

The pleasantest part of their trip was yet to come.

While the boys lay in the cabin, with the lights all out as usual, a heavy step sounded on the deck, and there came a sharp rap at the cabin door. The boys sprang out of their bunks instantly.

"What's coming off now?" whispered Jule. "Anyway, this fellow has more manners than our other night visitors."

Clay stepped to the door, searchlight in hand, and turned a circle of flame on the face of the newcomer. Then he dropped the electric and sprang forward. The boys were getting ready with their automatics when they heard his voice speaking in great excitement.

"Captain Joe!" he cried. "Captain Joe! Where the dickens did you come from? What are you doing at Ogdensburg?"

"I might ask the same question of you," replied the hearty old ex-captain. "To tell you the truth, lad," he went on, "I've been so lonesome ever since you boys left the South Branch that I've done quite a lot of traveling, for an old man. Several times I've been almost up with you but you always got away."

"You never came all the way up here to visit us?" asked Case.

"To be honest about it, boys," the ex-captain replied, "I just did that very thing. I've got a friend who is captain of the Rutland boat which arrived this evening, and I came on with him. Mighty fine trip we had, too. And how are you all, and where is Alex and my namesake?"

"You wouldn't know Captain Joe," laughed Clay. "He's got to be the biggest, fiercest, wisest, pluckiest bulldog in the world."

"And Teddy bear! You remember him of course," Jule put in. "He ate up two pirates down the river, body and bones, and is so fat that we have to help him out of bed. Great bear, that!"

"Boys, boys," warned Captain Joe. "Don't exaggerate. I've always told you not to exaggerate. Do you think Captain Joe will know me?"

"Of course he will," said Case. "Captain Joe never forgets a friend."

"And now that you are here," Clay put in, "you are going to remain with us while we go back down the St. Lawrence to St. Luce and return here. Then we'll either ship the boat to Chicago or take her slowly up the lakes. Won't that be a fine old trip?"

"It listens pretty good to me," Captain Joe answered. "To be honest with you, boys," he continued, "I've been wanting a trip on the *Rambler*, but I never felt like getting away until now."

"You sailed on the St. Lawrence once a good many years ago, didn't you, Captain Joe?" asked Jule.

"Did I?" asked Captain Joe extending his stubby forefinger by way of emphasis. "Did I sail on the St. Lawrence river? Boys, I know every inch of it, up one side and down the other and through the middle."

"Then you'll be a great help to us," Clay suggested.

"Oh, you boys don't need any help navigating a boat on any river," Captain Joe asserted. "You boys are all right! But I was going to tell you about the St. Lawrence river."

"A few years ago, there wasn't an eddy, nor a swirl, nor an island, nor a channel, on the whole stream from Wolfe island to the waters of the Atlantic that I didn't know all about. I've sailed her night and day and I could take a ship down the rapids now. Only the government won't give me a license because I can read and write," he added in a sarcastic tone.

"Well, Captain Joe, you're just the identical man we've been looking for," cried Clay. "Several hundred years ago an old Frenchman by the name of Cartier mislaid a channel down the river. Now we want you to help us find that channel!"

"Oh, you want to find a channel, do you?" laughed Captain Joe. "Well, now, I'll tell you, boys, if that channel has been open at any time within the past hundred years, I can find it. Of course I wasn't on the river as long ago as that, but my old dad was, and he taught me to read the St. Lawrence like a boy reads the stories of Captain Kidd."

"That is fine!" the boys exclaimed in a breath.

Then Clay laughed and nudged his companions and said:

"Captain Joe, did you ever hear anybody say that this is a mighty small world? If so, do you think it's true?"

"It is bigger than I have ever been able to get over," replied Captain Joe, not understanding. "I've seen quite a lot of it, but not all."

Then Clay told the captain of their adventures on the St. Lawrence, showing him the two mysterious communications, with the understanding that he was never to mention their existence to any one.

"And so there really is a lost channel?" asked Captain Joe.

"You bet there is! There is more than one lost channel. Go bite him doggie!"

The voice came from the doorway, and the next moment, Alex and Captain Joe, the bulldog, came tumbling into the room.

"Say, my namesake is getting to be some dog," shouted the Captain, after the greetings were over. "He's big enough to find a lost channel anywhere. And he looks fierce enough, too."

"He's always perfectly willing to do his share of the looking," Alex grinned. "And we're perfectly willing to give him a chance to help."

"Then I'll take him into partnership," Captain Joe, the man, said, "and we'll go out hunting for what you seek. If there is a lost channel anywhere it will go hard if we don't find it!"

CHAPTER XV—THROUGH THE FAMOUS RAPIDS

A special bunk, the softest and springiest that could be made, was fitted up for Captain Joe in the cabin that night. The old fellow so enjoyed visiting with the boys that it was late before they went to sleep, and so the sun was well up when they left their beds in the morning.

"Now," Clay said, after all had indulged in a short swim in the river, "we're going to celebrate the arrival of Captain Joe by one of Alex's beefsteak breakfasts at a restaurant. Captain Joe has traveled so far to see us that we're not going to take any chances on having him poisoned by Case's cooking."

"Now look here, boys," Captain Joe remonstrated, "I've had a good many restaurant meals along the South Branch since you boys deserted me, and a chef has been cooking for me on the Rutland boat, so I propose that we get breakfast right here, on the *Rambler*. It will be a novelty for me, anyway."

"What would you like, Captain?" asked Alex.

"Well," said Captain Joe almost smacking his lips, "you know the kind of pancakes they serve at the Bismark, Chicago? They're half an inch thick, you know, and as large as the bottom of a milk pan. Cost a quarter apiece, and a fellow doesn't want anything more to eat all day! Now, you go ahead and make pancakes like we used to get at the Bismark."

"And eggs, and ham, and beans, and coffee, and fried potatoes, and canned peaches?" asked Case. "We're sure going to celebrate, Captain Joe."

"Well boys," said the old captain, "if you want to go and make provision tanks of yourselves, you can do it, but for my part, I'm going to be careful in my eating, as I'm getting old! Just rig me up a simple little meal consisting of eight or ten of those twenty-five cent pancakes and half a dozen eggs and three or four cups of coffee, and I'll try to worry through the day."

"I don't see how you can get along with anything less than a dozen pancakes and a gallon of coffee," laughed Clay, "and I'll go on shore and buy a box of the finest cigars to be had in Ogdensburg."

Captain Joe held up a warning finger.

"Now look here, boys," he said, "you know how I used to pull away at that dirty old pipe on the South Branch. I used to be ashamed of myself, smoking up your quarters, so after you left I quit the weed entirely. I haven't smoked a pipe or cigar for a long time," he added, proudly.

And so the breakfast was prepared as Captain Joe directed. The boys set out what little honey Teddy hadn't succeeded in getting hold of, and the pancakes were greatly enjoyed. But the Captain didn't finish his stunt.

"You boys are mighty good to an old man like me," he said.

"Mighty good!" repeated Clay. "Don't you remember when some sneak stole all the money we had been saving for a year to take us on the Amazon trip? Don't you remember how we hustled and got a little more together, and how you were afraid we wouldn't have enough, and might go broke in the Andes, and you took two hundred dollars and put it in a packet and told us to open it when we got into trouble? There is nothing on this boat you can't have, Captain Joe."

"Well," said the old man, "I didn't need the money, and, besides, I got it back. It didn't cost me anything to lend it."

"We needed it, though," grinned Alex, "and we might have been back there yet if we hadn't had it. You're the luckiest man I know of or it would never have been returned. And we were lucky, too."

"And now, if you don't mind," said Captain Joe, "we'll cut all this talk out. I'm going to stay with you boys just as long as you'll let me, and I don't want to hear any more talk about that consarned two hundred dollars. I've heard too much already."

"We think of it every time we see the white bulldog," laughed Case.

"By the way," said the Captain, "I've got that two hundred dollars in my jeans this minute, and if you should happen to want any of it just let me know. I really don't know what to do with it."

"Pigs will be flying when we use any more of your money, Captain Joe," Alex smiled. "We've got plenty of our own."

After breakfast, with Captain Joe at the helm, the boat was turned toward the Great Lakes. It was seven o'clock when they left Ogdensburg and at ten they were at Alexandria Bay.

"Suppose we keep on the Canadian side going up," Captain Joe suggested, "and then, when we come back, we can take the American side."

"Can you take the boat up and back without knocking off any of these headlands?" asked Alex with a wink at the Captain.

"Look here, young man," replied the Captain not at all offended, "I was dipping the water into this river before you were born. I can take this boat within an inch of every island and crag and headland between here and Lake Ontario and never scrape off an ounce of paint. I've sailed on the ocean, too, and all up and down the Great Lakes. This St. Lawrence river was always like a little pet kitten to me."

According to this suggestion, the captain left Alexandria Bay to the south and proceeded over to the Canadian side. The boat was now just starting in on its run through the famous Thousand Islands.

Many times it seemed to the boys as if Captain Joe intended to run the craft directly through some of the magnificent cottages located high above the river, but always the boat turned just in time to keep in foot-clear water. The boys stood leaning on the gunwale for hours watching the splendid panorama of the river.

There were islands rich with verdure; there were islets brown and rocky, there were great level places hemmed in by the river where magnificent summer residences showed against the beauty of the landscape.

Now and then summer tourists hailed the *Rambler* from the river, and occasionally girls and boys ran down the island piers to greet her with the waving of flags. It was a glorious trip.

Captain Joe explained many features of the stream as they passed up, and as long as the boys lived they remembered the shimmer of the sun on the island foliage, the white-fringed waves ruffled by the light wind, and the voice of the

kind old man telling them the experiences of a life time.

Just before sundown, after one of the pleasantest days they ever experienced, the boys reached Kingston. Captain Joe seemed disinclined to leave the boat that night, and so the boys spent three hours wandering up and down the streets of the historic old city. Off to the west lay the famous Bay of Quinte. Farther south was Sackett's Harbor, while between the two lay Wolfe island, stuck into the mouth of the St. Lawrence river like a great plug. The boys enjoyed the night ramble immensely.

"Now, Captain Joe," Clay said in the morning, "suppose we circle Wolfe island, inspect the light house at Cape Vincent, and spend part of a day at Sackett's Harbor? I don't know of any better way to spend the next twelve hours than in making a trip like that."

"Sackett's Harbor was a military point during the last war with Great Britain," Jule said, "and I'd like to look over the town."

"Nothing much doing there now in the way of guns and soldiers," Captain Joe said, "but, as you say, it would pay you well to spend a day on the waters in this vicinity. You may never have the chance again."

So the *Rambler* headed for Cape Vincent, where they stopped long enough to inspect the big light, first taking a view of Sackett's Harbor. About noon, they came to Clayton, where they paused long enough to inspect several groups of islands on the American side.

Then, with Captain Joe still at the helm, the boat passed down to Alexandria Bay where they tied up for the night.

"To-morrow," Captain Joe said, as the boys made great inroads on the Bismark pancakes stacked up on the table, "I'll take you through the Lachine rapids. You'll find we'll have to go some."

"You haven't got any government license!" laughed Alex.

"No," said the old Captain, "I'm not an ignorant Indian. I can read and write, and so I can't get a government license, but I'll tell you what I can do. I can take this boat down the Lachine without getting a drop of water on the deck."

The Captain was a little bit inclined to tell what he had done and what he could do, but his stories were all truthful and interesting, so the boys rather enjoyed them, and the captain enjoyed talking.

"You needn't think we're going to fly through the air on this trip," Jule said winking at the Captain. "We're going to take about two days to get down to the Lachine. We'll loaf along the river to-morrow, making about one hundred miles, tie up for the night, and reach Lachine in the afternoon of the day after. What do you think of that for a program, boys?" he added, turning to Clay.

"That's the way I figured it out," Clay answered. "There is no use in being in a hurry. We've got all the time there is."

Every person on the boat, except perhaps the dog and the bear, slept soundly that night. There was no wind, and the little bay they were in protected them from the wash of the steamers. When they awoke in the morning the sun was rising round and red out of the river.

That day was another one long to be remembered by every member of the *Rambler* party. They drifted, using the motors just enough to give headway, fished in the clear water, and told stories of old days on the South Branch—days long to be remembered by them all.

That night partook of the character of the last one so far as sleep and rest were concerned. The boat lay at a little pier not far from a rural settlement. Early in the evening villagers came down attracted by the clamor of the motors but soon returned to their homes.

It was on that evening that Alex made his famous attempt to cook a river fish a la Indian. There was something the matter with the fish, or with the hot stones, or with the soil! At any rate, the white bulldog and the bear cub got the supper the boy had sweated over for an hour or more.

Shortly after noon on the following day, the *Rambler* came to the head of the Lachine rapids, six miles above Montreal.

Although the boys had every confidence in Captain Joe as a pilot, some of them were inclined to think that his memory of the rapids might not be as good as his skill. Many a time during that passage the grand and lofty tumbling of the waters as they broke upon projecting rocks seemed about to engulf the frail craft.

Many a time the nose of the *Rambler* seemed pointing directly at a hidden rock which sent the river spouting into the air like the "blow" of a great whale. Many a time the wayward current caught the prow and twisted it about until it seemed as if the boat would never respond to her rudder again.

But the eyes of the captain were true, the arms of the old sailing man were strong, and so the boat always came back to the course he had mapped out for her. When at last the rapids were passed, the boys were greatly relieved.

During the excitement of the trip, little fear had been felt after the first plunge, but now that it was over, they realized that they had been in absolute peril. Almost with the momentum which had carried the *Rambler* down the Lachine, the boat came to a pier on the river front at Montreal. Looking about, the boys saw that they were almost in the location where they had tied up before.

Clay sprang ashore, hastened to a telephone, talked eagerly for a few moments and then returned to the *Rambler*. Captain Joe sat out on the prow and the boy took a deck stool beside him.

"Captain Joe," the boy asked, "what would have taken place if we had run out of gasoline while navigating the rapids?"

The captain eyed the boy with surprise showing on his weather-beaten face. He poked Clay in the ribs before answering.

"Why do you ask an old captain a foolish question like that?" he said.

"I'm asking for information," was the reply. "Tell me what would have happened. I really want to know."

"Well," Captain Joe replied, scratching his chin meditatively, "if the gasoline had given out in the rapids, just about this time there would be a lot of boards bumping against the rocks, and a motor rusting in the bottom of the river, and five human beings, a bulldog and a bear floating out toward the Gulf of St. Lawrence."

"That's just what I thought," Clay exclaimed. "That's just why I was scared stiff when I found out that we were just about out of gasoline as we struck the head of the rapids."

"And you never said a word about it," asked the captain, "to any of the boys? You kept it all to yourself?"

"Huh," replied Clay, "where was the use in scaring the fellows out of a year's growth. Didn't you notice my cap walking straight up into the air? That was because my hair lifted it."

"Boy, boy," expostulated Captain Joe, "don't lie to the old man. I don't believe you were scared at all."

"Well, anyway," replied Clay, "the tanks are empty, and there will be a wagon down here pretty quick to fill them up. Now mind you, I'm not going to say a word to the other boys about this. If I do, they'll never get over roasting me. We should have taken on gasoline at Kingston, but I forgot all about it."

"Do you remember what you told me about this Lawyer Martin?" asked Captain Joe. "He seems to be the lawyer leading the band of ruffians who are trying to keep the lost channel lost forever!"

"Yes," replied Clay, "and I was just going to speak about that. It was in Montreal that we met him, disguised as a riverside character, and I was wondering if it might not be well to go ashore and look him up."

"Don't you ever think of doing that," Captain Joe replied. "You get your gasoline and lay in additional pancake material and we'll go on down the river to Cartier island. That's what they call that peninsula, isn't it? Let me tell you this," the old man added, "if you have anything more to do with this man Martin, you let him be the one to do the looking up."

"That's good sense, too," agreed Clay. "He might discover that we were on our way back if we went up into the city. So we'll remain quiet to-night and set out for Cartier island and the lost channel early to-morrow morning."

CHAPTER XVI—A CALL FROM WRECKERS

Nothing occurred to disturb the slumbers of the *Rambler's* crew that night. The cool wind made the cabin of the boat comfortable, and the street lights of Montreal winked down upon the craft with friendly eyes. The afternoon of the following day found them at Quebec.

"I've been thinking," Clay said as the boat tied up at the pier they had occupied on the occasion of their former visit, "that we ought not to keep this stolen canoe. Of course Max stole it."

"Perhaps he'll come down here and claim it again," suggested Jule.

"If he does," Alex exclaimed, "I'm going on shore to find him and get even with him. He'd no business to bring that gang of wharf rats onto us. I hope he's under arrest somewhere."

"There's an idea!" suggested Case. "Suppose we telephone to the chief of police and find out. We can leave the canoe in the care of the chief, too, if we want to. He might be able to find the owner."

"It seems to me," Captain Joe interrupted, "that you boys may as well keep that canoe until we return to Quebec, on our way to the Great Lakes. It will come in mighty handy when we're prowling around those two rivers you've been talking about. The owner won't miss it for a few days."

"That's another good notion," Clay agreed. "We'll use the canoe and return it when we get back. And now I'll go and telephone to the chief of police and see if he has discovered anything additional about Max."

Clay was gone only a short time. When he returned, he looked a trifle anxious. When he spoke, it was in an excited tone.

"Look here, boys," he said, "the chief of police advises to us to give up that hunt for the lost channel. He says that Fontenelle has just returned from Cartier island leaving a wrecked launch and a lot of perfectly good stores stacked on the bottom of the river."

"I had an idea," Captain Joe suggested, "that things would be moving about the time we got down here. Why, do you know, boys," he went on, "that this lost channel matter is creating about as much excitement in Quebec province as the coronation of a new king ought to?"

"The procession seemed to start about the time we struck the river," Alex grinned, "and there's been music ever since we left St. Luce."

"Yes," Clay went on, "and the newspapers have been printing feature stories and describing the family jewels, and the lost channel, and telling how many land-holders would be made homeless if the charter should ever be found and sustained. The newspapers are always meddling with our affairs."

"You let the newspapers alone," advised Captain Joe. "They have advertised you boys, and the *Rambler*, and the bulldog, and the bear, from one end of this river to the other."

"Well, what do you think about this advice given by the chief?" asked Clay. "We ought to reach some conclusion immediately."

"You came down here to find that lost channel, didn't you?" asked Uncle Joe with a twinkle in his eyes.

"We came down here to look for it," answered the boy.

"Well, then," continued Captain Joe, "we'll go and look for it."

"That's what I thought!" cried Case.

"I wouldn't turn back now for a million!" yelled Alex.

"Boys," smiled Captain Joe, "I never knew any one to get rich by changing plans every time some fool friend advanced a contrary opinion. When you make up your mind to do a thing, you go right on and do it. Did you ever notice the bulldog when he gets into a scrap?"

"I've seen him in several scraps," answered Clay.

"Well," went on the captain, "when the bulldog gets into a fight, the harder they chew him the tighter he hangs on, and that's about the way all the money and reputations have been made in this combative world."

"Oh, we hadn't any idea of turning back," Clay hastened to say. "I only wanted to know what the others thought about it."

"Well you found out pretty quick," laughed Jule. "Why, we've had four or five days that we haven't had a fight, or seen a midnight prowler, or been dumped on a sand bar, or experienced any other pleasant little incident of that description. I was actually beginning to fear that our river trip from this time on would be one long sweet dream."

The boys passed another restful night and were up with the sun. The first thing Alex did after bathing and dressing was to spring to the pier and start off into the city.

"Here, here!" cried Captain Joe. "We don't allow little boys to go wandering off alone! If you've got to go, I'm going with you."

"That's fine!" shouted Alex, capering about on his toes. "Come along, and we'll take the old town to pieces to see what makes it tick."

"I'm going uptown," Alex explained as they mounted one of the sidling streets which led up from the river, "to buy a porterhouse steak that weighs ten pounds. This will be our last chance."

"Now," said Captain Joe mildly, "don't you think a porterhouse steak weighing nine pounds and a half would be enough for our breakfast?"

"But we ain't going to have this steak for breakfast," Alex protested. "I'm going to put this steak in that cute little cold air refrigerator of ours and when we get down to Cartier island, I'm going to cook a beefsteak a la brigand. If you eat a steak cooked in that way once, you'll never want one cooked any other way. It's simply great!"

"It's a new one on me," replied Captain Joe.

"Oh, well," Alex said, "I'll show you all about cooking it when the time comes. When we get back to the South Branch, you can have one every day if you want it. We can get pretty good porterhouse in Chicago."

The two strolled through the city for a couple of hours, buying vegetables, condensed milk, tinned goods, fresh fruit and meats. Later, when the provisions were delivered to the *Rambler* at the foot of the pier, Case declared that Alex had spent money enough to take them all over Europe. Alex was somewhat disappointed to think that he had not encountered Max in the city, but did not inform his chums how keenly he had watched for him.

"What did the chief of police say about Max?" asked the boy as they returned to the boat. "You forgot to say anything about that."

"Sure I did," answered Clay. "Well, he said that Max had blossomed out in a suit that must have cost a hundred, with a big roll of money in his pocket. He said, too, that he had strutted around the city for a few days and then suddenly disappeared. It is the opinion of the chief that the boy, who is by no means as young as he looks, went down the river to Cartier island."

"I really hope he has," Alex blurted out, "I'll crack that boy's crust if I ever come across him."

"And you'll wash dishes, too," laughed Captain Joe. "Oh, I remember how you boys used to fight against slang up on the South Branch."

That night the boys anchored the *Rambler* in a cove of good size just south of Rivere du Loup. They were well away

from the wash of the steamers, and yet not near enough to the houses of the little railway station to attract general attention.

The night closed down cloudy and dark. The passing vessels on the river seemed to burn holes in the darkness for only an instant and then disappear.

The sounds which came from the water rang loudly in the heavy atmosphere and sounded mysterious and uncanny. There were plenty of vessels on the river now, as the channel between the gulf and Quebec is navigable for the largest ocean steamers.

While the boys lay in the cabin, sheltered from the gulf wind which had been so grateful the night before, the heavy rumbling of a freight train and sharp call of an engine whistle came to their ears.

"That listens good to me," Alex cried. "Say, fellows, how would you like to know, just for a couple of hours, that the noise of that train came from the Union station in little old Chicago?"

"Yes," Jule exclaimed, "I like to look into the river and think I'm standing on Madison street bridge! Do you remember the stories the newspapers used to print about the water in the Chicago river, before the drainage canal was put through? Pretty good fiction, eh?"

Captain Joe chuckled until his shoulders shook like jelly.

"Every reporter on the Chicago papers in those days," the captain said, "was turning out works of fiction. They used to print pieces about men falling off Madison street bridge and off Clark street bridge and dashing out their brains on the solid water below. And then they used to tell stories about the river being so black the typists used to color their ribbons in it. There's something about Chicago that seems to me to stir the imagination! It's a great old town!"

The boys discussed their home city until something like ten o'clock. They were just going to bed when a call came from the shore at the end of the cove. All were on deck instantly.

"Perhaps that's Max," suggested Jule, "or one of those river pirates."

"Or it may be a detachment of ruffians looking for the lost channel," Case put in.

Captain Joe sat back and laughed heartily.

"Boys," he said, "I believe that lost channel has turned your heads. You talk about it, and drink it, and sleep it, and I believe you would eat it if there was anything tangible about it. I'm interested in it, too, kids, but I don't spread it on my bread instead of butter."

"Hello, the boat," came the hail from the shore.

"What do you want?" asked Clay.

"I want to come on board."

"Beds all full," answered Alex.

"But I want to talk with you," insisted the strange voice.

"All right," Clay said, "proceed with your conversation."

"I'm not here to confide to the whole countryside what I want to say to you," was the angry reply.

Clay was considering a sarcastic rejoinder but Case laid a warning hand on his shoulder.

"There may be something in this," the boy said. "Suppose two of us get into the boat and go over and see."

"Don't you think of such a thing," Captain Joe advised. "That fellow may not have a boat of his own, but if he is of any account at all, he can get one long enough to row out to the *Rambler*. The place for him to talk to us is right on this deck. It may be a trap."

"That's good sense, too," Clay agreed. "He can go away if he doesn't want to comply with our requirements. He may be only a tramp seeking a ride on the river. There are plenty of such characters here."

"I wish he would come aboard," Clay suggested, "and I'll see if I can't coax him," he added, turning toward the shore and making a trumpet of his hands. "Perhaps he already has a boat."

"Hello, the shore," he called, "we're going away directly, so if you want to talk with us, you'd better row out."

"You always was the boy with a little prevarication on the end of your tongue!" suggested Alex. "We're not going away directly."

"Morning is directly," laughed Clay turning toward the shore again.

"Are you coming on board?" he asked.

"I haven't got any boat," was the reply. "Why can't you send one over?"

Clay's reply elicited a volley of epithets from the shore, and directly a great blaze sprang up not many feet distant from the water.

"Wreckers!" cried Captain Joe.

"Surest thing you know!" answered Clay. "The only wonder is that they didn't set their beacon going before."

"And this," Jule suggested, "seems to be more like real life. Things are livening up. They'll be going good by the time we get to St. Luce."

"They may be going too fast!" warned the old captain.

CHAPTER XVII—CAPTAIN JOE'S NIGHT VISIT

"I really would like to know," Case observed, "whether those fellows are real wreckers, or whether they have been waiting there for the *Rambler* to come back down the river. You know the story was printed that we were coming back to look up the lost channel."

"I don't know of any way of finding out unless we go to shore," Alex suggested, looking very much as if he would like to pay a visit to the blaze. "We might learn something of importance," he added rather coaxingly. "Suppose we do go and see."

"If you try to leave this boat to-night," Clay declared, "I'll tie you up with one of the anchor cables. We haven't got any time to waste hunting for you. So you stay on board the boat."

Alex did not exactly like the idea of going quietly to bed, but he was finally induced to do so.

"Now," said Captain Joe, as he stood alone on deck with Clay, "suppose we shove over to the other shore. Those fellows are wreckers, there is no doubt of that, and there is no sense in our mixing with them. If we stay here, they'll prow around the *Rambler* all night, and the bulldog will bark and the bear will growl, and it will be like sleeping in a boiler shop. What do you say to that?"

"That suits me exactly," Clay answered.

"Then I'll tell you what we'll do. From the point where we tie to-night, we'll pass down the river on the north side. That will bring us in behind Cartier island, and we can push up the west river instead of the east one, which seemed to be the center of activity when you were there."

"That's another good suggestion," Clay agreed.

"The west river," the old captain went on, "is a small stream in comparison with the other. There's a funny thing about it that I never could understand. I was in there once, landing supplies for a surveying party and it seemed to me then that that stream never grew to any size until it came within a mile or so of the isthmus which connects the peninsula with the main shore."

"Then there must be some tributary of good size there," said Clay.

"That's just the point," the captain went on. "There isn't any tributary of good size there. The peninsula is very narrow and slopes steeply to the west. In fact, the river to the east is several feet higher than the one on the west. That's one reason why I think there never was any channel through there."

"That is true," Clay answered. "You see, a channel through there, running at the rate the incline would naturally call for, would cut a hole through that neck of land about as wide as one of the main rivers. Why, it would drain the big river and turn all the water into the small stream. At least, it looks that way to me."

"Oh, I don't know about that," the captain answered, "there's a lot of water in that east river. Still, there's no channel there and never was so far as I can understand. Now, what I can't understand is, how this west river gets so big all at once. There may be a creek running in at the other side, but if there is, I never found it."

"You seem to understand that district pretty well," Clay laughed.

"Didn't I tell you I knew the whole St. Lawrence river south, north, and bottom?" demanded the captain. "Why, when I took that load of provisions in for the surveyors, there were Indians enough along the shore to give a city a population as large as Chicago's. And there were bears, and wolves, and deer, and beaver, and all sorts of wild creatures in the woods—thick as berries in a swamp."

During this conversation the two had been watching the shore where the light had sprung up. With a night glass they could see figures passing in front of the blaze, but the beacon, if such it was, soon died down to embers, and nothing more was heard from the shore.

They both listened for the sound of oars in the river, but none came. The tide was running in and the current was running out, with the result that great ranks of waves lay across the wide river like winnows in a field of grain. The wind blew sweeping up from the gulf, opposing the current, and, taken altogether, it was as dangerous and uncertain a night on the river as one could well imagine.

The *Rambler* danced and bobbed about frightfully, drawing at her anchor and seeming to lunge forward in the waste of water. However, she was a staunch little craft, and the boys were used to her capers on the waves, and so paid little

attention.

"They wouldn't dare to venture out in a boat to-night," was Clay's comment. "Besides," he added, "they know now that we are suspicious and watchful, and, unless I am greatly in error, we will hear no more of them."

"Shall we go across now?" asked the captain.

"I'm ready if you think we can make it."

The captain chuckled again and his shoulders shook.

"Make it?" he repeated. "Of course we can make it."

"The tide and the wind are fighting the current," Clay suggested, "and all we'll have to do will be to fight the waves."

It was rather rough getting to the north shore, but the trip was made without accident, except that Jule was thrown from his bunk and Captain Joe, the dog, and Teddy protested against the storm in ways best known to bulldogs and bears. Jule merely rubbed his eyes and crawled back into his bunk.

They found a place to anchor where the *Rambler* would be protected during the night by a finger of rock running out into the river. All along the shore to the north was a heavy forest. The trees swayed and creaked in the wind, and now and then a crash from the interior told of the falling of some monarch of the forest which had doubtless withstood the storms of the St. Lawrence valley for hundreds of years.

It was a wild night on the river and on the land, but the boys slept peacefully until morning. As for Captain Joe, he declared that it reminded him so much of old nights on the banks of Newfoundland that he wanted to sit up and refresh his recollection of those adventurous times.

Clay rather suspected that the old captain was too apprehensive of evil from the wreckers, or accidents from the storm, to go to bed, but he let him have his way, and the hardy old fellow seemed as bright and active as ever in the morning. He even declined to go to the cabin for rest when the boys insisted that he ought to do so.

"We'll get rest enough when we get down to the west river," the captain smiled. "I can sleep in the woods."

"That's just where we won't get any rest," Jule urged.

"Huh," murmured Alex. "That's where I get my rest! The natives were so afraid that I'd tire myself walking around that they trussed me up like a hen. I'd just like to get a hold of some of those outlaws. They're the limit—the worst I ever encountered."

"What did they do to you?" asked Captain Joe.

"Do to me?" repeated Alex. "Why, they had a stew, or a boiled dinner, or something, cooking in a tin pail over a fire, and they wouldn't give me a thing to eat. And that is the height of meanness!"

As if repenting of the violence of the day before, and trying to make restitution for the many blows at the sad old world, the weather that morning was all that could have been desired. The air was clear and sweet after its bath of rain, and the leaves of the forest sparkled and rustled like jewels as the sun shone upon their moist surfaces.

The boys made good time that day, although they did not feel inclined to hurry. Alex took the canoe out in the forenoon and caught half a dozen fish which he cleaned for dinner. The boy wanted to go ashore and prepare the dinner a la Indian again, but the others insisted that they really wanted a fish dinner, so the catch was baked in the oven of the coal stove. The boys claim to this day that Alex consumed half of the fish that he caught, but of course Alex disputes this.

At sundown they anchored the *Rambler* within four or five miles of the west river, in a little bay which ran into the mainland almost behind the westward extension of Cartier island.

No lights were shown on the boat, supper having been prepared in the dark, and the boys sat along the deck fighting mosquitoes and listening to the calls of the wild creatures in the woods.

The point they had selected for their anchorage was directly west of Point aux Outardes, and when the moon rose the boys naturally turned their eyes in that direction. Although the point was fully four miles away, a rocky promontory could be seen standing sharply out against the dark line of the forest.

"Captain," Alex said, as they sat back of the gunwale on the prow, "I wish you'd take this glass and see what you can discover on that point."

Captain Joe took the glass into his hand and held it for a long time, swinging it back and forth over the shore to the north, and over the river line of Cartier island. Then he handed it back to Alex.

"I'll tell you," he said slowly, "there's a campfire over on the point, and there are many people around it. At least I see figures moving back and forth."

"Perhaps that is a base of supplies for the fellows who are trying to find the lost channel in order to beat Fontenelle to the charter and the family jewels," Clay suggested.

"It doesn't seem as if they would camp in so conspicuous a place."

"Oh, I don't know about that," Case said, "they have nothing to fear from officers or wreckers. They are only hunting for

a lost treasure, which any one may find who is lucky enough to get to it.”

“Let’s go and call on them,” suggested Alex.

“I prefer to live a little longer,” Case laughed.

“Aw, come on, they won’t hurt us,” Alex argued, “I’m going.”

The boys laughed at the idea and Alex said no more about the proposed excursion, but Clay suggested to Captain Joe after the others were in their bunks:

“We must watch that little rascal, or he’ll get up in the night and run over there. He’s always doing tricks of that kind, and some time he’ll get into serious trouble.”

Captain Joe pretended to regard the situation as very serious, and said that he would see that Alex didn’t get away from the boat that night. With this Clay seemed contented. The old captain insisted on keeping watch again that night, but if the boys had been about the deck they would have seen very little of him, for all that.

As soon as the others were asleep, the captain untied the tow line of the canoe, stepped softly into it, and paddled away in the direction of the north shore. So far as possible he kept the bulk of the *Rambler* between himself and the point where the light had been seen.

Reaching the margin of the bay, he turned to the east and paddled straight to the mouth of the west river. After an hour of steady work, he reached a point a little east and directly north of Point aux Outardes. Nothing could be seen of the fire or the figures about it from the north, and the captain boldly crossed the arm of the bay stretching in behind Cartier island. In half an hour he was on the island itself, and separated only by a few rods of mingled rocks and bushes from the point.

Advancing cautiously to the south he came within view of the blaze and within hearing of much of the conversation going on there.

The night hours passed slowly. The moon swung to the south and off to the west, and the shadows lay long in the forest before the old captain moved from his point of observation. Then with a chuckle he crept back to his canoe, and long before the boys were out of their bunks he was fishing over the gunwale of the *Rambler* in the most innocent manner imaginable. The old fellow chuckled as he dropped his line.

“That bay stretching in behind the peninsula,” he mused, “looks to me just as it did a good many years ago. No improvements seem to have been made there notwithstanding the work of the surveyors, and the country is just as desolate as it was then. If I had had a little more time I might have paddled up to the mouth of the west river and looked over the situation there, but daylight showed too soon.”

“What’s that you’re muttering about?” asked Alex clapping a hand on the old captain’s arm. “You must be talking in your sleep.”

“Not that any one knows of,” chuckled the old captain. “I was only saying that from here the country looks exactly as it used to.”

“And my stomach feels exactly as it used to,” Alex declared. “You catch the fish, and I’ll cook ’em, and we’ll tumble the boys out for breakfast. They’re sleeping too long, anyway.”

This program was followed to the letter, and before noon the *Rambler* lay up the west river about a mile from the bay creeping in behind Cartier island. At first no one left the boat, however.

“Do you remember what the chief of police said about Fontenelle’s boat and a lot of perfectly good provisions lying on the bottom of the river?” asked Clay as the boys lounged on deck.

“Indeed I do,” replied Case. “I’ve been thinking it would be a fine thing if we could find that boat.”

“I have found it!” Clay exclaimed.

“Yes, you have!” Case said, doubtfully.

“Sure, I have,” Clay went on. “When we swung in past Point aux Outarde, you were all watching the point to see what had become of the men who camped there last night, while I was searching the bay on the north side looking for some signs of the wreck of the *Cartier*.”

“And you found it, did you?” Case cried excitedly.

“Sure, I found it,” Clay declared. “It lays bottom down in about fifteen feet of water, with the top of the cabin showing plainly.”

CHAPTER XVIII—IT IS NOW CLAY’S TURN

“Do you think we can raise her?” asked Case.

“We can if she has any bottom left,” declared Clay. “If they only cut a few holes in her and sunk her that way, we can get her out.”

"Aw, what's the good of taking up time with the old wreck!" demanded Alex, who had listened to the conversation. "It isn't our boat, anyway."

"But the *Cartier* is a splendid launch, and worth a lot of money," Clay suggested, "and we might pay the expenses of the trip by getting her out for the Fontenelles. It won't do any harm to try."

"All right!" Alex cried. "Just remember I'm the champion long distance diver, when you get ready to go down and look her over."

After breakfast the *Rambler* was taken still farther upstream, as far up, in fact, as the depth of the water would permit.

"There!" Captain Joe observed, pointing to a bend just above the prow of the boat. "This is the strange thing that I called your attention to. The river widens here in the most mysterious manner."

"It may be just back water," Clay ventured.

"No sir!" answered the captain. "There is no back water here. See how steadily the current runs? And there's no creek running in, either."

"Then there must be a subterranean stream running—"

Clay checked himself with the sentence half finished.

"Suppose," he mused, "just suppose, there should be a subterranean stream running in from under the hills—let us say from the north. That would be a channel, wouldn't it? And it might be a lost channel at that! Why didn't I think of that before."

The boy was so full of the thought, so enthusiastic over the thing it might mean, that he concluded to make a quiet investigation on his own hook, saying nothing to the others regarding the matter.

"What was it you said about some underground stream?" asked Captain Joe. "You started in to say something about it and then stopped abruptly."

"Oh, it just occurred to me that there might be an underground river somewhere around here, but I guess that's just a dream. There couldn't be any river, you see, for the ground is rocky, and there seems to be no place for an underground stream to get its supply."

"No," the old captain agreed, "there can't be any underground stream that's a sure thing. If there are caverns they are dry."

Clay chuckled to himself, and went into the cabin after Alex.

"Come on, Redhead!" he cried catching the boy by the arm. "We are now going ashore to dig up the lost channel."

"That's a nice pleasant little job, too!" Alex declared.

"Well, come on," Clay insisted. "We'll go over and make a start, anyway. We may be able to find out if the outlaws are really here."

Explaining to Captain Joe and the others that they were going only a short distance from the shore, the boys launched the canoe and were soon on the sloping shore of the peninsula. Once across they hid their canoe in a thicket which overhung the stream and disappeared in the interior.

"Now, look here," Clay said as he stopped and sat deliberately down in the shade of a great tree, "I've got an idea."

Alex stared hard in pretended wonder and amazement.

"Where did you get it?" he asked.

"Brain cell opened and gave it to me," Clay answered.

"Well, come across with it," Alex urged.

"Captain Joe wants to know where the water comes from to make the west river so large at its mouth," Clay went on. "I started in to tell him that there might be a subterranean stream somewhere hereabouts, but I thought he would laugh at me and so kept my mouth shut."

Alex sprang to his feet and swung round and round on his heels, chuckling and shaking hands with himself.

"That's the idea!" he cried. "That's just the idea! There is a subterranean stream here somewhere! Look at the way the rocks are piled up, and look at the long slope from the top of the ridges to the level of the river. There are catch basins here somewhere, and water pouring into the river that no one knows anything about."

"Now go a little farther," Clay suggested. "Figure that at some time, say two or three hundred years ago, this subterranean channel lay open to the sun. Now what do you make of it?"

"Holy smoke!" almost shouted Alex. "I make a lost channel!"

"There you are!" Clay began, "and all we've got to do is to just look around and find it. We've got plenty of time."

"That will be some cheerful job, too," Alex commented. "We've only got about forty thousand square miles of territory to look over."

"I think," Clay said, "that we have the idea, and that is the main thing. The rest is only a matter of detail."

As the boys sat under the tree, Alex having dropped down to the turf again, a rustling of bushes was heard to the east and they turned in that direction, scanning the thicket closely. Then Alex seized Clay by the arm and pointed away through the underbrush.

"Did you ever see that figure before?" he asked.

"Looks to me to be about the size of Max," Clay answered. "I wonder if he is watching us, or whether he is only looking in the direction of the *Rambler*. Anyway, we'd better move."

The boys shifted their position some yards to the north and crouched down again. The bushes showed motion once more, and they saw the figure they had observed moving toward the bank of the west river.

"He never saw us!" cried Alex. "He is sneaking down on the *Rambler*."

"Yes," Clay replied, "and there are two or three just behind him."

"I had an idea," Alex chuckled, "that things would begin to liven up as soon as we got into this country. This will please Captain Joe!"

"Captain Joe," Clay replied, "seems inclined to take things rather seriously. The chances are that he is wondering now, night and day, how four rattleheaded boys ever got so far over the world without being murdered or sent to the penitentiary. Still, he isn't always passing out advice."

From their new shelter, the boys now saw Max and three men pass to the west and stand under a screen of boughs looking down toward the *Rambler*.

"The war is on, I guess," Clay said. "Those fellows were here waiting for us to come back. Did it ever occur to you that they know about our having that mysterious map?"

"Now you've said something," Alex exclaimed. "That map was intended for those opposing the Fontenelles. It was given to us by mistake, and the people who should have had it know that we've got it. That's why they're watching us so. Wonder we never thought of that before."

"It seems to me that you've struck it right," Clay answered. "They've been waiting here all this time for us to come back it seems."

"Then I should think they'd keep out of sight until we get busy looking for the channel. They surely won't want to drive us away before we demonstrate what we know about it."

"I presume they think they are keeping out of sight," Clay decided.

"Well, they're not keeping very close watch, for they don't seem to know that we're on shore."

"Don't be too sure of that," Clay answered. "They may be watching us this minute. Perhaps we'd better move."

As the boys spoke, Max and his three companions started at a swift pace up the bank of the stream keeping always out of view of the boat. They passed the place where the boys lay in hiding and for a moment the lads heard them pushing through the underbrush.

"They've probably gone to their tent now," Alex suggested, "and I'm going to follow on and see if I can locate them."

"All right," Clay said, "only be careful. I'll go back to the boat and tell the boys what's going on. Be sure you don't get captured, now," he added as Alex turned to the thicket to the north.

"No danger of that," the boy grinned and the next moment he was out of sight, pushing through the thicket in the direction taken by Max.

Clay stood for an instant longer where the boy had left him and then moved in the direction of the river.

But his progress toward the stream came to an abrupt termination in a minute. He tripped over what he at first believed to be a running vine and fell to the ground. Then, as he lifted himself to a sitting position, he saw the obstacle over which he had fallen was a rope and that it was held in the hands of two evil looking men.

The men, bearded and dirty, broke into a laugh over Clay's look of amazement. They sprang toward him and in a moment he was relieved of his weapons. The boy sat perfectly still, for the attack had come so suddenly that he could hardly comprehend the situation.

"Ain't it the cute little child?" guffawed one of the men, slapping his knees and bending down to look the boy in the face.

"He's all of that," replied the other. "This is the little boy that's come out here to find a hidden channel that no one else can find. He used to be a real cute little newsboy in Chicago, and directly he'll wish he was back selling newspapers on Clark street!"

"Are these all the poppers you have, kid?" he asked pointing to the revolvers which had been taken from the boy. "You might injure yourself by carrying them."

Clay glanced at the fellow steadily. He had now in a measure recovered his equilibrium. His impulse was to smash a blow into the grinning face bent over him.

He didn't like the black, matted beard. He objected to the greasy, frayed jacket. The man's snaky, near-set eyes offended him. More than once he drew back a clenched fist to strike the evil face.

"It seems to me," the boy said, restraining himself with a great effort, "that I walked right into a den and found the snakes at home."

"Yes, little one," the man replied, "We sort of dipped you up in a bottle. I bet my chum, here, a dollar that he wouldn't get you the first time he tried. I lose, so you'd better pass out the dough and I'll pay up. I always pay my sporting debts."

"Perhaps you'd better take the whole roll," Clay said, producing a small handful of change and passing it over. "You'll get it in time, anyway."

The man took the money, counted it slowly with clumsy fingers and thrust it into a pocket.

"As long as you have money, you know," Clay said sneeringly, "you won't have to be taking pennies away from children or stealing from blind men. You're quite welcome to what I have."

"You just cut that stuff quick," snarled the man rising to his feet, his face blotching red. "Cut that quick!"

He might have struck the boy only his companion drew him away.

"Keep back, you fool," the cooler man said, "Do you want him to bring all the others here with his yelping? Why, we can't even shoot him till sundown, so we'd better gag him to keep him from squealing."

"You needn't worry about me squealing," Clay said. "I learned how to keep my mouth shut when you ruffians were serving your last sentence in the penitentiary."

One of the men drew out a knife and flashed it angrily before the boy's face.

"Keep a civil tongue in your head," he said, "and you, Ben, chase up to the north and get the kid that followed Max. We'll tie 'em up together."

Clay was now drawn to his feet and his hands tied tightly behind his back. In this condition, he was marched swiftly through the brush, vines and boughs striking his unprotected face. He paid little attention, however, to his physical discomforts. He was listening for some indication of the capture of Alex.

CHAPTER XIX—A SPLASH OF WATER

Much to Clay's amazement, his captor kept to the east following a ridge of rocks from which both rivers might be seen in the distance whenever the foliage did not intervene. After walking half a mile or more, the fellow turned his steps into a narrow gully and soon entered a natural cavern before which a campfire had been built.

"Now, you pretty little creature," he said, addressing Clay, "you're going to be tied up here and left until you return the map which was given to you by mistake."

"A map of what?" asked Clay instantly.

"A map of this country," was the short reply.

"I'm not giving out maps at present," the boy answered.

"Perhaps you will be, after you get good and hungry," snarled the other.

"In the first place," Clay said, "I haven't got the map. I couldn't get it for you if I wanted to. The boys wouldn't give it up."

"So you admit that you've got it?"

"I did have a rough drawing of this country," was the reply, "but it didn't seem to mean much to me."

"That's the document we want," the outlaw said, "and the quicker you give it up and get out of this district, the safer your hide will be."

Before Clay could make any response the man who had set off in pursuit of Alex came wrathfully into the cave. One hand was bleeding profusely, and there was a long cut on his left cheek. His clothing was disarranged, showing every evidence of a physical struggle.

"Where's the kid, Ben?" was asked.

The man's reply was a volley of epithets and profanity.

"You never let him get away from you, did you?" asked the other angrily. "You might bring him in in your pocket."

"You couldn't bring him in in a dray," answered Ben. "You might as well try to wrestle with a bumble bee. I got a grip on the little imp's collar, but before I could do a thing, he had a knife out. And then I got this," laying a dirty finger on a dirtier hand, "and this," pointing to the bleeding cheek. "And the next I knew, he was out of sight in the jungle."

"You're the brave boy!" snarled the other.

"Look here, Steve," Ben said, "if you think it's such a fine stunt to seize a Chicago newsboy, you just go and try it yourself. I've had enough of it. And that's no fairy tale."

Ben threw himself angrily on the floor of the cave, took a bottle of liquor and a roll of white cloth from under a fur robe which lay in a corner and proceeded to cleanse and bind up his wound. Clay watched him with a smile on his face. Steve was scowling frightfully.

"You needn't look so pleased over it, young feller," the outlaw said. "We'll get that little imp, yet. And we'll get your boat and your whole crew. And if we have much more trouble, we'll start a cemetery right here."

Clay made no reply at the time. He was wondering just how much the outlaws knew of the map. It seemed to him that the person who had drawn the first one might easily draw a second upon the loss of the first. He could not understand why the outlaws were making such strenuous efforts to secure the document when they might have procured a copy.

"What was it you said about a map?" the boy finally asked of Steve who sat now scowling at Ben. "Where did the map come from?"

"It came from a blooming Indian," was the sullen reply.

The fellow answered the question so promptly that Clay decided that he was merely a cheap tool in the employ of some master mind.

"Well," the boy went on, "why are you bothering us about it? Why don't you go and get him to make another?"

Steve hesitated and Clay listened very impatiently indeed for his answer. Finally the outlaw spoke:

"Blest if I know," he said. "We were told to get the map and that's all we know about it."

"And if you can't get it?" asked Clay.

"Then all we've got to do is to start a graveyard. If we can't get it, no one else shall use it. Mind that!"

"How long have you been waiting here for the *Rambler* to come back down the river?" asked the boy.

"Look here," replied Steve, apparently regretting his previous loquacity. "I've known a whole lot of boys to get along in the world without asking so many questions."

As he spoke he arose, went to the mouth of the cavern and glanced out. Ben followed him with the one eye which was free of the bandage, but did not arise. Directly a stone broke loose from a side of the gully and went pounding down to the rocky bottom. Then a low whistle was heard.

"Come on in," shouted Steve. "We did our part. What about you?"

The man who entered was roughly dressed. His face was covered by a week's growth of beard. His long black hair hung straggly about his ears. Yet, after all, the carriage of the head and body was not that of a riverman. Clay sat looking at him for a long time wondering where he had seen him before. He was certain that he had seen him before. Strive as he might, however, the boy could not associate the figure and pose with any scene in his past life. The man advanced into the cave and looked about.

"Where is the other boy?" he asked sharply.

Steve threw out a hand to indicate flight and snapped his fingers significantly. The newcomer frowned.

"And so you let him get away, did you?"

"Ask Ben about that," Steve replied, pointing to the bandaged face.

In spite of the newcomer's evident disappointment, a smile came to his face as he looked toward the wounded man.

"He's a bloomin' bumble bee!" growled Ben.

"And it seems that he stung you with steel," said the newcomer. "Brave men you are, to let a kindergarten kid get away with you!"

"What I say is," Ben answered, angrily, "that you can go and get him yourself. This here beauty mark I've got is enough for me."

"Don't get excited," smiled the newcomer. "It will all come out right in the wash. We'll get them all, in time."

Clay began to remember the voice.

"I have heard it before somewhere," he mused. "This man is not an outlaw in the common acceptance of the word. He is probably the man having this very delectable enterprise in charge."

Then he remembered the scene on the street in Montreal, and the story which had been told him by the campfire up the St. Lawrence came back to his mind.

This man might be the Lawyer Martin who had been referred to by the farmer. The lawyer, it had been stated, was apt in private theatricals and of pleasing personality. This man was disguised so far as clothing went, and his conversation showed that he was tactful and understood how to keep on the right side of the men with whom he mingled.

The more the boy studied over the problem, the more certain he became that the man who was handling the unlawful enterprise, designing to keep the Fontenelles out of their rights stood before him.

Presently Lawyer Martin, if it was he, turned a pair of keen yet half-humorous eyes in the direction of the boy.

"Did you have a pleasant trip up the river?" he asked.

"Fine!" replied Clay. "Plenty of good sport."

"If you had asked my advice," the other said, "you would have proceeded straight up the lakes from Ogdensburg. It would have been safer."

"If safety was the only thing we figured on when we started away," the boy answered, "we wouldn't have started at all. We would have remained at home and gone to bed."

"You seem to be quite a bright boy," the other suggested. "Why don't you give up the map turned over to you by mistake, and go on about your business? That's what you ought to do."

"Why don't you get another map?" asked Clay.

"Because," was the reply, "the old Indian who made the one you have was drowned on the night he turned it over to you."

"I'll tell you what I'll do," Clay said, "you come on board the *Rambler* with me and we'll give the map to Captain Joe, and then we'll all go together and deliver it to Fontenelle. It seems to belong to him."

"I think you'll change your mind," replied the other.

After a short whispered conversation with Steve and Ben, the man left the cavern. Clay would have given a good deal for some knowledge as to his objective point. He believed that the outlaws had a base of supplies other than the cavern on the peninsula, and he was wondering if the boys on the *Rambler* would be able to discover it.

After a time Ben began drinking from the bottle of liquor he had drawn from under the rug, and Steve, seeing that the fellow was drinking himself into insensibility, left the cave, first seeing that Clay was tied hand and foot and gagged with one of his own handkerchiefs.

The boy's position was an uncomfortable one. He moved restlessly about, rolling toward the entrance as if in quest of fresh air. Ben arose and stood watching him drunkenly.

"You're not so worse," the fellow cried. "If I had my way, I'd get out of this mix mighty quick. I'm a kind-hearted man, kid! The drunker I get, the kinder I am."

Clay was on the point of suggesting that he drink the remainder of the liquor in the bottle, so that he might be kind enough to untie him, but did not do so for obvious reasons.

The boy was in hopes that Ben would become too intoxicated to pay any attention to his movements, but he did not do so. Instead, he filled a cob pipe with villainous tobacco and sat down at the entrance to the cavern within a few feet of where the boy lay.

During all this time, the boy was wondering if Alex had gone back to the *Rambler* or whether he had trailed on after the men who had attempted his capture. In the latter case, the boy was evidently not very far away. He listened intently for some indication of the boy's presence, but none came. He wondered if the boys on the *Rambler* would make an effort to find him before night set in.

And so, gagged and bound, he spent a long, painful day. No one came to the cave, and Ben was his sole guardian. The man became talkative after a while and discussed the streets of Chicago, which he seemed to know well, but became silent whenever an incautious word regarding the present situation came to his lips.

When darkness came, Steve and two more burly ruffians made their appearance. They uncovered a box at the back of the cavern and, reaching in, drew out bread and canned fruit and vegetables. As the four sat feeding like a drove of swine, Ben observed Clay's eyes fixed hungrily on the food.

"Why don't you give the boy some of the chuck?" he asked, angrily.

"Here, kid," he added, taking the handkerchief from Clay's mouth, releasing his hands, and passing him a loaf of bread and tin of beef, "just help yourself to this table d'hôte dinner."

Steve and the others snarled out their objections to this procedure, but Clay was finally left to eat his scanty supper in peace.

After the men had finished eating, they arose and threw their cans and bottles into a shallow annex to the cave on the south.

"I'm great for keeping things in order," grinned Ben, giving a tin tomato can a particularly vigorous kick. "I always like to see things kept decent."

The can bounded against the wall, fell to the floor and rolled down a dark incline, and Clay's heart beat into his throat as he heard the splash of water.

CHAPTER XX—LIFTING A SUNKEN LAUNCH

After the departure from the *Rambler* of Clay and Alex, Captain Joe began exploring the little store rooms of the craft in search of cables and grappling hooks. He soon had quite a collection laying on the deck.

"What's the idea, Captain Joe?" asked Case.

"Well, boys," the captain replied, "you remember what the Quebec chief of police said regarding the *Cartier* and the perfectly good assortment of supplies lying at the bottom of the St. Lawrence river?"

"Sure, we remember that," Case replied.

"And you remember what Clay said about having discovered the boat as we came in? Why, he told us right where it is."

"Yes, he said he saw it on the bottom," Jule interrupted.

"Now, I have an idea," Captain Joe smiled, winking at the two boys, "that it would be all right for us to lift the launch while Clay is away. What do you say to that?"

"Great idea!" shouted Case.

"Then let's get at it," Jule suggested.

"The first thing to do," Captain Joe said, "is to find out exactly where the *Cartier* lies."

"Aw, I know that," Jule said, "Clay told me about that. It's right over there in about fifteen feet of water just below that submerged bar."

"Fifteen feet with or without the tide?" asked Captain Joe.

"Fifteen feet with the tide out," was the reply, "and the tide is out now, so we'd better be getting busy."

They swung the *Rambler* over to the north side of the bar and anchored. From this new position, across the white surface of the bottom, they could see the trunk cabin of the *Cartier* sitting squarely up in the water. The boat had evidently dropped straight down when scuttled, and she now lay on an almost even keel with her nose pointing upstream.

"Now, I tell you, boys," Captain Joe observed, "one of you must go down and attach a line to her forward towing bits. I'd go down myself, understand, only I'm so big and clumsy that I might displace too much water in the stream. Who'll go?"

"I'm the champion diver of the South Branch," Jule cried, "and I'll go down and have that line fast in about a second."

"It's a long dive," warned Captain Joe.

"I've stood on my head in deeper water than that," said the boy.

Case got out the rowboat and Jule was taken over to the place from which he was to dive. The end of the cable was passed to him and he dropped down. In a moment, he came climbing up the rope like a young monkey, shaking water over Case as he tumbled into the boat.

"Now get a-going," he said, "and we'll have this boat out of the mud before Clay and Alex return. I wonder what we'll find on board of her."

"You don't expect to find a lost channel, do you? Or a casket of family jewels?" asked Case, with a wink.

"I was thinking," Jule replied, "that we might find something to eat."

The boys rowed back to the *Rambler*, clambered on board, and the motor boat was started forward, one end of the cable attached to her after deck cleats. She pulled steadily for a moment under full power, but the launch refused to move. She was evidently deeply imbedded in the bottom.

"I reckon we'll have to go down and push," Case grinned.

"You just wait, boys, and I'll try it once more," Captain Joe said.

The second attempt was successful, and the *Cartier* was drawn slowly, carefully, to the bar. When she left her original position on the bottom of the river, she listed to one side and so came in almost on her beam ends.

"I guess we've spilled some of her crockery," Jule laughed as the boat showed one side of her hull. "Fontenelle may kick on our wearing out his furniture."

"Oh, he'll be glad enough to get his boat back," Captain Joe remarked. "Now, we'll see if we can pump her out."

The launch now lay tipping only slightly on the bar, her keel having cut into the soft sand, with her gunwales two or three inches above the surface of the river. The cabin stood well out of the river, of course, but the great body of water in the cockpit and over the cabin floor held her down.

"Now we'll see if we can't pump her out," Captain Joe said. "I don't understand what sent her to the bottom. She looks to be as fit as a fiddle."

"Perhaps we can tell that when we get the water out of her," Case suggested. "There may be a big hole in her bottom."

The *Rambler's* pump was now put in operation, but the interior of the launch remained full of water. The river rushed in as fast as the pumps removed it, so the craft did not rise to the surface.

"You'll have to get your feet wet again, Jule," Case said. "Just drop over into the cockpit and see if you can see any hole in the bottom."

Jule did as requested, floundering and splashing about in the water as though he considered the enterprise only a bit of fun.

"Nothing doing here!" he shouted back. "There's no hole in the bottom that I can see. There may be one under the double floor in the cabin but I don't believe it."

"Look for the sea-cock," cried Captain Joe, leaning over the gunwale of the *Rambler*. "It may have been opened. It ought to be right there in the cockpit close to the wall of the cabin."

Jule felt around in the water for a time, ducked his head under in order to get closer to the bottom now and then and finally raised his dripping face with a shout.

"I've found it!" he cried. "The sea-cock was wide open and that's what sunk the launch."

"Wonder Fontenelle wouldn't have investigated," said Case.

"The launch was probably sunk in the night," Captain Joe suggested, "when the members of the party were away. When they returned to the boat, of course, they had no grappling apparatus or anything to help raise her, and so they just went away and left her in the mud."

"That's probably it," Case said, turning on the pump.

"Hold on," Jule cried. "You wait till I get something to plug this sea-cock with. I can't turn the valve. It's rusty."

The boy was given a basket of waste which had been used in cleaning the motors, and in a short time the sea-cock was securely plugged.

Then the pumps were set in motion again and in a very short time the *Cartier* was virtually free of water.

"That's a mighty handsome boat," Captain Joe observed as the launch lay on the surface. "If I had her down on the South Branch, I could have the time of my life every day in the week."

The boys worked over the boat for some time drying off the woodwork and fixing the valve of the sea-cock so it would close.

"Of course, she won't run now," Captain Joe explained, "because the batteries and the magneto are soaked with water. We can transfer new apparatus from the *Rambler* and, as she has plenty of gasoline, she will go like a duck on a mill-pond."

"I guess Clay will think we have been going some to get that boat off the bottom," laughed Case.

Captain Joe looked at his watch, his face clouding as he did so.

"Why, look here," he said. "We've been a long time on this job. It is after one o'clock."

"We might have known that by the tide coming in," Case said.

"I wasn't thinking about the water," the captain laughed. "I was thinking about Clay and Alex. Now, where do you suppose those two scamps are? They ought to have been here long ago."

"Perhaps they've found the lost channel!" Jule put in.

"It is more likely they found a nest of outlaws they couldn't get away from," was Case's idea of the situation. "I think we ought to do something about it right now," he added.

"I am afraid," Captain Joe said, poking a stubby finger into Case's side, "that it takes you boys about half your time to find each other when you go off on these river trips. First one gets lost and then the other."

"That's all right," Case replied, "but every time a fellow gets lost he butts into valuable information. Clay may pick up

those Fontenelle diamonds while he's gone, or find the lost charter."

"It's up to us to do something," Jule insisted. "After dinner, we'll go out on the peninsula and see what we can discover if Captain Joe will remain on the boat. We won't be gone long."

Dinner was hastily prepared and hastily eaten, and then Case and Jule rowed to the shore in the *Rambler's* boat, the canoe having been left on the bank by Clay. The captain saw them disappear in the thicket and then sat down in the cabin to watch and wait.

In less than half an hour, he heard shouts on the shore, and then two figures came plunging down the high bank into the river some distance above the location of the *Rambler*.

The captain reached for his gun and stood waiting, fearful at first that a bold attempt to board the *Rambler* was being made, but as the two figures in the water came closer, he saw Case and Jule alternately swimming on the surface and diving. The reason for this apparently strange conduct on the part of the boys was soon discovered, for bullets began whistling about their heads and about the deck of the *Rambler*.

However, the swimmers reached the deck of the boat unharmed and dropped down behind the gunwales.

"Use your gun, Captain Joe!" Case panted. "Alex is back there in the woods trying to get to the river."

CHAPTER XXI—DOWN IN THE WHIRLPOOL

When Clay heard the splash of water as the tin can disappeared from sight, he began wondering if what he had heard had reached the ears of the others. The lost channel was always in his mind, and he was wondering if the presence of a subterranean body of water there could have any connection with the channel which had disappeared as if by magic two or three hundred years before.

In order to settle the question as to what the outlaws knew concerning the water which must lie directly under their cave, he asked:

"Will some of you men give me a drink of water?"

"Aw, go take a drink out of the river," was the reply he received.

"Gladly!" cried Clay. "Just untie my feet and I'll show you how quickly I can get to the river."

The men laughed heartily at what they considered a good joke and continued their preparations for leaving the cavern. In a short time the man believed by Clay to be Lawyer Martin made his appearance, and then the party started up the gully turning to the east and walking over the roughest territory Clay had yet seen in that vicinity. The leader of the party paused now and then to inspect the landscape and to listen for sounds from the west river.

"What were your friends doing this afternoon," he asked presently. "They have dug up a new boat somewhere."

"I don't know," replied Clay, stumbling over the ground with two husky guards close to his sides. "Was it my friends who were doing the shooting?" he added.

"Shooting?" the leader repeated in apparent amazement. "Did you hear any shooting? Which way did it come from?"

"From the west," was the brief reply.

Clay's escorts glanced at each other significantly, but said nothing. The boy was satisfied from the attitude of those about him that his chums had been attacked, but, as a matter of fact, he had heard no shooting, being at the time it took place in the cavern opening from the gully.

After what seemed to Clay to be an endless journey, the party came to the west shore of the east river. Here, in the glade to the north of the rocky ledge which they had followed, was a fairly comfortable camp with tents and bunks and plenty of cooking appurtenances.

Clay was pushed into a tent and his hands and feet bound again.

"We can't take any chances on your jumping us in the night," the leader said as he saw the ropes adjusted around the boy's ankles and wrists. "If you only had a little sense, we might make you more comfortable."

Time and again Clay had the name of Lawyer Martin on his lips. He was almost positive that the leader of the outlaws was the disguised man he had met in Montreal, the man of whom the farmer had spoken at the campfire. However, he conquered the inclination to address the fellow by the title which he believed to belong to him.

"If he really is Lawyer Martin," the boy reasoned, "and I let him know that I know the truth, he'll take good care that I never get out into the world again to tell of his connection with these outlaws."

That night was a long one for the boy. One of the outlaws walked watchfully about the camp all night and another sat close by his bunk watching with unwearying eyes. It was plain that they considered his capture of great importance. He reasoned that it was because they had failed in any attack that might have been made on his chums, and had not succeeded in securing the map they sought.

He did not know whether Alex had escaped the clutches of the ruffians or not, but he believed that if the boy really had

been taken prisoner he would have been brought to the camp he himself occupied.

The camp was astir at daybreak, when most of the outlaws disappeared from view, going in every direction except across the river. Clay would have given a good deal for exact information regarding their plans for the day, but he could only surmise that all their energies would be directed toward the destruction of the *Rambler* and the driving away of his chums.

While he lay pondering over the possibilities of the day, the leader of the party came to his side.

"How do you feel this morning, my boy?" he asked lightly.

"I feel like I'd like to stretch my legs a little," was the reply.

"If I gave you the privilege," asked the other, "will you promise to make no attempt to escape?"

"I'm not making any promises," Clay replied, "so I suppose I'll have to remain where I am."

"But you can't get away," the leader insisted.

"How do you know I can't get away?" replied Clay, laughing up into the man's face.

"Because we've got you tied hard and fast," was the reply.

"I've read in the papers," the leader went on, "about this Captain Joe bulldog of yours and this Teddy bear cub doing wonderful things in the way of helping you boys out of trouble, but they are up against the impossible here."

"I'm sorry," Clay said with a shrug of the shoulders, "but you know just as well as I do that no game is ever played out as it should be until the last card is on the table."

The leader smiled whimsically and turned away. After talking for some moments with the only man present in the camp, he turned to the west and disappeared. Then the man he had last talked with approached the boy.

"What do you want for breakfast?" he asked.

"Pie!" roared Clay. "Green apple pie, red apple pie, dried apple pie, and pie pie. And if you've got any chicken pie, that will come in all right later on."

"Your troubles don't seem to affect your appetite, kid," laughed the man whom Clay discovered to be the cook of the camp. "You're a jolly kind of a fellow, anyway, and I'm going to give you the best there is in the larder."

In half an hour a really good breakfast of ham and eggs, potatoes, bread and butter, and coffee was served to the boy. He ate heartily, of course, as most boys will under any circumstances, talking with the cook as the meal proceeded.

Directly the leader came to the edge of the little glade and beckoned to the cook. The latter looked from his employer to the boy and back again. The leader beckoned imperatively, and the cook left the tent and approached him. Together they stepped away into the edge of the thicket and engaged in an animated conversation.

Clay heard the leader ask if the ropes which held his hands and feet were still in place, and heard the cook reply that he supposed they were as he had not examined them.

"Just for the fun of the thing, now," Clay mused, "I'll find out whether that chap is right."

He pulled away at the cords on his wrist, but for a long time was unable to move them beyond the limit of the motion which had enabled him to use a fork at his breakfast.

"I wonder," he thought, "why they didn't give me a knife to eat that ham with. Never mind, I can make a knife of my own."

He set his elbow against an earthen plate which lay on the ground, breaking it into several pieces. The largest fragment, he got into his mouth and began to saw his wrist ropes against it. The strands of the rope soon gave way and the boy's hands were free. It took him but a moment to untie the cords which held his ankles.

Thus released, he listened for a moment to make sure that the two men in the edge of the thicket were not observing him. All was still in that direction and he finally ventured to the opening of the tent and looked out. The two men were nowhere in sight.

"Now or never," thought the boy. "While those fellows are cooking up some scheme for the destruction of the *Rambler*, I'll make a quiet sneak. The peninsula must be crowded with outlaws, all in search of a lost channel, and so I'll have to take to the river."

The boy was out of the glade in an instant, crouching low, of course, but making good time until he reached the margin of the river. Hoping to see a boat, he paused there a moment and looked about. As he did so, the roar of the falls which had obstructed the progress of the *Rambler* on her first trip to that vicinity, reached his ears and he knew that a boat would be practically useless, as it would never live through the falling water. The only thing for him to do, seemed to be to take to the water and keep as much out of sight as possible under the bank.

He sprang in and struck out down stream wondering if he could pass the falls without returning to the shore. After swimming a few strokes, he heard a shout from the bank and saw the leader and the cook hastening toward the river. The current was strong there just above the falls and the boy was an excellent swimmer, so the men did not decrease

the distance between themselves and their quarry.

"If you don't stop, we'll shoot!" the cook cried.

"And shoot to kill!" came the voice of the leader.

For a moment Clay swam on blindly under a rain of bullets but he had no idea whatever of voluntarily returning to the shore. The leaden pellets splashed into the water all about him for a time but presently as the men got better range, they began making closer acquaintance.

The roar of the falls was now almost deafening. The boy could hear a torrent of water pouring down upon broken rocks. He knew now that it would be impossible for him to negotiate the falls by way of the river. He must swim to the shore and pass around the danger point. This would subject him to the direct fire of his pursuers.

At last, almost hopeless, he dived into the water to escape the rain of bullets. To his surprise, he did not come to the surface again when he used his strength in that direction.

Either his body had lost its buoyancy or the water was pulling him down. He seemed to be in a whirlpool. The force of the water drew at his arms and his legs and clutched him about the chest. Around and around he whirled, until he grew dizzy with the motion and his lungs seemed bursting for want of air.

Then, almost unconscious, he knew that he was being drawn through an opening into which the water poured with awful force. He knew that he was being tossed to and fro in something like a basin or pool a moment later, and felt the fresh air creeping into his lungs.

The water where he lay did not seem to be more than three or four feet deep but the current was swift and steady. There was no light anywhere. The boy groped forward with his hands outstretched until he came to what seemed to be a ledge of rock. There, exhausted and almost unconscious from his exertions, he dropped down and his mind became a blank.

When he returned to consciousness, a single shaft of light penetrating the darkness of the place showed him to be in a cavern the dimensions of which he had no means of knowing. The ledge upon which he had fallen lay a yard or so above the surface of an underground stream. He could see the light glancing on the water and hear the roar of the whirlpool which had brought him into this subterranean place.

"I've found the lost channel, I guess," he thought bitterly, "and I guess there'll be two of us lost—a lost river and a lost boy."

After a time, he felt his way along the ledge only to find that it came to an abrupt termination against a shoulder of rock.

CHAPTER XXII—WHAT THE EDDY BROUGHT UP

When Case and Jule gained the deck of the *Rambler*, crying that Alex was back in the forest pursued by the outlaws, Captain Joe laid out a choice assortment of automatic revolvers along the deck behind the starboard gunwale. The dripping boys crouched down and waited.

"He wasn't very far behind us," Case said directly.

"Yes," Jule put in. "He ought to be here before long."

Captain Joe, watching the boys whimsically, pushed the revolvers around so they would be within easy reach. The deck looked like an armory.

"You outran him, did you, lads?" the old captain asked.

"We wanted to stay back and come in with him," Case explained, "but he wouldn't have it. He said that if we separated and ran in different directions, one party would be pretty sure to get in, while we might all be captured if we stuck together. He was right, of course, but we hated to leave him. He ought to be here in a minute or two."

"Did he say where Clay was?" asked Captain Joe.

"We didn't have much chance to talk with him," Case answered. "The outlaws were swarming over the peninsula, and kept us ducking and dodging most of the time. There must be a dozen or more toughs in there."

There was no more firing from the shore for a time, and those on board the *Rambler* hoped that Alex had succeeded in eluding his pursuers.

Presently the bushes at the margin of the stream parted and a face looked out—a heavy bearded face with fierce eyes.

"Good evening, pard!" Jule called out. "Come aboard!"

The fellow disappeared without making any reply.

"That settles it!" Case exclaimed. "We won't see Alex right away. The outlaws haven't caught him, and so they are watching along the shore in the hopes of picking him up when he leaves the thicket. I'd like to throw a stick of dynamite in there and blow up the whole outfit."

The supposition that Alex would not be seen at that time proved to be incorrect, however, for a shout was now heard from the launch, and Alex was seen waving a cap from the cockpit.

The cap soon disappeared from sight, however, for bullets began dropping down from the shore. On the *Rambler*, the boys were behind the heavy gunwales, and Alex was hidden by the cockpit walls so, beyond splintering the railings and making havoc in the finely-decorated cabin of the launch, the bullets did no damage.

"Now, how do you think that little customer got out to the launch without getting perforated?" asked Case.

"He swam out, of course," replied Jule, "—he just ducked under and swam out. I wish we could get him on board the *Rambler*."

"Now, that tow-line," Case said, "is too long. The boy can't swim under water all that distance. Can't we pull the launch up?"

"Nothing in the world to prevent it," said Captain Joe. "If we can get the end of the line into the cabin, the launch will come up like a duck. Then Alex can come aboard without much danger."

This plan was adopted. The *Cartier* was easily drawn up to the stern of the *Rambler* and Alex stepped aboard.

In a moment he was lying behind the gunwale with the others.

"Where did you say Clay was?" asked Captain Joe.

"I haven't seen him for a long time," was the reply. "We saw that wharf rat, Max, in the forest and I started away to follow him. At that time Clay was coming toward the boat. I thought he might be here."

"And so Max has shown up again, has he?" cried Case. "We'll have to land that boy where he won't be so active."

While the boys were discussing the situation a grating, flopping sound was heard in the cabin, and Jule rushed in just in time to see the cable which had held the *Cartier* to the *Rambler* drawing through the open window. In the excitement of getting Alex on board, the boys had neglected to secure the line and the launch was now dropping down stream.

Jule sprang for the end of the line, but did not reach it. It dropped down to the after deck and was drawn into the water.

"That's a nice thing!" shouted the boy, rushing to the motors. "Now we've got to go down and catch that boat!"

It was some moments before the anchor could be lifted and the *Rambler* turned and sent down stream, so the *Cartier* was halfway to the little bay running in behind the Peninsula before the boys caught up with her.

"She won't get away again," Captain Joe declared shortening up the line and making it fast to the after deck cleats of the motor boat. "We haven't got any time to go chasing runaway launches!"

As the old captain spoke, Case laid a hand on his arm and pointed to the projection on the peninsula behind which Captain Joe had listened on the night he had left the *Rambler* during his watch.

"There's a blaze over there," the boy said. "They must have a lot of men here to keep a force over there and another one between the two rivers."

"Young man," Captain Joe replied, "the man who is responsible for this whole mix-up is over there on the point, with a band of cutthroats."

"Why don't they go up and help the others?" asked Jule.

"It's just this way," Captain Joe replied, "we disappointed them very much when we got the *Cartier* out of the water. That rascal on the point wanted to have the pleasure of raising the boat himself."

"Then why didn't he do it?" asked Alex. "He had time enough before we got here."

"I don't know why he didn't," answered the captain, "but he didn't, and now he's sore because we got to it first. It seems to me that he might have ordered his wrecking apparatus here and got the boat out before we arrived."

"What do you think he wants of the launch?" Case asked. "According to all accounts, he's rich enough to buy a dozen."

"I can tell you about that," Captain Joe replied with a grin. "You remember when I stood watch one night, and you all said I looked sleepy the next day. Well, that night, I paddled over to the point and heard what those people were talking about. There is something on board the *Cartier* they want. I couldn't understand exactly what they said about it, but it is something in some way connected with a safe."

"The safe on the wall in the lost channel!" laughed Alex. "They think Fontenelle knows how to get to the safe if he can only get to the lost channel first."

"Well, we got to the launch first, anyway," Jule suggested. "And it strikes me that we'd better go aboard and look her over. Did you see anything remarkable when you were there, Alex?" he added.

"Didn't see a thing," was the reply. "I flopped out of the water into the cockpit and never even looked inside the cabin. I wish now that I had."

"Come on, then, let's you and I take a look through the cabin while Captain Joe and Case run the *Rambler* back to her

old position," Jule suggested.

The two boys sprang down into the cockpit, paused a moment to get their balance and opened the cabin door. As they did so, a scrambling noise was heard inside, and both were knocked nearly off their feet as a body launched against them, turned to the railing and shot over into the river.

From his position on the deck where he had been thrown by the impact of the collision, Alex looked up at Jule with a whimsical smile on his face.

"Did you see that?" he asked.

"I felt it," Jule replied, rubbing his head.

"What did it feel like?" asked Alex

"Like a battering ram," was the reply.

"Well," Alex said, "it might have been a battering ram, but it looked to me like Max, and it's dollars to apples that he caused the *Cartier* to start downstream. A few pulls from the water would have started the line running out."

"That's just it!" Jule exclaimed. "That's exactly the idea!"

Captain Joe now leaned over the gunwale of the *Rambler* and cried out:

"Which one of you boys fell overboard?"

"That was Max," Alex replied. "He's been here in the cabin of the launch for nobody knows how long, ransacking the lockers and destroying papers. He must have come aboard about as soon as it was lifted out of the water. The scamp certainly keeps busy, anyway."

Captain Joe passed over to the launch, and a long search was made through the owner's secretary and the drawers and boxes containing documents. The papers were wet, of course, and many of them were badly torn, but the purport of each was by no means doubtful. The great mass consisted of bills, newspaper clippings, personal letters and the hundred and one memoranda made by the captain and owner of a pleasure launch.

"I guess we'll have to give it up," the captain said, after a time. "There's one good thing about it, and that is that Max didn't meet with any more success than we did."

"How do you know?" asked Case.

"Because," answered the Captain, "he would have been off the boat before we ever got to it."

"Perhaps he wasn't here as long as you think he was," Alex put in. "Clay and I saw him up in the woods when we first went ashore."

The papers were spread out neatly and left to dry, and everything in the drenched cabin placed in as good shape as possible. Then the boys all returned to the *Rambler*, now nearing her old position in the west river.

Much to the surprise of all on board, there were no signs of the outlaws when the boat came to her old anchorage. Night was falling and there were no indications of hostile influences anywhere. Before darkness settled down over the scene, the boys drew the *Rambler* a little farther up the stream and prepared to pass a watchful and anxious night.

Alex proposed that he go ashore with the bulldog and make an effort to find Clay, but the proposition was instantly vetoed by the others.

"You'll get lost yourself," Case declared, "and we'd have two boys to look up instead of one. I think we'd better all stay on the boat."

"And that's good sense, too," Captain Joe put in. "Clay knows where we are, and he'll come to us if he can get away. If he doesn't come during the night, we'll get out after him in the morning."

"He may be waiting for darkness," Case suggested. "In that case, he ought to be here soon. He must be hungry."

"He surely will, and we'll keep supper waiting for him in this cabin all night," said Alex "When the outlaws had me pinched, they didn't give me anything to eat. I'll get even for that!"

The night passed slowly, drearily, and Clay did not come. As the reader understands, all through the dark hours, the boy lay bound in a tent not far from the west shore of the east river.

Shortly after daylight, breakfast being over, the boys began planning for a visit to the shore.

The canoe and the rowboat were both on the bank still in plain sight.

"You swim over and get the boats, Jule," Case said. "You haven't had as many open air baths as we have since we started on this trip."

"Now, boys," interposed Captain Joe, "I wouldn't touch those boats if I were you. If there are any outlaws in those woods at all, they're watching those boats. The first boy that swims up to one of them will be captured."

"Then we've all got to swim," declared Case ruefully.

"We're getting used to it this time," cried Alex

"I don't believe there's any one over there," Jule said. "They wouldn't keep still so long."

"I notice that you don't get your head up above the gunwale very often," Alex laughed.

"Look here, boys," Captain Joe said, pointing out of the cabin window. "Here's a place where the river widens without any good excuse for doing so. I talked to Clay about that, and his idea was that an underground stream runs in in this vicinity. Now, your eyes are better than mine. Look upstream and see if you can observe any current which might be made by the flowing in of a subterranean river."

"You're all right, Captain Joe," Case exclaimed. "You can't forget that lost channel any more than we can."

"I don't know whether there's a lost channel or not," the captain replied, "but I do know that there's a fresh supply of water coming into this stream right about here."

Case took a field glass and looked up the stream.

"There surely is a current starting in close to that bank," he finally said. "I can see sticks and bubbles popping up from the bottom. There's a spring there, all right."

Alex took the glass and studied the river for a long time. Then he seized Captain Joe by the shoulder and pointed.

"Say," he said, "there's a nude body coming up out of that eddy Case saw. You can see it under the water, drifting down this way."

The boy dropped the glass clattering on the deck and sprang into the water.

"Here, here, boy! Come back!" cried Captain Joe.

"It's Clay!" shouted Jule. "Can't you see it's Clay!"

In a moment, Jule was in the water, too, and both boys were diving after the figure they had seen in the eddy.

They caught it in a moment, and managed to get it to the boat. Captain Joe and Case supplied ropes, and in an incredibly short space of time, Clay lay stretched out on the deck.

"He's dead!" cried Alex "I just know he's dead!"

"They stripped him of his clothes and threw him in!" wailed Jule.

CHAPTER XXIII—THE LOST CHARTER IS FOUND

An instant after being laid on the deck, however, Clay opened his eyes and smiled up into the faces of his friends.

"He'll be saying, 'Where am I?' in a minute!" Alex cried, dancing joyfully about the prostrate figure. "That is the usual thing in stories, you know. He'll have to say, 'Where am I?' and I'll have to tell him that he mustn't talk. Look at him grin."

"What gets me," Captain Joe said, lifting the boy into a sitting position, "is how you came up from the bottom of the river without ever diving down to it. It looks uncanny."

"The lost channel!" answered Clay weakly.

"You found it, did you?" asked Alex.

"Boys, boys," said Captain Joe, "never mind the lost channel until we get this boy dressed and fed up."

The processes suggested by the captain were quickly accomplished, and in a short time, Clay sat in the cabin telling of the adventures of the morning. The boys listened wide-eyed.

"Now let me get this thing right," Captain Joe said. "You went into a whirlpool above the falls and came out into a cavern?"

"That's just it, exactly," Clay replied, still weak from his exertions. "I landed on a ledge, where I lay unconscious for a few moments and then followed down the channel of the underground river. There is plenty of room in the cavern," he continued, "and plenty of fresh air, but the place is shy on light. I fell many times in the darkness."

"I thought it wasn't safe for me to be in there!" grinned Alex.

"I thought it wasn't safe for me be in there!" Clay replied with a wink, "and so I made my way out as swiftly as I could. At this end of the channel, the water runs out just below the surface of the west river, and I thought I'd better reduce my weight as much as possible before going through the opening, so I took off my clothes and was pushed out by the current."

"Looked mighty funny to see you come floating out of the river without ever having gone in!" laughed Jule.

"Now, boys," said Captain Joe, after the boys had discussed all phases of the situation, "let's size this thing up together. In the first place, Clay has undoubtedly discovered the lost channel."

"It might have been found years ago," Clay said, "if the men who tried to describe it had only said that it was a subterranean stream."

"And now, the question is," went on the captain, "whether the charter and the family jewels are anywhere in the cavern through which the lost stream runs."

"It seemed to me," Clay broke in, "that the cavern was big enough to hold a small sized city. It is just the kind of a place where one would naturally hide valuables."

"It seems to me," Alex complained, "that the hardest part of our job is still to come, even if we have discovered the lost channel. We can't go up there and dive through the whirlpool, as Clay did, because the outlaws would perforate us before we got anywhere near the falls."

"I've been thinking of that," Clay said, "and I believe there is a way to get into the cavern without getting wet. When I lay in the cavern, high up on the ridge, before being taken to the shore, the men with me emptied several tin cans of food and pitched them into a corner of the cavern. One of the cans was sent along with a kick, and I heard a splash of water when it fell."

"Je-rusalem!" cried Alex. "Show me where that cavern is, and I'll take a rope and go through the opening where the can fell!"

"What would these fellows on shore be doing all the time you were reaching the cavern?" asked Case.

"I am certain," Clay went on, "that there is an opening from the floor of the cavern to the chamber in which the lost river runs, for when I came down, I saw a blur of light about halfway through the journey."

"That settles that part of it, then," Captain Joe said. "We'll have to wait for a suitable opportunity and get into the chamber by way of the cave. And now," he continued, "I propose that we move out to the bay or the St. Lawrence, where we won't be under the guns of the enemy, and cook several square meals. Honest, boys," he went on, "I've been so worried lately, that I've almost lost my appetite."

"Yes," Case laughed, "I notice you consumed only half a dozen of those Bismark pancakes for breakfast."

The *Rambler* was dropped down to the bay with the launch still by her side, and, once out of rifle shot, the boys enjoyed the freedom of the deck.

"Now, we'll stay here until night," Captain Joe said, "and then we'll see what we can do towards finding that cavern and dropping down into the lost channel. We ought to explore it in one night with the help of our searchlights."

The plan mapped out by the captain was successfully carried out. Leaving Jule on board the *Rambler*, the other members of the party crept cautiously ashore that night, and were led directly to the cavern by Clay. They were not disturbed during the journey. Off to the east, they saw the reflection of a campfire and the sound of many voices showed the boys that the outlaws were not at all anxious to conceal their presence.

The opening leading from the cavern to the channel of the stream was large enough for even Captain Joe to pass through with comfort. Directly under the opening was a ledge of rock and here the boys landed. Almost at the point of entry they saw marks on the wall which indicated that at some distant time an inscription had been carved there.

"We can't read the words," Clay said, flashing his searchlight over the wall, "but at least it tells us that this is somewhere near the scene of the old-time operations."

Alex, who had been poking about around an angle of rock, now gave a great shout of delight which called the boys to his side.

"There's your old safe!" he cried, pointing up to a niche in the wall, "and it's dollars to doughnuts that the lost charter and the jewels are inside of it!"

It was the work of only a few moments to bring the safe down from the ledge of rock to where the boys stood. It was merely a box of steel, not more than a foot in diameter each way, and was evidently constructed with thin walls for its weight was not great. However, it was tightly closed and the boys could see no means by which it might be opened. There was not even a keyhole or a button.

"We'll take it back to the *Rambler*," Captain Joe said. "Perhaps we can find a way to open it there."

"We'll find a way to open it," Alex exclaimed, "when we get hold of the document Max was looking for in the cabin of the *Cartier*."

"Good idea!" Captain Joe replied. "If you wait long enough, you'll always find something like intelligence in the head of a boy!"

When the party returned to the cabin, daylight was just showing in the east and the noisy revel of those at the campfire had ceased.

"I tell you what it is," Captain Joe exclaimed, "those fellows have given up chasing us for the reason that they have arrived at the conclusion that we don't know any more about the lost channel than they do. At first, they doubtless

thought the map might direct us to it, but now they have given up that idea, and are satisfied to let us hunt for the lost charter if we want to."

"Yes, but they are still watching us, all the same," Clay replied, "expecting to take the proceeds of the discovery away from us if we are lucky enough to find what both parties are seeking for."

This explanation of Captain Joe's seemed to be the correct one, for the boys were not molested while on their way to the *Rambler* with the steel box. Having secured the box, the question now was how to get it open, so nearly all that day, they searched among the papers in the cabin of the *Cartier* for some clue to the mystery. Before night it was found in a bundle of old papers stowed away in a secret draw at the bottom of the owner's secretary, where it had lain for a long time.

"This is easy," Clay said holding the paper up between his thumb and fingers. "The box is only an old French puzzle box. Press on the upper right hand front corner and a button will show. Press the button and the box will open, and there you are."

"What the dickens do you think the Fontenelles left this paper laying around in a place like this for?" asked Case. "Do you suppose they knew what it was?"

"Of course they knew," Clay answered, "and the paper was brought along so that the box might be opened as soon as found."

Although the hinges and lock of the steel box were rusted, it was opened with little difficulty and there were the family jewels and the lost charter! In spite of difficulties, the boys had succeeded in their quest. The search of more than three hundred years was ended!

When the *Rambler* and the *Cartier* started away toward Quebec, they left the men who had opposed them still on the peninsula. Reaching the city, they lost no time in communicating the result of their expedition to the Fontenelles. It is needless to say that the latter were overjoyed at the recovery of the charter and the jewels.

At the close of the interview between the elder Fontenelle and Clay, the former wrote a check for ten thousand dollars and passed it over to the boy. Clay smiled as he passed it back.

"You remember," he said, "that we recovered the *Cartier*, and that we searched her papers pretty thoroughly to discover the secret of the steel box. Well, Captain Joe, our old friend from Chicago, has conceived a great liking for the boat, and if you can induce your son to give us the launch, and also to make no trouble for the poor people who will suffer under this charter, we shall consider ourselves amply repaid for all our trouble. It has been a pleasant excursion, anyway."

"So far as the boat is concerned," the old man Fontenelle replied, "you are entitled to it as salvage. Besides, now that the charter and the jewels have been discovered, through your agency, the *Cartier* will no longer be elaborate enough for my son. He will have a handsome yacht built, anyway, so you may as well take the launch. So far as making trouble for those who have occupied our lands for years goes, no one shall suffer except those who combined their wealth to obstruct us.

"And so you see," he continued, "that the check is yours after all."

And the old gentleman would not accept "No." for an answer.

"One thing I should like to know," Clay said, before leaving Mr. Fontenelle, "and that concerns the mysterious map we received and the manner in which it came into our possession."

"I can set you right on that point," the old man said. "The man who gave you the map and who was drowned that same night was long in our employ. He finally became angry at some fancied slight and disappeared taking with him valuable papers. It is believed that the crude map delivered to you was among the papers he took. At any rate, on the day before you saw him, he expressed to a relative remorse at what he had done and promised to restore the papers. How he came to deliver the map to you, knowing the *Cartier* as well as he did, is something which will never be known."

The boys left Quebec the next morning without waiting for the return of the men who were still looking for the lost channel on Cartier island. Therefore they never saw either Lawyer Martin or Max again, but they read later in the news dispatches of Max being sentenced to the penitentiary for highway robbery.

The boys went over the old ground on the river again to Ogdensburg, where the *Cartier* was fully equipped with new electrical apparatus and then the two started away on their long journey up the lakes.

Captain Joe, was, of course, overjoyed at becoming the owner of the launch, which is now one of the show vessels on the South Branch.

Captain Joe, the bulldog, and Teddy when in Chicago alternate between the *Rambler* and the *Cartier*, having a welcome on either boat.

The boys were not content to remain long on the South Branch. In fact, within a few days, they fitted the *Rambler* out for a trip down the Ohio river. What occurred during this trip will be related in the next volume of this series entitled: The Six River Motor Boat Boys on the Ohio; or, the Three Blue Lights.

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