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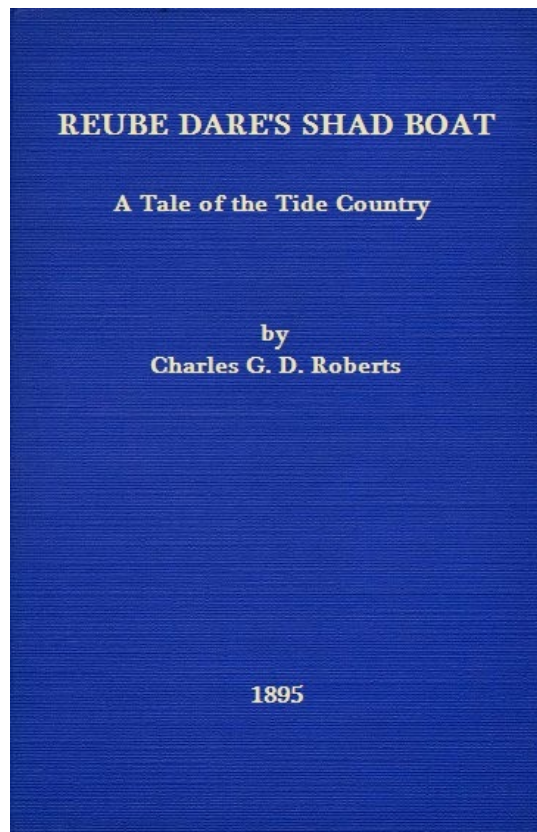
Author: Sir Charles G. D. Roberts

Release date: May 30, 2015 [EBook #49081]

Language: English

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

THE RAID FROM BEAUSEJOUR,
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REUBE DARE'S SHAD BOAT

A Tale of the Tide Country

BY

CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS



NEW YORK: HUNT & EATON
CINCINNATI: CRANSTON & CURTS
1895

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Composition, electrotyping,
printing, and binding by
HUNT & EATON,
150 Fifth Ave., New York.

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ILLUSTRATIONS.

["She's adrift!" he shouted. "Come on! Come on!"](#)

[The bull swerved slightly and shot past](#)

[Will marched ahead, carrying the torch](#)

[It was coin—all coin!](#)

[Then came the shining, silvery sides of a dozen shad](#)

["I think we'll make it," he said to himself](#)

[Will and Reube bent their bodies to the pull](#)

REUBE DARE'S SHAD BOAT.

A Tale of the Tide Country.

CHAPTER I.

The "Dido" Goes Adrift.

THE road from Frosty Hollow to Westcock, after climbing the hill by the red creek and passing Mrs. Carter's yellow cottage, ran through a piece of dark and ancient fir woods. With the sighing of the firs there mixed a deeper sound, the voice of the wild tides of the changing Tantramar, unseen and far below. Turning sharply to the right, the road presently emerged from the woods and came upon a very different picture from that which it had left behind. It traversed the face of a long, wide, steep slope of upland, set here and there with a gray or white cottage, here and there a little grove. From the upland foot a mile-wide belt of marsh stretched to the waters of the open bay. The pale-green marsh was divided sharply from the yellow and flashing waves by the long lines of the dike, to which it owed its existence as good dry land. At intervals could be seen small creeks winding through the grassy level. Every creek mouth formed a little haven, clustered about with net reels, and crowded with the boats of the shad fishers.

Out from the whispering wood and into the fresh June sunlight of the open came two tallish youths, walking slowly and talking with the joyous zest of old friends who had been long parted. The older-looking of the two was Will Carter, just home from college for the summer vacation. Two years of college life had changed him little. He was the same slim, thoughtful, discreet, yet blithely dauntless lad who had lifted the mortgage from his mother's farm and punished the ruffian Baizley, and softened the hard old heart of Mr. Hand.^[A] College study had increased the somewhat scholarly pallor of his face, but college athletics had added poise and grace to the movements of his well-knit muscles. He had hastened home to his mother immediately on the close of the college, leaving his brother Ted to take a month's canoe trip through the inland waters.

Will's present companion, Reuben Dare, was a chum only second to Ted in his love. Reube Dare was just eighteen. He was about the same height as Will, but of a much heavier build. His was also a heavier and slower nature, but one of faithful loyalty and courage combined with strong common sense. His hair was light like Will's, but his face was round and ruddy. At a hasty glance one might fancy that he was good-natured to the verge of being "soft," but there was a steady, controlling gleam in his light gray eyes which made folk very slow to presume on his good nature. In fact, his eyes gave one the peculiar impression of having reached full manhood before the rest of his face. He swung his long arms loosely as he walked, and occasionally he stumbled in the ruts, being too much absorbed in watching his comrade's words to note just where he was stepping.

It had long been Reube Dare's keenest ambition to put himself through college, but the poverty of his widowed mother—the population of that land of sailors and fishermen is largely made up of

widows—had stood sternly in the way. The success of the Carter boys, however, in reclaiming that rich marsh by the creek had proved a strong stimulus, and given him new hopes, with results which this story will show.

All at once Will Carter, who had been talking eagerly for the last half hour, stopped short, wiped his forehead, and perched himself on the rail fence under a shady roadside maple. Reube leaned against the fence, and took off his round straw hat.

"Now, Reube," said Will, "it's your turn. I've talked myself dry, and gabbled right along like the 'crick' at low water. Your letters, you old oyster, have told me mighty little. What have you been up to all winter?"

"Building my shad boat," answered Reube.

"Mother told me something about it. It's great, old man!" said Will. "But you don't mean to say you built her all yourself."

"Well, pretty near," replied his friend. "Old Chris Boltenhouse helped me with the frame, and set me right whenever I got in a muddle. It was hard work, but I tell you, Will, it was so interesting I could hardly take time to eat. I've thought of nothing else for months, except when I was worrying over mother's eyes, and now—"

"I heard about your mother's trouble with her eyes," interrupted Will, sympathetically. "I do hope it's not going to be serious."

"Worries me a lot," said Reube, gloomily. And then, his face brightening again, he went on, "But now I've got her done, and rigged and tarred and afloat at Wood Creek landing."

"Reube," interrupted Will again, and this time in a tone of severe surprise, "what a singular way to treat your mother! I cannot imagine that dignified lady in any such absurd situation as you speak of."

"Come off!" retorted Reuben, very literally, as he caught at Will's ankle and, with a quick twist, jerked him from his perch. "I'm not talking of mother, but of the *Dido*, and I say there's not a trimmer craft will go shad fishing from Westcock this season. I tell you, Will, I've just put my heart into that boat. If it were not for that grove of Barnes's we could see her now, lying with the others, in the mouth of the creek; and even at this distance you could pick her out from the rest."

"Well," said Will, "let's get along and inspect her as soon as possible. I'm as tickled about her as if I'd built her myself; and I'm going to help you with the fishing all I can, as my holiday diversion. Did she cost you much? Is she going to *pay*, like *new marsh*?"

"If she has a lucky summer," answered Reube—"and they do say there's going to be a great run of shad this season—I'll have her all paid for and quite a lump of money in the bank this fall."

"And then!" said Will, in a voice of joyous anticipation. "What then? College with us, for the winter term, anyway! And maybe a scholarship that will still further simplify matters!"

"No!" exclaimed Reube, shaking his head gravely. "No college for me till I have had mother away to Boston or New York, to get her eyes properly seen to."

Will's face fell a little. "That's so, old man. The eyes must be fixed up first of all, of course. But if the boat's a success, another season will straighten it all out, eh? And when you come to college you'll be a freshman, while I'm a senior! Won't I haze you though?"

"Come and practice a bit now!" said Reube, grimly.

Will ignored this invitation.

"What did you say you called the boat?" he queried.

"The *Dido*," answered Reube.

"Imagine the stately queen of Carthage going out shad fishing!" chuckled Will. "What struck you to choose that for a name?"

"O," said Reube, gravely, "it will serve to keep my aspirations before my mind's eye, even when I am occupied in the prosaic task of splitting shad."

At this moment a long, shambling figure was seen climbing a fence some distance down the hill, to the left of our pedestrians. Long, lank black hair fell on his shoulders from beneath a black and greasy slouch hat. Immediately the fellow disappeared in a choke-cherry thicket, after turning a furtive, swarthy face for one moment toward the road.

"How's your hereditary enemy behaving himself these days, Reube?" inquired Will.

"Well," said Reube, "Mart Gandy's Mart Gandy, same as he always was. But it seems to me that of late he has been troubling his neighbors less and himself more than he used to. They say he's seldom quite sober. He's left us alone pretty much all winter, though he did shoot one of my best sheep in the upper pasture along in the first of the spring."

"But didn't you punish him for it?" asked Will, indignantly, glaring back at the cherry trees wherein Gandy had vanished.

"I didn't actually catch him, or I would have," said Reube. "And I didn't want to have him taken up, for, bad lot as he is, he does look after his mother and sisters in a kind of a way, and he is all they have to depend on; for his drunken old father has become a regular idiot, doing nothing but sit in the sun, pick at his beard, and whimper for a drink."

By this time they had reached the top of a knoll, whence the whole shore line was visible.

"There's the *Dido*!" exclaimed Reube, proudly, turning with a sweep of the hand toward the mouth of Wood Creek. But the words ended in a cry of anger and anxiety. "She's adrift!" he shouted. "Come on! Come on! We must catch her before she gets out of the creek. The wind's right down the bay!"

As he spoke he vaulted over the fence and started on a run across the fields. Will was at his side in an instant.

"How can it have happened?" he asked.

"Gandy's work, I'll be bound!" muttered Reube, between his teeth; and his eyes grew pale and bright like steel.

[A] Professor Roberts has already told the spirited story of "How the Carter Boys Lifted the Mortgage," in a volume, *The Raid from Beauséjour*, which is published by Hunt & Eaton, New York.



"She's adrift!" he shouted. "Come on! Come on!"

CHAPTER II.

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The Red Bull.

THE short cut which Reube was taking across the fields and marshes was calculated to diminish by a good half mile the distance which separated him from his beloved boat. But it was a path beset with obstacles. Will Carter saw all these—the long strip of bog and alders at the foot of the upland; then the gluey stretch of "broad-leaf" marsh, passable enough at a later season, but now a mire with the spring rains; and beyond, furrowing the firm levels of young timothy and clover, the windings of a creek which he knew was, in most places, too wide to jump, and too deep to ford. With what breath he could spare—for his excited comrade was setting a terribly stiff pace—he spasmodically exclaimed, "We'd save time, Reube, by keeping to the road. We'll be tangled up and stuck here the first thing we know; and the *Dido* will be off on her own hook to seek the ruins of Carthage."

But Reuben made no answer. He saw no obstacles. All he could see was the far-off red stream, with the *Dido*, only a little way inside the line of the dikes, veering gently and aimlessly from one green bank to the other, but steadily creeping seaward with the current. Well he knew how soon, with the falling tide, this current would quicken its pace. Once let the *Dido* get outside the creek, and he knew not what might happen to her. She would certainly be off down the bay at a speed which it appalled him to think of.

And now, running in grim silence, Reube and Will drew near the foot of the uplands. Heavily, and with no waste of energy, they flung themselves over a peculiarly massive rail fence, and entered a spacious pasture. The field was dotted with mossy hillocks and a few low spruce bushes, between which the grass grew short and thick. Two or three wide-armed maple trees, standing far apart, relieved the vacancy of the sloping expanse, which ended in a broad fringe of alder swamp, spreading its labyrinth of black roots and bog holes a hundred yards out upon the marsh.

As they ran, threading their way among the bushes, and springing from hillock to hillock, they heard an ominous grunting bellow on their right, and turning sharply they saw a large dark-red bull stepping out from under the shade of a maple tree. The animal bellowed again, deep in his throat; and running his horns into the nearest mound, tossed into the air a little shower of turf and moss. This was an honest challenge, but our runners were in no mood to accept it.

"This seems to be his bullship's private domain!" panted Will. "I wonder if he's really as mad as he looks, or just bluffing?"

"No bluffing there!" muttered Reube, in a voice of anxious concern. "It's Barnes's bull, and he means every word of it! We're in a muss, and we've just got to run for all we're worth. I wish we'd stuck to the road!"

As he spoke the bull, seeing his challenge unanswered, charged like a great red thunderbolt. The boys rose into a fine burst of speed; but ere they were halfway across the field Reube felt his legs

and wind failing. He vowed inwardly that he would not, could not break down, and he wondered in his heart how Will was holding out. Will was a little ahead, being the lighter runner; but his pace was flagging, and the bull was now gaining upon them with dreadful rapidity. Under fair conditions the fierce and active animal could have given his rivals a hard race; but now, fagged from their long run down the hill, they were no match for him. He was not more than fifty feet behind them, when their course took them right under one of those spreading maples.

"No use!" gasped Will. "Up with you, Reube!" And springing desperately into the air, he caught a branch and swung himself up into safety.

But Reube was not one who could change his purpose thus rapidly. "The *Dido*!" he groaned; and, pausing under the tree, he glanced irresolutely from the sea to his pursuer.

"Come up, quick!" yelled Will, his voice as sharp and inflexible as an ax blade. Reube saw that there was no help for it. His eyes glared fury at his pursuer, as a tiger glares at the hunters when he reluctantly retires before them, and he started to climb the tree. But his stubbornness was all but fatal. He grasped at a branch, and, missing his hold, fell back. He repeated the attempt, this time more eagerly, but again he would have missed and would have felt the bull's horns pinning him to the tree had it not been for Will's readiness of action. Locking his legs between two branches, Will reached down, grasped his comrade under the shoulders, and with a mighty effort swung him around to the other side of the trunk. The bull swerved slightly and shot past. Half climbing, half dragged up by Will, Reube found himself safe among the branches ere the bull had checked its rush and returned to the attack.

"You saved me that time, Will," said Reube, in a somewhat shaky voice, grasping his companion's hand and wringing it hard. "But that was an awful grip of yours. I think every finger took a piece out of me!"

Will grinned inscrutably, and it flashed across Reube's mind that the severity of the grip had had some connection with his own obstinate delay in seeking safety. But the next instant all else was forgotten in his anxiety about the *Dido*, which was plainly visible through an opening in his leafy refuge. The boat had grounded for a moment on a grassy point, and now the quickening current wrenched her off again and carried her with slow gyrations beyond the very last of the landing slips. Fifteen minutes more, at this rate, and she would be in the open.

"I can't stand this, Will! I must try another dash," he groaned.

Immediately beneath was the bull, snorting and bellowing, thrusting with his great forehead against the trunk, and pawing the young turf so energetically that it seems as if he aimed at uprooting the tree.

"All right, old man," said Will. "Run right along now, and I'll wait here for you. Or perhaps you will mount the gentle steed beneath us and ride to your destination."

To this Reube vouchsafed no answer. He sat silent on his branch, glowering across the marshes, and eating his heart in helpless wrath, while Will, stretched face downward across the limbs, eyed the bull pensively, and cudged his brains for a way out of the dilemma.

Suddenly he straightened himself with a radiant face, and exclaimed:

"I have it, Reube! We'll trick his exasperated bullship and catch the *Dido* yet!"

But while the words were yet on his lips the bull lifted his head high, gazed out across the field for a second or two, and then dashed off at the same terrific gallop which had so nearly proved disastrous to our heroes. He had seen a burly, red-shirted figure traversing the upper corner of his field. It was seldom, indeed, that anyone other than his master, the only man he feared, presumed to enter the precincts of his sway, and here, in one morning, were three trespassers. The bull, blind with rage, charged upon the red-shirted figure, and the red-shirted figure, after facing him for a few seconds, turned and fled for the fence.

"It's John Paul! He'll get away safe enough," said Reube. "But what's your plan?"

"Got a better one by this time, old man," replied Will, dropping out of the tree—"just to cut while his bullship is otherwise engaged." And side by side the two sped on toward the shelter of the alders.

Before they got far the bull, having routed red-shirt and snorted at him loudly through the rails, turned, discovered their flight, and came once more thundering at their heels. But this time he had allowed his rivals too much handicap. Before he could get anywhere near them Will and Reube were among the alders. Once there, the big red bull could not match their speed. He floundered, foaming and grunting, through the shallow pools, and the deeper ones he had to skirt.

The boys, on the other hand, sprang lightly from root to hillock, from hillock to elastic, reedy tuft, swinging across the pools on the long, bending stems of the alders, and soon leaving their persecutor far behind. They reached the fence, vaulted it, emerged upon the open marsh, and there before them, still half a mile away, was the *Dido*, wheeling gracefully out from the mouth of the creek.



The bull swerved slightly and shot past.

CHAPTER III.

The Chase of the "Dido."

REUBE uttered a cry of something like despair.

"Now, old man, what's the matter with you?" queried Will, reprovingly. "Do you suppose the *Dido's* gone? Why, you old chump, we'll take one of the other boats and go after her. With this wind we'll catch her before she goes half a dozen miles. She won't get past the Joggins, anyway, I'll bet you a red herring!"

Reube's face brightened, beamed broadly, and resumed its old boyish frankness.

"Why, that's so!" said he. "That's just what we'll do. What a perfect fool I'd be sometimes, Will, if you didn't keep an eye on me!"

That half a mile across the marsh proved a long one owing to the many detours which our runners, now trotting slowly and deliberately, were forced to make by the windings of the full creek. At last they reached the landing place where the *Dido* had been moored. About the rickety old wharf stood four or five high reels, skeletons of light gray wood wound with the dark-stained folds of the shad nets. The fishing season was right at hand, but had not yet begun. Around the boats and the reels were many half-obliterated footprints, left by the feet of those who had been winding the nets and pitching the seams of the boats. Of fresh tracks there was but one set—the tracks of someone with long, narrow feet, who walked without turning out his toes. To these tracks Reube pointed with grim significance of gesture.

"Yes," said Will, "I understand. Did you ever see a plainer signature than Mart Gandy makes with his feet?"

The smallest of the fishing boats at the wharf was a light "pinkie"—a name given by the Tantramar fishermen to a special kind of craft with the stern pointed like the stem. The pinkie, painted red and white instead of blackened with tar like the other boats, was a good sailer. She belonged to Barnes, the owner of the red bull; and to Reube's judicial mind it seemed appropriate that she should be taken without leave. There was a further inducement in the fact that she could be got afloat more easily than any of the other boats. The tide had fallen so that her keel was high and dry; and the fine mud of Tantramar gripped it with astonishing tenacity. But after a few minutes of such straining as made the veins stand out on Will's forehead, and brought a redness about Reube's steel-gray eyes, she was afloat.

Up went her dainty jib; up went her broad white mainsail; and presently the red-and-white pinkie with Reube at the helm was nimbly threading the sharp curves of the creek. After a succession of short tacks the channel straightened, and heeling far over with the strong wind on her quarter the pinkie ran into the open with the tawny surf hissing at her gunwale. Reube held his course till they were a couple of hundred yards out, dreading some hungry shoals he knew of. Then he let out the sheet, eased up on the tiller, and put the pinkie's head straight down the bay on the *Dido's* track. Will loosened out the jib, belayed it, and lay down on the cuddy in its shadow. The *Dido* was out of sight beyond the rocks and high oak trees of Wood Point.

A stern chase, as has been said from of old, is a long chase; and while the red-and-white pinkie was scudding before the wind and shearing the yellow waves with her keen bow, Reube and Will had to curb their impatience. They did not even whistle for more wind, for they had all the wind the pinkie could well endure. When their ears had grown used to the slap and crumbling rush of the

foam-wave past their gunwale they spoke of Mart Gandy.

Reube Dare's father, whose farm adjoined that of the Gandys, had got himself embroiled with old Gandy over the location of the dividing line. While Reube was yet a very small boy old Gandy had pulled down the dilapidated line fence during one of Captain Dare's absences, and had put up a new one which encroached seriously on the Dares' best field. On Captain Dare's return he expostulated with Gandy; and finding expostulation useless he quietly shifted back the fence. Then his ship sailed on a long voyage to the Guano Islands of the Pacific; and while he was scorching off the rainless coasts of northern Peru, Gandy again took possession of the coveted strip of field. From this voyage Captain Dare came back with broken health. He gave up his ship, settled down on the farm overlooking the marshes, and called in the arm of the law to curb old Gandy's aggression. The fence had by this time been moved backward and forward several times, each time leaving behind a redder and more threatening line of wrath. When the case came into court the outcome was a surprise to both contestants. There were rummaging out of old titles and unearthing of old deeds, till Captain Dare's lawyer made it clear not only that Gandy's claim was unfounded, but also that before the dispute arose Gandy had been occupying some three acres of the old Dare property. The original grant, made a hundred years earlier to Captain Dare's grandfather, required that the line should run down the middle of old Gandy's sheep pasture—a worthless tract, but one which now acquired value in Gandy's eye. Down the pasture forthwith was the new fence run, for Captain Dare, fired to obstinacy by his neighbor's wanton aggression, would take no less than his rights. Then, the victory assured to him, the captain died, leaving to his widow and his boy a feud to trouble their peace. The farm was productive, but for some years old Gandy had vexed them with ceaseless and innumerable small annoyances. When the old man sank into imbecility, then his son Mart, a swarthy and furtive stripling, who betrayed the blood of a far-off Indian ancestor, took up the quarrel with new bitterness. In Mart Gandy's dark and narrow soul, which was redeemed from utter worthlessness by his devotion to his family, hatred of the Dares stood as a sacred duty. It was his firm faith that his father had been tricked by a conspiracy between judge, jury, and lawyers. The persistency of his hate and the cunning of his strokes had been a steady check upon the prosperity of Reube and his mother.

In answer to a remark of Reube on this subject Will exclaimed, "But you've got him all right this time, old man. There can be no difficulty in identifying those footprints."

Reube laughed somewhat sarcastically.

"Do you suppose," he inquired, "that the tide is going to leave them as they are while we go after the *Dido*, fetch her back, and then go and get those holes in the mud examined by the authorities?"

"Well, perhaps my suggestion was hasty," acknowledged Will.

After an hour's run Wood Point was left behind, and there was the *Dido* not a mile ahead and well inshore. She had been delayed in the eddies of the cove below the Point. Reube gave a shout of joy and twisted his helm to starboard, while Will warned him to look out for the mud flats with which the cove was choked.

"O," said Reube, confidently, "I know the place like a book."

The red-and-white pinkie was now rapidly overhauling the vagrant craft when a stiff current caught the latter and she began to race along the curve of the farther shore. Reube was anxious to catch her before she should round the next headland, and get back into rough water. The headland was a low, humped promontory of mingled plaster rocks and yellowish sand, without a tree upon its grassy crest. Shifting his course to intercept the *Dido*, Reube steered the pinkie straight for the point. Just then the *Dido* was seen to give a lurch, stop short, and keel over to the gunwale.

"She's run aground!" cried Will.

"But we've got her safe and will sail her back on next tide," said Reube, heaving a sigh of relief as he saw that his beloved craft stood still, refusing to be rolled over by the push of the yellow tide upon her ribs.

The pinkie was sailing at a great pace.

"Better take in the jib, Will," said Reube.

Will sprang up to obey. Just as he rose there was a staggering shock. The pinkie buried her nose in a hidden mudbank. The waves piled over her gunwales; the mast bent without breaking, like the brave, tough timber it was; and Will shot overboard headlong into the foam.

CHAPTER IV.

The Cave by the Tide.

ACTING instantly on the impulse of an old sailor, Reube had sprung forward almost with the shock, and started to haul down the mainsail in order to relieve the strain. The next moment, however, while the half-lowered sail was bulging and flapping, he leaped into the bow to help Will. The latter rose with a gasp and stood waist deep, clinging to the bowsprit. His head and arms were bedaubed grotesquely with the mud into which he had plunged with such violence. He gazed sternly at Reube, and exclaimed:

"Perhaps you'll claim that you know these mud banks as well as I do! I earnestly hope you may, some day, gain the same intimate knowledge of them!"

Then he climbed aboard and finished the furling of the sails, while Reube rolled convulsively in the bottom of the boat, unable to control his laughter. He recovered himself only when Will trod upon him without apology, and threatened to put him overboard.

When the sails had been made snug, and the pinkie bailed out, and the mud cleaned with pains from Will's face and hair and garments, there was nothing to do but watch the *Dido* in the distance

and wait for the tide to fall. In another half hour, or a little more, only a waste of red flats and yellow pools separated the two stranded boats. Reube took off his shoes and socks, rolled his trousers up high, and stepped overboard. These precautions were for Will superfluous; so he went as he was, and congratulated himself on being able to defy all hidden clam shells. Before he went, however, he took the precaution to put out the pinkie's anchor, for which Reube derided him.

"The pinkie's no Western stern-wheeler, to navigate a field of wet grass!" said he. "I fancy she'll wait here till next tide all right!"

"Yes—but then?" queried Will, laconically.

"Then," replied Reube, "we'll come back for her with the *Dido*."

"There's lots one never knows!" said Will, as he looked carefully to the anchor rope. And as things turned out it was well he did so—a fact which Reube had to acknowledge penitently.

The distance between the stranded boats was little more than a quarter of a mile, yet it took the boys some time to traverse it. The bottom of the cove was for the most part a deep and clinging ooze, which took them to the knee at every step, and held their feet with the suction of an airpump. Here and there were patches of hard sand to give them a moment's ease; but here and there, too, were the dreaded "honey pots" for which that part of the coast is noted, and to avoid these they had to go most circumspectly. The "honey pot" is a sort of quicksand in which sand is replaced by slime—a bottomless quagmire which does its work with inexorable certainty and deadly speed. Both Reube and Will knew the strange, ominous olive hue staining the red mud over the mouths of these traps, but they knew, also, that all signs sometimes fail, so they took the boathook with them and prodded their path cautiously. At last, after wading a long, shallow lagoon, the bottom of which was thick with shells, and unfriendly to Reube's bare feet, they reached the runaway *Dido*.

Breathless with anxiety, Reube climbed over the side, suddenly imagining all sorts of damage and defilement. But his darling was none the worse for her involuntary cruise. She had shipped some muddy water, but that was all that Reube could grumble at. Gandy had been too shrewd to do anything that might look like malice aforethought. In a trice the trim craft was bailed out and sponged dry. Then Will admired her critically from stem to stern, from top to keel, asking a thousand learned questions by the way, and feeling almost persuaded to build a boat himself. But even this interesting procedure came to an end, and at length the comrades threw themselves down on the cuddy roof, and realized that they were hungry. It was long past their dinner time. The tide was not yet at its lowest ebb, and it would be four or five hours ere they could hope to get the boats again afloat.

The only thing they had to eat was a pocketful of dried dulse which Reube had brought with him. This they devoured, and it made them very thirsty. They decided to go ashore and look for a spring. Far away, on the crest of the upland, were some houses, at which they gazed hungrily, but the idea of leaving the *Dido* and the pinkie for any such long jaunt was not to be entertained for a moment. As they again stepped out into the mud Will repeated the precaution which he had taken in regard to the pinkie. He put out the little anchor, and paid no heed to Reube's derision. To be sure, Reube was both owner and captain, but Will stood not on ceremony.

Not far from high-water mark our thirsty explorers found a clear, cold spring bubbling out from beneath a white plaster rock. The water was very hard, carrying a great deal of lime in solution, and Will lectured learnedly on the bad effect it would have upon their stomachs if they drank much of it. As usually happens, however, this theorizing had small force against the very practical fact of their thirst. So they drank till they were perfectly satisfied, and were afterward none the worse. This, Will insisted, was thanks to the abundance of sorrel which they found amid the grass near by, whose acid was kind enough to neutralize the lime which they had swallowed.

"But I say," urged Reube, "there are folks back yonder who drink water like this all their lives. The wells in this plaster belt are all hard like this, and some of the people who drink from them live to over ninety."

"That proves nothing," said Will, "except that they are a long-lived stock. If they had sense enough to go somewhere else and drink soft water they might live to over a hundred!"

Reube cared little for argument, always finding it hard to know whether Will was in earnest or not. He lazily changed the subject.

"By the way," he remarked, "now's just the chance to visit the cave at the end of the Point!"

"Cave!" cried Will, jumping up from the grass. "What cave? How can there be a cave round here without me knowing it?"

"Why, I only heard of it myself last fall," said Reube. "You see, the mouth of it isn't uncovered till near low water; and nobody comes near this point at any time, there being nothing to come for, and the shoals and eddies so troublesome. I've sailed round here a good deal at high and half tide, but no one comes near it when tide's out. You see all the broken rocks scattered away out across the flats from the Point. And as for the "honey pots" between them—well, old Chris Boltenhouse, who told me all about the place last fall, said they were a terror. You couldn't step without getting into one. Chris also told me that the Acadians, at the time of their expulsion, had used the cave as a hiding place for some of their treasures, and that when he was a boy quite a lot of coin and silver ornaments had been found there."

"Queer, too," muttered Will, "how things like that drop out of people's minds, come back, and are forgotten again! Well, let's look into the hole while we've got time;" and the two ran hastily to the narrow end of the turf.

Over the slippery rocks below tide mark they had to move more deliberately, but in a short time they reached the foot of the promontory and stood on the verge of the flats not half an hour above low water. Very villainous indeed looked the flats, with the olive-hued menace spread over them on every hand. But there was no sign of a cave. Scanning the rocks minutely, our explorers skirted the whole front of the headland, but in vain. Then they started to retrace their steps, inveighing against the falsity of traditions. But now, their faces being turned, the rocky masses took on for them a new configuration, and they discovered a narrow strait, as it were, behind a jutting boulder. It was a

most unlikely-looking place for a cave entrance, but Will poked his nose into it curiously. The next moment he shouted:

"Found!"

Reube sprang to his side. There, behind the sentinel rock, was a narrow, triangular opening of about the height of a man. Its base, some four feet wide, was thickly silted with mud, and its sides dripped forbiddingly. Will stepped inside, and then turned.

"It's darker than Egypt!" he exclaimed. "How are we going to explore it without a light?"

"Ah," said Reube in tones of triumph, "I've got ahead this time, Will! I happened to bring a whole bunch of matches from home in my pocket to supply the *Dido's* cuddy. And I picked up this on the Point when you were running ahead in such a hurry." And he drew a sliver of driftwood pine from under his jacket.

"Good for you, old man!" cried Will, joyously. In a second or two the sliver was ablaze, and the explorers plunged into a narrow passage whose floor sloped upward swiftly.



Will marched ahead carrying the torch.

CHAPTER V.

53

A Prison House.

IN their eagerness they forgot to look around before entering the cave. They forgot to look at the tide, which had already turned and was creeping swiftly over the treacherous levels. They forgot everything except that they were in the cave where once undoubtedly had been Acadian treasures, and where, as each dreamed in his heart and denied on his lips, some remnant of such treasures might yet lie hidden.

Will marched ahead carrying the torch and peering with eager enthusiasm into every crevice. The cave was full of crevices, but they were shallow and contained nothing of interest but some fair crystals of selenite, which gleamed like diamonds in the torchlight. A few of these Reube broke off and pocketed as specimens. The cave widened slowly as it ascended, and the slope of its floor kept it well drained in spite of the water ceaselessly dripping from roof and walls. Its shape was roughly triangular, and our explorers sometimes bumped their heads smartly in their haste.

Presently they reached a point where a narrow gallery ran off from the main passage. Which to take was the problem.

"It seems to me," said Reube, "that if there was any of the old Acadians' stuff here it would be most likely to be hidden in the smaller passage."

"Acadians' stuff!" sniffed Will, sarcastically. "A lot of that we'll find!"

But, none the less, he acted on Reube's suggestion, and led the way up the side gallery. After running some twenty-five feet the gallery turned a corner and ended in a smooth, sloping face of rock. There was no sign of crevice or hiding place here. Across the sloping face of the rock there ran a ledge about a foot wide some five or six feet above the floor, and the roof of the gallery at this point ascended steeply to a narrow and longish peak.

"No risk of bumping our heads here," said Will, as he flung the torchlight along the ledge and showed its emptiness.

"Better hurry back and try if we can't finish the main cave before the light goes out," said Reube,

pointing to the pine sliver, already more than half consumed. Shielding the flame with his hand to make it burn more slowly, Will led the way with quick steps back to the larger gallery. This now became more interesting. Its walls were strewn with most suggestive-looking pockets, so to speak, full of silt and oozy *debris*, into which Will and Reube plunged their hands hastily, expecting to find a coin or a silver candlestick in every one. So fascinated were they by this task that they paid no heed to the torch till it burned down and scorched Will's fingers. He gave a startled cry, but had presence of mind enough not to drop it. To make it last a little longer he stuck it on the point of his knife and then exclaimed, in a tone of disappointment:

"Reube, we must get out of this while the light lasts—and that'll have to be pretty quick!"

"Rather!" assented Reube. "Hark!"

The word was barely out of his mouth before the two lads were running for the cave mouth, their heads bent low, their hearts beating wildly. The sound which they had caught was a hollow wash of waves. In a few seconds the torch went out, but there was a pale, glimmering light before them, enough to guide their feet. This puzzled them by its peculiar tone, but in half a minute more they understood. It came filtering through the tawny tide which they found seething into the cave's mouth and filling it to the very top. Will gave a gasp of horror, and Reube leaned in silent despair against the wall of the passage.

"The tide will fill this cave to the very top, I believe," said he.

"Yes," answered Will, in a voice of fixed resolve; "there's nothing for it but to try a long dive right out through the mouth and into the rocks. We may get through, and it's our only chance!"

"Go on, then, Will. Hurry, before it's too late! And—have an eye to mother, won't you?" Here a sob came into Reube's voice. "You know I'm a poor swimmer and no diver. Good-bye!" and he held out his hand.

But Will was coolly putting on his coat again.

"I forgot that," said he, simply. "Well, we'll find some other way, dear old man. Bring along your matches;" and he turned back toward the depths of the cave.

For answer Reube merely gripped his arm with a strong pressure and stepped ahead with a lighted match. He could not urge Will to carry out the plan just proposed because in his heart, for all his confidence in Will's powers as a swimmer, he could not believe it feasible. He saw, in imagination, his comrade's battered body washing helplessly among the weedy and foaming rocks; while in the cave, for all the horror of it, there would certainly be some hours of respite—and who could say what they might not devise in all that time? He had a marvelous faith in Will's resources.

In grim silence, and husbanding every match with jealous care, they explored the main cave to its end. Its end was a horrid, round, wet hole, a few feet deep, and not large enough to admit them side by side. They looked each other fairly in the eyes for the first time since that one glance when they had learned that they were entrapped. Reube's eyes were stern, enduring—the eyes of one who had known life long. The boy had all gone out of them. Will's eyes looked simply quiet and kind, but his mouth was set and his lips were white.

"This is just a rat hole, Reube," said he. "We won't stay here anyway. Seems to me it would be better to have room to stand up and meet it like a man."

"Yes," replied Reube, his voice choking with a sort of exaltation at his comrade's courage; "we'll go back to the little gallery with the high roof. We'll get up on that ledge and we'll fight it out with the water to the last gasp, eh? It's pretty tough—especially for mother!"

"Well," said Will, with a queer, low tone of cheerfulness which seemed to his friend to mean more than cries and tears, "when I think of mother and Ted it sort of comes over me that I'd like to say my prayers—eh?" and for a minute or two, standing shoulder to shoulder, he and Reube leaned their faces silently against the oozy rock in the darkness. Then, lighting another match, they made all haste possible back to the side gallery, ascended it, and climbed upon the ledge. Hardly had they got there when they heard the tide whispering stealthily about the entrance of the passage. They felt that it was marking them down in their new retreat.

When the next match blazed up—for they could not long stand the darkness with that creeping whisper in their ears—Will gazed steadily at the peak of the roof above his head. The match went out.

"Another!" he cried, in a voice that trembled with hope.

"What is it?" asked Reube, eagerly.

"Roots!" shouted Will, leaping to his feet. "Tree roots coming through the roof up there! We must be near the surface, and there is evidently a fissure in the rock filled up with earth. We'll dig our way out with our knives and our fingers yet!"

"But there are no trees on the Point," urged Reube, doubtfully.

"Thunder, Reube! but can't there be old roots in the soil?" cried Will, impatiently. "Dig, man, dig!" And he began clawing fiercely at the earth above his head. Reube aided him with fervent energy, and the earth, though hard and clayey, came down about them in a shower. Presently they could reach no farther up.

"We must cut footholds in this rock," said Will.

The rock was plaster, but hard, and this took time. When it was accomplished they again burrowed rapidly toward the surface and air and light. They were working in the dark now, because with the rise of tide in the cave the air was growing close and suffocating. Three times they had to cut new footholds in the rock. They toiled in silence, hearing only each other's labored breath and the falling of earth into the water beneath them. The tide was now crawling over the ledge where they had first taken refuge. There it stopped; but this they did not heed. The fear of suffocation was now upon them, blotting out the fear of drowning. Their eyes and ears and nostrils were full of earth. They worked with but a blind half-knowledge of what they were doing. All at once there came a gleam of light, and Reube's hand went through the turf. He clawed at the sod desperately, and a mass of it came down about their heads. It troubled them not. There was the clear, blue sky above them. A sweet wind caressed their faces. They dragged themselves forth and lay at full length on

CHAPTER VI.

The Blue Jar.

IT was some minutes before either spoke. All they knew was that they were once more in the air and light. Then, with a start, Reube sat up and looked about him. He looked, of course, for the *Dido*. To his inexpressible relief the cherished craft was there in plain sight, riding safely at her anchor, some fifty yards from shore. And there, farther out, rode the pinkie. Reube blessed his comrade's foresight.

"Will, where would the boats be now?" said he, "if you hadn't insisted on anchoring them?"

Will sat up and surveyed the situation, thoughtfully clearing the mud from his eyes with little bunches of grass.

"It was just as well we anchored them," he assented. "And now that I've got my wind, I think I had better swim out to the *Dido* and bring her in for you. I feel as if I wanted a bath anyway; don't you?"

"I'll be with you in half a minute," said Reube. "But first I want to explore the cave a little more. It seems to me we came away in something of a hurry!"

He let himself cautiously down in the hole, feet first.

Will stopped his undressing and stared at him in amazement.

"Are you crazy?" he cried. "Do come out of that beastly hole! The idea of it makes me quite ill!"

"O, I'm not going far," said Reube, "and I won't be gone long, either. Don't be alarmed."

As his head disappeared Will ran to the hole and looked down, anxiously and curiously. He saw Reube groping in a crevice filled with soft earth, about three feet below the surface.

"What in the world are you after, Reube?" he inquired.

"That!" replied Reube the next instant, holding aloft triumphantly a small blue jar of earthenware. "Take it, and give me a lift out of this!"

Will deposited the old jar reverentially on the turf, and turned to help Reube up. He half expected that the jar would vanish while his back was toward it; but no, there it was, plain and palpable enough. It had a cover set into the rim, and sealed around the edges with melted rosin; and it was heavy.

Thrilling with suppressed excitement, Reube and Will sat down with the jar between them, and Reube proceeded to chip away the rosin with his knife. Will gazed at the operation intently.

"Probably some good old Evangeline's pet jar of apple sauce!" said he.

Reube ignored this levity, and chipped away with irritating deliberation. At last off came the cover. As it did so there was a most thrilling jingling within, and the boys leaned forward with such eagerness that their heads bumped violently together. They saw stars, but heeded them not, for in the mouth of the jar they saw the yellow glint of a number of gold coins.

"Well, dreams do sometimes come true!" remarked Will. And Reube, spreading out Will's coat, which lay close at hand, emptied upon it the whole contents of the jar.

It was coin—all coin! There were a few golden Louis, a number of Spanish pieces, with silver crowns and *livres Tournois*, amounting, according to such hasty estimate as the boys could make, to some five or six hundred dollars.



It was coin—all coin!

"That'll be three hundred dollars apiece," said Reube, with eyes sparkling; "and I'll be able to take mother to Boston and go to college too!"

"Three hundred dollars apiece!" said Will. "Indeed, I don't see what I had to do with it. You found it. You had nerve enough to take notice of it when you were more than three quarters dead. And you went back and got it. I've no earthly claim upon it, old man."

Reube set his jaw obstinately.

"Will," said he, "we were exploring the cave in partnership. If you had found the stuff, I'd have expected my share. Now, you've got to go shares with me in this, or I give you my word our friendship ends!"

"O, don't get on your dignity that way, Reube," said Will. "If I must, why, I suppose I must! And if I can't take a present from you, I don't see whom I could take one from. But I won't take half, because I didn't do half toward getting it, and because you need it enough sight more than I do. A couple of years ago I'd have spoken differently. But I'll divide with you, and as to the proportions, we'll settle that on the way home. Now I'm off for the *Dido*!" And having thrown off his clothes as he talked, he ran down the bank and plunged into the sea.

"I'll let you off with one third," shouted Reube after him, as he sat on the bank and watched. "Not one penny less!"

"All right," spluttered Will, breasting a white-crested, yellow wave. In a few minutes he was on board the *Dido*. Pulling up the anchor and hoisting the sail, he brought her in beside a jutting plaster rock which formed a natural quay. Then he resumed his clothes, while Reube took his place at the helm.

The wind being still down the bay and the tide on the turn, they decided not to attempt the all-night task of beating up against it. It took them, indeed, two tacks to reach the pinkie. Will went aboard the latter craft, leaving Reube in his darling *Dido*. The two boats tacked patiently back and forth, in and out of the wide cove, till they gained the shelter of a little creek under the lea of Wood Point. Here they were secured with anxious care. Then Will and Reube started for home by the road, pricked on to haste by the thought of how their mothers would be worrying, by the sharp demands of their empty stomachs, and by the elating clink of the coins that filled their pockets. When they reached Mrs. Dare's cottage Reube rushed in to relieve his mother's fears, for she had indeed begun to be anxious. Will hurried on toward Frosty Hollow, munching a piece of Mrs. Dare's gingerbread by the way.

As he trudged forward cheerfully, he was overtaken by an express wagon bound for "the Corners." The driver offered him a "lift," as the phrase goes about Tantramar. It was none other than Jerry Barnes, the master of the red bull, and the owner of the pinkie which Will and Reube had so boldly appropriated. Will told him the whole story, omitting only the discovery of the jar of coin. He and Reube had agreed to keep their counsel on this point, lest some should envy their good luck and others doubt their story.

"I hope," said Will, "you are not put out at our taking the pinkie?"

"I hope," grinned Barnes, "you're not put out at old Ramses for bein' so oncivil in the pastur'! But as for the pinkie, of course you did quite right. Only I'll want you chaps to get her back to the creek by to-morrow mornin's tide, as I'm goin' to drift for shad to-morrow night!"

"Of course," said Will; "we'll go after her the first thing in the morning. That's just what we planned on."

"That there's a smart boat Reube Dare's built. And he's a right smart lad, is Reube," remarked Jerry Barnes.

"There's where your head's level," agreed Will, warmly.

"And do you know when he's goin' to drift?" asked Barnes.

"He won't be quite ready for to-morrow night," said Will. "But we count on getting out the night following."

"Well, now, a word in your ear!" went on Barnes, leaning over confidentially. "I've no manner of doubt Mart Gandy cut the *Dido* loose. And now Reube had better keep his eye on his nets after the boats get away to-morrow night. I shouldn't wonder a mite if Gandy'd try slashing 'em, so as to give Reube an unpleasant surprise when he starts out for the *Dido*'s first fishing."

"I say," said Will, "I never thought of that! We'll 'lay' for him, so to speak, and give him a lesson if he tries it on."

"A nod's as good as a wink," remarked Jerry Barnes, mysteriously, as he set Will down at Mrs. Carter's door.

Mrs. Carter had not been at all anxious. Ever since Will's reclamation of the new marsh she had had an implicit faith in his ability and judgment. She had imagined that he was spending the day with Reube. She rather lost her dignified self-control over Will's story of the adventure in the cave, and she was filled with girlish excitement over the finding of the old blue jar.

"Of course, dearest boy," said Mrs. Carter, "you did quite right to want Reuben to take all the treasure, since he alone found it. But where would he have been but for you? Reuben is a fine boy, if his grandfather didn't amount to much. He takes after his mother's family the most. I'm glad he made you take a share of these lovely old coins."

"We'll be able to have some sort of a jolly lark on the strength of it when Ted comes home," said Will.

"We might take a run to Boston!" suggested his mother. "I want you boys to see the city; I want to see it myself. And I might—Mrs. Dare, you know, might want a friend near her if the operation proves at all serious, which I hope it won't."

"You dear, that's just like your thoughtfulness!" cried Will, jumping up and kissing her. And so it was agreed upon, subject, in a measure, to Ted's assent.

DURING the next forenoon the *Dido* and the pinkie were sailed up to their old berths in the creek. That night all the boats went out except the *Dido*, fading like ghosts into the misty, half-moonlit dusk. Reube was very indignant at the thought that Gandy might attack his shad net, and vowed, if he caught him at it, to clap him in jail. Mrs. Dare had made the boys take a pair of heavy blankets with them, and, stretched on these, they lay along the seat in the *Dido's* stern, just under the shelter of the gunwale. The reel, with its dark burden of net, rose a few feet away, and stood out black but vague against the paler sky. Close at hand lay the wharf, like a crouching antediluvian monster, with its fore paws plunged into the tide.

From where they lay our watchers commanded a view of the surrounding levels by merely lifting their heads. In low but eager tones they discussed the Boston trip planned for the coming autumn, and Reube squeezed his comrade's hand gratefully when he heard what company he and his mother would have.

"I can never tell your mother my gratitude," said he. "With her there my anxiety will be more than half gone."

"I'm so glad muzz thought of it!" said Will. "I'm sure it would never have entered my heedless head. And yet it is just the thing for us to do."

Another subject of their excited colloquy was the disposal of those old coins. If deposited at the Barchester Bank they would certainly arouse comment and set all sorts of romantic stories going. But presently Will thought of his friend Mr. Hand, to whom all things in the way of financial management seemed possible. It was decided that on the very next day Will should take the whole store to him and get him to send it away for conversion into modern currency.

"And he'll be able to see that we don't get cheated," added Will. "I fancy some of those coins will be wanted by collectors, and so be worth a lot more than their face value."

"I tell you, Will," exclaimed Reube, "I can't even yet quite get over my astonishment at the way you swear by old Hand; or, perhaps I should rather say, at the way the old fellow seems to be developing qualities of which he was never suspected until you begun to thaw him out."

"Indeed," said Will, warmly, "Mr. Hand is fine stuff. He was like a piece of gold hidden in a mass of very refractory ore. But Toddles melted him down all right."

In a short time conversation flagged, and then, listening to the lip-lip-lipping of the softly falling tide and the mellow far-off roar of the waters pouring through an *aboideau*, both the watchers grew drowsy. At last Will was asleep. Even Reube's brain was getting entangled with confused and fleeting visions when he was brought sharply to himself by the queer sucking sound of footsteps in the mud.

He raised his head and peered over the gunwale. There was Mart Gandy within ten paces of the net reel. He had come by way of the dike. In his hand gleamed the polished curve of the sickle with which he was accustomed to reap his buckwheat, and Reube's blood boiled at the thought of that long, keen blade working havoc in the meshes of his cherished nets. Gandy marched straight up to the reel, raised the sickle, and slashed viciously at the mass of woven twine.

Ere he could repeat the stroke a yell of wrath rang in his ear and Reube was upon him, hurling him to the ground. His deadly weapon flew from his grasp, and he was too startled to make much resistance. The weight of Reube's knee on his chest, the clutch of Reube's strong fingers at his throat, took all the fight out of him. He looked up with angry and frightened eyes and saw Will standing by, a meaning smile on his lips and a heavy tarred rope's end in his hand.

Reube rubbed the culprit's head rudely in the mud, and then relaxed the grip upon his gasping throat.

"I cannot pound the scoundrel now that I've got him down," said he, turning his face toward Will. "What shall we do with him? You can't lather a chap that doesn't resist and that has his head down in the mud. It's brutal!"

"We'll tie his hands to the reel and give him a taste of this rope's end," suggested Will, judiciously.

"I don't exactly like that either," said Reube, rubbing his captive's head again in the slime. "It's too much like playing hangman. He deserves the cat-o'-nine-tails if ever a scoundrel did, but I don't like the dirty work of applying it. We'd better just take him to jail. Then he'll get a term in the penitentiary, and be out of the way for a few years. Fetch me that cod line out of the cuddy, will you?"

By this time Mart Gandy had found his voice. That word "penitentiary" had reduced him to an abject state of terror, and he began to plead piteously for mercy.

"Lick me! Lick me all you like!" he cried, in his queer, high voice. "I kin take a hidin'; but don't send me to the penitentiary! What'd the old man do, as hain't got his right senses no more? An' the old woman'd jest plumb starve, for the gals they ain't a mite o' good to work. Le' me off this time, Reube Dare, 'n' I declare I won't never do it ag'in!"

Mart's imploring voice more than his words made Reube weaken in his purpose. As for Mart's promise, he put no faith in that, and marked on Will's face an unrelenting grin. Nevertheless he said:

"There's something in what the rascal says, Will. If Mart goes to the penitentiary his family's going to suffer more than he. I've a mind to let him off this time, after all."

"Well," grunted Will, "just as you say. But it would be nothing short of iniquitous to let him off altogether. You'd better give him a good ducking, to let him know you're in earnest, anyway."

Reube pondered this a moment.

"Mart Gandy," he said, sternly, "I'm going to let you off this time with nothing more than a ducking, to fix the circumstance in your mind. But remember, if I find you again at any of your old pranks I'll have a warrant out against you that very day! And I've got all the evidence needed to convict you. Now get up!" And he jerked the lanky and bedraggled form to its feet.

Mart, with the fear of prison walls no longer chilling his heart, had recovered himself during this

harangue, and his eyes gleamed with a furtive, half-wild hate. Still he made no resistance. The sickle lay far beyond his reach, and he knew he was physically no match for either Reube or Will. He was led to the very edge of the steep, slippery incline of the channel, wherein the tide had dropped about fifteen feet. Will snatched a coil of rope out of the boat.

"Can you swim?" he asked, curtly.

"No," said the fellow, eyeing him sidewise.

"He is lying," remarked Reube, in a businesslike voice.

"Well," said Will, "if he isn't lying we'll fish him out again, that's all."

Just as he was speaking, and while Gandy's eyes were fixed upon his face with an evil light in them, Reube stepped forward and executed a certain dexterous trip of which he was master. Gandy's heels flew out over the brink, his head went back, and, feet foremost, he shot like lightning down the slope and into the stream.

In a moment he came to the surface and began floundering and struggling like a drowning man.

"He's putting that all on," said Reube.

"Maybe not," exclaimed Will. "Better throw him the end of the rope now."

Reube smiled, gravely, but obeyed and a coil fell almost in Gandy's arms. The struggling man seemed too bewildered to catch it. He grasped at it wildly, sank, rose, sank, and rose again. Will prepared to jump in and rescue him. But Reube interposed.

"No, you don't," said he, coolly; "not without one end of this rope round your waist and me hanging onto the other end!"

"Make haste, then," cried Will, in some anxiety.

In a few seconds the rope was knotted firmly about Will's waist, and he sprang into the water. Even as he did so the apparently drowning man disappeared. He came up again many feet away, and, swimming with wonderful speed, gained the opposite bank. He clambered nimbly up the slope and started at a run across the marsh. Reube, with derisive compliments, helped the dripping and disgusted Will to shore again.

"I saw his game," said he, while Will wrung out his clothes. "He's just like a fish in the water, and he thought he'd make believe he was drowning, and so manage to drag you down without getting blamed for it. But he knew the game was up when he heard what I said and saw you had the rope tied to you."

"Right you are this time, old man," said Will.

The sky had cleared perfectly, and in the radiant moonlight Reube's skillful fingers quickly mended the net. The cut was not a deep one, as the blade had been stopped by two of the large wooden floats with which the net was beaded. The mending done and the net made ready for the next night's fishing, the boys turned their faces toward the uplands to seek a few hours' sleep at Mrs. Dare's.

Meanwhile Mart Gandy had never ceased running till he got behind an old barn which hid him from the scene of his punishment. Then he turned and shook his long, dark finger in silent fury toward the spot where his antagonists were working. When he reached home he crept to a loft in the shed and drew out a long, heavy musket, once a flintlock, which he had altered to a percussion lock, so that it made an effective weapon for duck shooting. This gun he loaded with a heavy charge of powder and a liberal proportion of buckshot. He muttered over his task till it was done to his satisfaction, and then stole off to sleep in the barn.

CHAPTER VIII.

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A Midnight Visitor.

REUBE and Will did not go shad fishing the next night, after all. A fierce sou'wester blew up toward evening, and drifting for shad was out of the question. Every boat was made secure with extra care, and all night the fury of an unusually high tide put the Tantram and Westcock dikes to the test. They stood the trial nobly, for well had their builders done their work.

The Dares' wide-winged cottage, set in a hollow of the hill, was little jarred by the gusts that volleyed down upon it. Having seen the *Dido* well secured behind the little wharf, Reube felt altogether at ease.

"Are you quite sure," asked Mrs. Dare that evening, "that Gandy won't make another attack on the shad boat or the net?"

"O yes, mother," answered Reube; "I'm no longer anxious on that score. Mart feels madder than ever, I've no doubt, and I think he'd have tried to drown Will last night if I had left him half a chance. But he is just mortally afraid of the penitentiary, and, now he knows we can prove a case against him, I imagine he'll bottle his wrath for a while."

"Well, dear, I hope you are right," said his mother. "But I must say I think Mart Gandy is more dangerous than you give him credit for being. I want you to be very careful how you go about alone at night. I know that blood, and how it craves for vengeance. Be watchful, Reube, and don't make the mistake of undervaluing your enemy."

"No, mother, I won't," answered Reube. "I know that wise head of yours is generally in the right. If you think I ought to keep my weather eye open, why, open I will keep it, I promise you. And now it's my turn! What were you doing out so late alone, when it was almost dark, with those poor eyes that can't see much even in broad daylight?"

"I know it was imprudent, Reube, and I did have some trouble getting home," confessed Mrs. Dare. "But, dear, I couldn't help it. I heard quite late in the afternoon that Jim Paul was on a spree again, after keeping steady for a whole year. He has been drinking hard for a week—drunk all the

time—and his wife sick in bed, and nothing to eat in the house. I went right down with a basket, and I was glad I went. The children were crying with hunger. And such a house! And Mrs. Paul lying on the floor, white as a ghost, where she had just fallen! She had got out of bed and tried to make some porridge for the children—there was nothing in the house but a little corn meal. Her husband was out, and she was trembling with fear lest he should return in a drunken frenzy and beat them all. Poor woman! And Jim Paul is a good husband and father when he is sober. You see, Reube, it took me a long while, blind as I'm getting, to find the children and straighten things up."

"Well, mother, this autumn, if all goes well," said Reube, cheerfully, "we'll get the poor eyes fixed as good as new. And then you may stay out late sometimes without me scolding you."

That night, when Reube and his mother were sleeping soundly, they were roused by a crash which the roaring of the wind could not drown. It seemed to shake the whole house. Reube sprang out of bed. As he dragged on his trousers his mother came to the door with a lamp in her hand.

"What is it, mother?" he asked, rubbing his eyes.

"Some one has broken in the outer door," replied Mrs. Dare, calmly. "He is in the back kitchen now, but the inner door is bolted."

Reube took the lamp from her hand and started down stairs.

"O, my boy, what are you doing? You have no weapon. O, if only we had—"

But Reube interrupted these words, which now had an all-unwonted tremor in them.

"Nothing else to be done, mother," he said, quietly. "Don't be scared! He won't bother me, whoever he is!" And as his mother looked at him she felt strangely reassured. Or, perhaps it was something in his voice which satisfied her. She snatched up her big Paisley shawl, flung it over her nightgown, and followed Reube at a discreet distance.

Reube opened a door leading from the hall to the inner kitchen. At the same moment the door between the two kitchens was battered in with a loud crash, and there entered a terrifying apparition. It was Jim Paul, drunk, and with a wild glitter in his bloodshot eyes. His face and huge, burly form were stained with the blood of various fights, and he carried in his hand the ax with which he had broken down the doors.

Jim Paul's appearance was well calculated to daunt an older heart than Reube's, but Reube's heart was of a dauntless fiber. A cold, steady light seemed to shine from his pale eyes as they met the fierce and feverish gaze of the intruder, who promptly stopped and glanced aside uneasily. Reube's mouth and broad brow, usually so boyish, looked as grim as iron as he stepped up coolly to the drunken giant and asked him what he meant by breaking into the house.

Paul hesitated, beginning to quail before the stronger will that confronted him.

"Give me that ax!" said Reube, quietly.

Paul handed over the weapon with most prompt and deferential obedience, and began to stammer an inarticulate apology. Reube kept eyeing him without another word, and Paul grew anxious and worried under the gaze. At last he plunged his great hand deep down into his trousers pocket and drew forth a lot of silver and copper coins. These he pressed Reube to accept, presently breaking into maudlin protestations of esteem.

Reube turned away abruptly, having made up his mind what to do with his troublesome guest. He set the lamp on a shelf, and then took the money which Paul still held out.

"I'll take care of it till you're sober enough to put it to its proper use," said he.

The big fellow was by this time on the verge of tears, and ejaculating a host of promises. He wouldn't touch another drop, and he'd mend both the doors so they'd be just as good as new; and he'd never forget Reube's goodness in not having him taken up for a burglar, and he'd go right home to his poor family.

"No you don't, Jim!" interrupted Reube at this point. "You'll stay right here where I put you for the rest of this night. And you'll go home to your family in the morning if you're sober enough, but not otherwise."

At this Paul began to protest. But paying no more heed to his words than if he had been a naughty child, Reube led him to a small room opening off the kitchen. The window of this room was a tiny affair through which a man of Paul's bulk could not manage to squeeze. Reube got a couple of heavy buffalo robes, spread them on the floor, and told Paul to lie down on them. Then, bidding him sleep soundly and feel better in the morning, Reube locked him in and went to bed. But he took the precaution to carry the ax up stairs with him. His mother said simply:

"You managed the poor fellow beautifully, my dear boy. I was glad you were not forced to be rough with him."

Reube smiled inwardly at his mother's magnificent faith in his powers, but all he said was:

"Good night, mother dear. He's all right where he is now, and I'll have a talk with him in the morning."

In the morning Paul had fairly sobered up. He was genuinely ashamed of himself. After making him eat some breakfast Reube gave him back his money and sent him home. As he was leaving the house he turned to say something, but seeing Mrs. Dare within earshot he hesitated. Reube followed him to the gate. There he stopped and said:

"I know I was just crazy drunk las' night, but I kinder reck'lect what happened. When we wuz all drinkin' down to Simes's, an' I'd licked three or four of the fellers, Mart Gandy says, says he, 'There's a lad hereabouts as yer cain't lick, Jim Paul, an' him only a kid, too!' In course I fires up, and says I, 'Show him to me, an' I'll show yous all!' Some more words passed, till I was that riled I was blind, an' then Mart Gandy says, says he, 'Yer cain't lick Reube Dare!' Off I started to once't, an' you know's well's I do that I'd never 'a' lifted a finger agin this house ef I hadn't bin jest blind crazy! But I'll remember what I might 'a' done ef you hadn't jest bin able to make me mind; an' 'fore God, I'll try to keep straight. But you mark my words. Look out fer that ther Gandy! He's up ter mischief, an' he ain't the one to stick at anything."

"Thank you, Jim," answered Reube, holding out his hand. "We'll say no more about last night, but I'll remember your warning, and I want you to remember the promise you've just made me!"

The Dido's First Fishing Trip.

JIM PAUL'S warning made an impression on Reube's mind. When Will Carter heard of it he exclaimed:

"That fits in with my own ideas exactly, Reube! There's some alien streak in that Gandy's blood that makes him more likely to knife you in the back than fight you to your face; and that being a kind of enemy you don't understand, you've got to be all the more careful, old man."

"Well," said Reube, thoughtfully, "what is one to do about it anyway?"

"Why, look sharp for a chance to get the scoundrel locked up, even if his family does need him," answered Will. "And, meanwhile, keep your eyes open after dark, and take no chances. Carry a good heavy stick, too."

"All right!" laughed Reube. "But I think these hands of mine are good enough for Mart, any day."

That night proving fine with a fair, light wind down the bay, Reube and Will took the *Dido* out for her first drift. In the cuddy were stowed some extra clothes in case of a cold bay fog rolling up, and several thick blankets, and enough bread and meat and cold tea for a couple of days in case the trip should be unexpectedly prolonged. Will insisted also on a generous sheet of Mrs. Dare's gingerbread and a brown stone jug of lime-juice ready mixed. He had a care for material comforts. But as for Reube, he was in such a state of exalted excitement that he could think of nothing but shad and the *Dido*.

Will was an excellent shot—famous, indeed, all about that region for his habit of going partridge shooting with a little rifle instead of the orthodox shotgun. He now took his beloved little rifle with him in the hope of bagging some rare specimen of gull or hawk. He little dreamed that he might turn out to be hunted instead of hunter on that trip.

By the time all preparations were complete, and the brown nets, beaded with wooden floats and leaden sinkers, unwound from the reel and neatly coiled in the *Dido's* stern, and the great half hogshead amidships filled with water to serve as ballast, the rest of the shad fleet were dropping one by one out of the creek. Like great pale moths their sails floated over the marsh, following the windings of the creek, and vanishing into the silvery night. The *Dido* followed with Reube at the helm. She sailed swiftly and soon overtook her slower rivals. Only the little red-and-white pinkie preserved her distance, and Reube had to acknowledge, reluctantly, that she was as speedy as the *Dido*. When the fleet reached the open every boat headed down the bay, at the same time diverging from its neighbor. The object of this latter movement was to get the utmost possible room for the nets; of the former to get as far down the bay as possible before turning with the tide to drift back. The fishing was all done on this backward drift.

The *Dido* gradually lost sight of all her rivals but the pinkie, which hovered, a faint white speck, far to starboard. The five hours' sail brought our young shad fishers past Cape Chignecto, and into wider waters. It was rough off the cape after the turn of tide, and the *Dido* pitched heavily in the steep yellow waves. Neither Reube nor Will had ever before been so far down the bay, and in their curiosity over a certain strange formation of the cliffs they sailed somewhat close to the shore.

Will, from his place on the cuddy, was expatiating learnedly on the distorted strata before them, when suddenly he broke off in the midst of a word, and yelled:

"A reef right ahead! Bring her about, quick!"

But Reube had seen the danger at the same instant. With one hand he jammed the helm hard down, and with the other loosed the main sheet, at the same time shouting to Will:

"Let go the jib!"

Will sprang to obey. But the stiff new rope, pulled taut during the long run and shrunken hard by the spray, would not yield at once even to his strong fingers. It had got jammed fast in some way. Meanwhile the *Dido*, broadside on and beaten mightily by the waves, was heeling as if she would turn over in the trough. The jib pulled terrifically, and the water hissed above the cleaving gunwale.

"Quick! Quick!" yelled Reube; and Will, snatching his knife from his belt, severed the rope at a slash and released the sail. Gracefully the *Dido* swung up, righted herself, and bowed on an even keel.

"That was something of a close shave," remarked Reube.

"It was," said Will, studying with angry eyes the rope which had baffled him.

After this they took a long tack which brought them once more into smoother waters above the cape. As the sun got higher the wind fell lighter, and at length Reube announced that it was time to get out the net. The mainsail was hauled down, and under a close-reefed jib the *Dido* lay to while the net was slowly and carefully paid out over the stern. The helm was so delicately manipulated that the floating net was not allowed to bunch, but formed its line of blocks into a wide, shallow crescent with the *Dido* at one horn. This accomplished, the remaining bit of canvas was furled and the long, slow process of "drifting" was fairly begun. The tide ran fast, and the shores a half mile distant slipped smoothly by. The rudder swung loose while Will and Reube ate their breakfast, and congratulated themselves on the sailing qualities of the *Dido*. After breakfast they basked in the sweet June sun, told stories, wondered idly if the net was capturing anything, grew sleepy, and at last began to get impatient. A great gray gull flew over, and Will raised his rifle. But he lowered it instantly.

"I was on the point of dropping that poor old grayback," said he, penitently, "just for lack of something better to do."

"I wondered why you were going to shoot it," said Reube, "when I knew it was no good as a specimen."

"I say," exclaimed Will, a few minutes later, yawning, "this sun's getting mighty hot! How long

have we been drifting?"

"A little over two hours," replied Reube.

"How long is one expected to drift?" asked Will.

"O, say four, or maybe five," was the reply.

"Well, as this is just a sort of trial trip and picnic," suggested Will, "I move we haul in the net and count our fish. Then we can sail round yonder point to a big creek I know of with a fine, shelving sand spit at its mouth. The sand is covered at high water; but about the time we get there it will be just right for you to go in swimming from. A swim will go fine this hot day, eh?"

"All right!" assented Reube. He was himself consumed with impatience to see what was in the net.

As the first two oars' lengths came over the side there was nothing, and the fishermen's faces fell. Then came the shining, silvery sides of a dozen shad, and they grew exultant. Then a small salmon, and they chuckled. Then two or three large jellyfish slipped through the meshes in fragments. And then the shad really began. It was a noble haul, and excitement ran high in the *Dido*. The huge tub amidships was nearly half full of the gleaming spoils by the time the last fathom of net came over the side; and there was also another and larger salmon to show. The water in the tub was thrown overboard, as the shad made sufficient ballast.

"If the *Dido* keeps it up like this she'll be as good as your diked marsh," cried Reube, gloating over his prizes.

"Right you are!" said Will, heartily, washing his hands with vigor over the side. "And now for that swim. We've earned it, and we need it."

Forthwith the sails were got up, and the *Dido* made all haste for the swimming place which Will had indicated. She rounded the point, skirted the shore for nearly a mile, ran into the creek's mouth, and dropped anchor beside the tempting yellow sand spit.



Then came the shining, silvery sides of a dozen shad.

CHAPTER X.

Besieged on the Sand Spit.

WILL lost no time in getting off his clothes. He felt hot and fishy, and the cool, tawny ripples allured him. Reube tested the anchor to see that the *Dido* held fast, and then began more slowly to undress. The anchor had been dropped not more than thirty or forty feet from the sand spit, but the boat had swung off before the light breeze till the distance was increased to a score of yards.

"That's quite a swim for me, Will," said Reube, doubtfully, eyeing the tide.

"Nonsense! You can swim twice as far as that if you only think so," asserted Will with confidence. "By the way, I wonder what makes you such a duffer in the water. That's your weak point. I must take you in hand and make a water dog of you."

"I just wish you would," said Reube. "I don't seem to really get hold of myself in the water. I have to work frightfully hard to keep up at all, and then I'm all out of breath in less than no time. Why is it, I wonder?"

"Well," answered Will, "we'll see right now. You swim over to the bar yonder, and I'll stand here

and watch your action. I fancy you don't use your legs just right."

"It's too far. Pull her in a little way," urged Reube.

Laughingly Will complied. He pulled on the rope till the *Dido* was almost straight above the anchor. Then Reube slipped overboard with an awkward splash and struck out for the sand spit.

His progress was slow and labored. His strokes made a great turmoil, but produced little solid result. Will's face wore a look of amused comprehension, but he refrained from criticism till the swimmer had reached his goal and drawn himself out panting on the sand.

"How's that?" asked Reube.

"O, it's all wrong! If it was anyone less obstinate than you he wouldn't keep afloat half a minute struggling that way," answered Will. "But wait a moment and I'll show you what I mean."

With a graceful curve Will plunged into the water as smoothly as if he had been oiled. A few long, powerful strokes brought him to the spot where his comrade was standing.

"Now," said he, "get in there in front of me when the water comes up to the lower part of your chest. You use your legs wrong, and your arms too. Your arms don't make a quarter the stroke they ought to, and your fingers are wide open, and your hands press out instead of down on the water too much. Keep your fingers together, and turn your palms so that they tend to lift you, instead of just pushing the water away on each side. And, moreover, finish your stroke!"

"And what about my legs?" asked Reube, humbly.

"Never mind them till we get the hands right," insisted Will. "Now lean forward slowly, with your back hollowed well and chin up, your arms out straight ahead, and straighten your legs. Right! Now round with your arms in a big, fine sweep, drawing up your legs at the same time. That's more like it. But your legs—you draw them up right under you with the knees close together. That's all wrong. Didn't you ever watch a frog, old man? As you draw up your legs spread your knees wide apart like one of those tin monkeys shinning up a stick. Try again. M-m-m! Yes, that's something like what I want. You see, with the knees doubled up wide apart they have their separate motions as you kick them out again. The legs press the water down, and so do some lifting. The feet push you ahead, and at the same time you thrust a wedge of water backward from between your legs as they come strongly together."

"That's reasonable," assented Reube, practicing diligently. In a few minutes he had made a marvelous advance in his method. Will sometimes swam beside him, sometimes stood on the bar and criticised.

All at once, in the midst of an encouraging speech he clapped his hands to his heart with a cry of pain, sank upon the sand, and called out sharply:

"Come here quick, quick, Reube!"

Reube remembered his lessons even in his anxiety, and with long, powerful strokes made his way swiftly to Will's side. As he landed Will straightened himself up with a grave smile, and held one his hand to draw Reube back from the water's edge.

"I'm all right now," said he.

"But what was the matter?" queried Reube, in impatient astonishment.

"Why, just that," replied Will, suddenly pointing to the water.

Reube turned and glanced behind him.

"*Sharks!*" he almost shouted. And there, sure enough, were two black triangular fins cleaving the water where he had just been swimming.

After staring for a moment or two in silence he turned again and met the inscrutable smile on his companion's face. He held out his hand.

"I understand," said he. "If I'd got flurried in the water I would have forgotten the lessons you have just given me, and couldn't have got to shore fast enough." And in the love and admiration which glowed in his eyes Will read sufficient thanks.

"Now the question is," mused the latter, "how we're going to get to the boat."

"Seems to me we'd better stay right here for the present," said Reube, drily.

"Yes," suggested Will; "and when the tide gets a little higher what then?"

"Um!" said Reube, "I was forgetting this is not an honest island. This does certainly look awkward. But what do you suppose those chaps are doing, cruising to and fro right there? Are they just catching herring? Or are they after us?"

"You would know what they were after if you had seen the way they streaked in here when they got a glimpse of you," responded Will.

"I don't see what we're going to do about it," said Reube presently, after they had gazed at their dreadful besiegers in gloomy silence. "But there's something in the way of a weapon which we might as well secure anyway." And running to the other side of the sand spit he snatched up a broken picket which had been left there by the previous ebb. "It's better than nothing," he insisted.

"Reube," said Will, "if we stay here it's all up with us pretty soon. We'll just make a dinner for those chaps. It seems to me I'd better take that stick you've got there and make a dash for the *Dido*. You know I swim wonderfully fast, and dive like a fish; and I can perhaps manage to jab the sharks with that picket, or scare them off by making a great splash in the water. If I succeed in getting to the *Dido* I'll bring her over for you, and we'll fix the enemy with a couple of bullets."

"No," said Reube, doggedly, grasping the other firmly by the shoulder. "You just wait here. We'll fight this thing out side by side, as we have fought things out before. Remember the cave, Will! And we won't fight till we have to. We're safe for a half hour yet anyway."

"And then the distance between us and the boat will be all the greater," urged Will.

"No, the wind's falling and it may turn and blow the *Dido* over this way," insisted Reube. "See, the fitful little gusts now. Or one of the other boats may come in sight near enough for us to hail her. You never can tell what may happen, you know."

Indeed, as a matter of fact, Reube was right. He could not tell what would happen. What actually did happen was neither of the things which he had suggested, and yet it was the most natural thing in the world.

Foiling the Sharks.

SLOWLY the tide crept in upon the spit, and the strip of sand grew narrower. Those grimly patrolling black fins drew nearer and nearer as the bar became smaller. The gusts of wind grew more and more capricious, sometimes seeming as if they would actually swing the *Dido* over to the rescue of the despairing prisoners; but this they refrained from doing.

"She'll swing over to us yet," asserted Reube, confidently. "She isn't going to desert us in such a horrible scrape as this!"

But Will made no reply. He was studying his tactics for the struggle which he felt was now close at hand.

"You'd better give that stake, or picket, or whatever it is, to me, Reube," he suggested. "You'll have enough to do just swimming. I, being perfectly at home in the water, will be able to make the best use of it, don't you think? If I can manage to give each of those brutes a solid jab in the belly, maybe they'll get sick of their undertaking and depart."

"All right," agreed Reube, though with some reluctance. And he handed over the sharp stick.

"You'll have to fight for yourself and me too, that's all," he continued.

"I'll make a fight anyway," said Will. "And I dare say I can drive them both off. In these well-stocked waters they can't be very hungry or very fierce."

At last the strip of sand was not more than three or four feet wide and six inches above water. But though so narrow it was more than a hundred yards in length, extending like a sort of backbone up the entrance to the creek. About the middle it looked a foot or two broader than where the captives were standing.

"Come up there where it is wider," said Reube.

As they went those black fins kept scrupulously abreast of them, and they shuddered at the sight.

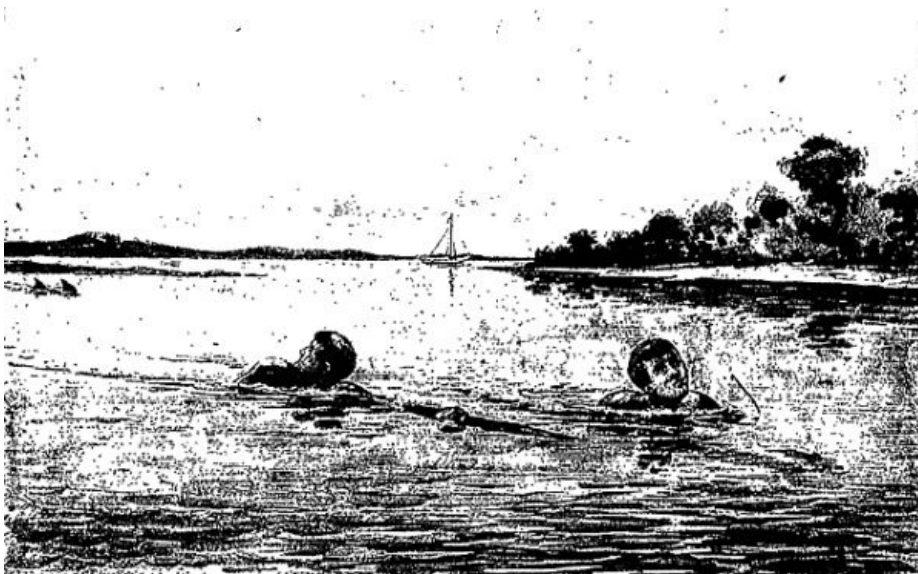
At this point the opposite shore of the creek jutted out somewhat sharply toward the sand spit. Will cast his eye across the narrow channel.

"What fools we are all this time!" he cried. "Why, we can easily swim across to land on this side before the sharks can get all the way around the shoal."

"Can we?" inquired Reube, doubtfully.

"Yes," said Will, "and the sooner the better. But now look, Reube; keep cool. Don't try to hurry too much. Take the long, slow strokes. And remember, I'll keep behind, and, if the brutes do get around too quick I'll keep them busy a minute or two, never fear. Then you can come to my rescue with one of those fence stakes yonder. Come on, now!" And side by side they slipped swiftly into the water.

With long, powerful strokes they sped across the narrow channel that divided them from safety. Will, swimming at much less than his full speed, dropped almost a yard behind as soon as they were fairly started, and swam on his side so as to command a view of the water behind. The narrow ridge of yet uncovered sand, however, prevented him from seeing what took place when he and Reube slipped noiselessly, as they thought, into the water. Those black fins had turned on the instant, and were darting with terrific speed for the lower end of the sand spit.



"I think we'll make it," he said to himself.

By the time our swimmers were fairly half way across, or perhaps a shade better, Will saw the fins come round the foot of the sand spit.

"I think we'll make it," he said to himself, measuring the distance with cool eye. But he refrained from telling Reube what he saw. A moment later, however, as he marked the terrible speed of the approaching peril, he could not help saying, in a voice which he kept quite steady and casual:

"You're doing finely, Reube. Don't hurry your stroke, but put a little more power in it for a spurt and we're safe."

Reube wasted no breath for a reply. He knew this adjuration of Will's meant that the danger was

drawing very near; but his companion's anxiety as to his nerves was quite unneeded. He struck out as steadily as ever, but with all the force which his muscle and his will power together could create, and went ahead so fast that Will had to really swim to keep up with him. In half a minute more—to them it seemed a long time—Reube struck bottom in shallow water and dragged himself to land. The sharks were now so near that for an instant Will hesitated. Would he have time to get out, or must he turn and defend his legs? But his decision was instantaneous. With a mighty thrust of his legs and one free arm he flung himself forward, felt the mud beneath his hands, jerked his feet under him, and stood up just in time to turn and deal the nearest shark a desperate blow with the pointed stake as it half turned over to seize him. Astonished and daunted, the great fish recoiled, and before its fellow could join in the attack Will had sprung out of reach.

"It's a blessed thing," said Will, "to get ashore with a whole leg, isn't it?"

His light manner was but the froth on the surface of his deeper emotions. He was trembling from the long strain and stern self-repression.

Reube drew a deep, slow breath.

"Verily," said he, with a grave face, "that was pretty nearly as bad as the cave while it lasted!"

"O, surely not," objected Will. "We had the free air and sun, and a chance to fight for our lives. But it makes me mad to think what fools we were in the first place."

"How so?" asked Reube.

"Why," answered Will, "if we'd come, this way on the first arrival of those beastly leviathans we would not have had half so far to swim, and our pursuers would have had nearly twice as far to go. It would have all been as simple and easy as falling off a log, and our hearts wouldn't be going like trip hammers now, the way they are."

"That's so," agreed Reube, in a tone of disgust. "But now I'm wondering what other scrapes we can manage to get into between here and home. I never realized till now the truth of the proverb—generally I despise proverbs—which says 'It never rains but it pours!' It seems to me I have been at steady high pressure the last few days, and lived more and felt more than in all the rest of my life put together."

"My idea is that fate'll let us alone for a while now," remarked Will, with the air of a philosopher. "The law of probabilities is all against any further excitement on this trip."

"So be it!" said Reube. "But let's get to the *Dido*—and our clothes!"

Trotting up the lonely shore of the creek for half a mile, they came to an *aboideau*, and crossed to the other shore of the stream. Following down the bank, they soon came opposite the *Dido*. The sharks were nowhere to be seen, and the *Dido* presently swung so near that a short plunge put them safely on board. Dressing hastily, they got up the anchor and sailed out of the creek with their bowsprit pointing homeward. As they did so the sharks appeared again, pursuing them. Will tied a piece of pork to a dry block, tossed it overboard, and snatched up his rifle. The bait floated a moment unmolested, then the nearest shark, darting upon it, turned over and engulfed it in his murderous mouth. At the same moment Will fired. The ball, with deadly precision, entered the brute's mouth and pierced its brain. With a convulsive flurry it rolled over stone dead.

CHAPTER XII.

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The Shot from the Rocks.

THE other shark, taking alarm, darted away at once.

"That's a trophy we must secure!" exclaimed Reube. "You don't have a chance to shoot a shark every day."

Will was already noosing a couple of ropes. The *Dido* was brought alongside the rolling carcass, and after a great deal of difficulty the nooses were made fast to its head and tail. In the effort to hoist the heavy mass aboard the boat was nearly swamped; and at one time Will offered to give up the job. But Reube generously insisted on continuing. At last, by waiting till a wave rolled boat and carcass, together in just the most propitious way possible, the thing was accomplished with a sudden hoist. Along with the great fish a barrel or two of water came aboard; and while Reube steered, Will was kept busy for a half hour bailing the boat out.

This accomplished, Will discovered that the hot sun, the excitement, or possibly the motion of the boat, had given him a violent headache.

"O, it's all very well, but you know you're seasick," gibed Reube, as he sat at the helm.

"Maybe so," assented Will, undisturbed at the imputation. "Anyway, I'm going to lie down here under the shade of the mainsail to sleep it off. Even if I snore don't wake me, as you value your life!"

With the aid of a blanket he made himself comfortable, and in a few minutes was sound asleep. Steering the *Dido* and watching the shores slip by, and building plans for the coming year, Reube was well content. The wind, after having almost died away, had shifted a few points and was blowing gently but steadily. With this wind on her beam the *Dido* sailed fast, heeling smoothly, and sending the waves past her gunwale with a pleasant murmur. Reube took little account of time just now. Life seemed a very attractive dream, and he was unwilling even to stir. But his hand on the tiller was firm, and there was no smallest danger of him dropping to sleep.

This lotus-eating mood, with a few intervals, must have lasted four or five hours. The tide had turned and been a good three hours on the ebb. At last he observed vaguely that he was just off the promontory where he and Will had been caught in the cave. Thinking of the dangers of the locality, he steered a point or two further out to give the sunken reefs a wide berth. As he did so he noticed that the tide was out as far as the foot of the bluff, and that the cove flats were all uncovered. He

was fairly past the point when out of the tail of his eye he caught a movement among the rocks just where the cave mouth lay. Turning his head quickly, he saw Mart Gandy step forward and raise his great duck gun to his shoulder.

The distance was scarcely fifty yards, and Gandy was a first-rate shot. There was no time to think. Like a flash Reube dropped forward upon the bottom of the boat, letting the tiller swing free. At the same instant there was a loud, roaring report from the big duck gun, and the heavy charge of buckshot, passing just over the gunwale, tore a black hole in the sail.

Reube had fallen just in time. He picked himself up again at once, recaptured the tiller, and tried to put the *Dido* before the wind in the hope of getting out of range ere Gandy could load up for another shot. But the boat was pointing straight for the shore, and came round very slowly. Ere Reube could get her on a new course Will appeared from behind the sail, astonished at the noise and the confusion.

He took in the situation at once. Gandy, who was reloading in fierce haste, stopped for a moment with paling face at Will's unexpected appearance. He had evidently been under the impression that Reube was alone, or doubtless he would not have committed himself by such an attack. Then he made up his mind that he would see the thing through. Flinging down his powder horn, he rammed home the wadding fiercely, and reached for the heavy shot pouch at his side.

"To shore, Reube! Straight ashore with her!" said Will, in a low, intense voice.

Reube obeyed instantly, seeing that his former intention had been a mistake. Mart Gandy wadded home the buckshot in his great gun barrel. The charge was a terrific one. Will stooped, like a wild-cat crouching for a spring. The *Dido* rushed straight on, and both Reube and Will declared afterward that they knew just what it was like to charge a battery.

As Will's keen eye saw Gandy's finger feel for the trigger, he yelled, "Down! Reube!" and dropped beneath the gunwale. On the instant Reube fell flat in the stern. The great roar of the duck gun shook the air at the same moment. But the charge flew wild and high, and a black hole appeared in the upper part of the sail. The report was followed by a yell of pain, and the big gun clattered on the rocks. Gandy staggered back. The breech of the gun had blown out, and a fragment of it had shattered his arm. In a moment, however, he recovered himself and rushed desperately at the face of the bluff.

The boys saw at once what had happened.

"We've got him now," said Reube, sternly. His sense of justice quenched all sense of pity.

"Yes," remarked Will, "he can't climb the rocks with that arm; and now that he can't fire that clumsy weapon of his, he's no longer dangerous. We'll just take him prisoner!"

Meanwhile the *Dido* was dashing straight on to the Point, trusting to Providence that she would strike a soft spot. But with Gandy disabled there was no need of this desperate haste, so Reube steered for a place where he knew there was neither reef nor honey pot, but a slope of firm sand. He was too much occupied in the delicate task of making a safe landing for the *Dido* to observe what Gandy was doing. But Will watched the actions of the latter, with a cold smile on his finely cut mouth.

"He is a coward, every time, when it comes to the pinch!" was his remark. "See him now, too scared to meet us like a man, and struggling like a whipped cur to climb those rocks and get away! He can't do it, though!"

Indeed, Mart Gandy at this moment realized the fact which gave Will such satisfaction. With his right arm broken, he could not make his way to the top of the bluff. Like a hunted animal, he turned and glared with eyes of hate and fear upon his adversaries. Again he looked at the rocks, turning his head quickly from side to side. And then, with a shrill, fierce cry, he darted out straight across the flats toward the head of the cove.

"He'll get away after all," remarked Reube.

"Get away, indeed!" muttered Will. "It's in the very thick of the honey pots he'll be in less than half a minute, or I'm much mistaken. There!"

As he spoke, Gandy was seen to throw himself violently backward. It was just in time. As he tore himself by a mighty wrench from the engulfing slime he struggled to his feet, swerved to one side, and ran on.

Reube drew a long breath of relief; and Will said, dispassionately:

"That was well done. It was sharp."

Just then the *Dido* ran up on the sand, and stopped with a shock that would have pitched Will overboard if he had not grasped the mast.

"Now we've done it, Reube!" he exclaimed. "We're aground hard and fast, just when there's no longer any need of being here. I fancy we won't undertake to follow Mr. Gandy through these honey pots."

Reube made no direct answer. He was on his feet watching the fugitive, anxiously.

"Ah-h-h!" he cried, "he's got it. He'll never get through that patch of death traps along there."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when Gandy seemed to wallow forward as if the ground had given way beneath him. With a mighty heave of his body he tried to throw himself backward as he had done before. But this time he was too late. The hungry, greenish-red ooze but lipped and clung to him more greedily. He flung himself flat, rolled on his side, and strove to drag one leg free. With the effort his other leg sank up to the thigh. Then he lifted his face and uttered a shriek of heart-shaking horror.

Reube and Will sprang out upon the sand, Will grabbing up the boat hook as he did so. Reube snatched it from his hand.

"Go back," he cried, "and get a rope, and follow me carefully right in my tracks. I know this cove and you don't."

The next moment he was speeding like the wind to the spot where Gandy lay writhing in that inexorable grasp.

Gandy is Rescued from the Honey Pots.

WILL was but a few seconds in getting the necessary rope out of the cuddy. Then, taking an oar with him, he followed Reube as fast as he could run, casting wary eyes at the oily patches which were dotted around his path.

The wretch in the honey pots had evidently no thought that his enemies would attempt his rescue. When he saw them approaching he thought they came to mock him or to gloat over his last agony, and he nerved himself to control the terror which had unmanned him. Then he saw the boat hook, the oar, the rope, and he knew that these meant help if help were possible. A wild hope, mixed with wonder, lit up his deep-set eyes. Could it be that Reube Dare would try to save him after all that he had done? To let him perish would be just, and so easy and so safe. To help him would be perilous indeed, for no one could go among the honey pots without taking his life in his hands; and yet here was Reube, here was that interfering Carter chap, running toward him as if there were no such things as honey pots. He could not understand it. The deadly mud was sucking, sucking, sucking at his feet, his knees, his thighs. It was like dumb, insatiable tongues of strange monsters curling about him. Nevertheless, he half forgot the horror in a new feeling which broke upon his spirit, and this emotion spoke in his eyes as Reube arrived at the edge of the honey pot. Reube saw it, and it insensibly softened his voice as he said:

"Keep up your nerve now, and we'll get you out all right." At the same time he stretched out the boat hook, which Mart grasped with desperate strength, pressing it to his breast with his one sound arm.

Flinging all his weight into the pull, Reube surged mightily on the boat hook. But his utmost force produced no effect. The pull of the twisting mud was mightier. Instead of extricating Gandy, even by an inch, he found himself sinking. He was on treacherous ground. With a quick wrench he freed the leg that was caught by dragging it from its boot. Then, leaving the boot where it was, he ran around to the other side of the honey pot and felt for firm standing ground.

As he did so, Will came up breathing quickly.

"Be keerful on your right!" cried Gandy, sharply, and Will sprang aside, just avoiding a bad spot.

"Thanks, Gandy," he remarked, in a casual way, as if Gandy had picked up his hat for him or handed him a match. Then he flung a coil of rope, saying:

"Fix the end of that under your arms; fix it firm, so that it won't slip."

Then he went round the honey pot to where Reube was standing, with pale brow knitted closely.

"What are we going to do?" asked Reube. "I can't budge him."

Gandy, in spite of shattered arm, had succeeded in fastening the rope about his waist, and now, placing the long, light shaft of the boat hook in front of him, was bearing down upon it as hard as he could.

"That's a good idea," cried Will. "But here, Mart, the oar will be better because it's bigger round and flat in the blade. Fling us the boat hook and take the oar!"

These efforts, though they had not at all availed to extricate the victim, had kept him from being dragged further down. With the oar he was able to exert his strength to more advantage. Will now made a loop in the rope and passed the handle of the boat hook through it. Then, one on each side of the rope, and each with the shaft across his breast, so that the whole formed a sort of rude harness, Will and Reube bent their bodies to the pull like oxen in a yoke. At the same time Gandy, using his unwounded arm, lifted with all the force that despair could give him.

For two or three seconds there was no result. Was it all to be in vain? Then from Gandy's white lips came a gasping cry of "She gives!" and slowly, slowly at first, then with a sudden yielding which nearly threw the rescuers to the ground, that terrible hold gave way, and Gandy, was jerked forward upon solid ground.

White and panting from the strain, they turned to free him from the rope. He had fainted and lay as if dead. The anguish of his wound and of his terror and the gigantic effort which he had just put forth had overcome him.



Will and Reube bent their bodies to the pull.

"Let's get the poor wretch down to the water," proposed Will.

"We'll take him right aboard the *Dido*, where we can see to his arm and fix him a place in the cuddy," said Reube. "The *Dido's* hard and fast now for another six hours, so we can take our time. But I wish we could get the chap to a doctor sooner than that."

So saying, he picked up Gandy's long form and walked with it easily down to the boat. The wounded man was still unconscious. A bed of quilts was fixed for him, and Reube was just about to cut the sleeve from his shirt to examine the arm and bathe it when Will cried:

"Hold on a minute, Reube. The way the boat lies now I think we can pry her off with the oar. See how the sands dip away on the outside."

He was right. Using the big oar as a lever, they got the *Dido* afloat in a very few moments. Then Reube said:

"You sail the boat, Will, and I'll see to the patient."

"You had better let me attend to him while you steer," suggested Will.

"No," said Reube; "he's my own private enemy, and I must look after him myself. You see to the boat." And Will obeyed without more ado.

Had they been watching Gandy's face they would have seen the eyes open and instantly close again. But Reube was delicately cutting the sleeve away and Will was watching the process, the sail, and the *Dido's* course all at the same time. Gandy was conscious, but in a faint way he was wondering over the situation in which he found himself. Presently he heard Will speak again:

"Well, now you've got him, and the poor rascal is a good deal worse for wear. I can't for the life of me see what you're going to do with him."

Will's voice was kind, in a bantering way. He found it hard to maintain a proper degree of righteous indignation against a man whose life he had just saved. And that helpless arm he could not but contemplate with pity.

"I'm going to get him home and into the doctor's hands," said Reube. "It seems to me he's punished enough this time, and maybe he'll realize it. Anyway, I'm not going to take action against him after all the trouble we've had to save him. We'll just say nothing about that shot from the rocks till we see how he turns out when he gets well. If there's any good in him, this experience ought to bring it out. And there must be some good streak in a fellow that's faithful to his family the way Mart is."

By this time the arm was bare, and Reube was bathing it tenderly. Then, covering the wound with a wet compress, he bandaged it loosely and rose to fix a shelter over the patient's face. To his amazement the tears were rolling down Gandy's sallow cheeks.

"What's the matter, Mart? Feeling worse?" he inquired, anxiously.

But Gandy made no reply. He covered his face with his one available arm, and Reube could perceive his thin lips working strangely. Having seen that he was as comfortable as he knew how to make him, Reube seated himself by Will in the stern. Save for a few chance and commonplace remarks, there was silence between the two comrades for an hour, while the *Dido* sped merrily homeward. They had enough to occupy their thoughts in that day's adventures, but they did not wish to talk of what their captive could hardly like to hear about. At last Will remarked:

"It's warm, Reube, and your patient must be thirsty."

"That's so," said Reube, springing up. With a tin of fresh water he stepped over to Gandy's side, slipped an arm under his head to raise it, and said:

"Here, Mart, take a sup to cool your lips. They look parched."

Instead of complying, Gandy grasped and clung to the hand that held the cup.

"Forgive me," he begged. "Reube Dare, forgive me. I never knowed what I was doin'. To think of all I've done to you, an' then you to treat me like this!" And he covered his face again.

"Mart," said Reube, more moved than he was willing to let appear, "never mind about that now. We'll let bygones be bygones. Here's my hand on it." And he grasped the hand that hid Mart's eyes.

In his weakness Gandy was so overcome that he tried to laugh just while he was struggling not to cry, and he made a poor mixture of the attempt. But, raising himself for a second on his elbow, he managed to murmur unsteadily:

"I can't talk, but, 'fore God, I'll show you both what I think of you."

And Mart Gandy kept his word through after years of loyal devotion to these two young men who on this day had taught him a new knowledge of the human heart. An ambition to seem worthy in their eyes led him to mend his life, and the Gandy name soon grew in favor throughout the Tantramar countryside.

As for the *Dido*, fate looked kindly on her trips all that season and for several seasons thereafter. That autumn Reube took his mother to Boston. Mrs. Carter, with Will and Ted, went at the same time; and after a simple operation, much less painful than had been expected, Mrs. Dare regained the perfect use of her eyes. On their return to the Tantramar Will and Ted set out again for college, and this time Reube went with them. His *Dido* had proved herself a fair match for the new marsh in the matter of giving her master an education. During successive summer holidays she carried Reube and Will and Ted on many a profitable and merry trip, but never again did she experience one so eventful as that with which she began her career as a Tantramar shad boat.

THE END.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected.
Inconsistencies in punctuation have been maintained.
Some illustrations were moved to facilitate page layout.
A cover was created for this eBook.

[The end of *Reube Dare's Shad Boat: A Tale of the Tide Country*, by Charles G. D. (George Douglas) Roberts.]

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