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Along the St. Lawrence, by
John Henry Goldfrap**

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Title: The Border Boys Along the St. Lawrence

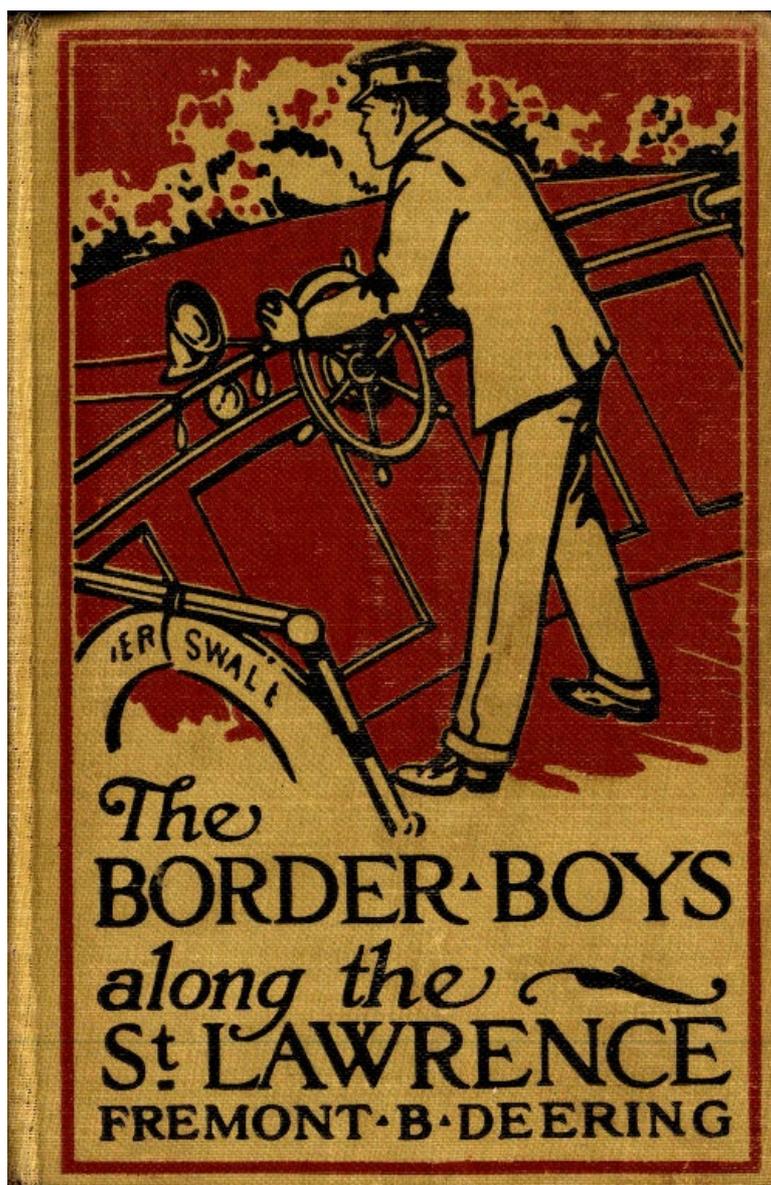
Author: John Henry Goldfrap
Illustrator: Charles L. Wrenn

Release date: March 30, 2016 [EBook #51600]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Stephen Hutcheson, Dave Morgan
and the Online
Distributed Proofreading Team at
<http://www.pgdp.net>

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BORDER BOYS ALONG THE ST. LAWRENCE ***





Outlined against the night in a vivid green glare was what appeared to be a boat of living flame. ([Page 76](#))

THE BORDER BOYS ALONG THE ST. LAWRENCE

By FREMONT B. DEERING

AUTHOR OF

"The Border Boys Across the Frontier," "The Border Boys with the Mexican Rangers," "The Border Boys with the Texas Rangers," "The Border Boys in the Canadian Rockies," "The Border Boys on the Trail."



A. L. BURT COMPANY
Publishers New York

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Printed in U. S. A.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. Through the Rapids	5
II. A Close Shave	15
III. The Mysterious Gray Night Craft	23
IV. On the Trail of the Ghost Craft	32
V. Down to Montreal	46
VI. Homeward Bound	54
VII. Run Down	62
VIII. A Misleading Light	73
IX. Adrift at Night	83
X. On Windmill Island	94
XI. Ralph Investigates the Explosion	103
XII. Saved from the Ruins	111
XIII. A Race for the Doctor	119
XIV. Harry Hears a Noise in the Bushes	127
XV. Cross Purposes	137
XVI. Harry Plays Detective	147
XVII. A Visit to the Hospital	157
XVIII. The Three Conspirators	165
XIX. Ralph Gets a Telegram	175
XX. Thinking Things Out	184
XXI. A Big Surprise	193
XXII. "Not Just Yet, Stetson!"	201
XXIII. The Missing Boat	211
XXIV. In the Grip of the Storm	218
XXV. La Rue's Wild Leap	226
XXVI. Looking for Their Chum	234
XXVII. A Dazzling Discovery	242
XXVIII. Checkmated	251
XXIX. A Hermit of the St. Lawrence	258
XXX. The Stolen Skiff	266
XXXI. Afloat Again!	276
XXXII. A Joyous Meeting	283
XXXIII. Off on the Chase	289
XXXIV. The Tunnel Entrance	296
XXXV. Hands Up!	303

The Border Boys Along the St. Lawrence.

CHAPTER I. THROUGH THE RAPIDS.

"Steady, Ralph, old fellow, the Galoups are right ahead."

"All right," responded Ralph Stetson from his position at the steering wheel of the swift motor

boat the *River Swallow*, "I saw them ten minutes ago, Hardware. Just give Persimmons down below a hail and tell him to slow up a bit. They're wild waters and we don't want to go through them too fast."

Harry Ware, who (from the fact that his initials were H. D. Ware) was known to his chums by the nickname Ralph Stetson had just used, hastened to the speaking tube connecting the bridge of the *River Swallow* with the engine room, in which Percy Simmons, another of Ralph's chums, was tending the twin racing engines with assiduous care.

"Slow down a bit, Persimmons," he yelled, "we're just about to hit up the Gallops."

"Whoop! Hurray for the Glues!" floated back up the tube, as Persimmons abbreviated the name of the famous rapids into the form by which they were locally known. "Hold tight, everybody. Zing! Zang! Zabella!"

The rapids the boys were approaching had been well named by the early French settlers along the St. Lawrence the Galoups, or, in plain English, the Gallops, or, again, to give them their local name, the Glues.

For two miles or more near the American side of the river the white-capped, racing waters tore along at thirty miles or so an hour. The great rocks that lay concealed under the tumbling foam-covered waters caused the river to boil and swirl like a hundred witches' caldrons.

To an experienced skipper, however, the Galoups held no particular terrors. All that was needful was familiarity with the intricacies of their currents and whirlpools and they could be "run" in perfect safety. During the three months that the Border Boys had been the guests of Mr. Stetson at his summer home on Dexter Island, some miles below, they had gained the necessary skill to negotiate the racing, tumbling Glues. Aside from the fact that he had ordered the engines of his father's fast craft, the *River Swallow*, slowed down as they approached the place, and that his hands gripped the steering wheel more tightly, Ralph Stetson, only son of King Pin Stetson, the Railroad Magnate, felt no particular qualms as the whitecaps of the rollicking Glues appeared out of the darkness ahead.

The *River Swallow* was a narrow, sharp-stemmed motor boat which had more than once successfully defended her title of the fastest craft on the St. Lawrence. She was about sixty feet in length, painted a gleaming, lustrous black, with luxuriously fitted cabins and engines of the finest type obtainable, which drove her twin propellers at twelve hundred revolutions a minute. No wonder the boys, who, since their sojourn on the island, had become adepts at handling her, enjoyed their positions as captain and crew of the craft.

One of the two paid hands, who berthed forward, came up to Ralph just as the latter reached out for the simple mechanism which controlled the powerful search-light mounted near the steering wheel.

The boy had decided to use the rays of the great

lamp in picking out his course. In one or two places big rocks bristled menacingly out of the boiling rapids, and if the craft should happen to strike one of them, even with a glancing blow, a terrible accident would be almost certain to result. But with his search-light to act as a night-raking eye, Ralph felt small fear of anything of the sort occurring.

The man who came up to Ralph, just as a sharp click sounded and the bright scimitar of electric light, its power increased by reflectors, slashed the night, was a rather remarkable looking man to be an ordinary paid hand on a wealthy man's pleasure boat.

9

Fully six feet in height, powerfully built and erect, he had at first glance a look of refinement and intelligence that did not, somehow, appear to blend well with the somewhat inferior position he occupied. It is true that it was honest, clean employment, of which no decent man need have been ashamed, but Ralph felt every time he looked at him that Roger Malvin—such was the name the man gave—might have secured some more suitable occupation.

Yet the first favorable impression that Malvin gave did not, for some reason, survive closer acquaintanceship. Underlying his air of frank intelligence was something else that Ralph had not so far been able to understand. There was something almost sneaking and furtive about Malvin at times. But Ralph, loath at any time to distrust any of those with whom he was thrown in contact, decided that probably this was a mere peculiarity of manner with no foundation behind it.

10

The other paid hand seemed a less complex person. Olaf Hansen was a short, rather insignificant looking little Norwegian, with light blue eyes, a ruddy complexion and a shock of yellow hair. He appeared to be rather under the sway of Malvin, who, before the boys had arrived, had had command of the *River Swallow*. Whether or not Malvin held any grudge against them for assuming charge of the boat and depriving him of the easy berth he had enjoyed, Ralph was not able to determine; but once or twice he had noticed little things about the man which more than half inclined him to the belief that such was the case. If this were actually so, Malvin had so far adopted no active measures of reprisal and obeyed orders with alacrity and willingness, just as he might have done had he always "berthed forward" in the cramped quarters assigned to the crew of the *River Swallow*.

"Want a hand to get through the Gallops, sir?" he asked respectfully as he came to Ralph's side.

11

"No, thank you, Malvin," was the rejoinder. "I guess by this time I'm enough of a skipper to take her through without any trouble."

"The river's fallen a little and they are pretty bad to-night," hazarded Malvin. "I thought if I took the wheel——"

He laid a hand on the spokes as he said this.

"Be good enough not to do that again," said Ralph, rather sternly, as he spun the wheel, thus shaking off the man's grip. "You made me

swerve from my course quite a bit, and that isn't safe right here, as you know."

He looked sharply at the man as he spoke. The *River Swallow* had been up to Piquetville after supplies, groceries, and so forth, for use on the island. Malvin and the other hand had been given leave to go uptown while the boys marketed. For an instant a suspicion flashed across Ralph's mind that Malvin had been intemperate during his "shore leave." But a minute later he decided that it was only his imagination. Still, he did not like the way in which the man had deliberately tried to wrest the wheel from him. It savored of insubordination, something which he had never noticed in Malvin's conduct hitherto.

12

"You can tend the search-light, Malvin," he ordered sharply. "Try to pick up Big Nigger rock. Our course lies to starboard of that. Then we'll pass the Needles on the port. After that it's a clear run. The current will carry us through without much help from the engines."

"Very well, sir," said Malvin respectfully, taking up his position by Ralph's side, one hand on the mechanism of the search-light.

13

Suddenly the even tenor of the *River Swallow's* course was changed. It was apparent that a force superior even to her powerful engines had hold of the craft. Her light fabric shook as if in the grip of a giant's fingers. She wallowed, swerved and plunged in the swift waters, throwing spray high over her bow as she entered the grasp of the Gallops.

Ralph thrilled. There was something that made the blood race through his veins as fast as the rapids themselves in the swift, sweeping dash through the treacherous channel. Once in the grip of the Gallops, there was no turning back. The task of bringing the *River Swallow* safely through lay in his hands and in his hands alone. On his nerve and skill everything depended during the next two miles.

The *River Swallow* shot forward, drawn by the tension of the racing rapids.

14

Suddenly Ralph's attention was attracted to Malvin. For the second time that evening an ugly suspicion flashed into his mind.

15

CHAPTER II. A CLOSE SHAVE.

As Malvin had said, the river was lower by a foot or more than it had been earlier in the summer. The Gallops were worse than Ralph had hitherto seen them. In going up the river to the town that afternoon their course had lain on the Canadian side, for it was impossible for any craft to ascend the rapids, no matter how powerfully engined. Therefore, Ralph had had no previous notion of the wildness of the waters which were now hurtling the *River Swallow* forward like a stone out of a sling. Had he known what effect the drop in the river would have had upon the

swirling waters, it is likely that he would have taken to the Canadian side on the return trip. But the voyage through the rapids, as has been said, always exhilarated him; and, besides, it was growing late, and the passage through the Gallops shortened the trip to Dexter Island materially.

He was thinking these things over, giving all the while an alert mind to the handling of the boat, when his attention was drawn to Malvin in the manner described. The man was apparently making no effort to use the search-light to find out the jagged outlines of the rock known as Big Nigger. Instead, he appeared to be making aimless sweeps on the water with the light, and not trying in the slightest to locate the chief menace of the Gallops.

16

"Malvin!" called Ralph sharply.

"Sir!" the man's voice was steady and respectful.

"I told you to locate Big Nigger."

"I'm trying to, sir."

"Nonsense. You know as well as I do that the rock should lie off on the other side. We pass it to starboard. Why don't you cast the light in that direction?"

"I will, sir. I quite forgot that for a minute, sir," was the response, in the same respectful tones.

17

"Odd that you should forget it," spoke Ralph, "when you have run these rapids scores of times! I don't understand——"

"Wow!"

The cry came from Hardware.

"Holy mackerel! Ralph!"

"Great Scott!"

Ralph spun the wheel over with every ounce of power at his command. The rapids strained and tore at the rudder frantically. It was as if they wished to aid and abet in the destruction of the *River Swallow*. For dead ahead of the craft had loomed suddenly a sinister, menacing object that had caused the wave of panic to sweep over the boys on the bridge of the motor boat.

Big Nigger Rock!

Revealed by the rays of the search-light as suddenly as if it had been thrust upward by an unseen hand from the bottom of the rapids, the black boulder that bore the name dreaded by rivermen had appeared.

18

"We're goners!" The cry came from Malvin.

He threw off his coat, and Ralph noted with astonishment, even as excited as he was, that the man had on under that garment a life preserver!

But the boy had not a moment to ponder on this strange fact, although it looked almost as if Malvin knew, by some marvelous instinct, that something was going to happen and had prepared for it. All the boy's energies just then were centered in one task: to keep the *River*

Swallow from being shattered into kindling wood against the gleaming, spray-wet sides of the Big Nigger.

“Shut down on your port engine; come full speed ahead on your starboard!”

Ralph had seized the flexible speaking-tube and roared the command down it.

“Jump now!” he added, as Persimmons’ “Aye! aye!” came back to him.

19

It was the only chance of saving the *River Swallow* from annihilation. By stopping one propeller and coming ahead on the other, Ralph hoped to be able to aid the rudder enough to swing the *River Swallow’s* bow outward from the rock.

Malvin paused by the rail. He had apparently been in the act of casting himself into the waters that boiled and seethed alongside. But Ralph had no time to notice the man now. All that he had eyes to see was the towering black buttress of rock ahead of them, against which it appeared that nothing short of a miracle could save the *River Swallow* from being splintered.

Young Ware, white-faced and tense, stood by Ralph’s side. Like Ralph, he sensed the full measure of the danger confronting them. Yet it spoke volumes for his pluck that he did not utter a sound after that first startled exclamation had escaped him, when the Big Nigger swung into the search-light’s vivid circle of white light. As for Persimmons in the engine room, he knew that some emergency must be confronting them. Yet he did not dream of deserting his post. Then the young skipper’s voice came down the tube once more.

20

“Get on a life preserver and come on deck. Quick! It may be life or death!”

The *River Swallow* headed straight for the Big Nigger. Ralph, every nerve and muscle in his active body strained to the breaking point, exerted every effort at his command to stave off the apparently inevitable crash. He knew that he had done all he could to avert the disaster that threatened to be swift and annihilating. All that was left to do now was to await the issue. Suddenly a sharp exclamation escaped Persimmons’ lips, and an instant later it was echoed by the others whom the young engineer had joined on the bridge.

“She’s swinging out!”

21

It was true. Out of the grasp of the rapids a boy’s skill had snatched victory against what had appeared to be overwhelming odds.

The Gallops roared and screamed and threatened in a thousand voices. They danced and leaped like white teeth defrauded of their expected prey. For that time at least they were to be cheated of a harvest of disaster to which, in the years gone by, they had become accustomed as a regular toll on the part of those who braved their fangs.

The *River Swallow’s* bow, forced outward by the engines and the rudder, swerved slowly to port. The next instant, at racing speed, she shot by

the Big Nigger, hurtled along like a helpless chip on the surface of the mad waters.

So closely did they shave disaster that, from the bridge, it would have been possible with extended fingers to touch the rough surface of the Big Nigger as they were swept by. The next moment the peril that had chilled the blood in their veins was behind them.

"And now for an explanation from Malvin," spoke Ralph grimly. "I rather think that there is one coming."

22

23

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERIOUS GRAY NIGHT CRAFT.

Perhaps Malvin, who had stood poised as if ready for a jump as they passed the Big Nigger, heard the boy. At any rate, as Ralph spoke, he turned.

"A terribly narrow escape that, sir," he said.

Ralph told Persimmons to go below and attend to his engines before he replied. Then he turned on the man.

"Yes, a terribly narrow escape which might have ended in disaster for us all," he said, with an emphasis that allowed no doubt as to his meaning. In case that Malvin had not fully understood him, he added:

"Malvin, your carelessness almost cost us all our lives."

"My carelessness, sir!"

The man's voice held an aggrieved tone. He tried to slip into his coat and cover the life jacket he wore.

"I said 'your carelessness.' I don't care to use a harsher word. How did it happen, Malvin, that you wore a life jacket to-night?"

"A life jacket, sir?"

"Yes; the one you put on under your coat. Surely you did not have an intuition that we were going to be wrecked?"

Ordinarily a bright, lively lad, Ralph could be stern enough when he chose. His experiences out west and in old Mexico had broadened and developed the youth whom we first encountered on a visit to Jack Merrill's ranch in search of the health he had almost lost by overstudy at Stonefell College.

Ralph was not that boy now. He was the stern questioner of a man whose recent actions had surely justified him in entertaining black suspicions of the fellow. For the first time Malvin hesitated as Ralph shot out the question about the life jacket.

"Oh, yes, sir. The life jacket, sir. Yes, you see
——"

24

25

His voice trailed off. But Ralph pressed him harder.

"Come, I am waiting for an explanation. If one is not forthcoming I shall inform my father of your conduct."

"I don't see why I can't wear a life jacket if I want to," said Malvin, at length, in a voice that, for the first time, held a note of sullen defiance. "I know these Gallops better than you do, Master Stetson. I have always worn a life jacket when running them."

"Yes," said Hardware dryly, "you are more timid than we thought you, Malvin."

"Never mind, Harry," struck in Ralph; "tend that searchlight and keep a bright lookout for the Needles. We must pass them to port."

"All right," responded Hardware cheerfully; "luckily, there's no 'needles in a haystack' business about them. They are as clear as the freckles on Persimmons' face. Don't worry."

26

He began swinging the search-light off to the left-hand side of the boat, searching for the group of sharp-pointed rocks known as the Needles, which were by no means the menace to navigation that Big Nigger was.

"So you always wear a life jacket in running the rapids?" insisted Ralph, as his companion carried out his instructions.

"Always, sir; yes, sir. It's the safest plan."

"Well, I guess you are entitled to considerable praise for your foresight, Malvin," said Ralph meaningly. "You can go forward."

"All right, sir. Very well, sir," was the rejoinder. Malvin once more appeared to have full control of himself.

He descended the two or three steps leading from the raised bridge from which the navigation of the *River Swallow* was directed. As his figure vanished forward in the darkness, Harry Ware turned to his chum.

27

"What do you make of that fellow, Ralph?"

"He's a puzzle to which we have no answer—as yet," was the reply.

"A puzzle, all right. I sure agree with you. But as to the answer part——"

"Well?"

"I rather think that we are not so far off from the solution as you fancy. For instance, this business to-night."

"Let's hear what you make of it."

"Why, it looked to me as if the fellow deliberately tried to wreck the boat."

"But for what earthly reason?" demanded Ralph, in an astounded tone.

"Well, for one thing, we have supplanted him on board her. You must remember that before we came up here your dad had given Malvin absolute charge of the craft. I've heard that he

28

took full advantage of this. The boat was seen cruising about at all hours of the night."

"Even so. Granted that he dislikes us, even hates us, although he has shown no signs of harboring such a feeling."

"I'm not so sure of that. Under that smooth manner he hides a vindictive nature. I've caught him looking at you once or twice, when he thought you weren't looking and that nobody saw him, in a way that made me think he didn't like you any too well."

"Possibly he can't be blamed for that, either. It is rather a come-down for him to have to take orders where he was used to giving them instead. But, even assuming all this, what reason would he have to try to wreck the *River Swallow*?"

"I imagine that in the answer to that lies the solution of that puzzle you were talking about a while back."

"Well, let's suppose—although I don't for a minute believe it—that he actually was fiendish enough to try to destroy the craft out of malice, would not he have gone to the bottom, too?"

29

"I'm not so sure. Malvin is reputed to be the strongest swimmer in these parts. He was wrecked in a canoe in the rapids once and swam to an eddy and eventually reached the shore. Then, too, to-night he had on a life jacket. Does not that point to the fact that he believed some accident was going to happen, in which it would be necessary for him to swim for his life?"

"Oh, as to that, he had a good explanation for it," responded Ralph.

"So I suppose," was Harry Ware's dry comment.

"After all, we may be unduly excited and manufacturing a melodramatic scare out of nothing at all," pursued Ralph. "Well, there go the Needles! In a minute more we'll be out of the Gallops, and for once I shan't be sorry. That was just about as near to a smash-up as I care to come."

The *River Swallow* shot onward for a short distance, and then, as she entered smoother water, Ralph rang for full speed ahead on both engines. He had hardly done this, when Hardware gave a sudden yell and pointed frantically ahead of them.

30

Through the night the gray, dim outlines of a passing craft, slipping along under the shore of one of the islands which dotted the other side of the Gallops, was visible. She carried no lights and was moving at a swift rate of speed.

In addition to the fact that the other craft carried no lights, she had risked collision with the *River Swallow* by cutting right across her bows. Both these actions were gross violations of the river law. The two boys stared into the darkness ahead as the gray shadow slipped on toward the Canadian shore.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" burst from Harry Ware's lips. "It's the ghost craft again."

"Ghost nothing! If we'd hit her we'd have found

her solid enough, I'll bet," declared Ralph. "Clap the search-light on her, Hardware. We've seen that craft so often lately that the thing is getting on my nerves. Men who are out on lawful errands don't sneak about without lights. Let's show her up and see what sort of a boat she is, and who mans her."

Harry obediently turned his attention once more to the search-light. But though he swung it assiduously in the direction in which the "ghost craft," as he called the mysterious gray motor boat, had last been seen, its rays failed to reveal a sign of her.

"Well, she can appear and vanish in a mighty spook-like fashion, even though she may be built of solid wood and iron," declared young Ware, with conviction, as he reported no trace of the craft that had glided across their course in the darkness of the night.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE TRAIL OF THE GHOST CRAFT.

The boys, whom we left so sadly puzzled by the strange appearance and almost simultaneous vanishment of the "ghost craft" at the conclusion of the last chapter, formed part of a group of healthy, high-spirited lads who are already familiar to most of our readers under the name of the Border Boys. They earned this title in the first place by their feats on the troublous Mexican frontier, where, as related in "The Border Boys on the Trail," they defeated the machinations of a notorious cattle rustler named Ramon De Barrios, who had long proved a thorn in the side of the ranchers along the frontier.

Particularly had De Barrios harassed the cattle and horses of Mr. Merrill, whose son Jack, a school-fellow of the others at Stonefell College, had invited Ralph Stetson, son of the railroad "king," and Professor Wintergreen, to spend some time with him and "rough it." In this volume the secret of the lone mission was revealed, and the boys, by pluck and brain, regained the stolen herd of stock rustled under cover of night from the Merrill ranch by De Barrios and his followers. A thrilling experience was that of the attempted dynamiting of a big irrigation dam in the midst of a violent storm, which had raised the prisoned waters almost to the breaking point. Jack Merrill and his chums succeeded in thwarting the plans of the rascals who hoped to inundate half a county and ruin much valuable property, out of revenge.

In the second volume of this series, "The Border Boys Across the Frontier," we made the acquaintance of Buck Bradley, a bluff and hearty circus manager who proved to be a trusty ally of the boys when they made their escape from a band of Mexican revolutionists. The boys' capture had followed their attempt to prevent a large consignment of arms and ammunition from being shipped from Uncle Sam's side of the line. Once more they proved their right to the title of

"Border Boys," for, by a subterranean river flowing under a supposedly "haunted" mesa, they crossed the international boundary, and at once plunged into a series of strange and exciting adventures, including a ride on a big locomotive that ran the gauntlet of armed rebels.

The boys were next met, together with other old friends, in a succeeding book, which was called "The Border Boys with the Texas Rangers." Again, amid new scenes, the lads found themselves in exciting predicaments. Jack was lost in a hidden valley from which he escaped by a climb up steep and rocky cliffs, triumphing over apparently insurmountable obstacles. But his pluck and sturdy training brought him successfully through this adventure, and he rejoined his comrades in time to participate in the heading off of a wild stampede of cattle, an opportunity which tested the boys' best efforts.

In yet another volume, the experiences of the lads with the rurales of Mexico were set forth. This book was called "The Border Boys with the Mexican Rangers," and painted a picture of life in the wilder parts of old Mexico amid rugged mountains and brigand-infested plains. A clever use of an extemporized heliograph was made by the lads and saved them from a predicament into which they had been forced by a stupendous cloud-burst which swept their camp away. At a lone ranch, too, they met with some surprising adventures which culminated in a ride for life across the plains. At a grand fiesta they won several of the prizes, a feat which earned them the still further enmity of men who had good reason to dislike and fear them. In old Mexico, the land of fascinating romance, the boys surely had their full share of incident and adventure, and their experiences served to strengthen their characters and broaden their minds. To cope successfully with difficulties forms the best sort of training for lads, and our Border Boys showed that when it came to the test they were not lacking in energy or grit.

35

A fifth volume, called forth by the demand on the part of our readers to follow the boys still further through their lives, dealt with a different phase of their existences altogether. In "The Border Boys in the Canadian Rockies" the lads traveled on their sturdy little mustangs through a wild and rugged country. Not the least interesting phase of their experiences dealt with the mystery surrounding Jimmy, the waif, who came into their lives when they landed at a tiny way station on the Canadian Pacific Railroad. Several mysterious happenings, too, puzzled and annoyed them not a little while they were on their journey to the Big Bend of the Columbia River. These incidents involved a man of strange personality who, for no apparent reason, harassed and alarmed them on numerous occasions. However, in the end all that had appeared inexplicable was cleared up, and Jimmy, the waif, came into his own at last.

36

About two months before the present volume dealing with their adventures opens, the lads had accepted the invitation of Ralph Stetson's father to spend some time with him at his estate on Dexter Island, in the wonderful St. Lawrence River, that mighty outlet of the Great Lakes, which rolls its turbulent current along the

37

border line between the United States and Canada. The scene of much historical interest in the past, the making of history is still going on along the St. Lawrence. Both the United States and Canada keep a sharp lookout for smugglers and other evildoers along the line which extends through the exact center of the great river. Interesting adventures are of almost daily occurrence in that region.

Beginning with the night upon which we encountered them in the rapids, the boys were destined to be plunged into experiences along the international boundary line that would demand all the resourcefulness and efficiency which had been developed in them by the scenes through which they had already passed.

38

But for the time being, at any rate, the mystery of the ghostly craft had to wait for a solution. The next day was the one selected by the boys for a joyous excursion on their swift, sure craft down the historic waters of the St. Lawrence, which has been called "the noblest, the purest, the most enchanting river on God's beautiful earth."

For a thousand miles from Lake Ontario to the sea the mighty current of the great waterway runs, embellished with islands and made beautiful by leaping rapids and swirling whirlpools. Except to the specially built river steamers these rapids, that is the larger ones, are not navigable except on the way down the river. Coming up, even the most powerful craft have to take to the canals, of which there are several, all on the Canadian side and free to all commerce.

The boys planned a quick trip down to Montreal and thence to Quebec. The return trip would have to be made more slowly, owing to the obstacles already mentioned.

39

Having provisioned the *River Swallow*, on which they intended to make their home during the cruise, there was nothing left to do but to start up the engines and set out. For this trip Malvin and Hansen were left behind, as Mr. Stetson needed them to do some work about the island and they were not actually required on the river craft.

It was a glorious morning when the boys started out. The sun lay glitteringly on the clear, swiftly flowing waters, and the *River Swallow* glided from her dock as if she were as pleased with the prospect of the cruise as were the boys.

Ralph Stetson, naturally studious, had found much to interest him in the history of the great river they were navigating; and, indeed, no stream in the world has more storied interest than the mighty water course that marks the border of the United States and Canada.

40

Jacques Cartier is generally given the credit of the discovery of the St. Lawrence, although some historians mention other candidates for the honor. Ralph's studies told him that little is known of Cartier, beyond the fact that he belonged to a hardy race of French fishermen.

By some writers he is even referred to as a corsair, although there does not appear to be much evidence to support this theory. It was not

until his second voyage, however, that Cartier really entered the river, to the mouth of which he gave the name of the Bay of St. Laurens.

With the spirit of exploration strong upon him, Cartier pushed onward, hugging the southern shore of a river eighty miles wide. To his mind, he had found the Mecca of every explorer of that day: the visionary passage to Cathay. For to discover a waterway to the far east was the dream of every early voyager.

As he sailed onward, mighty rock walls rose up majestically on each side of the great stream he was traversing. Gray rocks piled themselves tier upon tier, topped by huge forests and backed by glimpses of mountains beyond.

41

Then came bold headlands, thrusting their fronts into the river. From day to day the scene shifted, with the current ever increasing in swiftness. The rocky headlands gave way to long level reaches of swampy land. Cartier, in his records, speaks of the innumerable crows that haunted these marshes, although there were plenty of duck and other wild fowl.

But at last Cartier began to realize that he had not stumbled on the passage to Cathay as he had fondly dreamed.

The year before he had taken two Indians captive. They were still part of his crew. He summoned them before him.

"What river is this?" he asked.

42

One of the Indians pointed majestically to the west.

"The river without an end," he said solemnly.

Cartier found the Indians extraordinarily skillful in managing their frail birch bark canoes, even in the wildest of the rapids. He was greatly interested in all the different tribes which he encountered. Many of them were at war with each other, although all sprang, according to present-day opinion, from the Cree stock.

The old French traveler says that he found the Indians friendly. He describes a visit to one of their towns, which stood at the base of a hill surrounded by cornfields, with the river and the primeval forest beyond. This village, occupied by a tribe known as the Amerinds, was well fortified, as were all the villages of this tribe, by a high stockade.

With a body guard of twenty of his men Cartier entered the walled village. They found inside the stockade a gallery from which missiles could be hurled down on any foe. Piles of stones lay in readiness for this purpose.

43

Behind the village stood an imposing height of land which Cartier, impressed by the noble view from its summit, named Mont Royale. This was the origin of Montreal, which city stands on the site of the stockaded Indian village of Hochelaga.

It was too late in the season when the bold investigator reached this village to press on further, and he therefore made his way back to winter quarters at Havre de St. Croix on the St. Charles River. His experiences during the "white

winter," as he called it, were enough to daunt even his courageous spirit. To add to his troubles, his men contracted scurvy, and many died before spring came, from the close confinement and lack of proper food.

The Indians brewed for the sufferers a sort of tea of pine boughs and bark called "ameda," which appeared to have a good effect on the victims and, in Cartier's opinion, saved the lives of many of them.

44

He returned to France and, some time later, made a third voyage. This time it was a trip for colonization. But the little colony suffered terrible privations and much illness and misery, and it was to the Indians that they owed what succor in the way of provisions and primitive medicine they were able to obtain. Cartier sailed back to France, leaving the remnants of the colony, and never returned again.

Then came Champlain, the founder of Quebec. It is a far cry from the noble city of Quebec as it is to-day to the huddle of huts erected in the form of a square by Champlain, and surmounted by a dovecote on the top of a pole to symbolize his peaceful intentions. Of his discovery of the historic lake that bears his name it would be beside the mark to speak here, inasmuch as this necessary digression is simply to acquaint our readers with a little of the history of the river on which our Border Boys were destined to meet such surprising adventures, and with the city of Montreal, to which they were now bound.

45

46

CHAPTER V. DOWN TO MONTREAL.

The run down the river to Montreal was made rapidly and without incident. The boys found the slow progress they had to make through the canals adjoining the Lachine and Long Sault rapids, which they could not descend, rather tedious. Nevertheless, they thoroughly enjoyed watching one of the red-funneled excursion steamers from up the river shoot through the boiling waves and cascades, apparently to certain destruction.

At the Lachine Canal they were "locked down" eighty-two feet, passing through three locks in the process. They arrived at Montreal, Canada's "White City," that evening. The next morning they devoted to seeing the sights of the town.

Perhaps some extracts from a letter written some days later by Ralph to a school chum will give our readers a boy's idea of this city and of Quebec.

47

"About the first thing we noticed," wrote Ralph, "was the Victoria Bridge, which spans the south channel of the St. Lawrence and carries the rails of the Grand Trunk Railway. It is almost two miles long, has twenty-four spans, and hangs sixty feet above the river. We saw it first in the twilight. It looked like a black ribbon stretched across the sky.

"Montreal is the queerest city from the point of view of design that I ever saw. It is built up from the river in a series of terraces. It is chock full of fine buildings, as fine and finer than any in New York, but of course not so tall. There is the big cathedral of Notre Dame, with twin towers like the one in France. It has a bell weighing 24,780 pounds, the heaviest bell in North America. The church will seat fifteen thousand people.

"The ice cream sodas here are not good. We know, for we sampled them. But I was going to tell you, under Notre Dame Street are buried the bones of Le Rat, a Huron chief, who broke the peace pact between the French and his tribe. He fell dead as a door nail while addressing a lot of Hurons and French who had come together to have a pow-wow.

48

"We didn't spend very much time here, however, being anxious to get on to Quebec. Besides, something happened the other night at the island that we are anxious to get back to solve. I can't tell you more about it now than to say that it was a 'ghost ship'! That sounds promising, doesn't it?

"Now, to tell you something about Quebec. I am mighty glad to have been there. It is truly a wonderful city. Somebody told us that it got its name from Cartier exclaiming, as he saw the three-hundred-foot rock that rises from the river, '*Que bec!*' Knowing that you are not much of a French scholar, I will translate. That means 'What a beak!' And so that is how Quebec got its name, and, if you'd ever seen it, you would think it was a good one.

49

"I can't describe the city better than to call it a huge cliff all stuck over with spires, roofs, chimneys, ramparts and muzzles of antiquated guns that a modern piece of artillery could knock into a cocked hat. Cape Diamond, as the immense rock is called, is all tufted with patches of shrubs. It made me think of Professor Crabtree's face. You know: all hard and rugged, with whiskers scrawling over it!

"The Lower Town, as it is called, lies at the base of this rock. Here is the water-front section, and streets that turn and twist about like corkscrews. It is a smoky, ancient, old place full of queer smells and business.

"You get out of it to the Upper Town by Mountain Street, and it's all of that! They say that till thirty years ago a carriage couldn't get up it, but it has been graded so that now you can drive up. We walked, thinking it would be good exercise for Persimmons, who hates walking, anyhow.

50

"The citadel is a wonderful place perched up on a high rock, and you can see all over the region from it. One thing to be seen there is a brass cannon the Britishers captured at Bunker Hill. No wonder they're proud of it. I guess it's about all they did get.

"The Citadel runs, in the form of a big granite wall with towers and bastions stuck on it at regular intervals, all along the brow of the height overlooking the city, like a wrinkle on a forehead. Quebec, as perhaps you know, is the only walled city in America. It certainly is a great place to see. You might think that you

were looking down from the Citadel on some old town in the middles ages—except for the tourists with their cameras!

“We went out to the Plains of Abraham; that is, Persimmons didn’t go, having overeaten on some cake he made himself and we wouldn’t touch, having sampled his cooking before. This is the place where Wolfe licked Montcalm. But both their names are carved on a monument just as if they had fought side by side.

51

“In the Post Office, where I am going to mail this letter, there is a block of granite from an old building that once stood on its site. It was called the *Chien d’Or*, or the Golden Dog. There is a story connected with Phillibert, the merchant who built it. He came here when Bigot, a ‘grafter’ or ‘boss,’ as we should call him nowadays, had control of the city and of New France. He ran things to suit himself and pocketed all kinds of crooked money. Phillibert ran a sort of department store and fought Bigot all he could. Over the door of his store he had the figure of a dog cut. It was gnawing a bone. The dog was meant to be Bigot and the bone the country he was ‘grafting’ on. Bigot got so sore at this that he had his brother-in-law assassinate Phillibert.

“There are more churches here than in any place I ever saw. The folks of Quebec ought to be the best in the world. Near the market in the Lower Town is one of the first churches built in America. A porch was built over its door as a token of thanksgiving when a fleet of British ships on its way to wallop Quebec was wrecked off the mouth of the St. Lawrence.

52

“Near where this church stands is a place where they will tell you Champlain lived in 1608 and planted the first garden in the country with seeds brought from France. In a convent on Garden Street Montcalm is buried. The Canadians have marked all these places with tablets. I think it would be a good scheme to do the same thing with historic places at home.

“But you are probably getting tired of all this. Tell the fellows we are having a great time and expect to have a better. Anyhow, I will write you before long how we come out about that queer motor boat. We are going to find out what is up; you can bet your life on that.

53

“Always your pal,

“RALPH.”

54

CHAPTER VI. HOMEWARD BOUND.

The next day the boys, enriched by many postcards and souvenirs, set out on their return trip. They voyaged along under the high banks of the St. Lawrence, from Cape Diamond to Cape Rouge, drinking in every bit of the striking scenery with interest.

About a mile above Wolfe’s Cove they passed the historic little village of Sillery, where, in the

stormy days of the Christian conquest of Canada, the Jesuits called about them the Hurons and preached to them in a language of which the wondering Indians, listening with stoical patience, understood not a word.

In later years there came a dispute as to whether the land about Sillery belonged to the Jesuits or the Hurons. The British decided in favor of the Jesuits, but offered the Hurons other lands. These they refused, and the red men soon melted away into the forests to dwindle ultimately to extinction.

55

About midway between Quebec and Montreal the boys stopped at the town of Three Rivers, so called from the fact of its being on the triple junction of the St. Maurice River with the St. Lawrence. Three Rivers was an important early trading post, being the head of tide water on the St. Lawrence. Champlain erected a fort there on the site of a primitive defense built by the Algonquins and destroyed by the Iroquois. It was from here, too, so Ralph was able to inform his chums, that Father Brebeuf set forth with a party of Hurons to preach in the farthest wilderness.

The good father, according to history, was as much of a fighting man as a preacher. He taught the Indians how to build fortifications and to palisade squares with flanking towers, which were a vast improvement on their round stockades.

The boys stopped at a dock adjoining a small farmhouse, not far from Three Rivers, to buy some fresh provisions, for Persimmons' experiments in cookery had proved disastrous to their larder.

56

The place was kept by a descendant of the old "*habitants*" of the country, a man as brown as a berry, with high, Indian-like cheek bones and beady black eyes. His house must have stood there for hundreds of years. It was of rough, whitewashed stone, and had a steep roof, with a huge chimney at one end.

While they were waiting for the fresh milk and the eggs that the *habitant* promised to produce promptly, they gazed about the living room into which they had been ushered.

Its rough walls were whitewashed and adorned with crude pictures, chiefly of religious subjects. Ropes of onions, hams and dried fruit hung from the roof beams. In a corner, snowshoes and sleds and firearms told a mute story of the severity of the Canadian winter. It was all as it might have been in the days of the earliest settler.

57

But, if the people were primitive, they had a clear idea of how to charge for their viands! There was no help for it but to pay the bill, while the cunning little eyes of the *habitant* surveyed the roll from which Ralph peeled the required amount. He was plainly wishing that he had charged twice as much, particularly when he saw the fine boat the boys had.

The return trip through the canals with occasional stretches of clear water was monotonous. Nothing occurred out of the ordinary. But the delay in the canals and a slight

overheating of the machinery resulted in its being dark by the time they neared their island.

"Well, we've had a grand trip, but I'm glad to be back again," declared Ralph, as they came into familiar waters once more.

"So am I," agreed Hardware. "I'll be glad to get a decent meal again."

58

He glanced in an aggravating way at Persimmons, who had been the ship's cook and bottle washer, as well as engineer at times, and was now getting a breath of fresh air above deck. He ducked just in time to avoid a well-aimed piece of oily waste which Persimmons, justly indignant, flung at him.

"Next cruise we take," declared the disgruntled lad, "you can take the pots and pans, Hardware. And I'll bet that anything you make will taste like your name!"

"I'd rather it did than like an unripe persimmon!" declared Hardware. Then Ralph had to exercise his good offices to make peace between the belligerents. But soon more important matters occupied their minds.

The strange craft that they had almost forgotten on their cruise of sight-seeing came back now with vividness to their recollections. The surprising appearance and equally startling disappearance of the mysterious motor boat were recalled as they threaded home waters again. As the *River Swallow* moved through the darkness with her electric side and bow lights glowing like jewels, each boy was busy with speculations concerning it.

59

Their reveries were cut short by a sudden shout which appeared to come from right under the bow.

"What was that?" exclaimed Hardware in a startled tone. He was alone on the bridge with Ralph. Persimmons was below, having returned to his engines.

"Jiggered if I know! Somebody shouted, though. It was right under the bow."

"That's what I thought. Hark, there it is again!"

Both boys strained their ears. Unmistakably a hail had come out of the darkness.

"Clap on the search-light quick, Hardware," ordered Ralph.

60

The boy snapped the light on. It blazed out fan-like in the night, cutting a broad circle of light that revealed the whole river as Hardware swept it from side to side. Suddenly he gave a shout and pointed.

Embraced in the circle of light, and right under their bow almost, was a frail boat. In it were seated two Indians. Their craft was piled high with baskets which they had been trying to sell among the islands.

The boys knew at once that the red men came from a reservation down the river and belonged to the St. Regis tribe.

"They're coming right down on us!" cried Ralph.

"What's the matter with them?" cried Harry. "I see," he added immediately, "they've broken their paddle. See, they are waving the stump of it in the air! Steer out, Ralph! Steer out, or you'll run them down!"

"I—I can't," exclaimed Ralph in an agitated voice.

"Can't! Why not?"

"Don't you see where we are? There are rocks on each side. If I turn out we'll be ripped like an egg shell on them."

"Gracious, that's so!" And then Hardware noticed for the first time that they were running through a narrow channel between two islands.

CHAPTER VII. RUN DOWN.

Something must be done. In another moment the frail boat would be drawn by the current right down on the bow of the *River Swallow* and cut in two. But there was no room to turn out or avoid them!

Ralph was the first to gain possession of his senses. He sounded the gong impatiently for Persimmons. Then in the same breath he ordered Hardware to hand him one of the life belts.

"Now then, you take a rope and when we strike them, for it can't be helped," he breathed, "lower it over and try to catch one of the men. I'll get the other."

Young Ware with compressed lips nodded. At the same moment Persimmons came on deck.

"Take the wheel, Perce," exclaimed Ralph in a low tense voice, "and keep going upstream whatever happens."

"What's going to happen?" asked the alarmed boy.

"In another second we are going to hit an Indian canoe. If we can we are going to save their lives. Hold fast!"

There was a grating bump and a jar, and a cry of alarm came out of the night. Hardware cast his rope, while Persimmons, with a white face and strained muscles, kept the *River Swallow* on her course. Ralph had taken off his boots; now he ran to the other side of the bridge.

For a flash he saw below him an upturned face, borne past with the rapidity of lightning on the swift current. He cast the life preserver, which had a rope attached to it. To his joy he felt the life-saving device caught and the rope grow taut. But the next moment, under the sudden strain of his weight, a line, stretched across an opening in the bridge against which he had been leaning, parted.

While the other lads set up a yell of alarm, they

saw Ralph jerked from the bridge into the tempestuous current. Ralph struck the water and went under.

When he came to the surface, he felt as if a hundred hands had hold of him drawing him under again. Weighted by his clothes, he was sadly handicapped. But he made a valiant fight for it. He still held the rope, but he was unable to reach the life preserver, because it was borne down stream with the Indian clinging to it, as fast as he was.

For what appeared an eternity the battle kept up, and then Ralph felt himself suddenly hurled upon some rocks. Gripping them with the grasp of desperation he hauled himself out of the water and laid hold of the rope with both hands.

It pulled taut. It was plain, then, that the Indian still clung to the life preserver. Conserving his strength for a few minutes, Ralph began to draw steadily in on the line. To aid him he took a turn of it around a small tree. The slender trunk bent like a whip under the strain, but it held without snapping.

Inch by inch Ralph hauled in, and after what seemed an interminable struggle, he pulled up on the bank a dripping, half-dead figure. It was that of the Indian who had grasped the life preserver. The man cast himself down on the beach for a short time, but soon recovered with the vitality of his race.

He gazed at Ralph as if the boy had been a being from another world. Then he appeared to realize what had occurred and broke out angrily into a tirade. Ralph held up a roll of dripping bills to appease his wrath.

"All right. No could help. Me pay," he said, trying to placate the angry Indian.

The man nodded, but still sullenly.

"Where my friend? You drown him, you pay lot more!" he said.

"So that's the way they rate friendship, is it?" reflected Ralph. "I guess 'Lo, the poor Indian,' has been a lot overestimated, or else this is an exceptional specimen."

"I hope your friend is all right," he said aloud, "but anyhow, we'll soon see. Look!"

From up the river came a sudden glare of blue light. It was a Coston signal from the *River Swallow*.

"There they are now," cried Ralph. "They are lying to for us. Lucky thing I have along my water-proof box of matches."

He fumbled for the metal cylinder which had been of so much use to him in many tight places. Then, followed by the Indian, he set off across the little island to the side on which, judging by the light, the *River Swallow* was lying to. It did not take long to collect dry sticks and leaves and make a bright glare.

Through the night came a hail from the *River Swallow's* megaphone.

"Are you all right, Ralph?"

Ralph cupped his hands. "Fine; but mighty wet! You'd better send ashore. I've got the Indian."

"Good! We got the other," came back another hail.

"Your friend all right," said Ralph turning to the Indian. "Pretty soon they send small boat ashore for us."

"Huh," muttered the Indian, leaving a doubt to be inferred as to whether he would not just as soon have had the extra money as learn that his friend was safe. Not long afterward the small boat carried by the *River Swallow* came ashore, and they were rowed off by Hardware.

Full speed was made to the island, where the Indians were accommodated for the night. The next day they were sent on their way rejoicing with a skiff which had been lying idle in the boat house and a substantial recompense for their misfortune.

It was two nights later, after the boys had made a flying trip to the Thousand Islands with some guests of Ralph's father, leaving them there, that, on the return voyage, they once more encountered "the mystery of the river," as they had come to call it.

68

Malvin and Hansen were both on board, but neither was on deck, when suddenly out of the darkness the form of the gray, ghost-like motor craft emerged once more, like a figure in a fog, lightless and suddenly vanishing, as if swept from sight by an invisible hand.

Ralph had the wheel. He gave a sudden gasp as the apparition appeared before his eyes, then faded, vapor-like.

"The search-light, quick!" he ordered Hardware in low breathless tones. A bright spear of light cut the night. Here and there it swung, like a radiant, pointing finger. But it settled on no gray, swiftly sneaking craft.

69

The momentary reverie into which Ralph had been plunged by the mysterious appearance of the "ghost craft," already encountered upon other night trips in the *River Swallow*, lasted but a brief time.

"You can't find her with the search-light, eh, Harry?" he asked.

"Not a hide nor hair of her, as Mountain Jim would have said," was the reply; "she's certainly a big mystery, Ralph."

"And one which it is going to be up to us to solve," was the rejoinder. "You remember the last time we saw her, she was sneaking away from Dexter Island. This is the first time we have noticed her since, and she is coming from the same direction. From the fact that she carries no lights and altogether acts in a highly suspicious way, it is fair to assume that she is after no good. In some way that I can't just explain I'm pretty sure that whatever tricks she is up to are in some manner connected with Dexter Island."

"Just the way I feel about it, old fellow," was his chum's rejoinder. "I'd give a lot to unravel the mystery and—hello! Look there!"

70

Right ahead of them seemingly a light had suddenly flashed up out of the darkness. It was out of the path of the search-light and shone quite brilliantly. The light was in about the location where they had last sighted the gray night rover.

"Out with that search-light instantly," ordered Captain Ralph snappily.

Instantly the bright rays of the big electric night-piercer were cut off.

"Now switch off the other lights, the running lamps and the stern one."

Harry Ware hesitated an instant.

"You are going to run without lights?"

"For a time, yes."

Snap!

Out went every light on board the *River Swallow* that might betray her whereabouts to any other craft.

71

"We're taking a big chance, Ralph," said Harry Ware curiously. "What's the game?"

"Why, that light ahead belongs to the 'ghost craft'; I'm sure of it. At any rate, it's a clew worth following."

"You're going to chase her?"

A thrill of excitement vibrated in Harry's voice.

Ralph's jaws came together with a click. It was characteristic of his father, the "railroad king," to do this when he had reached an important determination.

"Yes, Harry, I'm going to follow that light up for a while. See, it's moving pretty quickly. Ring for more speed."

"Well, that old spook of the St. Lawrence will have to go some to dodge the *River Swallow*," ejaculated Harry, as he obeyed Ralph's order; and almost simultaneously the swift craft leaped forward in pursuit of the Will o' the Wisp ahead of her.

72

The chase was on. It was destined to be the beginning of a strange series of adventures.

73

CHAPTER VIII.

A MISLEADING LIGHT.

"Can you make out anything of that craft yet, Harry?"

The chase had been on for half an hour, and still the elusive light bobbed along ahead of them.

Percy Simmons, down in the engine room, had been fully informed by young Ware of what was going on, and he was coaxing his fine machines to their top notch of effort.

"I can't see anything of her outlines yet, Ralph," was Harry's response to Ralph's interrogation. "She must be a flyer."

"She'll have to be to get away from us."

"Anyhow, it looks like a stern chase."

"But not necessarily a long one. I haven't heard of a craft yet that could get away from the *River Swallow*, at least, in these parts."

"You mean an earthly craft," rejoined young Ware, in rather quavery tones.

74

"Good gracious! What's got into you? You surely don't think that the boat we are after is anything but a motor boat like this one, run by men who have a good reason for not wanting us to catch up with them?"

"Um-er, I just had a shiver. A 'goose walked over my grave.' My grandmother says that that means that some sort of spirits are about."

"Rubbish! I thought you were a different sort of a fellow from that, Harry. We'll have to quit calling you 'Hardware' if you are going to be so soft as to think there is anything supernatural about that elusive boat."

"Just the same, there's something queer about her."

"Nothing but what will admit of an explanation," was the reply. "As for the way they are dodging us, it's just what I expected. Honest men would not run away from us any more than they would go sneaking about in such a mysterious way at night."

"Maybe they are only fish dynamiters," suggested Harry Ware. "You know how strictly the law is dealt out to those rascals, and there have been several Canadian fish destroyers caught on the American side lately, and stiff terms dealt out to them."

75

"Pshaw! Fish dynamiters are poor, poverty-stricken fellows who are too lazy to get fish in a proper, lawful manner, and crawl out at night to ply their trade in wretched, patched-up boats! No mere fish dynamiters could afford a swift, powerful craft such as the one ahead surely is."

"That's so," agreed Harry, "but that craft ahead is surely a riddle just the same. I think——"

He broke off with what might be fairly termed a yell.

"Ow!—oo! Look there! *Now* do you say that there isn't something more than natural about that boat?"

76

In spite of himself, Ralph felt his scalp stiffen as he beheld the extraordinary sight to which Harry's alarmed exclamation had attracted his attention.

Outlined against the night in a vivid green glare was what appeared to be a boat of living flame!

The water around her burned lambently as the apparently flaming boat plunged along through it.

"Gracious!" gasped Ralph, as he looked at the strange spectacle. There was a touch on his arm. He started in spite of himself and turned quickly.

Malvin was at his elbow. He was pointing at the green, blazing craft ahead of them.

"It's—it's the *Lost Voyageur!*" he exclaimed, in trembling tones. "Don't chase it any more, sir! The legend is, that it means death to those who see that boat and pursue it."

By this time Ralph had recovered his equanimity. His sturdy common sense asserted itself. He listened impatiently while Harry exclaimed triumphantly:

77

"There; what did I tell you! That's the boat I heard about! The boat in which a party of the old voyageurs committed all sorts of outrages on the St. Lawrence Indians. In revenge for their cruelties the Indians attacked the boat one night and massacred the whole party. Ever since, at times, the ghost craft has been seen on the river, and death has followed every one who has tried to chase it or inquire into its mystery."

"Oh, dry up!" snapped Ralph. "Malvin, get forward where you belong instantly."

"But, sir——"

The man appeared genuinely frightened, but somehow Ralph had an idea that he was not so scared as he seemed.

"See here, Malvin, obey my orders. I am in command of the *River Swallow*. Get forward at once and keep a bright lookout. As for you, Harry, I'm more than astonished at your being foolish enough to believe such a pack of children's stories."

78

As Malvin left the bridge, seemingly with reluctance, Harry spoke up:

"But, Ralph, look at that green fire! Ugh! it makes me shudder."

"Heard of phosphorus, haven't you?"

"Y-y-y-yes, but——"

"No 'buts' about it. Those fellows think that we are just a pack of kids that they can scare by a foolish ghost trick. See, the light is dying out. Well, they'll find out in a few minutes that their trick didn't scare us. I'm more convinced than ever now that we have tumbled headlong into a big game of some kind. What it is I can't imagine, but that fellow Malvin knows more about that boat than we do."

"What makes you think so?"

"Why did he come butting in up here on the bridge and try to get us to stop chasing that craft?"

79

"Scared, I guess. I know *I* was."

"Scared! Nonsense. If I read Malvin rightly, he's not the sort of fellow to shy at a child's trick like the one those fellows played. No, Harry, there's something back of all this, and I for one mean to find out what it is before I'm many hours older."

"Go ahead," was all young Ware had to say, but to himself he muttered:

"We'll never overtake that craft, and—I hope we don't!"

The night shut down blacker than ever as the green glare that had outlined the fleeing craft in such startling fashion died out.

But right ahead the light still shone, the light that Ralph knew was the stern lamp of the craft they were pursuing. It had apparently been hoisted in defiance, and this made the young captain all the more determined to find out more about the gray stranger.

"What are you going to do if you do overtake her?" asked Harry.

80

This question was a poser. Ralph, in the excitement of the chase, had not considered this. He had no right to board the stranger or even to question those on board, for legally he had nothing upon which to proceed.

"It may prove to be a foolish chase, after all," he admitted. "It may all come to nothing, but I couldn't sleep unless I did what I could toward unraveling the mystery that I am sure envelops that craft. No men would go to the pains to rig up a ghost scare and all that unless they had a mighty good reason for doing so. I'm going to keep after her till I get close enough to hail her."

"What then?" demanded Harry.

"Why, I don't just know," admitted Captain Ralph, "but if I don't get satisfactory answers to my questions I mean to follow her till she makes port and report the matter to the authorities, and then it will be up to them. I feel justified in doing this from the fact that she has been seen off our island, presumably on mischief bent."

81

There came a sudden sharp outcry from the bow.

Ralph gazed ahead and his heart fairly jumped into his throat.

Dead ahead, right under the bows of the onrushing *River Swallow*, was the light they had been pursuing, the stern light of the other motor boat.

"Great Scott! We'll be crushed like an eggshell when the collision comes!" was the thought that flashed through his brain as he rang, half automatically, for "full speed astern!"

"Back her!" roared the voice from the bows, the voice of Malvin.

Harry Ware stood speechless, gripping the rail. He was helpless for the moment in the face of the impending disaster. The *River Swallow* was making almost thirty miles an hour. To collide with a solid body such as the craft ahead at that speed meant disaster, swift and certain.

82

Then a yell of terror burst from his lips. A sharp cry was torn from Ralph's throat simultaneously.

The next instant, at almost top speed, the *River Swallow* struck. Fairly head on, she had collided with the obstacle before her.

CHAPTER IX.

ADRIFT AT NIGHT.

There was a jarring bump. Something rasped and grated along the keel, sending a shudder through the light timbers of the high-speed *River Swallow*.

Then she raced on as fast as ever. And that was all. Where was the boat whose stern light they had struck? Was she indeed formed of ghostly vapor and had she no tangible fabric?

Ralph, sweating from every pore, and tremblingly grasping the wheel, was half inclined to believe so, as he felt the propellers at last take hold on the reverse motion and the *River Swallow* begin to back. So startled was he from his accustomed presence of mind, that for a moment or two he felt more as if he were passing through the phantasmagoria of a nightmare than participating in every-day life.

"Wha-wha-what was it?" palpitated Harry Ware, still clutching the rail and staring straight ahead as if he expected to see the form of the ghostly craft emerge once more in front of them.

84

"Are we going down? What's up?" came from Percy Simmons below.

"We're all right, Persimmons," hailed Captain Ralph, in reply, as his faculties came back with a rush. "Just check your engines, will you? There's something I want to find out. Malvin!"

"Aye! aye! sir! Narrow escape, sir. I was 'most frightened to death! I thought we were goners," came back the man's voice from the bow.

"Well, apparently we have suffered no harm. A trick of some sort has been played on us. I mean to try to find out what it is. You and Hansen attend to lowering the anchor at once. Then get the small boat overboard."

"The boat, sir? What for, sir?"

"Obey my orders and ask no questions," shouted Ralph. "Now, then, Harry, you go below. Search thoroughly for a leak. I don't think there is one, but still I'll take no chances."

85

"But wha-wha-what was it?" persisted Harry. "It must have been a ghost, that craft. We hit it and went right through it as if it had been smoke. I—I'm scared, Ralph."

"Well, work off your fears in attending to your duty below. We hit something, all right. It wasn't the boat. I want to find out what it was."

"Humph! this all comes of going chasing a ghost ship!" muttered Harry, none too graciously, as the anchor chain rattled out and he departed on his mission.

Left alone on the bridge, Ralph concentrated in deep thought for a few moments. Then he galvanized into action.

"Anchor down?"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"Lower away on the boat and place the portable search-light in it."

"Yes, sir."

Presently came the sound of the ropes running out through the davits which supported a small, light motor tender used by the *River Swallow*.

86

"All gone?" asked Ralph, as he heard the splash that announced that the tender had struck the water.

"Yes, sir. But if you'll pardon my making a suggestion, there's no use waiting round here, sir. The current's bad, sir, and I doubt if the anchor will hold."

"I'll decide that, Malvin. Get the search-light into the tender as I told you."

"Very well, sir."

"It's odd," mused Ralph, "that that fellow Malvin wants to try to block every move we make to unravel the mystery of that gray motor boat. What can be his motive unless he is interested in her? I've got a suspicion that this is a big game we've blundered into, but I mean to see it through as far as I can. Dad hates a quitter—boy or man—and I know that when I tell him about to-night's work he'll agree with me that I acted for the best."

But, had Ralph known it, it was to be many days before he would have an opportunity of seeing his father and telling him of the strange events of that night and those that were destined to succeed them.

87

The *River Swallow* lay motionless. All about was a black void. Of the gray motor boat nothing was to be seen or heard. In fact, not from the start of the chase, nor on any of the previous occasions that the boys had sighted her, did the motor craft that had proved so elusive and tricky make any sound. From this Ralph argued that she was equipped with an under-water exhaust, a device which silences the otherwise noisy explosions of a gasoline engine.

Harry Ware came back on deck.

"Sound as a dollar," he reported.

"Good! I thought so, but dared not fail to have an investigation made," rejoined Ralph.

"But, Ralph, what became of the other craft? What was she, a ghost or a submarine?"

88

"Neither."

"What, then?"

"A solid, speedy craft just like this one."

"But we struck her."

"We did not. We never touched her."

Harry Ware gasped.

"Are we all crazy? We hit that stern light and went clean through it."

"We didn't even hit a stern light."

"But we saw it. It was as plain as the nose on your face."

"We saw a light. That doesn't prove that it was the gray motor boat's stern light."

"What, then?"

"It simply goes to show that those fellows on board her were too smart for us."

"They played us a trick?"

"That's what."

Percy Simmons, being needed no longer at the engines, had joined his companions on deck. He had been an interested listener. Now he spoke.

"They fooled us, eh?"

"Just what I've been saying," rejoined Ralph. "But, see here, let's get into the boat and go hunting."

"Go hunting? Say, what's the matter with you? What are we going hunting for?"

"We're going a-gunning to find the heart of this mystery," was Ralph's rejoinder. "Come on, boys."

He gave a brief order to Malvin to stay by the *River Swallow* with Hansen and await their return. Then, with Harry and Percy as companions, he rowed off into the night.

"Keep that search-light playing," he ordered, referring to the small but powerful lamp on the bow of the tender. The motor was not used, as the tender was light and rowed quite easily. As he rowed, Ralph kept looking around over his shoulder. After some time, during which he had rowed in ever widening circles, with the *River Swallow* as a focal point, he gave a sharp cry of triumph.

"Ah-ha! There's what I expected."

Bobbing up and down on the waves, not many feet away, the search-light showed a strange object. It was apparently a round tub with a pole set upright in it. And such it proved to be on closer inspection, which also disclosed the fact that a lantern, extinguished, was swinging on top of the pole.

"And here's the clever trick that fooled us into thinking we were overhauling that motor boat," said Ralph, as he inspected it. "They simply towed this tub with the lantern on the pole for some distance till we thought it was their stern light. Then, when the chase grew too hot, they set it loose with an anchor on it and scudded off, while we ran down the light, foolishly thinking that we were colliding with the other craft. Simple, isn't it?"

"But blessed effective," declared Percy Simmons.

"That's your ghost ship, Harry," laughed Ralph.

"Don't rub it in. I feel enough like a chump already," groaned Harry.

"Well, anyhow, their little bit of deception has ended the chase for to-night," said Ralph, after some more discussion. "Let's get back to the *River Swallow*, boys, and then light out for home. We've spent a lot of time on this job. I was going to say 'wasted,' but I guess we're destined to see more of that craft in the future, and it has done no harm to learn what cunning fellows are in charge of her. We'll be harder to fool next time."

"You bet we will," came from both his companions, with a meaning emphasis.

"Now for the *River Swallow*," said Ralph, as he took up the oars and prepared to row back to the craft.

"Where's the light you told Malvin to put out?" asked Percy, in a puzzled voice, for the darkness shut them in all around and no light showed through it to guide them back.

92

"Why, I don't see it. However, I know about where we left her," responded Ralph.

But his knowledge was not as accurate as he surmised, for, after pulling about on the dark waters for more than an hour, and shouting at the top of their voices without eliciting any response, the lads were face to face with the fact that the chances of their finding the *River Swallow* that night were very remote.

"It's that rascal Malvin at his tricks again," declared Ralph angrily. "When we get back home I'll get my father to discharge him. He's sore at us because we've got full charge of the boat, and he's trying to take it out in every mean, petty way he can think of."

"It looks very much like it," agreed Percy Simmons, "but in the meantime we are adrift on the St. Lawrence with only a mighty hazy notion of where we are. What are we going to do?"

93

This question was to prove a poser for some period of time.

94

CHAPTER X. ON WINDMILL ISLAND.

Drifting in the darkness, they were still discussing the situation when, through the gloom, they saw, not far off, a tall, black shadow showing darkly against the curtain of the night.

"What is that off there?" demanded Percy Simmons, indicating the tall object.

"Looks like some sort of a monument," supplemented Harry Ware.

"I guess I can solve the mystery," struck in Ralph. "That is Windmill Island, or I'm very much mistaken. That tall tower is all that is left of an old windmill that stood there many years ago."

"Seems to me I've heard a lot about Windmill Island," said Harry. "Does any one live there?"

"I think there is one hut on it. It is a deserted, lonely sort of a place, rocky and barren," replied Ralph. "You know something of the story connected with it?"

"Only that it was used as a sort of hiding place for the invading parties at the time of the attempted Fenian invasion of the Dominion of Canada," responded Harry, who had been reading up on the history of the St. Lawrence.

"That's right, Harry. That is just the purpose the island once served. It is almost in the center of the river. It was the plan of the conspirators to make it a sort of headquarters, and it was well stocked with arms and ammunition, all hidden in carefully excavated caves and galleries within the island itself; although there were some caves already in existence, for the place was selected for that very reason."

"What became of the invaders?" inquired Percy Simmons, who was not versed in this chapter of the history of the northern border line.

"They were repulsed and many of them surrounded in the old windmill tower and starved, or shot to death by the Canadians," was the reply. "Others, who took refuge in the caves and tunnels, were driven out by hunger and made prisoners. Oh, yes; Windmill Island has seen stirring times since the old French settlers first put up that tower. The sails of the mill rotted away long ago, and now there is only the tower left to show what once stood there."

"But who lives there now?" asked Harry curiously.

"I don't know that it has any regular residents," was Ralph's rejoinder. "I've heard that it is sometimes used by smugglers or fish dynamiters, but so far as that goes, I have no first-hand knowledge."

"At any rate, we might land there and remain till daylight," suggested Percy Simmons.

"That's a good idea, Persimmons," concurred Ralph.

He turned the tender's head and started to row toward the island. They could now see its rocky shores bulking up darkly under the tall tower, which had once been a windmill, peacefully grinding out grain for the early settlers on the St. Lawrence.

"I suppose Harry would rather stay in the boat," said Percy Simmons mischievously. "There are sure to be spooks around on an island that has seen so much of tragedy."

"Say, do you want to *swim* ashore?" demanded Harry indignantly. "Just cut that out if you don't want to get hurt. Wow!"

From the shores of the island, toward which they were pulling, a sudden gush of red flame split the night. It soared up waveringly toward the heavens, casting a red glare on the waters.

"Fire!" shouted Percy Simmons.

"It's a hut ablaze!" came from Harry Ware.

"Great Scott, fellows, it's going up like so much

kindling wood! Let's hurry ashore. We may be able to help and——"

Bang!

98

An explosion that rocked the earth and beat deafeningly on their ear-drums had occurred. The burning hut was blown high into the air and almost immediately red-hot fragments came raining about them.

"Throw them out of the boat," cried Ralph, as the blazing embers began dropping. "There's gasoline in our tank, and if any of those sparks set the boat on fire—good night!"

Regardless of burnt fingers, the boys commenced throwing the blazing fragments, that hailed about them like a fiery rain, into the river. They struck the water with hissing sounds. Once or twice the boys narrowly escaped severe burns. But they hardly thought of this as they worked to save the boat from catching fire.

At last the fiery torrent ceased. They looked shoreward. A quadrangular figure, marked in brightly glowing fire, showed where the foundations of the hut had stood. All other trace of it had been wiped out utterly by the explosion.

"What on earth can have happened?" demanded Harry.

99

"An explosion," came sapiently from Percy Simmons.

"As if we didn't know that! That was no kid's fire-cracker that went off, either," determined Ralph.

"What, then?"

"Dynamite," was the reply, "or some similar explosive. I felt the river heave under our boat when she went up."

"Great gracious! A dynamite explosion!" cried Percy Simmons.

"Say, let's get out of here! Some more might go up and then we'd be right in the middle of more trouble," cried Harry, in rather alarmed tones.

"I hardly think we need fear another explosion," said Ralph, "but, to be on the safe side, we'll just stay here for a while. Then if anything more is due to go up in smoke we'll be safe."

100

"Safe!" exploded Harry.

"Why, yes. In a few minutes, if nothing happens, I mean to go ashore there."

"You do! Are you crazy?"

"Not that I am aware. At any rate, I don't see ghosts flitting about over the river," parried Ralph, with a good-natured laugh at the discomfited Harry's expense.

"But why go ashore? It looks like a mighty dangerous place to me," supplemented Percy Simmons.

"I want to go ashore for just one reason," said Ralph, "and that is to satisfy myself that no human beings were injured in that explosion."

"You're dead right, Ralph," exclaimed Harry heartily, wringing his chum's hand; "we didn't think of that. We're with you from the jump, old chap, and if any one has been injured you can rely upon it that we will do our best for them."

"I knew you'd think that way about it, boys," said Ralph. "And now let's pull in toward shore. I guess we needn't fear another explosion."

101

"There's a rough sort of landing pier ahead," said Harry, as they drew closer. "Better pull in there."

The boat's head was swung. In a few minutes more she grated against the ramshackle timbers of a tumble-down dock.

"Now then, boys, pile out. Let's see what has been going on here," said Ralph, in a brisk voice, as he shipped his oars and tied the painter to a convenient pile. The others clambered up after him on the wharf. A short distance back from the shore the remains of the exploded hut still glowed, casting a lurid light about the scene. Through the ruddy glow they saw a figure come striding toward them as they advanced up the dock.

"Some one coming," declared Ralph. "Hullo, there, you! We saw the explosion from the water. Is any one hurt? Do you want help?"

102

Right then the Border Boys were in for the surprise of their lives, though they did not know it till the advancing figure, that of a tall, strongly built young man, spoke.

"You blooming Yankees, get right out of here," were the astonishing words that greeted them. "Get, now. Do you understand, or do I have to make my meaning plainer?"

"Well, I'll be double gash-jiggered!" exploded Percy Simmons.

103

CHAPTER XI.

RALPH INVESTIGATES THE EXPLOSION.

"What happened? What exploded?" demanded Ralph, ignoring the man's manner purposely.

"I suppose you figure that it's some of your bally business?" was the response, in loud, bullying tones. "We've not got much use for Yankees this side of the line, and you can put that in your pipe, smoke it and just dig out."

Ralph's anger began to rise. The tone in which the man spoke, his utter ignoring of their kindly purpose in coming ashore, and the scene they had just witnessed, all combined to put him in a ferment. Ralph didn't often get angry, but when he did, like men said of his father in the financial district, he "made things hum." His companions heard his jaws click in the well-remembered fashion.

"I asked you a proper question in a decent way,

104

my man," he said, in a quiet voice, controlling his anger with an effort.

"And I don't choose to answer you. That's enough, ain't it? Now get!"

The tones were peremptory.

"Don't move a step," said Ralph to his companions. "This fellow has no business to order us about."

The man had, by this time, advanced quite close to them. They saw he was tall, rather swarthy and fairly well dressed. He did not look like a man who "used the river," as the phrase goes, for those who make their living from the waters of the St. Lawrence.

"I'll order you about just as much as I please," he snapped angrily, seemingly in a towering rage. "This island is mine."

"I'll have to contradict you there," rejoined Ralph calmly. "Since the time of the Fenian invasion the island has been a sort of no-man's-land. The United States and Canada have not yet decided to which government it belongs. We've as much right here as you have."

105

"You impudent young whelp, don't accuse me of telling an untruth!"

"I'm doing no such thing," retorted Ralph bluntly. "I'm stating facts and—you're not."

"Well, anyhow, you can't land here. I've no idea where you came from, but I don't want you here; so get out before I drive you out."

"You'll have to answer me a few questions first. What exploded here?"

"What do you think you are? A bloomin' bobby?"

"No, I don't think I'm a policeman; but neither I nor my friends here intend to leave till we know more about this explosion. If you have explosives stored here you are a menace to the other islanders, of whom my father is one."

"A lot I care about that. Are you going?"

"No."

"Then take that!"

106

The man made a rush at Ralph, apparently meaning to throw him off the dock on which they were still standing. But before he could reach him something happened; or rather, two things happened at once.

Something twining and snake-like in its grip encircled the man's legs; almost at the same time, deprived of his footing, he sat down violently and with a sad loss of dignity.

It was Harry Ware's doing. Seeing that trouble was impending, and knowing Ralph well enough to realize that his chum would not yield to rough coercion, he had bethought himself of the only weapon they had. This was a heavy weight attached to a long line which was sometimes used as an anchor when they went fishing in the tender. To hasten to the boat and bring back the weight and the attached line was the work of

little more than a moment.

The boy returned with his improvised weapon just in time to behold the man's onslaught. He swung the weight and then suddenly released it. The heavy iron shot out and in a jiffy it had swung the rope round and round the man's legs, effectually depriving him of the power to move, without injuring him in the slightest, except in his self-respect.



The heavy iron shot out and in a jiffy it had swung the rope round and round the man's legs.

"You infernal young demons!" yelled the man furiously, as he sat helpless on the dock.

The force of his fall had shaken him, and this had not helped to improve his temper.

"Come, calling us bad names won't do any good," soothed Ralph.

"I'll have you arrested! I'll have the law on you! See if I don't," bawled the man, struggling to release himself from the encircling rope.

"I wouldn't talk about law right now," warned Ralph, in smooth, even tones. "The law might be interested to know something about this explosion to-night, you know."

"Yah-h-h-h-h!" snarled the man. His anger and humiliation had rendered him incapable of any more articulate form of speech.

"Come on, boys, we'll go up to the ruins," said Ralph, while the man still struggled with his bonds. In the darkness he was having a hard time to untangle them.

"Don't you dare go up near that hut," he roared at the top of his voice.

"See here, my friend, you've said enough," hailed back Ralph, as, together, the three chums set off for the glowing timbers that marked the smoldering remains of the hut.

"I'll fix you," roared the man, springing to his feet and rushing after the boys the instant he succeeded in getting loose.

"Don't make any attempt to interfere with us," warned Ralph, as the man rushed at them.

"Oh, I won't, eh? Well, you'll see. I'll just——"

Whack! As the man pounced on him, Ralph's fist shot out like a piston rod on a compound engine.

109

It appeared to have almost as much "kick," too, for the man went down like a stone and lay on the ground, using bad language and threatening the Border Boys with all sorts of terrible things.

"Stop using profanity," advised Ralph; "it never did anybody any good and never will. Besides, we don't care to hear it. Good night."

"I'll fix you, you young jackanapes," screamed the man, still, however, not rising from the ground. "How dare you strike me? How dare you ——"

"Remember, I warned you not to interfere with us," rejoined Ralph, perfectly coolly; "you have only yourself to blame. I simply defended myself against an unjustifiable assault."

"Unjustifiable!" shouted the man. "Is it unjustifiable for you to intrude in my affairs? Is it unjustifiable to come butting in——"

"Where we appear to be needed?" said Ralph, suddenly pausing in an attitude of keen attention. "Hark, boys!"

110

From the neighborhood of the ruins there had come a low groan.

"There's somebody suffering there! Come on!" shouted Ralph.

The others needed no second urging to the rescue. Followed by the imprecations of the man they left behind, they hastened on toward the smoking pile that marked the site of the hut.

111

CHAPTER XII.

SAVED FROM THE RUINS.

"The groans seem to come from over there," said Harry, after an interval of searching among the scattered beams and timbers.

"Where?"

"Right there where the remains of that stone chimney are standing. Phew! what a strong odor! It makes my head ache."

"Dynamite," was Ralph's brief response; "that

shows I was right. It was dynamite that blew up the hut."

Right by the chimney that Harry Ware had indicated was a confused pile of boards and scantlings. As the boys reached the spot a hollow moan came from beneath the tumbled mass of wreckage.

"Here, boys! It's right under here!" cried Ralph. "Hurry now and tear this stuff away. It may be a matter of life and death."

112

The boys worked feverishly for a few minutes and then they uncovered an arm, and a minute later an unconscious form was stretched out before their eyes.

"Why, it's a boy!" exclaimed Percy Simmons, as the white face of the inanimate form was illumined by a faint glow from the smoldering hut.

"So it is. Just a kid. See, there's a bucket over there and a well yonder. Make haste and get some water, Harry," said Ralph. "We'll bathe this cut on his forehead."

"Poor little fellow, he looks about all in," said Percy Simmons, as Harry hurried off on his errand of mercy.

"I'm not so sure about that. He may have only been knocked unconscious when those beams fell on him," replied Ralph hopefully. "I can find no trace of broken bones."

"Well, that's good, anyhow. See, here comes Harry back with the water. What now?"

113

"We must bathe the wound and then try to get him to a doctor," was the reply.

"A doctor?"

"Certainly. He needs medical attendance. We can only give first aid measures."

"But there's no doctor nearer than Piquetville."

"Think again."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, on North Twin Island, not far from us, Dr. Chadwick has a summer home. He arrived there two days ago. We'll take this boy there, and see what can be done for him."

While this conversation was going on Ralph had been tenderly bathing the little lad's wound, while the others supported his limp frame. He appeared to be hardly more than eleven or twelve years old, with a meager, starved-looking little body; but his hands were cruelly scarred and mauled as if by hard work. His feet and calves were bare and a tattered shirt and torn trousers formed his sole garments. Altogether, it was a forlorn little scarecrow that they bent over in the dim light of the ruins.

All this time they had forgotten completely about the man they had left behind them, felled by Ralph's necessary blow. He now was recalled abruptly to their recollection by no less a circumstance than his arrival on the scene.

114

"What are you doing with that boy?" he demanded roughly.

"Trying to do the best we can to patch him up till we get him to a doctor," said Ralph sharply. "Did you know he was in the ruins?"

"What is that to you if I did or not?" grumbled the man. "If you must know, I was looking for him when you came up and interfered."

"And you wasted valuable time which might, for all you knew, have cost a human life, in quarreling with us? You're a fine specimen—not!" growled out Ralph. He was mad clear through at the other's brutal cynicism. But he was to get madder still presently.

"Don't you dare take that boy off this island," the man said peremptorily.

115

"And why not?" demanded Ralph. "Surely it's plain enough, even to as callous a being as you are, that he needs medical attention."

"I can attend to him. If you take him away from here, you do it at your peril," was the extraordinary reply.

"Great Scott, man, do you call yourself a human being?" burst out Percy Simmons.

"Come on. Pick him up and carry him down to the boat. Easy now, don't shake him," said Ralph as, after bandaging the lad's head with his handkerchief, he issued the order to his chums, ignoring the man utterly. The fellow fumed as Percy Simmons and Harry Ware took the injured lad's head and feet and started off for the boat.

"Put down that boy!" he screamed.

"By what authority?" demanded Ralph.

116

"By mine. I'm his father."

"Then you must have married mighty early. You don't look much over twenty-one or so."

"Confound your impudence!" shrieked out the man. "How dare you come here and kidnap my son?"

"Oh, we're not kidnapping. We are taking him to Dr. Chadwick on North Twin Island. He may decide that he must go to a hospital. If the doctor does order this we will inform you. Will you let us have your name?"

"I will not," shouted the man. "I warn you that you are law-breakers. You'll be punished for this. I'll see to that, if it takes me the longest day I ever live!"

"Then you'll have to wait till the time that men or boys are to be punished for saving lives," flung back Ralph scornfully, as they made their way to the landing.

The man offered no further objections to their taking the boy. Possibly he had had his lesson already and found out that instead of three mere boys, he had tackled lads who had seen enough of peril and adventure to render them capable of rising to almost any emergency that might present itself.

117

Nevertheless, he followed them to the dock and watched without comment while they stowed the lad as comfortably as they could on the floor of the little tender, using the cushions off the seats so that he might rest the more easily.

"We'll let you hear from us in the morning," cried Ralph, as they shoved off, the man still remaining in silence on the dock.

"Don't you dare to come back here again," he bawled in reply. "If you do, I shan't be alone."

"Perhaps we shan't be, either," shot back Ralph, as he fell to work on the oars.

With this parting dart, they left the strange man of Windmill Island silhouetted against the glowing remains of his hut. As long as they could see him, he stood motionless there, watching the receding boat.

"Well, if this isn't a night of adventures and mysteries, jumbled up like a tangled fishing line, I'd like to know," exclaimed Percy Simmons feelingly, as the boat moved slowly through the water.

118

119

CHAPTER XIII.

A RACE FOR THE DOCTOR.

"We'll switch to the motor, Persimmons."

The dawn comes up early so far north as the St. Lawrence. It was not yet three o'clock in the morning, yet there was a faint gray light illumining the river.

They had been waiting for this. In the darkness, and with the many whirlpools and rapids that occur in that part of the river, it would have been dangerous to do anything more than wait about for daylight. As the light grew stronger the little motor began to crackle and bang, and the tender moved swiftly off through the water in the direction of Dr. Chadwick's island.

"How is our patient getting along, Ralph?" asked Harry, who was steering.

"Breathing easily, but still unconscious. Give us all the speed you can get, Percy. This boy's life may be the reward of a few extra miles coaxed out of the engine."

"I'll do my best," young Simmons assured him.

With Persimmons making good his promise, it was not long before the tender's headway was checked off Dr. Chadwick's island, a pretty, wooded spot with a bungalow showing amid the trees. The bungalow stood back from the water up a steep, grassy slope. The first rays of the rising sun were gleaming on this when the little tender came to a stop at a neat stone dock.

"Blow the whistle," ordered Ralph. "I guess somebody is up. Anyhow, there is smoke coming from the chimney."

Obediently, Percy Simmons began sounding the

120

pneumatic whistle.

Toot-toot-toot-toot-toot!

At the fifth blast the figure of a servant appeared from the bungalow at the top of the slope.

Ralph snatched up the tender's megaphone.

"Dr. Chadwick at home?" he shouted.

121

The servant nodded in reply.

"Then please ask him to hurry down here as soon as possible. We've got a badly injured boy with us. Ask him to make all the haste he can. It's a serious case."

The man gave a wave of his hand to show he understood and vanished. It did not take long for Dr. Chadwick to appear. He was evidently up early to go on a fishing expedition, for he wore outing clothes. He was a middle-aged but active man. He came down the slope quickly, carrying a black surgical case in one hand. As he saw the boys he broke into a run. Speedily he was on the dock looking down into the tender.

"Well, well," he exclaimed, "you young men are early callers. What is the trouble? Ah! that lad there! Cut on the head, eh? Bring him ashore and I'll examine him."

The injured lad was carefully lifted to the dock by the boys and laid down on the crib-work, while the physician bent over him sympathizingly. He removed the bandage that bound the boy's head. As he saw the wound he whistled.

122

"Pretty bad cut, this. How did it happen?"

As the boys explained the case to him, he worked on the wound, applying antiseptics and carefully bandaging it.

"Is the skull fractured?" inquired Ralph.

"That is impossible to say. I cannot do more than examine it now."

"What had better be done?"

"I'd recommend a hospital," said the doctor.

"Is there one near here?" inquired Ralph.

"Yes, at Cardinal, on the Canadian shore."

"We had better take him there?"

"I should strongly advise it. In fact, it may be his only chance of pulling through. It was a good thing you came to me so early. I am going down the river to-day and may be gone for some time. Otherwise I should be glad to help you out in elucidating the mystery of that island."

"Thank you," rejoined Ralph; "we mean to try and do something in that way ourselves."

123

"Well, you look capable enough," said the doctor dryly, with a twinkle in his eye.

Not long after, for the doctor had cautioned them not to delay, the tender shot out from the dock. In the rush of events it had hardly occurred to the boys to talk over the

disappearance of the *River Swallow*. Now, however, that they had done almost all they could for the boy, and the tender was headed for Cardinal, not more than six miles off, the talk swung naturally enough to that topic.

Indignation against Malvin was the ruling feeling, although Ralph warned them not to prejudge the man.

"He may have had some good reason for what he did," he said.

"He'll have a good excuse, anyhow. I'll bet my head on that," said Harry Ware, with emphasis.

They were swinging between the North Twin and the South Twin Island as the lad spoke. As they shot around a promontory on the latter's easterly end, Percy Simmons, who had relieved Harry at the wheel, checked their talk by an abrupt shout.

124

"Motor craft ahead!" he cried.

"Where?" demanded Ralph.

"Right over our bow. By hickory," the boy's voice became surcharged with sudden excitement, "it's—it's the *River Swallow*!"

"By all that's wonderful, so it is!" and Ralph echoed the other's shout.

"Hail her!" suggested Harry, "it won't be long now before we squeeze some sort of an explanation out of that wiggly Malvin."

The tender was urged to top speed. The *River Swallow* was bound down the river, apparently headed for Dexter Island. She was making good speed, but, aided by the current between the two islands, the tender bade fair to intercept her. Harry Ware opened a locker and snatched out a flag. He waved it energetically above his head.

Before long the *River Swallow's* way was checked. She swerved from her course and headed for the little tender. As she came alongside, Malvin's face appeared on the bridge. His countenance beamed with what appeared to be genuine relief as he met the boys' eyes unflinchingly.

125

"Thank heaven you're safe, young gentlemen!" he cried. "I feared something had happened to you."

"Humph," muttered Harry to himself, as some steps were lowered and they prepared to board the *River Swallow*, "I've got more than half a notion, my friend, that you weren't half as worried as you would like us to think."

Malvin and Hansen helped to get the injured lad on deck, where he was laid out in the cockpit. Had Ralph not been preoccupied he would have noticed Malvin give a perceptible start as his eyes fell upon the lad's pallid face.

"It's Henderson Hawke's boy, Jim Whey," he muttered to himself. "So it was these brats of Border Boys who landed on Windmill Island last night. I thought so from the description Hawke gave me of his visitors."

126

After seeing the wounded lad comfortably disposed, Ralph ordered full speed ahead. Cardinal was reached after a swift run and the lad hurried to the hospital in an ambulance summoned from the dock.

"I think we may hope for the best," said the house surgeon in answer to the boys' inquiries. "What is the lad's name?"

"We—we don't know; but I'll be responsible for him," rejoined Ralph.

"Humph! Queer sort of lads," muttered the surgeon, as he turned to give some orders and the boys returned to their fast motor craft.

127

CHAPTER XIV.

HARRY HEARS A NOISE IN THE BUSHES.

"And now for some sleep."

Ralph spoke, as, after enjoying a hearty breakfast of fruit, steaks and coffee, the two latter cooked on the *River Swallow's* electric broiler by Percy Simmons, the three boys, who had passed such a sleepless, trying night, yawned openly in each other's faces.

Malvin had the wheel with orders to steer direct for Dexter Island. Ralph had already questioned the man and, as Harry Ware had prophesied, Malvin, the inscrutable, had his excuses all down "pat."

It was as he had said, he declared. The swift current at the point from which the lads had left the larger craft in the tender had caused the anchor to drag. Caught by the swift current, and with only the Norwegian to run the engines, Malvin declared he had had a narrow escape from going on the rocks.

128

His story was circumstantial, direct, and told without the flicker of an eyelid. Ralph had no choice but to accept it, as well as Malvin's explanation that he had been searching for the boys ever since he had regained control of the large craft.

It is almost unnecessary to say that Ralph, in view of his suspicions of the man, did not believe, at least as a whole, Malvin's carefully detailed story. In fact, he resolved to question the Norwegian hand at some later time. But it may as well be stated here that from Hansen, a stolid fellow who fully lived up to his title of "squarehead," the boys were able to glean but little.

Ralph and his chums slept till noon. They were astonished when Harry Ware, the first to awaken, peeped out of a porthole and announced that they were lying at the dock at Dexter Island.

"Confound that fellow Malvin," muttered Ralph. "I told him to call us as soon as we landed off the island. We must have got here more than two

129

hours ago, and yet he let us sleep; just another instance of his carelessness.”

There came a knock on the cabin door.

“Come in,” cried Ralph, and then, as Malvin entered with a folded paper in his hand, he demanded why they had not been called.

“My father was expecting——” began Ralph, when Malvin interrupted him.

“Begging your pardon, sir, here is a note from your father.”

“A note?” exclaimed Ralph, in an astonished voice.

“Yes, sir.”

“I don’t just see why dad should send me a note, when he is here on the island himself,” said Ralph, as he took the folded paper.

“That’s just it, sir, if I may say so,” said Malvin, more obsequiously than ever; “you see, he isn’t here.”

“Not here!”

“No, sir. He left the island last night on Mr. Collins’ boat. The servant who handed me the note said that it would explain everything.”

“All right. You can go, Malvin.”

Ralph unfolded the paper and saw that scrawled on it in his father’s big, forceful writing were a few words. It was characteristic of the older Stetson that he didn’t waste words when he had anything to say. The note read as follows:

“DEAR JACK: Called away to Montreal. Conference on a steel-rail deal for the new Georgian Bay Railroad. Can’t tell when I’ll be back, but get along as best you can and enjoy yourself.

“DAD.

“P. S.—I hailed Collins’ boat as she went by and he will take me to Point Lalone, where I can catch the Grand Trunk for Montreal. My address will be Imperial Hotel, Montreal.”

“Well, if that isn’t too bad! Just when we need his advice, too,” burst out Harry, as Ralph concluded reading the brief note aloud to his chums.

“It is hard luck. But it’s just like dad,” laughed Ralph. “Here he comes up here for a vacation, and the first thing you know he’s plunging off to Montreal to bury himself in work again!”

“That’s the American business man all over,” commented Percy Simmons judicially; “duty before pleasure; the nose to the grindstone always.”

“No danger of your ever being taken that way,” scoffed Harry Ware; “a hammock and a big glass of ice cream soda for you, if you ever get rich.”

“Oh, I don’t know that I’m any exception to some folks I know,” retorted Percy airily.

"Say, fellows, let's go up to the house," suggested Ralph. "I want to make some inquiries about what time dad left, and so on. Then this evening we might take a run over to the Canadian shore and send a wire to the Imperial."

"All right," rejoined Harry; "suits me."

"Look out, we might encounter that spook craft again," said Percy Simmons teasingly.

"Oh, all right for you," retorted Harry, flushing up, "you, buried down in the engine room! You didn't see that boat when she burst out into a green glare. I thought sure it was that *Lost Voyageur* craft that they tell about."

"I've a notion," remarked Ralph, as they walked up the path leading from the boat landing to the large, handsome house that topped a rising knoll, "I've a notion that others than ourselves might be interested in hearing about that ghost craft."

"Who, for instance?" asked Harry.

"Why, the authorities. I've a strong inclination to report the matter to the Canadian police when we run over there to-night."

"Why not kill two birds with one stone and run into Cardinal? We could find out there how our young friend is getting along, and also do what you suggest. But what makes you think the authorities would be interested in the matter?"

"Why, just this. That craft is engaged in some sort of nefarious business, probably smuggling. It's the only plausible explanation for the conduct of those on board her, and all their devices to throw pursuing craft off her track."

"Smuggling! I guess you've hit the nail on the head, all right, Ralph. But why should she have been seen off this island?"

"That is exactly what I want to find out," was Ralph's rejoinder. "In fact, if I wasn't so certain that some link exists between that queer, night-roving boat and Dexter Island, I wouldn't take so much trouble to run all possible clews down."

"Hark! What was that?" exclaimed Harry Ware suddenly, stopping and wheeling right about face.

"What?"

"I heard a rustling sound in that clump of bushes," explained the boy.

"Gracious! More spooks. You've got 'em on the brain," scoffed Percy Simmons loudly.

"Say, just can that comedy stuff of yours, will you?" demanded Harry Ware. Then turning to Ralph, he said, "It wasn't my imagination, Ralph. I sure heard something in there."

"Probably a squirrel. There are several on the island," rejoined Ralph.

"Yes, make a noise like a nut and maybe he'll come out," kindly suggested Persimmons.

"Thanks for the suggestion, but I'll leave that to

you. You see, you could do it more naturally," parried Harry Ware, to Percy's discomfiture.

"We'll take a look in there just to satisfy ourselves," said Ralph, who, for some reason, appeared to take Harry Ware's report more seriously than did Persimmons.

135

But a search of the clump revealed no sign of life, human or animal.

"Score up another one to the spooks," chuckled Persimmons.

But it was no spook or animal, either, that had made the rustling sound which Harry's sharp ears had detected. It was a man; Malvin, in fact. He had glided like a weasel from the boat the instant the boys left it. Following a circuitous track, veiled from the main path by flowering shrubs and ornamental bushes, he had secreted himself in the clump of plants to which Harry had drawn attention.

He had heard almost every word of the latter part of their conversation, and an evil smile mantled his face as he listened. When the boys stopped short he had glided off like a snake through the screening shrubbery, and as he went he muttered words that boded no good to the boys, should they put into effect their intention of informing the Canadian authorities of the "ghost craft" and its ways.

136

Clearly Ralph had not guessed wrongly when he hazarded the belief that a link existed between Dexter Island and the mysterious men of the night-roving motor boat.

The link was Roger Malvin.

137

CHAPTER XV. CROSS PURPOSES.

Following out his prearranged plans, Ralph ordered the *River Swallow* to be made ready for her run to Cardinal that night. After a good supper the three young Border Boys, now changed to motor boatmen, sauntered down toward the dock somewhat ahead of the time they had decided on leaving.

Harry Ware was in advance of his comrades, and as he turned an angle in the patch he came into full view of the *River Swallow* lying at her dock.

"What a pretty picture she makes lying there," he thought. "My, to look at her you'd never think she could hustle over the water the way she can!"

Malvin and Hansen were standing near the craft, and the former turned as Harry came round the corner.

138

Instantly a long, low whistle came from the fellow's lips, and Harry could have sworn that at the same instant a third figure arose from the deck of the *River Swallow*, where it had seemingly been lounging, and vanished down the forescuttle.

Harry Ware rubbed his eyes.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" he exclaimed. "Am I seeing things, or what? There are Malvin and Hansen on the dock. Besides the servants, they are the only men on the island, and that man on the deck—or the man I thought I saw on the deck—is most assuredly not one of them."

He stood there puzzled exceedingly by what he had seen, for he was almost certain that his eyes had played him no tricks. Yet if he had really seen a third man on the *River Swallow*, how had he come there? No boat had come into the dock that afternoon, and there was no other way of landing on the island except at a point which was commanded by the house. It was another mystery to be added to the strange events that appeared to be piling up around the boys in baffling confusion.

"Shall I tell the others about it and risk getting the life joshed out of me?" thought Harry to himself, as his comrades' steps drew nearer.

After a minute's cogitation, he decided to remain silent about what he had seen—for that it was no optical delusion he was certain.

"But I couldn't convince them of that," he mused. "They'd say I had been seeing spooks again, and Persimmons would kid the life out of me. No, I guess I'll keep my mouth shut and do some detective work on my own account."

With this resolution in his mind, he joined his chums, and, arm in arm, the three strolled down to the *River Swallow*.

"All ready, sir," declared Malvin, "but you're a little bit ahead of the time you said, sir. I wasn't expecting you."

Harry looked sharply at the man.

"No, I'll bet you weren't expecting us," he thought.

"All right," responded Ralph to Malvin. "Percy, get below and tune the engines up. It is almost dusk. I would like to get under way before dark."

Persimmons dived below, donned his engineer's overalls and began to test up his engines for the night run. To his surprise, they responded sluggishly to his efforts to get them in working order.

"The first time they've laid down on me," he muttered, as, monkey wrench in hand, he tried to locate the source of the trouble.

"What's the matter?" hailed Ralph impatiently down the tube. "Aren't you ready yet?"

"Not yet. There is some trouble here I can't locate."

"Bother! I wanted to get under way as soon as possible. What do you think is the matter?"

"Impossible to say yet."

"Well, hurry up and do the best you can."

"You bet I'll do that. It may take some time, though."

"But they were working all right when we tied up this afternoon."

"That makes it all the more puzzling. Something has happened to them between then and now, that is certain."

The young engineer went vigorously to work. Systematically he went over wiring and ignition and tested the compression. All were in perfect working order, and yet the engines only responded with a lifeless series of "shoo-oo-oofs-s-s!" to all his efforts.

Percy Simmons knitted his brows. He sat down on a leather-covered bench that ran along one side of the engine room.

"Let's see; I've been over everything," he mused, "gasoline valves, spark plugs, wiring, batteries, magneto and all. They're all running as smoothly as a hundred-dollar watch. What the dickens —"

142

He broke off suddenly.

"I'm a fine engineer!" he exclaimed. "The carburetors!"

Industriously he commenced examining the carburetors, the "hearts of the motors." There were four in all on the twin four-cylinder engines of the *River Swallow*. After he had worked a while, Percy Simmons made a discovery that brought him to his feet with a yell.

In the bowls of all the carburetors sand had been placed. This, of course, prevented the proper mixture of air and gasoline taking place, and made it impossible to start the engine.

"Now what wretch can have done such a thing?" exclaimed Percy to himself as he made this discovery. "Somebody with a knowledge of engines and how to cripple them in just the last place any one would think of looking to locate the trouble!"

Malvin's was the first name that flashed into his mind, for suspicion is one of the most infectious of mental maladies, and Ralph's attack of "nerves" in regard to the former captain of the *River Swallow* had communicated itself swiftly and forcibly to his two young chums.

143

But a moment's reflection caused Persimmons to reject this explanation of the sanded carburetors. Malvin, while capable of running an engine when it was in perfect working order, had no technical knowledge of machinery such as the person who had maliciously "doped" the carburetors must have possessed.

Hansen? No, the Norwegian was even less skillful about a motor than Malvin. Who, then, could have been responsible for such a wanton act of vandalism?

"Gee! If we get up against any more mysteries I'm going to quit and go back home," breathed Persimmons agitatedly to himself. "What with spook motor boats, mysterious ghostly lights and strange doings on uninhabited islands, and lastly these sanded carburetors, life along the St. Lawrence is getting too rich for my blood."

144

In response to Persimmons' summons, Ralph

came below. The young captain's shipmate explained the state of the case to him.

"What do you make of it?" he concluded.

Ralph could only assume a puzzled expression.

"I don't know what to say," he said.

"Well, Malvin and Hansen are pretty well eliminated, don't you think?"

"I guess so. I agree with you that neither is possessed of enough technical engineering knowledge to enable him to cripple a motor in this fashion."

"That settles that, then. But it is equally certain that none of us did it."

"That goes without saying."

"Then we come down to one culprit," announced Percy, looking important.

145

"Who is that?"

"One of Harry Ware's ghosts," declared Persimmons soberly, but with a twinkle in his eye nevertheless.

"I guess we can safely call the ghosts out of it," laughed Ralph, in spite of his vexation. "The thing is, who would have a motive to try to prevent the *River Swallow* leaving Dexter Island to-night."

"There's only one motive that I can suggest," said young Simmons seriously.

"And that one is?"

"A desperate desire to prevent us from communicating to the authorities our experiences of last night."

"But who could know anything about that? We agreed to keep that part of the object of our journey to ourselves. Nobody could know of it."

"Unless somebody overheard us when we talked it over."

"What do you mean?"

"That maybe Harry Ware wasn't so far off as we thought he was, when he declared he heard a rustling in that shrubbery."

146

"But, even so; even if anyone did overhear us, Malvin, for instance, we've already decided that he couldn't cripple the engines in such a skillful manner."

"That being so, there is only one explanation. The sand is there. Some one placed it there. It wasn't one of us. It is practically impossible that it could have been Malvin or Hansen. That lets everybody out."

"Yes," said Ralph slowly, "unless——"

He paused.

"Well, unless what?"

"Unless there is somebody on board this boat that we know nothing about."

Percy Simmons broke out in a frantic yell.

"Holy Mackerel! You're getting 'em, too. We'll all be seeing things before we get through."

147

CHAPTER XVI. HARRY PLAYS DETECTIVE.

It is strange upon what slender circumstances big results sometimes depend. Had the fear of ridicule not held back Harry Ware from telling the others about the figure he had seen glide along the deck and vanish in the crew's quarters of the *River Swallow*, a great part of the events of that night might have turned out differently.

As it was, however, Harry kept his counsel, with what results we shall see before long. The trouble with the engines once located, it did not take Percy Simmons long to adjust matters, and within half an hour he had the big motors whirring as evenly as if nothing had ever disturbed the even tenor of their workings.

As soon as he was notified that everything was all right below, Ralph rang for the reverse and the *River Swallow* backed out from her dock into the darkness that was falling fast. But for the delay, thought Ralph, who had chafed impatiently over it, they might have been in Cardinal by that time. But there was no help for it, and as soon as he had room to turn he sent down a clanging signal to Persimmons for "full speed ahead."

148

Harry Ware was on the bridge by the young captain, but after a while he said he thought he smelled gas, and went forward. He wanted to explore the crew's quarters for himself. Malvin and Hansen were on the lookout stations in the bow, and, as Harry approached the forescuttle, the former came up to him.

"Where are you going, sir?" he asked in a tone that struck Harry as being rather agitated.

"Why, we suspect there's a leak in one of the gas tanks," was the boy's ready reply. "I'm going down there to see if I can locate it."

"I'll go, sir," interrupted Malvin eagerly; "let me go, sir."

149

"Don't bother yourself," replied Harry; "your place is forward on the lookout. Captain Stetson would be angry if he knew you had left it. You'd better go back."

Malvin did not obey at once. Instead, he placed his head right over the scuttle, and in a loud voice announced, after a minute of sniffing, that he could smell no fumes of gasoline.

"It's no use your taking the trouble to go nosing around down there," he said, turning to Harry. "If the gas was leaking, I'd smell it sure."

"Nevertheless, I shouldn't be doing my duty if I didn't obey Ralph Stetson's orders," stoutly declared Harry. "Let me pass; I'm going down. I'd recommend you to get back on your station."

Malvin's rejoinder was peculiar. He did not, in fact, address it to Harry at all. He placed his mouth over the scuttle and in a loud voice, unnecessarily loud it sounded to Harry, he bawled out:

"Oh, all right, sir. Go below if you want to. But—LOOK OUT BELOW—there's some low carlins there you might bump your head on."

150

The last part of this speech was delivered in low and cautionary tones. Having uttered the warning, Malvin turned and, with a respectful nod, paced back to his post of duty.

"Now I wonder why he hollered, 'Look out below,' at the top of his lungs like that?" pondered Harry.

"Well, I'll give it up," he murmured, renewing his meditations. "Anyhow, here goes for an exploration of the forecastle."

He dived below, having first switched on the electric light in the sailors' quarters by means of a switch at the head of the ladder leading below.

As he descended the steep rungs, not without difficulty, for the *River Swallow* was being driven fast and was pitching and rolling considerably, he looked sharply about him. But there was nothing to indicate that anyone was in hiding there. In the men's bunks the beds were neatly made up. In one corner were their chests and personal belongings. Everything was shipshape, orderly and—empty.

151

"It was my imagination then, after all," breathed Harry as he looked about him; "I'm glad I didn't say anything to the fellows."

At precisely the same moment, Ralph was remarking to Persimmons, the latter having come on deck to gulp down a breath of fresh air:

"Don't say anything about the sanded carburetors to Harry, Percy. He's scared enough as it is."

"You can bet I won't. He'd be off on his old spook tactics again if I did," responded the Simmons boy with alacrity.

And thus did the lads on board the *River Swallow* play at cross purposes, little dreaming what mutual benefit might have resulted from a comparison of notes.

152

Firmly convinced that he had been the victim of a delusion, Harry made his way back to the deck and retraced his steps aft to join Ralph on the bridge.

"Everything all right?" asked the latter.

"Oh, sure."

"Malvin at his post?"

"Oh, yes. He and Hansen were right on the job. There with both feet."

"Good. I didn't feel altogether sure of that Malvin fellow."

Without further comments Ralph reverted to his duty of steering the *River Swallow* through

swiftly moving currents and eddies, for they were bound up the river. Harry leaned against the rail beside him.

"Whereabouts are we?" he asked as the boat sped along through the darkness.

"Passing Chimney Island. You can make it out off there to the left."

153

"Not up to Windmill Island yet?"

"Not yet. Anyhow, we won't go near it going up. I'll pass it on the return trip, though. We can make better time by striking the current there."

The remainder of the journey to Cardinal, a rather sleepy, though fairly populous, Canadian town, was made without incident. As they came abreast of the town dock, which was brilliantly illuminated with electric arc lights in expectation of the arrival of the steamer bound down the river for Quebec, they noticed the crowd idly gathered there. It was ready for any excitement and broke into a cheer as the fast boat came sweeping up to the dock. Then, at a signal from Ralph, the *River Swallow* suddenly slackened speed, churning the waters whitely with its reversing propellers, and eventually came to a standstill with the precision of an auto being driven up to the curb.

It was a fine bit of boat-handling that the spectators were quick to recognize and applaud.

154

Malvin, bow line in hand, leaped ashore as the *River Swallow* glided up, and Hansen equally quick, for the man was a good sailor, hopped nimbly about, dropping fenders to prevent the racing motor boat's sheeny sides being scratched or marred by contact with the timbers of the dock.

"Good bit of work that, lad," said a grizzled old man on the dock, as the boys came ashore, all dressed in natty yachting garments, visored caps, blue coats, white flannel trousers and white canvas shoes.

"Thank you," laughed Ralph. "I guess my engineer was as much responsible for it as I."

"Ah-hum," said the old man. "I used to handle a boat once, but now I ain't fit for nothing but just night watchman at the grain elevator yonder," and he pointed to a towering structure that loomed against the dark sky.

Malvin and Hansen had been left in charge of the *River Swallow*. Arm in arm the three boys started up the street. But after they had gone a short way, Harry suddenly declared that he had left something he wanted in the cabin.

155

"I'll go back for it. You fellows keep right on," he said.

"Where shall we meet you? We're bound for the hospital," said Ralph.

"Where from there?"

"To the Western Union offices."

"And then?"

"Why, I guess to the police station or whatever

answers to it over on this side. I've a burning desire to lay the facts in the case before the authorities."

"Very well then, I'll meet you at the telegraph office."

And so it was arranged. While Percy and Ralph hastened to the hospital, which lay at one end of the town, Harry made the best of his way back toward the *River Swallow*. His conscience hurt him a bit for not having told his friends the true reason for his return to the motor craft.

Harry was not in search of something forgotten.

He was on the trail of the third man who, despite all evidence to the contrary, he was still firmly convinced was concealed somewhere on board the *River Swallow*.

156

157

CHAPTER XVII. A VISIT TO THE HOSPITAL.

At the hospital, Ralph and young Simmons were informed that the lad they had brought in that morning was better, and that it was almost certain that he would recover in course of time. Naturally, both boys were anxious to see him, as they felt that the lad they had found in the ruins of the dynamited hut could throw a great deal of light on that mysterious occurrence.

For some reason, which he himself could not have defined, Ralph was beginning to link the different strange happenings of the previous night into a continuous chain. Irrational as the idea appeared that there was any connection between the blowing up of the hut and the latest voyage of the gray motor boat, he could not help feeling that somewhere the two occurrences dove-tailed into each other. But he said nothing of this to his chums, as, actually, he had nothing upon which to base his belief.

Permission to see the lad whom they had saved from almost certain death under the smoldering timbers was denied to them, after they had waited some time to obtain it. Percy was bitterly disappointed. Ralph was also rather put out that they could not see and talk to the little lad, who, they felt certain, held the key to the mystery. But he was not astonished. He knew better than Percy Simmons how serious the boy's condition had been that morning.

"Come back in two days," the house surgeon said. "I could not think of permitting you to talk to your young friend until then. He must on no account be excited."

"He is resting easily?" asked Ralph.

"Yes; but—he is terribly fragile and emaciated."

"Any-anything else?" asked Percy, recollecting certain bruises and marks he had spied on the lad's body.

"Why, yes. Since you ask, I should say that he has been the recent victim of cruel and inhuman

158

159

treatment. Do you know anything concerning this?"

"No, we know nothing about him except that we brought him here," said Ralph; "but we take an interest in the case."

"Oh, it's not very interesting," rejoined the man of medicine, mistaking his meaning; "a simple case of slight concussion of the brain and exhaustion and shock. We have many such cases. It is quite ordinary, I assure you."

"I guess you and I look at cases from different angles," smiled Ralph.

"Ah; quite so! quite so!" exclaimed the Canadian surgeon, and hurried off to make his nightly inspection of the wards.

But, before he went, he had a question to ask:

"I say,—Yankees, aren't you?"

"We are Americans," rejoined Ralph gravely. "That is, we're Americans all we know how to be, twenty-six hours out of the twenty-four, and three hundred and sixty-five days a year, and more on Leap Year."

"My word! You Yankees are——"

"There's no such word as Yankee," struck in Percy, not knowing whether to laugh or be angry.

"Oh, well, Americans, then. Same thing! Same thing! Jolly smart people, just the same. Good-night!"

And off the little bald-headed man bounced, leaving the two lads alone.

"No use waiting here, Percy," said Ralph, as the surgeon vanished.

Percy looked around the bare office. A desk, a telephone, and a long row of dismal, precise-looking chairs were its sole ornaments. A smell of disinfectants hung heavily in the air. Behind the desk a small man with a closely cropped head, and very neat, well-brushed clothes, was writing in a big book, a supply of spare pens held behind his ears on either side of his shiny skull.

Suddenly the telephone jangled harshly. The man jumped up and went to it. The boys, half unconsciously, paused.

"Hello," they heard the little man say in snappish, peeved tones, "hel-lo. Yes-yes-yes. This is the Mercy Hospital. Yes, I said. Yes-yes-yes. A boy? A boy wounded in the forehead? Concussion case? Yes, we have such a case here."

The boys exchanged glances. There appeared to be hardly a doubt but that some one at the other end of the wire was calling up about "their boy."

The conversation to which they were auditors at one end only continued.

"Who is this?—Who?—Say it again.—Malvern?—No?—Speak louder, can't you? Oh, Malvin. Yes ——"

"Great Scott!"

The exclamation fairly leaped from Ralph's lips.

162

The busy little man looked around angrily.

"Can't you keep still while I'm 'phoning?" he demanded. "Boys are a nuisance."

He applied himself again to the 'phone.

"No, sir, I did not say *you* were a nuisance. I said, 'Boys are a nuisance.' Yes."

He turned and glanced malevolently at the boys, as much as to say, "Now see what you've done."

Then the conversation went on.

"See the boy?—No, that is impossible.—Two boys were here to-night to—Hey! What confounded impudence!"

Ralph had dashed forward and was clutching his arm. He had jerked the receiver from the fussy little old man and slapped his other hand over the transmitter.

"Don't say anything about us being here, sir, I beg of you. You may foil the ends of justice. You may——"

163

"Hoity-toity! What's all this? What are boys coming to? Be quiet, sir. Let me talk at once. Hullo, Mr. Malvern! Hello, sir! Are you there?"

But apparently "Mr. Malvern," to use Canadian telephone terms, was "not there."

At any rate, the little man hung up the receiver with a thump and a snort.

"That man has left the 'phone. See what you did!" he exclaimed angrily to Ralph. "It might have been something of the highest importance."

"I assure you, sir," declared Ralph eagerly, "that the man at the other end of that wire was one whom we have every reason to believe a suspicious character. I had a strong reason for not wanting him to know we had been here to-night, and that was why I interfered, as I'm afraid you think, without just cause."

"What, hey? Suspicious character, eh? Well, allow me to say, young man, that your own actions are not above suspicion. No, sir!"

164

The fussy little man took a huge pinch of snuff. While he was sneezing, the boys slipped out.

"Where to now?" asked Percy Simmons.

"To the telegraph office. Then to the police station. We've found out something important to-night. Malvin knows that boy! I'm equally certain that he knows the crew of the phantom motor boat, and the fellow who tried to drive us off Windmill Island."

"Do you really believe it?"

"Just as surely as I do that we are standing here. But don't let's waste time. That boy in the hospital knows something, and the 'other side' knows that he knows something. It's up to us to beat them to it!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE THREE CONSPIRATORS.

Harry made his way down to the dock, where the boat had been left, with "both eyes open," as the saying goes. He did not fear that he would miss sighting whoever came off the *River Swallow* as soon as they were sure that the boys had gone up town. Of course he was assuming that Malvin and the man he was certain he had spied earlier that day, would leave together. If they did this, even if they vacated the motor craft before he reached it, there was only one road that they could follow, and that was the street down which Harry was walking, the only thoroughfare that led to the dock.

As he hurried along, many thoughts surged into the lad's mind. What was he to do in the event of the mysterious "third man" actually leaving the boat?

"I guess my best plan will be just to stick to their heels wherever they go," he said to himself. "Yes," he went on, busily turning matters over in his mind, "that's the scheme. While Ralph and Harry are looking after things in town, this end of the game is up to your Uncle Dudley."

166

As he neared the wharf, Harry became aware that great excitement and bustle were going forward there. The down river passenger boat had just arrived, and a number of people were struggling to disembark by way of the gang plank, while an equally determined crowd was striving to get on board. Suddenly the boy became aware of three figures among the crowd, whom he recognized instantly.

The trio was composed of Malvin, Hansen and another man.

As Harry saw this third member of the group, he almost gave vent to an involuntary cry of recognition.

The stranger was the same man whom they had encountered on Windmill Island on the eventful previous night.

167

There was no mistake. Harry recognized instantly every feature of the fellow's face, which had been etched upon his mind with all the vividness of a photograph.

Harry's pulses bounded as he made this discovery. So, then, it appeared that Ralph had been right. Unquestionably a link did exist between Windmill Island and Malvin, and also, apparently, Hansen, although the boy was morally certain that the obtuse Norwegian was merely an insignificant pawn in whatever mysterious game was being played by Malvin and the other man.

"Well, this is a discovery," gasped the boy as he watched the three talking earnestly together, not far from where the *River Swallow* lay tugging at her moorings.

Then, like a galvanic shock, another thought

flashed through his mind.

The third man,—the man of the island,—was also, almost without question, the fellow whom Harry had seen slip along the deck and vanish down the forecutter, when the Border Boys appeared to board the *River Swallow* some time before they were expected.

168

The elation of this revelation was still stirring in the lad's mind, when the three men, who seemed oblivious of the crowd about them, suddenly shoved their way through the press, and, walking side by side, set off up the road that led toward town.

This was insubordination of the rankest sort on Malvin's part. He had been told by Ralph to stay by the boat. Now Harry's mind alternated between indignation and curiosity as he saw the trio coming toward him. Near where he stood was a big pile of empty boxes and barrels. It was the work of only an instant for him to slip adroitly behind these and effectually conceal himself as the men advanced toward him.

They were talking earnestly and eagerly. As they came abreast of Harry's place of concealment, he heard Malvin's voice. The fellow evidently did not fear detection or eavesdroppers, for he was talking in a bold, loud voice.

169

"A lucky thing I hid in that shrubbery and overheard every word the young whelps were saying," he was exclaiming. "Otherwise we might have walked right into a trap. What do you advise doing, Hawke?"

"So the man of the island is named Hawke, is he?" thought Harry, as he listened with every instinct strained. "Well, that's one discovery, Mr. Malvin. Another one is that I was not mistaken when I thought I heard something in the shrubbery this afternoon."

"Give me time to breathe a bit after my confinement in that gasoline compartment," rejoined Hawke in a surly manner. "I thought I'd suffocate in there. That inquisitive young brat stayed down in the forepeak too long to suit me, I can tell you."

"Well, it was a good thing I gave you warning by shouting, 'Look out below,'" rejoined Malvin; "otherwise all our plans might have been upset."

170

Hansen's voice halted the two worthies just as Harry feared they were about to get out of earshot.

"Hold on, you fallers," he heard the Norwegian say, "vile I skull gat light by my pipe."

"Hurry up, then. We've work ahead of us," came Malvin's voice. "Those brats are off up town to try to talk to Jim Whey. We want to get ahead of them."

"If that boy talks, I'll——" Hawke's voice trailed off in a threatening growl.



"If that boy talks, I'll—" Hawke's voice trailed off in a threatening growl.

"So Jim Whey is the name of that lad you said was your son till we called your bluff," thought Harry, as he listened while the Norwegian struggled to get a light in the brisk breeze that was blowing.

"Pshaw! That lad won't be able to talk for some time to come, if he was as badly hurt as you told me," said Malvin, reassuringly. "It was right after I'd slipped my anchor and given the kids the go-by that I heard the explosion and saw the flash. I always told you to be careful about that dynamite, Hawke."

"It was Rawson that would have it stored there," grumbled the other. "He had a crazy notion that some time we might make a submarine mine out of it, and make things hot for anyone who came snooping around Windmill Island uninvited. How was I to know that that crazy dog would come galloping into the shack and upset the lamp and blow everything to Kingdom Come? If the boy and I hadn't skinned out as soon as it happened, we'd neither of us be on earth to-night. I wonder where the *Artful Dodger* was when things exploded?"

"I don't know," responded Malvin; "we'd sighted her not long before, and she played the phosphorescent trick, the light stunt and all, but it didn't scare those pesky kids, except one of 'em who swore she was a spook!"

Hawke burst into a laugh. Harry's ears burned

as he heard.

"I wish they were all like that," continued Malvin. "Confound them, they ran me out of a good job, and we can't use the *River Swallow* any more in our work. And not content with that, they've got to start chasing the *Artful Dodger* now."

"Well, they'll chase her a precious long time before they get any satisfaction," responded Hawke; "and then it's liable to be in reverse English. Rawson isn't the sort of man to stand for any monkey business. He'd as lief send 'em all to the bottom as eat, I reckon."

"Yes, that's Rawson," agreed Malvin. "Well, Hansen, got your light?"

"Aye, aye," growled the Norwegian.

"Then come on. We've wasted too much time already."

The trio struck off up the road toward the town. Harry, after waiting what he deemed a safe period of time, slipped from his place of concealment and followed them.

His brain was fairly in a whirl with what he had overheard. It explained many things.

Judging from what the men had said, the "spook motor craft" was called the *Artful Dodger* and was engaged in some nefarious business, as, indeed, the boys had already guessed. A man named Rawson was in command of her, and he was evidently a desperate character. The mention of the submarine mines, the explosive for which had been detonated by accident, amply demonstrated that.

Moreover, Malvin must have visited the island the night before, after they had left with the boy, and taken Hawke on board the *River Swallow*, concealing him in a small space under the gasoline tanks forward. Nor was this all. The injured lad, Jim Whey, was clearly a cog in the machine somewhere.

Also, judging from what he had overheard, Jim Whey knew much of the machinations of the gang of which, apparently, he was an unwilling member. Otherwise, why should the men have feared that he might talk to the lads who had rescued him? That Jim had revelations of importance to make, was clear from what had been said.

"I'll have to hurry up and meet the others," exclaimed Harry to himself as he hastened along, taking care to keep a safe distance behind the three men he could see ahead of him.

"My! I guess I've got something to tell them that won't sound like any ghost story from Spook Land!"

173

174

175

CHAPTER XIX.

RALPH GETS A TELEGRAM.

Harry met his friends at the telegraph office after he had tracked the three men from the *River Swallow* to a telephone pay station, the same one, in fact, from which Malvin had called up the Mercy Hospital. His excited face at once showed them that he had news of importance to communicate, and they listened eagerly to his story, standing outside the place so as to be sure there were no eavesdroppers about. Ralph had already sent his telegram and was to have an answer in an hour.

Harry Ware wasted no words in telling his experiences. His narrative was soon over, and Ralph suggested an immediate start for the police station.

"We surely have got enough evidence against the gang now to warrant informing the police," he said. "Of course, we've no idea what sort of work this *Artful Dodger* and these men are engaged in. But we know it is something unlawful, and that is excuse enough for us to let the police know what is going on."

176

They were not long in reaching the police station, a solid-looking gray stone building with two lights burning in front of it. They ascended a flight of stone steps and entered the place, which was empty except for a stout sergeant seated behind an oak desk. As soon as he spoke, the boys discerned that he was a recent importation from England.

"Is the inspector in?" asked Ralph.

"The h'inspector h'is h'in, but h'I dunno h'if you can see 'im. W'at's yer business, coveys?" inquired the sergeant, twisting a big mustache and looking important.

"It's—it's of a private nature," said Ralph, who was spokesman of the party.

"Ho, dear! Private, h'is h'it? Well, h'I'll notify the h'inspector, h'and per'aps,—mind, h'I don't say for certain,—per'aps 'ee may see you to-morrer."

177

"But we must see him to-night. It's important, I tell you," cried Ralph to the apathetic official, who appeared to be about to go to sleep.

The reply to this was unexpected.

"Yankees, h'ain't yer?" asked the sergeant.

"Yes; Americans, that is. What of it?"

"Ow, nuffin. H'only you Yanks h'are h'always in such a bloomin' 'urry."

"Naturally we are in a hurry. We are on the trail of some malefactors. Some bad men. They are engaged in some sort of nefarious business, and we thought it our duty to notify you at once."

"H'oh, h'is that so? W'at 'ave they been a-doin' h'of?"

"Why, we don't exactly know. You see——" began Ralph in explanation. But the sergeant cut him short.

178

"So you don't h'even know w'at they've been a-doin' h'of, hey? H'I thought there was something precious h'odd h'about this 'ole business. Look 'ere, young chaps, 'ow do you suppose we can

h'arrest these men,—h'even supposin' there h'are h'any such persons,—h'unless we know w'at they've been a-doin' h'of?"

"That's for you to find out," cried Ralph, growing rather heated, for the sergeant's manner implied that he did not place much credence in the boy's story.

"Ow! For h'us to find h'out, h'is h'it?"

"Of course. We have reported them as suspicious persons. If we can see the inspector, I will give him full details."

"You will, will yer. Well, that's bloomin' condescending h'of yer. The h'inspector 'as to go to a dawnce ter-night, and h'if yer wants ter see 'im, you'll 'ave to come around to-morrer."

"You refuse to let us see him, then?"

179

Ralph was red hot by this time.

"H'I do, yes. By wurtue of the h'authority in me wested. H'as h'if h'I'd disturb 'im for a bunch h'of kids!"

"You may be sorry," warned Ralph. "In our opinion, there is some work of grave import going forward,—probably smuggling,—although of that we are not certain."

"Oh, what's the use of talking to him!" exclaimed Persimmons, glaring at the placid sergeant. "Thank goodness, we're Americans and get after our law-breakers, instead of going out to pink teas when there is work to be done!"

"Yes, I guess the American police and Custom officials keep their eyes open, in which respect they offer a refreshing contrast to the Canadian authorities," sputtered Harry Ware equally irritably.

"Oh, keep quiet, boys. What's the use of talking!" said Ralph with a helpless look.

"H'ow, no. Talk all you want to, mates," said the cockney sergeant. "H'it h'amuses me, don'cher know."

180

"Well, what do you know about that!" gasped Harry.

"M' dear young chaps, h'I know nothing whatever h'about h'it," replied the sergeant.

Fairly baffled by such obtuseness, which seemed impossible to be natural and therefore only assumed to irritate, the boys left the police station.

"Well, what shall we do now?" asked Harry hopelessly. "I guess we are up a tree for fair."

"I don't see it in that light," responded Ralph. "On the contrary, these obstacles make me all the more determined to nail this crowd and find out what sort of crooked work they are up to. We'll go back to the telegraph office and find out what reply I've got from dad at Montreal."

"And then?"

"Well, I've got a plan if you fellows will consent to it."

"We're in on anything you suggest, Ralph," responded Harry, while Persimmons vigorously nodded his endorsement to that.

"Well, then, fellows, my plan is this. It's plain there is no use wasting time on Canadian officials. Therefore we've got to rely on the American authorities."

"Looks that way," agreed the others.

"All right, then. We'll leave here for Piquetville without saying anything to Malvin about our destination. We'll anchor off shore there and go up to the dock in the tender. You can explain that the engines have gone wrong, Percy. Then we'll communicate our suspicions to the authorities and bring them off to the anchored *River Swallow*. In that way we can nab the whole bunch."

"Including the third man,—Hawke?" asked Harry anxiously.

"Including him, I hope. It's my notion that Hawke has some articles of value on his person which are to be smuggled, and that Malvin took him off the island after the hut blew up for that purpose. It's likely that Hawke was to be hidden on our island till a chance came to smuggle whatever they are transporting illegally across the border. Circumstances prevented this, and so Malvin concealed him on the *River Swallow*. I'll wager that he'll be on board to-night by the time we get down to the dock."

Talking thus, the three lads were not long in reaching the telegraph office.

Ralph entered the place eagerly.

"Any reply to that message I sent a while ago to Montreal?" he asked anxiously.

The operator glanced up at him with an odd look.

"Why, yes," he said, "one came a few minutes ago."

He handed him a pink telegraph form with a recurrence of his odd look. Ralph noticed it, but it was not until he had glanced over the despatch that its significance burst upon him like a thunderclap. No wonder the operator had had a queer expression on his face! This was the message:

"Am under arrest here. Suspected of diamond smuggling. Don't worry. It looks like a joke on the authorities.—Dad"

CHAPTER XX. THINKING THINGS OUT.

"Gr-e-a-t jumping Je-hos-o-phat!"

The words fell from Percy Simmons' lips as Ralph, in a low tone, read the despatch to his chums.

"Diamond smuggling! Your dad!" gasped Harry.

"It's-it's-well, it's got me beaten!" choked out Ralph impotently.

"Here, give me a blank," he demanded of the operator impatiently. The man shoved one over. Ralph seized a pencil and wrote feverishly. This was the message he wrote:

185

"Just got your despatch. An outrage. But many things that have occurred here appear to be connected in some way with your dilemma. We are beginning to get down to brass tacks. Wire me again as soon as possible to Dexter Island.—Ralph."

There was a motor boat that brought despatches among the islands, charging a good stiff price for such service, but price wasn't worrying Ralph just then.

"Send that!" he said brusquely, shoving the despatch under the inquisitive operator's nose. "I want the reply sent to Dexter Island the instant it comes."

"Well, of all the idiocy," he burst out angrily, after he had perused his father's despatch once more. "For pure, unadulterated blunderers, commend me to these Canadian authorities. It's all clear enough to me. They have been on the trail of diamond smugglers. I guess the authorities on both sides of the line have been cooperating. In some way that we don't know, some of the operations of the gang have been traced to Dexter Island——"

"The *Artful Dodger!*" exclaimed Harry.

186

"Yes; perhaps they suspected that boat and traced her there, or heard of her being seen in that vicinity. Then when dad left hurriedly for Montreal I suppose they leaped at the conclusion that he must be one of the gang, and at once arrested him. Can you beat it?"

"*You cannot,*" said Percy Simmons with deep conviction; "you can't even tie it."

"What is to be done now?" asked Harry, with a note of despair in his voice.

Complications were surely piling up thick and fast for the Border Boys. Even in their most exciting times on the southern frontier, they had never encountered such a tangle of inexplicable happenings as that into which they now found themselves plunged.

"We'll stick to the program I just outlined," said Ralph. "It's all we can do. If the authorities are on the lookout for the diamond smugglers, and if,—as we have every reason to suspect,—Hawke and Malvin are members of the gang, their arrest will be the first step in Dad's exoneration."

187

As there was nothing to be gained by lingering in Cardinal, the little party hastened down to the *River Swallow*. They found the lights burning, everything ship-shape, and Malvin and Hansen standing at the gangway ready to receive them. As Harry looked at Malvin's respectful, courteous smile of greeting, he could not help

repeating to himself a line from Hamlet that he had learned in school, to the effect that a man may "smile and smile but be a villain still."

Acting under Ralph's instructions, not one of the boys gave the faintest sign that they suspected anything. Ralph addressed some perfunctory inquiries and orders to Malvin, and then told him that he could cast off as soon as he got the order. It came as soon as Percy Simmons hailed the young skipper through the speaking tube, and told him that everything was all right below in the engine room.

188

A few minutes later, the *River Swallow* had left the lights of Cardinal behind her and was shaping a swift, sure course for Piquetville.

"Wonder if Malvin suspects anything?" wondered Harry aloud to Ralph as he stood beside the young skipper in his accustomed place on the bridge.

"Blessed if I know," was Ralph's response as he twisted the wheel and made the fast craft meet a swirl of some small rapids they were passing through.

"You don't appear to be worrying about it!"

"No, to tell you the truth, I'm not. So far as Malvin's feelings are concerned, I don't know and I don't care."

"But, Ralph, hasn't it struck you that if they suspect our intention, they are likely to try to overpower us?"

"Well, I did think of that, too."

189

"If they chose, they could make it hot for us. There's not much doubt that Hawke is on board, concealed forward somewhere, and he is probably armed. So, probably, are the other two. We haven't any weapons of any kind."

"And we wouldn't use them if we had," rejoined Ralph. "I learned out west that the man who carries the most weapons is by no means the most formidable. A man, or a boy, who carries a pistol is a coward, and more than that, he is a dangerous coward."

"Then you have no fear of Malvin trying reprisals?"

"Not the least. In the first place, he wouldn't dare to do anything like that. It would be simply putting his head in the halter."

"And in the second place?" asked Harry, for Ralph had paused.

"Well, in the second place, Malvin is not that sort of a man. His pose is the meek and mild. The butter-wouldn't-melt-in-my-mouth-sir sort of an attitude. Not but what snakes in the grass like that aren't dangerous, but they rarely, if ever, resort to personal attack unless they are mighty sure of coming out on top."

190

"I hope you are right," replied Harry, "but if it should come to a shindy, I've got a notion that we might come off only second best. There are three of them and——"

"Three of us," smiled Ralph. "I've an idea that

even without weapons we would prove a match for them. But, as I said before, Harry, there's little fear of matters coming to that pass. Malvin & Co., in the first place, must have probably guessed that the Canadian authorities did not listen very warmly to our tale of woe. In such a belief, they probably think they are perfectly secure in anything they may do."

"But they know that we suspect them."

"You hit the nail on the head there," rejoined Ralph rather seriously. "That's the worst part of the situation. If Malvin hadn't overheard us and found out that we were on to his little game, it would have been as easy as rolling off a log to nab the whole boiling, or at least this particular part of it."

191

"You think there are more in the game, then? The same thing has occurred to me."

"I'm sure that there must be more in it. The outfit on board that *Artful Dodger*, for instance. Those fellows must have been students of Dickens to have thought that name out, but it's a good one, all right."

"Yes, it sure fits that fly-by-night craft to a T," agreed Harry.

"I wonder if we'll ever see her again," mused Ralph, as the *River Swallow* drove onward through the night.

In the distance the lights of Piquetville began to bob up. They were not far from their destination.

"I don't know," rejoined Harry, "somehow I've got a notion that we shall encounter her again, somewhere and sometime."

192

"I have the same idea," agreed Ralph.

Both boys were right. They were fated to see the night-loving craft of the St. Lawrence again, and that before very long. Their next meeting with her was destined to be under circumstances which were to be indelibly imprinted upon their minds.

193

CHAPTER XXI.

A BIG SURPRISE.

"What dock are you going to make for?" asked Harry, as they drew nearer and nearer to the American side of the river.

"I guess the Piquetville Yacht Club's dock will be just about right," was Ralph's rejoinder. "There's deep water off there, you know, and we can anchor and go ashore,—that is, you fellows can go ashore."

"Aren't you going?" demanded Harry in surprise.

"No. It is necessary for me to remain on board the *River Swallow* and see that the rascals don't attempt any monkey tricks while you are gone."

"But it may be dangerous," protested Harry.

"Pshaw! There's not much danger to fear from a rat like Malvin."

"But Hawke?"

"Depend upon it, he has good reasons for not wanting to be seen. I don't apprehend any trouble with him. Now go below and tell Percy what we've decided on."

Harry would have liked to add more protests about leaving their young leader alone on the *River Swallow* with the men, who, as they all knew, had deep cause to hate the railroad man's son. But there was no choice in the matter for him, for, as they all knew, when Ralph's mind was made up to anything, he could not be swerved from his determination.

In due time the *River Swallow* lay to off the lights of the Piquetville Yacht Club. The place was brightly illuminated and so was the town that lay behind it. Piquetville was a bustling, busy place. It maintained plenty of business and was very up-to-date in every way.

Down rattled the anchor.

"I wonder what Malvin thinks is in the wind," said Harry, as he slipped into a shore-going coat and Percy appeared on deck by his side all ready to board the tender as soon as it should be lowered.

"You can depend upon it that he is sharp enough to know that something is up, but you can also bet that he will be too sharp to show it," was Ralph's rejoinder.

"Lower away the tender!" he hailed as Malvin reported the anchor down.

"Aye, aye, sir," came in cheerful, willing tones.

If they had not known Malvin to be such a rascal, they would have found it hard to believe that the owner of such a cheerful voice could be the schemer they knew him to be, and the criminal that they suspected more than strongly he was.

"Good-bye."

"Take care of yourself."

These were the leave takings between the boys accompanied by a warm pressure of hands that meant more than words. A few moments later the tender was chugging off ashore and Ralph was left alone on board the *River Swallow*. He would have given a good deal to know what Malvin thought of the night's proceedings. He knew the fellow was far too shrewd not to guess that something was about due to break. But if Malvin really had such ideas, he kept them to himself with admirable coolness.

After the tender had departed, he came aft to where Ralph was sitting in a deck chair and inquired if there was anything more to be done.

"No; if all is snug, you may take a nap, Malvin, or amuse yourself as you see fit."

"Thank you, sir. I reckon I'll turn in and get forty

winks, sir," rejoined Malvin.

He touched his cap and hurried off forward.

"Now who would suspect that that man is the central figure in a big smuggling scheme of some sort?" thought Ralph as the man departed. "He is certainly an admirable actor."

Ralph leaned back in his chair and watched the twinkling lights ashore. It was a beautiful night, calm, peaceful and starlit. The water shimmered like a sheet of silver. Hardly a ripple disturbed the mirror-like surface of the St. Lawrence, which, at this point, was fully two and a half miles wide, a mighty lake of swift flowing water.

197

It was delightful to be seated there in the *River Swallow's* comfortable cockpit. But somehow Ralph did not think much of the scene about him. His mind was busy with the dilemma of which his father's despatch had informed him.

What an odd turn of fate it seemed, that, while he and his chums were on the trail of a gang of miscreants who had been using Dexter Island as a rendezvous, his father should be arrested in Montreal for the very crime which they were trying to lay at the door of Malvin and Co.!

"I wonder how long this sort of thing has been going on," mused Ralph; "probably for some time, perhaps ever since Malvin, two years ago, entered my father's service. I remember Dad congratulated himself on obtaining a man of such education and refinement to handle the *River Swallow*. He was rather astonished, too, that a fellow who was so intelligent and apparently well educated should be willing to take such a post. It's all clear enough now.

198

"The job Dad gave him afforded Malvin just the opportunity he wanted to carry on his smuggling schemes without being suspected of a connection with any such dealings. No wonder he had it in for us when we came and deposed him from his position of boss of the *River Swallow*! It meant that he could no longer have things all his own way. That henceforth he would be liable to be watched, and that the visits of the *Artful Dodger* to Dexter Island would be likely to be observed and suspicion aroused."

He had been watching the lights of the tender as the speedy little craft sped toward the shore. Now he saw them pause alongside the yacht club dock and come to a standstill.

199

"The boys have got ashore," he thought, "in a few minutes they will be in consultation with the customs authorities. Then we shall see what the next step in this little drama is going to be. I rather think that, by this time to-morrow, Messrs. Malvin and Co. will have seen a great light."

In the meantime, Harry Ware and Percy Simmons had made their boat fast and clambered up on the dock.

A man in a uniform that they recognized as that of a U. S. Customs Inspector stepped up to them the instant they set foot on shore.

"Off the *River Swallow*?" he asked.

"Yes," rejoined Percy, "we——"

"That is all, be good enough to come with me."

"Why—what——" began the boys, but the official sternly cut them off.

"No questions now, the chief inspector wants to see you at once. I guess, too, I'll be sending somebody out to watch the *River Swallow*."

200

"What have we done? What's the matter?" demanded Harry.

"Never mind. You'll know soon enough," was the brusque reply, as the official bade them come with him and "make no trouble."

201

CHAPTER XXII. "NOT JUST YET, STETSON!"

Ralph was interrupted in his reverie by the sound of a swift, cat-like footfall behind him. He was conscious of a sudden thrill that was not exactly fear but rather apprehension, as whoever was pussy-footing through the dark cock-pit drew closer.

No man on an honest errand, as he well knew, would have adopted that stealthy method of approach. For an instant Ralph regretted that he was not armed. But it was only a momentary thought.

He turned his eyes, till out of their corners he could see a dark form drawing close to his chair.

Ralph gave no sign that he had heard anything unusual. He kept his gaze apparently riveted on the shore and sat motionless, without the quiver of a muscle. But for all his seeming calmness, he sensed that a crisis of some kind had arrived.

202

Then out of the darkness emerged the figure of Malvin. The man was a very different being from the obsequious creature he had hitherto appeared to be. His voice rang harsh and stridently and in his hand Ralph could catch the glint of a pistol.

The weapon was aimed at the boy's head.

"See here, Stetson," the fellow grated, "you're alone on this boat and in my power. Are you going to do what I say without making trouble?"

Ralph did not turn. There was not the flicker of an eyelid to show the great bound his heart had given as he realized his situation. That Malvin was a desperate man, the boy knew well enough; but just the same, he had not believed that the man would ever dream of adopting the tactics he had now assumed.

"Well?"

Malvin's grating voice, a very different one from the honeyed accents he had hitherto used to address the young commander, came again in tones of impatient interrogation.

203

"Supposing, as commander of this boat, I don't choose to take orders from you?" questioned

Ralph.

"In that case, jig is up for you, young fellow."

"Going to kill me?" asked Ralph without a quiver in his voice, although a very unpleasant feeling had taken possession of him.

He felt that Malvin meant what he said. And he was in the fellow's power absolutely.

"Yes," spoke Malvin. "I mean to use this little piece of hardware unless——"

He paused as if uncertain of his next words.

"He's nervous," thought Ralph, "he doesn't like this job. He's doing it at the orders of somebody else, probably Hawke, who appears to exercise an influence over him."

"Well, unless?" asked the boy aloud.

"Unless you obey orders absolutely. Just as I have had to obey your orders since you sneaked your way into command of this craft."

204

"You forget that this is my father's boat," reminded Ralph.

"Yes, your father," sneered Malvin. "Your father, who is in jail in Montreal!"

"So you know that?" cried Ralph, startled out of his assumed calm.

"Know it? Why, yes. Men with whom I am associated engineered his arrest. Cleverly done, wasn't it?"

"You contemptible sneak!" burst out Ralph. "So it was your gang that did this?"

"I don't see any reason to deny it. We wanted him out of the way and sent that message summoning him to Montreal. Once there, our agents saw to it that he was put where he wouldn't trouble us for a while."

Words failed Ralph utterly. He saw red for a minute. But almost simultaneously he steadied his nerves to meet the crisis.

205

"I may as well tell you, Malvin," he said, "that it will pay you better in the long run to desert these men with whom you are associated and array yourself upon the side of law and order. Do this and I'll promise you that, when the authorities descend upon you, I will do what I can to make things easier for you."

It was a forlorn hope and—it failed.

Malvin hesitated for one instant, and Ralph's mind swung pendulum-wise between hope and apprehension. But the man's next words showed him that Malvin was irrevocably tied to the diamond smugglers.

"As if I'd be fool enough to listen to such stuff!" he sneered. "Come now, youngster; no more nonsense. We know what your two chums went ashore for. To get the authorities, didn't they?"

"Since you must have it, they did," shot out Ralph.

206

"I thought so. We know every move you have

made. Now you're going to learn that it doesn't pay to butt in where you are not wanted."

"What are you going to do?" demanded Ralph.

"Get right out of here with this boat. You'll work her out. Do you understand?"

"Your words don't admit of any misconstruction," was the calm reply.

"Mosey up on the bridge, then. Look sharp! Do you hear?"

"I hear. Suppose I don't choose to obey?"

"In that case——"

Malvin emphasized this with a poke in the ribs from the revolver.

"See here, Malvin," asked Ralph, eying the fellow without flinching, "have you been drinking to-night, or are you simply ill-advised by bad companions?"

"No more trifling," warned Malvin sullenly. "You've robbed me of my job as commander of this boat. Not content with that, you've tried to interfere with my business. Do what I say at once, or let me give you a straight warning. You're playing with your life."

207

Ralph tried another tack.

"Well," he said, "of course I don't want to get shot. Let's get down to cases. What do you want me to do?"

"Navigate this boat out of here. Hansen and—and—somebody else will attend to the engines."

"The somebody else being the man who put the sand in our carburetors—Hawke."

Malvin was perceptibly startled.

"Hawke! What do you know about him?" he demanded.

"Oh, quite a good deal. You're a fool to travel with such a man, Malvin. We met him on Windmill Island. We know that you picked him up there and have kept him concealed on the *River Swallow*. I more than suspect, moreover, that he is a certain notorious diamond smuggler for whom the authorities on both sides of the border have their nets spread. Is that enough?"

208

"Yes, it's more than enough. You're too flip. Now get up on that bridge or take the consequences."

"All right. Tell your men to get the anchor up."

Malvin uttered a peculiar whistle. It must have been a signal, for the clank of the windlass was heard almost immediately. The *River Swallow* began to swing her bow as the current turned her down river.

Again came a whistle from Malvin and the engines began to rumble and shake the craft with their revolutions. They were running "free." That is, the clutch that caused them to engage the shafts had not yet been "thrown."

Ralph had a plan in his mind. It was a desperate chance to take, but his seemingly ready

209

agreement with Malvin's orders had proceeded from this same wild plan he had suddenly formed.

"Get up on that bridge. Remember, I'm behind you. One false move and——"

Malvin did not finish the sentence. He did not need to. His tone was sufficiently eloquent.

The boy ascended the few steps that led to the bridge. Malvin was right behind him. Ralph could see in his mind's eye that menacing pistol held close to the small of his back.

They reached the bridge. The moment for Ralph's plan to be put into execution had arrived.

He turned swiftly.

"Look!" he cried. "There comes a boat—a customs house boat!"

Malvin, startled, off his guard, turned his head for an instant toward the shore.

With a loud cry, Ralph leaped for the man. He seized his pistol wrist and wrenched it backward. Then he threw himself on the fellow with the whole force of his vigorous young strength.

As Malvin crashed backward down the steps, Ralph leaped for the pneumatic whistle. It was operated by a lever.

"Now for a police call!" he exclaimed pantingly as he grasped it. In another moment a cry for aid would have gone shrieking out from the *River Swallow's* siren.

Ralph's fingers trembled on the lever and he had just given it the first move toward him when something happened.

He felt himself seized from behind in a powerful grasp and his arms pinioned to his side.

"Thought you'd get the police, eh?" snarled a voice in his ear. "Not just yet, Stetson."

CHAPTER XXIII. THE MISSING BOAT.

"So these boys are off the *River Swallow*?" asked Chief Inspector Barrett of the U. S. Customs service as he gazed at Harry Ware and Percy Simmons.

They stood before him in his private office, whither they had been escorted by the official who had met them on the wharf. Both boys were indignant. The manner in which they had been treated had not served to soothe their feelings. They had, in fact, been looked upon as malefactors, when, in reality, they had come ashore for the purpose of exposing a gang of rascals. It was a strange trick that Fate had played upon them.

"What have we done?" demanded Harry Ware

angrily.

"Yes, you'd think we were criminals from the way we've been treated," seconded Percy Simmons.

212

"Now, now, keep cool," conciliated the inspector. "We've had our eye on the *River Swallow* for some time. To-night we heard from Canada that she was to touch in here to-night with gem smugglers on board. We've been on the lookout for the gang that is suspected for some time."

"And you mean to say you think that we have anything to do with it?" gasped Harry angrily.

"I didn't say so. But I'd like you to explain a few things."

"Very well. But please hurry. We have left a friend on board the *River Swallow* with three desperate men. We want to hurry back. We had counted on your assistance."

"Well and good, and you shall have it. I think it only fair to inform you that Dexter Island has been shadowed for some time. A motor craft has been seen visiting there at night. We suspect the boat to be one used by the diamond smugglers. The *River Swallow* has been used to convey the gems to this side. Doubtless you young men are not aware of the extensive range of gem smuggling operations on the Canadian border. In that case, let me inform you that the duty on cut gems brought into America is sixty per cent. ad valorem. You can see, therefore, what a fortune these gem smugglers can make by evading the lawful duty."

213

"And in the meantime," said Harry sarcastically, "the men you want,—or at least a part of the gang,—are on board the *River Swallow*."

"What's that? What do you mean?" demanded the inspector quickly.

"I'd have explained sooner, if you'd let me," said Harry dryly.

He proceeded at the inspector's direction to give him a hasty sketch of the events that had led up to the present night. The inspector listened with interest at first and then with absorption.

"Give me a description of this man Hawke," he said.

214

Harry described the man as well as he could.

"Jennings," exclaimed the chief inspector, "this Hawke is La Rue, the head and front with Rawson of the whole gem smuggling gang! I'm sure of it from the description. You will accompany these young men to their boat. Take Adams and Prescott with you. Arrest all three of the men. So far, I know nothing of Malvin or Hansen; I suspect they are mere understrappers. Bring them here at once. Hurry now."

"Yes, sir. Come along, young men," said Jennings, preparing briskly to execute his chief's orders.

"And Jennings."

"Yes, sir."

"You had better be armed. Tell the other men to take weapons, too. La Rue is a desperate man and the others may give you trouble, also."

Jennings and the two boys hurried off. Harry Ware and Percy Simmons were delighted at the turn affairs had taken. The arrest of Hawke,—or to give him his real name, La Rue,—was at hand. Before long, by their instrumentality, the gem smugglers would be safely in the hands of the customs officials.

215

Only one doubt assailed them as Jennings hastily summoned his two aides. Would they be in time? The knowledge that Ralph had been left alone on the *River Swallow*, without weapons to defend himself, and in the company of three men who had good reason to fear the worst from the boys' visit ashore, had a disquieting effect upon them.

As they hurried through the streets, they wished that Jennings would make even more haste.

When they reached the main custom house, where Adams and Prescott, who were on night duty, were to be picked up, a low, rumbling sound came from the northern sky.

Jennings glanced up quickly. To the north the stars had been blotted out. Heavy clouds had rolled up obscuring them. As the boys followed the direction of Jennings's gaze, they saw a sudden lambent flash, as yet far off, flare up and vanish on the cloud bank.

216

"Lightning!" exclaimed Harry.

"Yes, we're in for a storm, I guess," said Jennings. "We get them pretty bad up this way when they do come, too."

"Regular hummers, eh?" asked Harry.

"I guess that's the word for it. The old timers say that they follow the river. I don't know how that may be, but I do know that I never saw worse electric storms than we get right along the St. Lawrence."

Adams and Prescott, who had received directions by telephone from the inspector's office, were ready and waiting for them when they arrived at the custom house. They were placed in possession of the facts of the case by Jennings, as they and the boys hastened to the yacht club dock.

Both were warm in their praises of the way the boys had handled the situation, and waxed humorous over their practical arrest as suspects. Percy and Harry, however, failed to see anything screamingly comical about it.

217

The dock was reached and then and there the party received a big surprise.

The lights of the *River Swallow* were not in sight!

So far as could be observed, no boat lay at anchor where the boys had left the speedy craft.

A search conducted from the motor tender only confirmed their worst fears. The *River Swallow* had vanished, and on board her was Ralph, alone and in the power of the gem smugglers.

CHAPTER XXIV. IN THE GRIP OF THE STORM.

Ziz-z-z-z-z!

A ragged, flaming bolt of lightning ripped across the black sky. It showed the broad reach of the St. Lawrence in the vicinity of Piquetville lashed into a fury of white-capped waves and turbulent waters.

Through the furious electric storm the *River Swallow* was wallowing along, rolling and plunging terrifically. Owing to her narrow beam, the craft was far more "cranky" than an ordinary boat, and to anyone not used to her actions in rough water, the experience would have been an alarming one. Besides being familiar with the craft he was guiding, however, Ralph had other things to worry him beside the storm.

For one thing, La Rue,—or Hawke, as Ralph still knew him,—was standing beside him, pistol in hand, and from what Ralph knew of the man, there was little doubt that he would hesitate to use the weapon if the need arose. The boy had another cause for worry in the fact that he did not know what his companions, who had gone ashore, would think of the disappearance of the *River Swallow*. He knew that they would be worrying over his situation on board her, and the thought of their anxiety disquieted him to the full as much as his own predicament.

219

But, with it all, Ralph had a certain grim satisfaction in one factor of his problem. Below decks in a bunk, with a badly damaged head, incurred in his fall down the steps leading from the bridge, lay Malvin. The man was incapacitated for duty and was, in fact, only half conscious. As he had fallen from the bridge, it was La Rue who had seized Ralph's arms before the boy could sound the alarm, and who had ordered Ralph, upon the pain of being shot down, to steer the *River Swallow* out of the harbor. The young skipper had no recourse but to obey, and so the *River Swallow* was struggling with the storm, with an inexperienced man—Hansen—in the engine room and on the bridge a boy who was menaced with a pistol in the hands of the diamond smuggler.

With the storm had arisen a wind that screeched and howled like a witches' carnival about the *River Swallow*. The craft was rather high out of the water and of light draught, like most of the St. Lawrence River craft. She pitched and rolled awesomely under the blast. There was no real danger, as Ralph well knew, but, as has been said, to anyone unused to her violent motions in a storm, the wild behavior of the *River Swallow* was, to say the least, alarming.

220

To complicate matters, it was pitchy dark, the frequent flashes of lightning alone illumining the gloom. The wind was blowing the same way as the current, and below them lay a labyrinth of rapids, shoals and islands that required an experienced skipper to thread, even by daylight.

"This is a fine fix," thought Ralph to himself, as the wind tore about him, the waters rolled high

221

and the lightning flashed and zigzagged across the thunder-ridden sky. "If I ever get the *River Swallow* through this without piling her up on a shoal or getting the bottom ripped out of her in some rapids, I'm entitled to a gold medal."

"Will this get worse?" asked La Rue.

The boy noted with glee that there was a note of apprehension in the fellow's voice.

"I hope not," Ralph rejoined, shaking his head fearsomely.

"Why?" La Rue was scared. It was plain enough in his voice, which was nervous and jerky. "Are—are we in any danger?" he demanded tremblingly.

"The—the very g-g-g-greatest," exclaimed Ralph, cleverly acting the part of a seriously alarmed young skipper.

"You mean that if the storm does not die down we may be wrecked?"

222

"The storm will get a lot worse before it gets any better," rejoined Ralph. "This is one of the worst nights I have ever seen on the river."

The *River Swallow* gave a fearful roll, almost burying her lee gunwale in flying spume. An exclamation that was almost a shriek burst from La Rue's lips. The man was ashen pale. He was terrified, and, moreover, he was becoming conscious of another feeling. What this was, we shall see before long.

"Gracious! I thought we were gone that time!" cried Ralph, appearing to be on the verge of panic.

"Then there is a pup-pup-possibility that the boat may capsize?"

"I shouldn't wonder," said Ralph gravely.

A groan escaped La Rue.

"You really think that, ker-ker-captain?"

Ralph couldn't help smiling at the title La Rue had conferred on him in his fawning, miserable fright.

223

"Of course I do," replied Ralph. "Why, her timbers are very thin. She was only built for a racing machine, not for such work as this."

Bang! Who-o-o-o-f!

A big sea, which Ralph had purposely met quartering, smote the *River Swallow* a terrific buffet on the port bow. The spray and spume flew high in the air, drenching the occupants of the bridge.

"A few more of those and we're goners, sure," said Ralph with a grin, which he had to turn away his face to conceal, as La Rue broke into a whimper.

"Isn't there anything you can do, captain?"

"Nothing, except trust to Providence that we don't go to the bottom within the next half hour," rejoined Ralph.

Another huge wave hit the craft. A tremor ran through her but it was nothing to the anguish that convulsed the terrified La Rue as the sea struck.

He was now a ghastly blending of two hues, a pasty yellow, a greenish white.

Biff! Bang! Another buffeting blow. Skipper Ralph was actually beginning to enjoy himself.

"Oh-h-h-h! Ah-h-h-h!" quivered the frightened wretch at his elbow.

"Hadn't you better hand me that pistol?" asked Ralph sweetly. "You might shoot yourself, you know."

A groan was the only response from La Rue. The man was abject, disgusting in his cravenness.

But Ralph had no mercy upon him.

"It's getting worse," he said positively.

"Wer-wer-worse!"

"That's what. I did think for a while that we might weather it. I know different now. Hawke, we have not much longer to live."

"Der-der-der-do you mer-mer-mer-mean that we are ger-ger-going to be d-d-d-drowned?" stuttered La Rue, clasping his hands.

"Brace up! Don't be a coward! Face drowning like a man, Hawke!"

And skipper Ralph contrived it so that another big wave came racing and rolling over the *River Swallow's* sharp bow. It was the last straw. La Rue went to pieces utterly.

CHAPTER XXV.

LA RUE'S WILD LEAP.

"Aren't there any life preservers on board?" he wailed piteously.

His tones might have stirred a heart of flint. Ralph actually felt sorry for the fellow, wretch as he knew him to be. But the thought of the revolver that had been so recently pressed against him, and the threats with which he had been overwhelmed, steeled him against compassion.

"Life preservers? I don't believe there are, Hawke," he said. "You see, the boat was to be equipped with a new type of preserver and the old ones were all sent ashore some days ago. They have not yet been replaced by new ones."

"I'd give a thousand dollars for a life preserver right now!" cried Hawke. "I am rich. I could reward anyone who would save my life."

Ralph's strategy had worked. The fellow was in abject fear of his life by this time. He was firmly convinced that the *River Swallow* was doomed to be annihilated.

Another big wave slapped the craft on the bow, sending a shower of spray high over her.

"Oh, Lord!" groaned La Rue. "I thought sure we were gone that time, Captain Stetson."

"For shame! Be a man, Hawke. Is there anything you want to save?"

"Oh, gracious, are we going down?"

"I don't know. As I said before, I think it very likely."

"We'll be food for fishes this time to-morrow! Oh-h-h-h-h-h!"

The *River Swallow* gave a giddy, sidewise plunge. At the same moment a flash of lightning illumined the tossing water. It was Ralph's turn to give a gasp of dismay. The flash had revealed, down the river, a big, black object that he knew must be an island.

The wind and the current were carrying them down stream.

"Wow!" exclaimed Ralph to himself. "There may be more truth than poetry in Hawke's fears. If we ever hit——"

He did not dare to complete the sentence even to himself. The thought was too horrible. In his mind's eye he could see, as clearly as in a nightmare, the breaking up of the *River Swallow* on the rocky shore of an island.

"You-you asked me if there was anything I wanted to save?"

It was La Rue's scared, trembling voice again.

"Yes; get what you can, Hawke. But don't let it be anything bulky. If you don't want to be dragged down, take only your most valuable possessions."

"My most valuable possessions! Oh, gracious!"

"What's the matter now?"

"Oh, I feel seasick. I have a fearful attack of *mal-de-mer*."

"Fight it off," advised Ralph. "This is no time to be seasick. In a short time you may need all your strength."

With another hollow groan the unhappy wretch dived below to carry out Ralph's advice about saving his valuables. It was not long before he appeared on deck once more, staggering and moaning in a piteous manner to himself.

This time a flash of lightning gave Ralph an opportunity to observe that La Rue carried a slender black leather wallet, which he clasped as if it were something as precious to him as life itself. In the glare of the lightning, the man's face was as white as chalk and his eyes blazed with a weird, unnatural light.

In spite of his momentary impulse of pity for the man, Ralph felt a wave of disgust for such a helpless craven sweep over him, as he watched him stagger up the steps to the bridge.

"Do you think there is a chance to save my life?"

he stuttered out as he gained Ralph's side.

"Impossible to say," was the reply. "But see here, Hawke, you appear to think only of yourself. Haven't you any concern for your companions below?"

"Never mind them," cried La Rue, beside himself with fear by this time, for the storm had reached the height of its fury; "they are only understrappers, both of them. Do you see this case?" he continued wildly.

The man's actions and speech were such that Ralph thought that fright must have turned the fellow's head.

"Yes, what of it?" demanded Ralph, as he eyed the wallet the man was flourishing under his nose.

"Look!"

He opened the case. In the light of another vivid flash, Ralph saw within the case a transparent pane of talc. Under this thin covering gleamed something that made Ralph's head swim as he gazed.

The flash had revealed to his astounded gaze a fortune in gems. White, red and green, they mirrored back the lightning with blinding radiance.

"Gems!" gasped the boy.

"Yes, gems," rejoined Hawke, his face livid as another brilliant flash revealed every line of his features and his wild, staring, frightened eyes; "gems worth two hundred thousand dollars. If you save my life, I will see that you are well rewarded."

In the now almost incessant glare of the lightning, Ralph's eyelids flickered. But it was the brilliance of the gems held out almost under his nose by his terrified passenger that made him wink, far more than the electrical display.

"Goodness! They're enough to blind a fellow," he exclaimed to himself as he eyed the heap of precious stones.

"But what good are those gems to you in comparison with your life, Hawke?" demanded Ralph.

"None! none!" wailed the wretch abjectly. "I'd give 'em all to you, Captain Stetson, if you'd save my life. But they are not mine to give. I am simply an agent for others."

"A gem smuggler, in fact?" demanded Ralph sternly.

"Yes; that's what you might call it. Oh, captain, I have led a bad life! I'd like to repent before I die."

"You are in the employ of several men engaged in the business of evading duties on precious stones?" remorselessly pursued Ralph.

"Yes, sir. Oh! but I repent all my wickedness now. I'd give all these gems for even ten minutes of life. I—"

He broke off. An appalling flash of lightning pierced the sky, followed by a peal of thunder that rent the heavens. Even Ralph quailed before such a terrific upheaval of the elements. As for La Rue, he sank to his knees on the bridge.

"The gems! the gems for my life!" he implored, his eyes raised skyward.

He was still in the midst of a half-insane tirade, when the *River Swallow* struck with a quivering shock.

"It is the end!" screamed out La Rue, his voice ringing above the uproar of the storm.

Before Ralph could stop him, he had rushed to the side of the bridge; and then, with a wild cry, he plunged straight overboard into the boiling, angry waters that swept alongside.

CHAPTER XXVI. LOOKING FOR THEIR CHUM.

We left Harry Ware, Percy Simmons and the three customs inspectors sadly baffled on the dock of the Piquetville Yacht Club. Their search for the *River Swallow*, it will be recalled, had revealed nothing of the craft. Several inquiries made in the vicinity had met with the same disheartening results.

Sick at heart and worried more than they cared to confess, Harry and Percy listened to the consultation going on between the three experienced servants of Uncle Sam's revenue service.

"If that fellow La Rue is on board, there is no telling what may have happened," said Jennings. "He is a desperate man, as we have good cause to know."

"But he is a coward at heart," struck in Adams. "Remember how he showed the white feather in that affair of the Chinese smuggling three years ago?"

"Yes, he secured immunity from punishment by turning state's evidence on his accomplices," rejoined Jennings. "It was too bad he was allowed to go. There'll always be plenty of work for us as long as he is at large."

"It's odd, the way he's managed to slip through the toils so many times," commented Prescott, the third customs man. "Why, the government has had its hands upon him half a dozen times, and yet he has always managed to get away in some mysterious manner."

"There's one member of the bunch, though, that I'd rather get than all the rest," declared Jennings.

"Who is that?"

"Rawson."

"The captain of that night-running motor boat?" inquired Prescott, who had been but recently

transferred to the northern border after commendable work in the southwest.

"That's the fellow. I see you've heard of that boat."

"Who hasn't? Even these young men encountered her on several occasions. She has been seen in the vicinity of Dexter Island. I assume that Malvin, who was in the employ of Mr. Stetson, received consignments of gems to be smuggled later."

"That appears certain. But did you say Stetson was the name of the owner of the island?" inquired Prescott.

"Yes, Stetson, the big railroad man. It's his son Ralph that is on board the *River Swallow* in the power of those men."

"The same Ralph Stetson that was mixed up in that affair of the arms and ammunition, smuggled across the Mexican border by the underground river?"

"The same fellow," broke in Harry.

"Then depend upon it, young men, that your chum will be able to take care of himself," assured Prescott. "I heard full details of that affair, and the way in which he and his friend Jack Merrill acquitted themselves, showed that they were made of no ordinary stuff. I'd back that boy against a dozen La Rues any time."

"The way in which they have all handled this affair so far proves that they are a bunch of uncommonly smart lads," said Jennings. "If it hadn't been for a slip-up, we might have had La Rue in our hands by this time."

Agitated though they were, Harry and Percy could hardly conceal a smile at this ingenious way of putting the case. Had it not been for Jennings' stupidity in arresting them—for that is practically what he had done—the customs authorities might have reached the *River Swallow* in plenty of time to apprehend the rascals on board and save Ralph from being carried off. For that he had gone of his own free will never entered the chums' heads for an instant. They knew Ralph too well to think that he would desert them in such a way, unless he had been literally abducted.

It was this fact that worried them. It pointed inevitably to one conclusion: Ralph had been overpowered by the men on board the craft, and either injured or made captive, while they worked out whatever schemes they had in mind.

"Oh! if only one of us had stayed on board, it would have made the odds less against good old Ralph," sighed Harry.

But it was too late to indulge in regrets. The harm was done now. Somewhere on the river the *River Swallow* was speeding along with their chum on board her. They wondered when, and under what circumstances, they would hear from him again, for that they would join him before long they had no doubt.

Great drops of rain began to fall. A puff of warm wind blew from off the river into their faces.

"Here she comes," declared Jennings, as a flash split the sky. "Boys, we'd better get to shelter."

"Can't we do anything more to-night?" asked Harry anxiously.

"I'm afraid not, my boy. I know just how you feel about your chum, but it would be worse than looking for a needle in a haystack to go chasing after that boat to-night."

"What do you recommend doing, then?" asked Harry.

"I would suggest that you find quarters in a good hotel. Have a sound sleep, and early in the morning we will join you and the hunt will begin in earnest. One other thing," as he noticed their troubled faces, "don't worry about that fellow La Rue. He is a big bluff, an arrant coward. His bark is a lot worse than his bite. He wouldn't dare try any violence. He's a mixture of knave and craven, with the former predominating."

How true this description of La Rue was we know from his behavior during the storm, which shortly broke in all its fury. While Ralph was battling with the elements, his chums were snugly in bed at the Piquetville House. Despite their anxieties, they were too worn out not to fall into a sound sleep, which endured till a loud knocking at their door, almost as soon as it was light, informed them that the customs men were below.

240

They lost no time in dressing, and soon joined the others. They all ate a hearty breakfast together, and then set out for the dock. It was a glorious morning. All trace of the storm had vanished, leaving the air clear and cool.

At the Yacht Club dock lay the *River Swallow's* tender. A few minutes' delay occurred while the little craft was stocked up with extra gasoline, for they knew that they might be off on a long chase. But at last everything was ready. Harry took the wheel. Percy Simmons looked after the engine. The three customs men sat at their ease in the stern seat.

"Which way?" asked Harry, as they chugged out into the stream.

241

"Down the river," was the reply of Jennings. "We'll comb the islands first."

"Let her out," ordered Harry to Percy Simmons, as they got clear of the dock.

The engine gave a sputter and a roar, and the chase after their missing chum was on.

242

CHAPTER XXVII.

A DAZZLING DISCOVERY.

With La Rue's cry still ringing in his ears, Ralph rushed to the edge of the bridge and peered over. Alongside nothing could be seen but swirling, rushing foam.

But suddenly a flash revealed to Ralph the fact

that they had run aground on the point of either an island or the mainland, he could not, for the time being, determine which. Trees and rocks could be made out by the frequent flashes, which showed, also, that the *River Swallow* had grounded bow on, and was now swinging outward with the current.

Ralph was recalled from his observations by a voice behind him. It was Hansen, the Norwegian. The man had stopped his engines, being seaman enough to know what had occurred as soon as he felt the grinding shock of the landing.

"We bane gone ashore, sare?" he asked.

243

"Yes, we've grounded, Hansen, and I must tell you that your wretch of a master Hawke, while crazed with fright, threw himself overboard. I fear he is lost forever."

The Norwegian appeared dazed. His fishy blue eyes rolled wildly.

"La Rue bane dade?" he muttered.

"I don't know anything about La Rue," said Ralph, thinking the man had not rightly understood him, "I said Hawke had gone. He jumped overboard when we struck. Crazy from fright, I guess."

"He bane all de same," said the Norwegian calmly. "Hawke bane La Rue, La Rue bane Hawke. I bane glad he gone."

"Glad, why?" exclaimed Ralph, horrified at the man's callousness.

"He bane bad man. He say if I don't do as he say he lose me mine yob. By yiminy, I got wife and childrens by mine home in Norway. I no vant lose yob. So I do as he say."

244

"What did he make you do?" asked Ralph, too interested for the minute to remember anything but what the man was saying.

"He bane make me take package off motor boat what come by Daxter Island by night. I have to give package to Malvin. Dey say dey bane smogglers and kill me if I talk."

He sank his voice low.

"Dey bane make me halp Hawke while he put sand by carburetors."

"So it was Hawke, or La Rue, that played that rascally trick!" cried Ralph.

"Sure. He bane hidden forward. Dey hear you mean tell police about dem. Den dey cook up plan so you no get away."

"The precious scamp!—but, well, he's gone now. Hansen, you must come below and help me get Malvin on deck. Is he conscious, do you know?"

"He bane sit up when I come trou' cabin from engine room," said the man.

245

"Very well, then. We must get him up here. The boat is hard aground and may be going to break up. We must get ashore."

"How we do dat?"

"We must swim for it. I'll try the water and see how deep it is."

The lead line showed, to Ralph's great joy, that the water alongside was not beyond his depth. Both Hansen and Malvin were tall men. With good luck, it might be possible to wade ashore. It was while he was heaving up the lead that he noticed a dark object lying on the bridge, right where La Rue had taken his crazed leap.

He picked it up. It was La Rue's coat. He had cast it off when he took his mad plunge.

As he handled the garment, Ralph suddenly felt a hard, oblong object in one of the pockets. It felt like a case. He plunged his hand into the pocket and drew out—the leather wallet that contained the priceless collection of gems!

What a find!

246

The boy's head swam. La Rue, in the desperation of terror, had entirely forgotten the fortune in precious stones. Hastily Ralph thrust the wallet into his pocket.

"You bane find something," came a voice behind him. Hansen's voice. Had the Norwegian seen anything? Ralph by no means trusted the man, and he didn't like the idea of his knowing of the great find.

"It was La Rue's watch," he said; "he left it in his coat. Now let us go below and get Malvin on deck."

"I'll spare you that trouble," came a voice behind them both.

They turned and faced Malvin himself. His head was bandaged. His face chalky white.

"Well, you got the upper hand of me," he said, addressing Ralph, "but I bear no malice. Are we all going to the bottom?"

247

The man's cool, calm demeanor offered an odd contrast to the cowardly behavior of La Rue. He appeared to have resigned himself to whatever fate was to be his.

"Better a grave in the river than a long sentence in a Federal penitentiary," he muttered.

Ralph did not hear this. His mind was concerned with saving their lives. But, like a true boat captain, he still had a feeling that he owed a strong duty to the *River Swallow*.

"Before we go we must get out stern lines and fasten to them the spare anchors," he declared. "The boat is riding easily now. If we can keep her stern swung out we may still be able to get her off when the storm dies down."

Malvin flashed a glance at him. The boy's voice had rung cool and determined. Malvin was no fool. He recognized in those accents the voice of authority. Moreover, although he had not the slightest intention of using it as a means of persuasion, Ralph had possessed himself of the revolver that La Rue had cast aside when he made his wild leap. The boy contrived that a glint of it should show as he spoke. He didn't see any harm in providing that his orders should be backed up by a display of force if necessary.

248

As for Hansen, he was an old hand on the waters. The present situation did not alarm him particularly. He obeyed Ralph's orders with alacrity. It was the force of habit acting on a man who had so long been accustomed to taking orders that obeying them was second nature.

It did not take long to cast the two spare anchors out astern and swing the *River Swallow* so that only her prow rested upon the rocks. As mentioned before, she was a very light draft boat and four feet of water was ample to float her.

"She'll lie snug enough now," declared Ralph, when his orders had been carried out; "and now let's see about getting ashore and finding out what sort of a place this is that we have struck."

249

The *River Swallow's* emergency rope steps were found to be capable of reaching the water's edge. The lead had already told them that the depth was shallow. Hansen went first with Malvin, displaying no hesitation in following him. Ralph, true to the traditions of the captain's office, came last. He found Malvin and Hansen half-way to shore, wading painstakingly and not without difficulty, through the swift rushing waters.

The two gained the beach ahead of Ralph. He had supposed that they would be waiting for him. But when he reached the shore he could see nothing of them, and, although he shouted, he gained no response to his cries.

It was then that a disquieting thought occurred to him.

Hansen had seen him transfer a package from La Rue's coat to his own pocket.

Was it not possible that the man had guessed, through some previous knowledge, that the package he had abstracted was the wallet containing the precious stones destined for transfer across the border? In such a case it behooved him to be on the keen lookout for a surprise of some sort. From what he knew of him, Malvin was not the sort of man to allow a fortune in gems to get into the hands of the enemy.

250

Ralph felt his breast pocket as, wet through to the skin and half exhausted from his struggle against the rapidly running water, he stood on the shore. A satisfying feeling rewarded his touch. So far he held a prince's ransom in gems secure.

How long could he do so? Ralph realized that the instant he had become possessed of the wallet of gems he had incurred a responsibility which it might tax his keenest abilities to carry out.

251

CHAPTER XXVIII. CHECKMATED.

"Hull-o-o-o-h!"

Ralph sent the cry shrilly echoing among the

trees and brush that topped the rocky rise edging the beach upon which they had struck.

There was no answer. Again and again he sent the cry forth, while the storm whipped it out from his lips and scattered it broadcast. But to his far-flung appeals there came no rejoinder.

“Deserted!” muttered Ralph. “That shows how much those fellows really amount to. When they thought they were going to the bottom they were glad enough to depend upon me. Now that their feet have struck the hard shore they’re off again. Within a week they will be up to new schemes of villainy.”

Thoroughly decided in his mind that Hansen and Malvin, once having gained the shore, had left him to shift for himself, Ralph hesitated about his next move.

252

The storm had abated, but muttering peals of thunder and spasmodic flashes of lightning showed that it was still hovering about the vicinity. The rain fell in torrents, but Ralph was already so thoroughly soaked that this caused him but small inconvenience. His thoughts were centered on the treachery of the other survivors. The least they might have done, he mused, would have been to await his coming on shore. Then they could have taken counsel together and decided upon their next move.

The strain of the night had told upon the boy. He felt nervous, irritable and chilled. Even La Rue’s fate, much as it had bothered him at first (rascal though the man was), now held little of interest for him. His sole idea was to find some place of shelter, and then he would sleep—and sleep, till nature was recuperated.

It was no light task that the boy had performed. Few persons but those who knew the river could have imagined the tireless skill and vigilance necessary, if a craft, once caught in the vortex of a St. Lawrence storm, was to be kept from disaster.

253

The trust imposed in him Ralph had loyally carried out while opportunity served. It was through no fault of his that, caught in a swirling eddy with an inexperienced engineer to answer his signals, the *River Swallow* lay helpless.

And yet Ralph was not weak enough to blame anybody but himself. He saw now, and all too clearly, that it had been an error of judgment for him to send both Harry Ware and Percy Simmons ashore at Piquetville. With even one of them to aid him, he might have been able to stand off the rascals who wanted to gain possession of the *River Swallow* till aid of some sort arrived.

All these thoughts, and many others, surged through his mind as, brain-sick, footsore and wet to the skin, he stood on the beach and looked at the dark hulk on the waters which he knew was the *River Swallow*. Ralph had never, in all his adventurous times, felt so much like quitting as he did right then and there.

254

He ran over in memory other predicaments in which he had been placed: The ruined mission from which he had had to escape by a swaying rope from a tower that rose a hundred feet

above the solid ground; the terrible trap into which the boys had fallen in the Northwest, and from which they had escaped only by a desperate leap across a boiling, swirling river, ultimately to seek refuge on a drifting log. Once more he recollected their experiences in the Canadian Rockies; the dread moment when the bear almost had them in his grasp at the entrance to the subterranean cavern.

But all these paled into insignificance in his mind beside the present situation.

In all the predicaments which his excited mind had hastily recalled it was either his life or his companion's that was at stake. Now, however, in addition to the personal equation, the salvation of a fine craft—the *River Swallow*—depended upon his grit and enterprise.

255

"Well, there's no use standing here," he said to himself, as he listened to the rumbling of the storm dying away in the distance.

Before the tempest broke the weather had been hot, oppressive, in fact. Now the air had become almost chilly in contrast. Ralph, in his wet clothes, shuddered. The night breeze that crept along in the wake of the storm made him feel that a warm fire would be welcome.

"No use standing still here," he mused; "there's nothing to be done till morning, at any rate. If this is the mainland, there should be some farmer's house in sight. In the event that we have struck an island, it seems almost equally positive that some one is living upon it."

He sat down in the lee of a rock, sheltered from the driving rain and the wind, and considered his position. On second thoughts, it did not seem so serious. He had checkmated a gang of ruffians, and as he thought of this he gave his chest a thump.

256

The wallet with the fortune within its transparent inside cover was still there. He controlled the situation. The next morning he resolved that, no matter what happened, he would deliver the entire collection to the authorities.

"Thank goodness, Hansen did not guess what I had taken," he said to himself. "In fact, I doubt if either Malvin or Hawke would have made enough of a confidant of him to let him know that they had such a sum in precious stones to sneak across the border. So far as I can see, this Hansen was a sort of weak-kneed go-between. He was entirely in their power. Their tool, in fact."

Musing in this way, Ralph arose to his feet. The rain still beat down, but it was not as violent as before.

Far off, intermittent flashes could be seen on the horizon. The storm had plainly passed.

257

Ralph patted the pocket wherein reposed the gems.

"Checkmated," he chuckled, "checkmated, by all that's wonderful! Now for some sleep and then—to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXIX.

A HERMIT OF THE ST. LAWRENCE.

For some time Ralph floundered and stumbled along the beach in the direction which he had elected to follow. At length, as he rounded a point, he caught sudden sight of a light, burning amid a clump of stunted, dwarfed cedar trees.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Where there's a light there's a promise, anyhow, of a fire and something to eat. Eat! I've almost forgotten what the word means, and as for sleep——"

Ralph's lips parted in an expansive yawn.

"Oh, for a bed! I could sleep the clock round, I do declare," he confessed to himself.

With the light as an inspiring goal, he pushed forward vigorously along the beach, wondering to himself, meanwhile, if Hansen and Malvin had reached a place of refuge.

"At any rate, they don't deserve one," he thought. "Their desertion of me was a base bit of business. If they have to stay out to-night with the stars for a counterpane and the earth for a cot, I, for one, have no great sympathy for them."

259

In due time he reached the place from which he had perceived the light shining through the night. So far as he could see, it was a rough-looking shanty, built of driftwood and old timbers nailed or fastened together in haphazard fashion. The light was proceeding from a small window and, peering in through this, Ralph was able to see a very old man seated at a rough table, apparently repairing a fish net.

"I've heard strange stories about some of these squatters along the St. Lawrence," said the boy to himself, as he hesitated outside the door. "I hardly know if I ought to knock or not. Suppose this is some maliciously disposed old hermit, like that one we met down in Texas?"

He hesitated thus for several minutes; but at last he mustered up the resolution to knock on the door.

260

He struck a good thundering tattoo with his knuckles, and was immediately rewarded by hearing a voice from within. It was querulous, old and cracked. Plainly, it belonged to just such an old man as he had seen seated at the table when he looked through the window. He was an old, bald-headed, patriarchal-looking man.

Despite the apparent age of the occupant of the lone hut on the St. Lawrence, he looked hale and hearty. Ralph's first view had established this. The old man's skin was pink and clear, his blue eyes bright, and although he stooped, he showed traces of having been a well-built, powerful man in his youth.

"Rap! rap! rap!" went Ralph's knuckles again.

Then from within: "Wa'al, what cher want?"

"To see whoever lives here," spoke up Ralph.

"Who are you?"

"A boy that was cast up here to-night on a motor boat that went aground."

261

"Wa'al, speak up, can't cher? What cher want?"

"To sleep here to-night and a chance to dry my clothes," replied Ralph, greatly puzzled over the brusqueness of his reception.

"You ain't one of the La Rue gang?"

Ralph's heart gave a leap. What could this venerable old solitary know of the La Rue gang?

"No, of course I'm not one of the La Rue gang," declared Ralph, in an indignant tone. "If I was I guess I might have better quarters. Open up now, will you?"

"I'm a-comin'! I'm a-comin'. Gosh all fish hooks, but yer in a tearin' hurry, young fellow."

"So'd you be if you'd gone through a quarter of what I have in the last few hours," replied Ralph.

The door was flung open and a lamp held high above the head of the shack's occupant. Seemingly he wanted to make sure of Ralph before he admitted him.

262

"City, be'ant you?" he asked.

"Well, I've been around in cities a bit," confessed Ralph.

"Oh, well, none the worse for that, I dessay. Come in. You don't look as if you'd bite."

Ralph caught himself recalling some recent moving pictures on board the *River Swallow*.

"Oh, I don't know," rejoined the boy, with a smile he could not control, "just give me something to bite on and I'll see what I can do with it."

The old man set out baked beans and bacon, cold potatoes, cold corn and a piece of soggy pie.

"Fire's done plum give out, er I'd give yer coffee," he said apologetically.

"Never mind," said Ralph. "I'd rather have water. You get fine water here on the——"

He paused an instant to give the old man a chance to speak.

"Island," croaked the veteran, "Castle Island, we call it on 'count the odd-shaped rocks and stuff."

263

In this simple manner Ralph ascertained without more ado that he was on an island. This, at least, was a valuable bit of information. It gave him something to go on.

His host at this point appeared to wake up to the fact that, while he had been talking pretty freely with his guest, Ralph had not yet unbosomed himself of any of his affairs. The old man's inquiries were minute.

Ralph told him all of the truth that he thought advisable. Of course he made no mention of the

gems or of the smuggling episodes. To old man Whey, as the old chap said he was to be called, he accounted for his presence on the island by saying that his motor boat had run aground.

The old man inquired where the accident had taken place, and Ralph quickly placed him in possession of all the details.

"That's nuffin'," declared old man Whey; "we'll have her off there in mighty quick time. Lucky thing you landed in Deer Bay; otherwise you'd have got in bad waters. If you are lying where I think you are, you can come pretty nigh gettin' off under your own power."

264

It had already become clear that old man Whey knew the river like a book. To Ralph it appeared that here was a good man to tie to.

"If you'll help me get my boat off in the morning, and we succeed in floating her, I'll give you whatever you choose to take for your services."

The old man exploded.

"Sho, boy! Kain't I do a good turn ter my neebor?" he asked. "Pay me, indeed! My fishing and the work I do for the cottagers once in a while gives me all I want. Pay me, indeed! Git right into that bunk now. Sleep your head off. I'll call you when I'm ready in the morning."

Ralph was nothing loath to turn in on the rough sleeping shelf assigned to him. But before closing his eyes he thrust the wallet containing the gems under his pillow.

265

"It'll be safe there," he muttered drowsily to himself.

But in the morning when he awakened the wallet with its fortune in gems was gone.

And also among the missing was old man Whey.

266

CHAPTER XXX.

THE STOLEN SKIFF.

The sun streamed into the miserable old shanty. It had looked unattractive enough by night. Seen by day it was ten times more shabby and ramshackle. Old fish nets, ragged, frayed lines, all the paraphernalia of a river fisherman lay scattered about.

On the crude table stood some unwashed tin dishes, great shad-flies and eel bugs buzzing about them with a whirring sound. Against the wall hung some of old Whey's clothes, queer, homemade garments, half patches and half the original material; it was hard to tell where one began and the other ended. The sunlight that streamed into the squalid place, which had an untidy, dirt floor, came from the same window through which Ralph had observed the light the night before.

The place was the typical home of a St. Lawrence River fisherman. In one corner stood the old man's most cherished possessions, his

267

sturgeon spears and a big jack lantern for night fishing. A crude attempt at taxidermy, too, was above an open fireplace at one end of the hut—a stuffed “butter-ball” duck. It stood wobbling on one leg, the seams of its sewn-up skin bursting through with the cotton that stuffed it.

In the opposite corner was a rusty stove with three legs, the place of a fourth support being supplied by a log. A few tin plates, clumsy knives and forks, bags of flour, potatoes, onions and other staples about completed the furnishings of the hut. The roof was leaky, as some muddy pools on the floor and the sunlight streaming through sundry holes into the room, amply testified.

Ralph’s eye took in all this in a few seconds. Then his mind reverted to his loss. Beyond a doubt, old man Whey was the thief. The old rascal must have decided to search his guest in the night and abstract whatever of value he found. The boy could not help an indignant exclamation as he thought of the almost priceless collection of gems the old man’s rapacious fingers had gathered in.

268

“Just to think,” exclaimed Ralph indignantly, “that an old, half-senile man should have robbed me of precious stones that I thought nobody could take from me!”

Angry at his lack of caution in not having hidden them before he entered the hut, Ralph went to the door. It was ajar, and a touch threw it open. Outside, the morning sparkled brightly. The hut was on the river’s edge. On the shore was drawn up a St. Lawrence skiff, a narrow, double-ended craft of a type peculiar to the great river.

Its oars lay on their fixed thole pins and the line that lay up on the beach was bone dry. Plainly, if this was the old man’s only boat, which, considering his poverty-stricken state, was likely, old Whey had not been out that morning.

This rather puzzled Ralph. He had made up his mind that the old man had risen as soon as the storm died out—or perhaps he had not gone to bed at all—and had looted his garments and bed and then made off with their valuable contents. If the venerable thief had decamped, however, it was plain he had not gone in his own boat; that is, unless he was possessed of more than one, which, for the reasons mentioned, was highly improbable.

269

Some bacon was in a frying-pan on the rusty stove in which a fire was smoldering. A pot of coffee, also, stood there; and with some bread from one of the corner cupboards Ralph managed to make a rough breakfast. Then, refreshed and invigorated, he set out for the scene of the wreck. Naturally, the desire to see how badly the *River Swallow* was damaged was uppermost in his mind. It outweighed even his worry over the losing, or, rather, the theft, of the leather wallet.

He had not proceeded very far when his steps were arrested by a low cry from a clump of brush back from the beach.

270

“Don’t strike me again! Don’t!” came in a trembling voice from whoever was concealed there.

"Somebody hurt," said Ralph to himself, and began to hasten up the beach toward the clump of bushes.

As his footsteps crunched on the gravel the voice broke out afresh:

"It's the boy's wallet, I tell you. You mustn't steal it! Give it back! Give it back!"

Much mystified at this mention of the wallet, Ralph parted the bushes. He had hardly done so, when he started back with an exclamation. Old man Whey lay there in a crumpled heap. Apparently he was injured. But Ralph soon discovered that although the old man's face had been bruised by a brutal blow he was not badly hurt.



Old man Whey lay there in a crumpled heap.

"What's the matter, Mr. Whey?" asked the boy, blaming himself for his suspicions of the old man. "What has happened?"

"Oh, is it you, my boy?" asked the old man, opening his eyes. "Three men came to the hut while you were asleep. I had dozed off and opened my eyes in time to see them taking something from under your pillow."

"Those men!" cried Ralph, guessing the truth. "Were there *three* of them?"

"Yes. I saw them take your wallet. I chased them

and told them to give it back, but they laughed at me and then struck my face as you see, and threw me into these bushes. I'm not much hurt, but I'm half dead from fright."

Ralph's mind was busy reconstructing things. There were three men. That, then, made it plain that La Rue had not perished, but had managed to get ashore through the shallow water. He must have met Malvin and the Norwegian sailor when they landed, which accounted for the prompt disappearance of the latter two.

Apparently, then, they had watched him (Ralph) come ashore, and had tracked him to the hut of old man Whey. Having done this, they had awaited an opportunity to recover the gems, which Hansen had evidently seen Ralph transfer from the coat pocket of La Rue's discarded garment to his own. It may be said here, that this is precisely what had happened and Ralph's guesses were not a whit short of the whole truth of the matter.

Despite his anxiety to reach the scene of the wreck, the boy felt that his first duty lay to old man Whey, who was in a pitiable condition of shakiness over his fright. But when Ralph had helped him to his feet, he rallied and began to grow quite angry.

"Ah! If I'd been young and strong like I was once this wouldn't have happened," he quavered. "I'd have given them something to think over. Yes, I would. But I'm old and all alone since Jimmie left me."

"Who was Jimmie?" asked Ralph, more to keep the old man's mind off his brutal treatment than anything else, as the two advanced toward the hut.

"Jimmie! Why, he was my grandson. He was a fine little lad, Jimmie was, but he was lost in his boat two years ago, and I've never got a trace of him since."

"Lost? You mean that he was lost in a storm?"

"Yes. Jimmie was out fishing when one of those storms we call a twister came up. The last I saw of him he was being blown round that point yonder. I've never seen him since. He'd be about twelve years old now, Jimmie would. He was a fine boy," garrulously went on the old man, "and after his father, my last living son, died, Jimmie meant a lot to me."

His voice broke and his dim old eyes grew dimmer.

"You don't think it possible that he may have been saved?" inquired Ralph, with a vague hope of comforting the old man.

Old Whey shook his head mournfully.

"No, sir. Jimmie's dead and gone, he is, and the old man is left alone. All alone."

After he had had some strong coffee and breakfast, however, the old man rallied. He said he would accompany Ralph to the scene of the wreck. He suggested taking the row boat, as it would be easier than walking. Just as a westerner catches up a pony rather than walk a quarter of a mile, so a denizen of the St.

Lawrence always travels in a skiff or a punt or a "put-put" (St. Lawrence for motor boat), if he is lucky enough to possess one.

But when they came out of the hut, imagine the surprise of the old man and the boy when they saw that the boat had gone!

There was no question about it, the skiff had vanished utterly without leaving a trace.

They hurried to the beach, the old man almost tearful over this new calamity. Ralph bent and examined the ground in the vicinity of the place where the boat had lain. Then he straightened up with an angry exclamation.

"La Rue's work again!" he cried. "Three men have been here and, beyond the shadow of a doubt, it was La Rue and his companions. They have escaped from the island with the gems in your stolen boat."

275

276

CHAPTER XXXI. AFLOAT AGAIN!

The old man was more than angry. He was furious. He wept and wailed and tore his hair. The loss of the boat affected him like some great disaster, which, in fact, it was to him. But Ralph succeeded in allaying somewhat his fury and grief by promising him a new skiff as soon as he should be able to procure one.

"I feel that I am partly responsible for the loss of your skiff," said the boy, "as, if it had not been for me, those three men would not have come near your hut. So I'll see to it that you get another one."

"A Guerin skiff?" quavered the old man. "That one they took was built by him. He is dead and gone now, but nobody on the St. Lawrence ever built skiffs like Amie Guerin. That one of mine was thirty years old and better than when she was new."

After Ralph had promised that if possible one of the skiffs from the workshop of the redoubtable Guerin should replace the missing one, the old man grew calmer.

"I am selfish," he said. "After all, perhaps your beautiful motor craft is ruined, and what is one poor skiff to the loss of a fine craft like that?"

"Let us go and see how badly she is damaged," said Ralph; and together the old man and the boy set off for the point upon which the luckless *River Swallow* had driven her bow. In a short time they reached it.

The *River Swallow* lay on the placid river, apparently unharmed. The stern lines that Ralph had had the foresight to order out had held, and her after part was swinging clear of the sand-spit on which she had rammed her bow.

Ralph waded out to the craft and examined her as well as he could. To his joyous amazement, so far as he could make out, she had suffered no

277

278

great damage. One or two of her rivets might be strained, he thought, but beyond that the *River Swallow* appeared to be in good order.

The boy could not resist the temptation to see if he could get her off the sand-bar. This was not as difficult as it sounds. The wind of the night before had held the craft on the sand-spit. But now she appeared to be about to glide off into deeper water of her own volition. Almost her entire hull was afloat, the exception being the foot or two of bow that was embedded in the sand.

"I believe I could do it," mused Ralph, as he sized up the situation critically. "Wouldn't it be fine to come cruising along into Piquetville under my own power with old man Whey for a crew!"

He turned to the old man.

"Mr. Whey, can you steer a boat?"

"What kind of a boat?" croaked the old man, who had been lost in admiration of the shapely lines and finish of the *River Swallow*.

"Why, this boat. The *River Swallow*. Do you know anything about handling a wheel?"

"He! he! he! What a question!" chuckled the old man. "Why, Enos Whey was skipper of a Montreal packet afore rheumatiz crippled him up. D'ye want me to help you get her off the shoal?"

"That's just what I do. If you will ship as wheelman and run her to Piquetville I'll pay you well for it."

"I'll do it! By gum, I'll do it!" cried the old man. "I haven't had a wheel in my hands for fifteen years, but a man never forgets how to steer. Help me aboard, lad, and I'll show you what I can do."

Ralph clambered on board the *River Swallow* and then proceeded to help the old man up the rope ladder, sometimes used by the boys in debarking in a rough sea. With many grunts and groans, old Whey was at last safely on deck.

"What now, lad?" he asked.

"I'll get the engines started and then we can cast off the stern lines. Then you'll take the wheel and I'll throw my clutch into the reverse and give her full power. I *think*, that with both propellers tugging at her the *River Swallow* will back off into deep water just as nicely as anything."

"She ought to," agreed the old man, "that sand is soft and she is not up on it very far. You go below, lad, and tell me when you are ready."

Ralph hastened to his cabin, jumped into overalls and descended to the motor room. Everything was in apple-pie order, except that Hansen had left tools untidily lying about. Leaving the cleaning-up process till some future time, Ralph turned on the gasoline, set the sparks on both motors and then pulled the lever that started the compressed air apparatus that spun the engines till they picked up their power.

There was a whirr and a buzz and then a volley of explosions.

"Fine!" exclaimed Ralph, as the big motors began to revolve. He adjusted the mixture and then the powerful machines settled down to a rhythmic hum. The clutch was not in and they were running free—that is, the propellers were not yet revolving.

"All right!" cried Ralph, hastening on deck. "All ready when you are!"

The old man and the boy cast off the stem lines, and then Ralph, without loss of time, for there was danger of the freed hull swinging with the current, hastened below once more. Old man Whey took up his position on the bridge. A flash of fire came into his aged eyes as he felt the spokes of a steering wheel in his grip once more.

He seized the engine-room signal lever with a hand that shook but was still determined.

"Full speed astern!" flashed up on the indicator below, on which Ralph's eyes had been glued.

"The old man sure does understand his business," murmured the boy, as he grasped the reverse lever.

There came a rattling, grinding whirr as the cogs of the gears engaged. Then a tremor and a convulsion of the hull.

"Is she moving?" wondered Ralph excitedly.

He speeded up the engines to their full capacity. The sharp pitched propellers "bit" the water, exercising a tremendous backward drag on the *River Swallow*.

Unable to restrain himself, Ralph rushed up on deck. What he saw caused him to utter a shrill whoop of joy, which was echoed in a feeble croak by old man Whey.

"We're off!" shouted the boy.

"See here, you get below and mind your engines," chuckled old man Whey. "I'm the temporary skipper of this craft."

CHAPTER XXXII. A JOYOUS MEETING.

It was some two hours after the floating of the *River Swallow*, which proved as staunch as ever, that a group of persons on board a speedy, trim little motor tender spied the craft coming toward Piquetville with a "bone in her teeth."

Joy that verged on the delirious ran riot on the tender, which was the *River Swallow's* own boat, when, from the side of the fast motor craft, came a puff of white smoke, a loud report and then the stars and stripes fluttered out in all their glory on the after flagstaff.

"Whoop-ee! Zing! zang! zabella!" cried Harry Ware exultingly. "It's good old Ralph! The old

bull-dog has won out!"

"I knew he would. I'll bet he's got that gang imprisoned on board there right now!" cried Percy Simmons.

"Look! There he is on the bridge!" cried Jennings, indicating a figure at the wheel.

284

"Is that Ralph?" questioned Percy hesitatingly.

"Yes—no, by hookey! It's an old man with a white beard!"

"Well, what under the sun!" burst from Harry Ware.

"I rather fancy, young men, that your comrade will have an odd story to tell when we meet him," struck in Prescott. "By Jove, he appears to be as efficient on the St. Lawrence as he and his chums proved to be on the Mexican border."

"You bet Ralph's on the job wherever he is!" said Percy Simmons fervently.

"I'm anxious to hear his story," said Adams, the third customs man. "It's few men, let alone boys, that could bull-doze La Rue and two other men as bad, and come back home with flying colors and an old Santa Claus for helmsman."

"The man at the wheel looks like old Father Time," laughed Harry.

"He's right on time, anyhow," declared Percy Simmons.

285

Not long after an interested group, gathered in the inspector's office at Piquetville, heard Ralph's story. The official was visibly chagrined over the loss of the gems, but he concealed this as well as he could and complimented Ralph on his excellent work.

"If you would accept a position I'd like to have you in this service," he said; "but you can at least do us one favor. Lend the government of the United States your *River Swallow* for tonight."

"I'll do a lot more than that," said Ralph quickly. "But, if I may ask, what is the plan, Inspector?"

"Just this. I think that La Rue and his companions, after they stole the old man's boat, made for some rendezvous of the gang. They are there now, according to my best judgment."

"Yes; that's about right," agreed Jennings. "But they'll make a break as soon as possible."

"Just my idea, Jennings," rejoined his chief; "and that 'break' will be made on that fly-by-night boat of theirs. They'll try and dispose of the gems, smuggle them across the line, that is, in some other point along the river; or they may even try to get to the Great Lakes. It's our job to head them off."

286

"A man's-size job," muttered Adams.

"All of that," said the inspector; "that is the reason why I asked this young man for the loan of his boat. My idea is, first to descend on Windmill Island, which, from Master Stetson's story, I believe to be the hiding place of the

gang. The old island would make an ideal hang-out for them. It is full of passages and galleries and then, too, that old windmill tower would make a fine meeting place for such scamps. Folks around here believe it is haunted and wouldn't be likely to bother them. Young men, we will start for Windmill Island at dusk."

"You want us along?" asked Ralph delightedly.

"Why, of course," was the astonished reply. "You didn't think we could get along without you, did you?"

"Well, I must say that I'd like to be in at the finish," rejoined Ralph.

"Same here," put in Harry Ware.

"Me for that cruise, if I never take another," grinned Percy Simmons delightedly.

"And if I kin come, I'd like ter take a good swat at ther feller what stole my skiff, by gum!" chortled old man Whey, at which they all laughed; and the inspector promised the old fellow that he should be a member of the party that hoped to tout the gem smugglers out of their last stronghold and bring them to book for their misdeeds.

It was just at the conclusion of this arrangement that a messenger boy broke into the room.

"Sage fer Ralph Fetson!" he burst out.

"No such——" began the inspector.

"I guess he means me," said Ralph, taking the message.

Sure enough, the dispatch was for him. He tore it open and scanned it eagerly. It was from his father.

"Arrest, annoying mistake. Trip here useless. Made on a forged message. Tell all about it on my return.

DAD."

"Well," said Ralph, after he had communicated the news, "I guess we know almost as much about that as dad. He can't get here before tomorrow morning, and by that time——"

"We'll be able to confront him with the men responsible for his unpleasant experience," promised the inspector confidently.

CHAPTER XXXIII. OFF ON THE CHASE.

"Well, Harry, this is going to be some cruise!"

"Humph! I've a notion it will be all of that and then some," replied Harry Ware, as he and Ralph Stetson stood side by side on the bridge of the *River Swallow*. The dusk was deepening into night and the *River Swallow* lay at the

Piquetville dock tugging at her hawsers, as if anxious to be off on what was to prove the most memorable trip of her career.

"We're going to try conclusions with that *Artful Dodger* at last, and tie her up hard and fast, and certain members of her crew as well."

"All well and good," said Harry, "but just the same my advice would be to stay far away from that craft. She's a bad one. I don't like the idea of coming up with her."

"More ghost shivers, eh?" laughed Ralph. "Stay ashore if you like, Harry."

The Ware boy flushed crimson.

"What are you talking about? I'm not scared. Don't you dare say I am, Ralph Stetson."

"That's all right, Harry," soothed Ralph, with a laugh. "I know that when we catch the *Artful Dodger* you'll be just as courageous as any one else. But till then——"

"You'll please quit teasing me about that craft."

"All right, if that's the way you feel about it."

"What if they threw a bomb or something at us while we were chasing them?"

"No danger of that. I shouldn't wonder, in fact, if we miss the craft altogether. Of one thing I'm glad, though, we are going to explore the mysteries of Windmill Island."

"Umph! That's a nice, cheerful job. We saw one explosion there. How do we know that there won't be another? That fellow Rawson was thinking of making a mine with that dynamite that blew up when the hut caught fire. How do we know he mayn't have some such cheerful little contrivance planted off the island that may blow us sky-high?"

Ralph lost all patience.

"Say, if you don't stop croaking, I'll ask the inspector to have you put ashore. Why, old man Whey is far more courageous than you are."

Harry walked off with his hands in his pockets. He was indignant, but Ralph only smiled.

"He'll be back in a while," he said to himself, "and when he does come he'll be ashamed of himself."

He was right. Shortly after the customs inspectors boarded the boat and found the boys and old man Whey all ready for them, Harry stole up to Ralph.

"I hope we don't sight that *Artful Dodger*," said he, "but if we do, nothing will suit me but to bring her back with a double half-hitch in her nose."

"I knew that was the way you'd feel about it, Harry," said Ralph, and then turned to greet the customs inspectors.

All was in readiness. Nothing was to be gained by waiting, and the word to cast off soon came. Through the fast falling gloom the *River Swallow* slipped out into the St. Lawrence, while a thrill

ran through all of those on board as they thought of the night's work that depended upon them.

"Want the search-light?" asked Harry, as they moved along.

Old man Whey, who acted as pilot, from his thorough knowledge of the river, had just told them they were not far from Windmill Island.

"Not on your life," snapped the chief inspector; "we don't want to herald the fact that we are coming. I would suggest, captain, that you extinguish even your side-lights."

"Taking a chance," said Ralph, scanning the compass card.

293

"Never mind. We'll have to risk it."

The next instant a sharp click showed that the lights were out.

Stealthily as a shadow the *River Swallow* crept over the dark water, not a light showing on board her. With her under-water exhaust, too, her engines were perfectly silent. Like a ghost ship she crept along, with old man Whey guiding Ralph's steering.

After a while the old man signaled to the chief inspector.

"Better take to the small boat here," he advised, "and anchor the *River Swallow*. I'm not sure of the rocks and shoals, and Windmill Island lies right off there."

"Very well," said the inspector, "anchor as noiselessly as possible."

The anchor chain was slipped out slowly with hardly any of its customary whirring and rattling. The engines ceased to revolve. The *River Swallow* swung noiselessly at her moorings. Then came the command to lower the launch tender.

294

When this was done, they all descended into it and, using the oars—for they did not want to announce their coming by the popping of the engine—they set off through the darkness for the shore.

Presently, like a tall ghost, the white finger of the windmill tower upreared itself through the surrounding gloom.

Ralph, who sat next Harry, felt the lad give a shiver.

"Goose flesh?" he laughed, nudging the boy.

"Goose flesh nothing!" exclaimed Harry indignantly. "It's fighting flesh."

The bow of the tender grated on the beach. It was after ten o'clock. No light or other evidence of human habitation was visible.

"Maybe our birds have skipped," said the chief inspector, in disappointed tones.

"Hold on a minute!" whispered Ralph, in a low, tense voice. "What's that coming?"

295

"It's a motor boat," cried Harry.

"Heading this way, too," declared the inspector.

"Lie low, everybody," cautioned Jennings the next instant. "It's the *Artful Dodger*, for a thousand dollars!"

296

CHAPTER XXXIV. THE TUNNEL ENTRANCE.

The tender was a light one. It was no very hard task for the party to draw the little craft up the beach and into the concealment of a clump of bushes.

Hardly had this been done, when around the point behind which they had landed, came the craft they had heard. The night was starlit, and in the dim radiance they could see her dark outlines coming on at a good speed.

Beyond the little cove into which they had drawn the tender was a fairly high cliff, rocky and threatening. The motor boat crossed the little cove and kept straight on. No lights burned on her. Plainly her errand was not one which those on board cared to advertise.

"Great Scott! what is she going to do?" exclaimed the inspector, in a low whisper, as the motor boat kept right on across the little cove without altering her course in the least. Not one degree did she swerve from the route she was steering.

297

"What on earth do they mean to do?" breathed Ralph. "Run the boat smack into that cliff?"

"Looks as if they are bent on suicide," commented Jennings uneasily.

"I told you it wasn't any ordinary kind of boat," said Harry Ware. "It wouldn't surprise me if——"

"Jumping Jupiter!" burst from the inspector.

The rest of the party could only gasp their amazement. At the moment articulate speech was impossible.

The motor boat had reached the cliff—and vanished without sound or sign.

"She's gone down!" cried Ralph, the first to recover from his astonishment.

"Gone down, nothing!" retorted Harry scornfully. "She's just melted into air, that's what."

298

"Don't be so foolish," chided Inspector Jennings. "Depend upon it, that is another of their tricks, like the ones they played on you, boys."

"We'll start for that cliff and examine it," declared the chief inspector. "There's some clever sleight of hand in all this mummery."

"We're going to that cliff!" gasped Harry, in affrighted tones. Nevertheless he set off with the others, but he might have been observed to hang some distance behind them. The boy was now more firmly convinced than ever that there was

something supernatural about the mysterious craft.

"The Fenians had all sorts of secret ways of landing upon and leaving this island," said the chief inspector; "and I'll wager that the motor boat just used one of those to work the trick we've just seen."

The night was warm and there were occasional flashes of summer lightning. To Harry's thinking, this made the strange quest they were engaged on all the more uncanny.

299

At last they reached the cliff.

"I wish another flash would come," said Ralph, "we daren't light matches. But I brought along an electric torch."

"A good idea. We may need it later," said the inspector. "Hullo! Look there! I guess that explains the mystery of the motor boat's vanishing."

Another flash had revealed a tunnel-like hole in the cliff which could hardly be observed from the water side, on account of several thick bushes which grew, either by accident or design, about its mouth.

"There's a path," said Ralph presently, as another flicker of lightning revealed a rough trail leading up the cliff face.

"We'll follow it. Easy, now, boys, we don't want to give the alarm," warned the chief inspector.

300

Through the darkness the intruders on the gem smugglers' realm crept up the slippery track. At last they gained the top. Below them, as the flickering flashes showed, was a big pool of water, either natural or artificial. Doubtless the tunnel through the cliff led into it, for moored to one side of the pool could be seen the mysterious motor boat.

There were no lights on board her. Apparently those who had arrived at the island had made their way up the hill to the windmill tower, for a light could now be seen gleaming, like an angry eye, half-way up the structure.

"They're all up there. Collecting their effects preparatory to leaving the island forever, I imagine," whispered the inspector. "Let's have a look at their boat."

It was a rather risky business, but still they were a strong party and the government officers were well armed. The descent to the side of the pool was made by a rocky path very like the one by which they had ascended the cliff.

301

Harry hung back while the others inspected the boat. But Ralph rallied him after a short time.

"She's all solid, Harry," he declared; "come on and see for yourself. Nothing ghostly about this fellow, unless a sixty horse-power motor of the best and speediest design appeals to you as being spookish."

Harry came forward and soon satisfied himself that it was all as Ralph had said. Inside the boat they found tubs of phosphorus, for producing the ghostly effect that had so scared Harry, plenty of

spare lanterns to work the stern-light trick and a stern search-light of great power, evidently intended to be thrown full in the eyes of the helmsman of any pursuing craft and dazzle his vision.

In a locker, too, were sheets with holes for heads and a number of masks painted to resemble grinning skulls.

302

"Quite a paraphernalia," grinned the chief inspector. "All this would make a regular eight-hour-union ghost turn green with envy."

In a small shanty which stood close by they found more evidence to show how the operators of the *Artful Dodger* had been practicing on the credulity of the islanders. All sorts of rigs and canvas frames by which the outlines of the motor boat might be altered at will were discovered. For instance, one frame was found which could be hooped on to the boat's stern, changing her whole appearance. A false cabin top was also found, by means of which the *Artful Dodger* could be speedily converted to a cabin cruiser, in case any one was looking for a motor boat of another type.

"Well, this is the most complete layout we have uncovered for some time," spoke the chief inspector. "I think——"

But Ralph interrupted him.

303

CHAPTER XXXV. HANDS UP!

"Somebody with a lantern is coming this way!" exclaimed the boy.

Advancing through the darkness was a single bright disc of light. It was swinging violently, as if whoever was carrying it was walking fast.

"Quick, get in here behind this hut," ordered the chief inspector.

"Why not arrest them now?" asked Ralph.

"'Twould never do. We want to get the diamonds and other stones. You can depend upon it, that if we were premature they would find some way to destroy that evidence."

From their place of hiding the party watched the approach of the men with the lantern.

There were four of them. Two were recognized as Malvin and La Rue. Another, a big, beefy man with a flaring red face and a pair of huge black moustaches, was identified by the inspectors as Rawson; and the fourth was a slight, delicate-looking little fellow, undersized and narrow-chested.

304

"Slim Shiner," whispered the chief inspector, "the cleverest gem smuggler at large! It was he who secured the gems in Europe and saw to it that they reached the gang over here safely. Then Malvin and the rest disposed of them across the line. Malvin was of invaluable use to

the gang, for he worked from your father's boat, which, of course, was not once suspected till we learned of the *Artful Dodger* being seen off Dexter Island."

"Well, everything's cleaned out," La Rue was saying, "and now for a clear getaway. A lucky thing that the water was shallow when I jumped from that blamed *River Swallow*, or I wouldn't have been along to-night."

"No, nor the gems, neither," growled Rawson. "We think a heap more of them than we do of your bones, La Rue."

"That's right," chuckled Slim. "A good thing for you you managed to get them away from that kid while he was asleep, La Rue, or you wouldn't have dared face the gang again."

"Well, I guess not," laughed Malvin. "But our troubles are over now, boys. We'll move on to the Great Lakes and try our luck there. That gang of young whelps on the *River Swallow* broke up our game here, all right, bad luck to them."

"We'll take care of them later on, never fear," snarled La Rue. "I've a score to settle myself with that Stetson brat. Ha! ha! that was a good joke, though, having his old man clapped in jail in Montreal. That was your trick, Slim."

"Oh, these Canadian officials are such softies they'll believe anything you tell 'em," modestly declared Slim. "A telegram to the chief at Montreal was enough to turn the deal."

"It was a good one, all right," snorted Rawson.

"Well, let's get aboard. We've got lots of gasoline. What's our first stop, Rawson?" asked La Rue.

"Buffalo," was the gruff rejoinder; "and you fellows want to lie low, too. I'll bet there's a hue and cry out after us right now."

"You bet there is, and closer than you think," exclaimed Ralph to himself.

The men climbed aboard. Rawson bent over the engine, and the next instant the craft began to move across the placid pool.

"Run hard now and cut 'em off," cried the inspector. "Run as you never ran before for the small boat."

At top speed they raced over the cliff path and launched the tender just as the *Artful Dodger*, a mystery no longer, emerged from the cliff face.

"Start the engine at top speed," ordered Inspector Jennings. "No use for concealment now."

Percy Simmons spun the wheel. The tender shot forward, headed so as to intercept the *Artful Dodger* as she came out of the cove.

At that instant those on board the smugglers' craft saw the swift little tender cutting across to head her off. They dashed ahead at full speed.

"What's their game now?" demanded Ralph excitedly.

"Heading for the Canadian line," was the chief inspector's brief response. "Give her more speed, boy, she mustn't slip through our fingers now."

"I'll burn up the engines," declared Percy.

"Never mind that," shot out Ralph; "burn up the boat, but we've got to get them!"

The fever of the chase was in his veins. He felt as if his life depended on catching the other craft. The tender was now on a course which must bring her across the craft's bows. As they drew near, the chief inspector stood up.

A revolver was in his hand. His two aides drew close to him with grim, determined looks.

"Stop that boat!" hailed the chief inspector, in round, ringing tones.

There was no reply.

"Heave to, or I'll send a shot into you!" he cried threateningly.

"Who in blazes are you?" came back a shout from the other craft.

"Inspectors of the United States Customs Service!" came the sharp response. "Heave to!"

"Go to the dickens! You can't bluff us! We're for the Canadian line!" came back a taunting shout.

Bang! A shot whizzed across the bows of the fleeing motor boat.

"The next will come closer," warned the inspector.

There was a hurried consultation on board the other craft. Angry voices arose. It was plain that some were counseling surrender, others flight. In the midst of it all came Malvin's voice.

"All right. We give up and be hanged to you."

The tender ranged alongside the other craft. The engines of the latter had been stopped; she lay motionless on the water. But the inspectors were alert for a trap. Perhaps the men on the *Artful Dodger* had one ready, but the sight of the armed officials caused them to undergo a change of mind.

Just as they ranged alongside, there came a snarl of rage from Malvin as his eyes lighted on Ralph. Beside himself with fury, he sprang at the lad with the ferocity of a tiger.

"Confound you!" he roared. "You are to blame for all this!"

Ralph caught the fellow by the wrist as Malvin aimed a vicious blow at him with an oar. The next instant there was a splash and Malvin was overboard. There was not much fight left in him when they fished him out.

In the meantime La Rue had been detected in the act of attempting to conceal a leather wallet. The chief inspector wrenched it from him, and it was found to contain the gems all intact.

Rawson submitted to arrest more quietly than had been expected, as did the redoubtable Slim.

On the way to the *River Swallow*, with the *Artful Dodger* in tow, Malvin admitted having stolen the old man's boat while he and Ralph were at breakfast, and said that it could be found on Windmill Island.

"Now, if I only had my boy back, I should be happy," sighed the old man, as he heard of the safety of his beloved skiff.

"You'd better tell him, La Rue," said Malvin, to his sullen comrade.

"Well, if you want to know," said La Rue, after a pause, "your precious grandson is in the Mercy Hospital in Cardinal."

"In the hospital?" gasped the old man. "Jimmie?"

"Yes. Those brats on their *River Swallow* can tell you how he came there. As for me, all I know about the little whelp is that he was blown ashore on the island one night in a storm. He sought shelter in the windmill tower and overheard us while we were discussing our plans. It did not suit our policy to let him go and blab all he knew to the outside world, so we kept him there until that explosion resulted in Stetson and the other pups taking him away."

"Oh, thank heaven, Jimmie is found!" exclaimed the old man.

"I guess you won't enjoy each other's company long," sneered Rawson. "The kid's going to die."

But Jimmie didn't die. In fact he soon recovered, and is now in the employ of Mr. Stetson. The railroad king arrived home from Montreal in time to see the rascals who had placed him in such an embarrassing dilemma in Montreal, arraigned in the police court at Piquetville and held for the United States authorities. All received terms in the Federal prison and took their sentences according to their dispositions. Hansen was never heard of again, and as he was only a pawn in the great gem smuggling game, he was not sought after.

Mr. Stetson received a handsome apology from the Canadian government for its embarrassing mistake. He has had it framed, and it hangs in his library, where he shows it to visitors as a great joke. Naturally, this leads to a recital of the part that Ralph and his chums played in breaking up the gem smuggling gang on the Canadian line.

Old man Whey is happy on his island, and Mr. Stetson has seen to it that he has everything he desires. Windmill Island was purchased by a wealthy New Yorker not long after the events we have described, and turned into a handsome summer home. The old tower, the scene of so many lawless scenes, is now a lighthouse, and thus good has come out of evil.

The Border Boys have once more proved their right to the title by the stirring times in which they participated along the Canadian frontier. It is not likely that they will ever forget a single detail of their experiences on the mighty St. Lawrence. Harry no longer believes in the supernatural. That night when the gang met its fate laid the "ghost" of superstition for once and all in his mind.

And now, having brought our tale to a conclusion, we will bid God-speed to the Border Boys. Wishing them well in all they may undertake in the future, and a happy issue to all the adventures which such enterprising young spirits are likely to encounter, we will bring this latest volume of their experiences to a close.

THE END.

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