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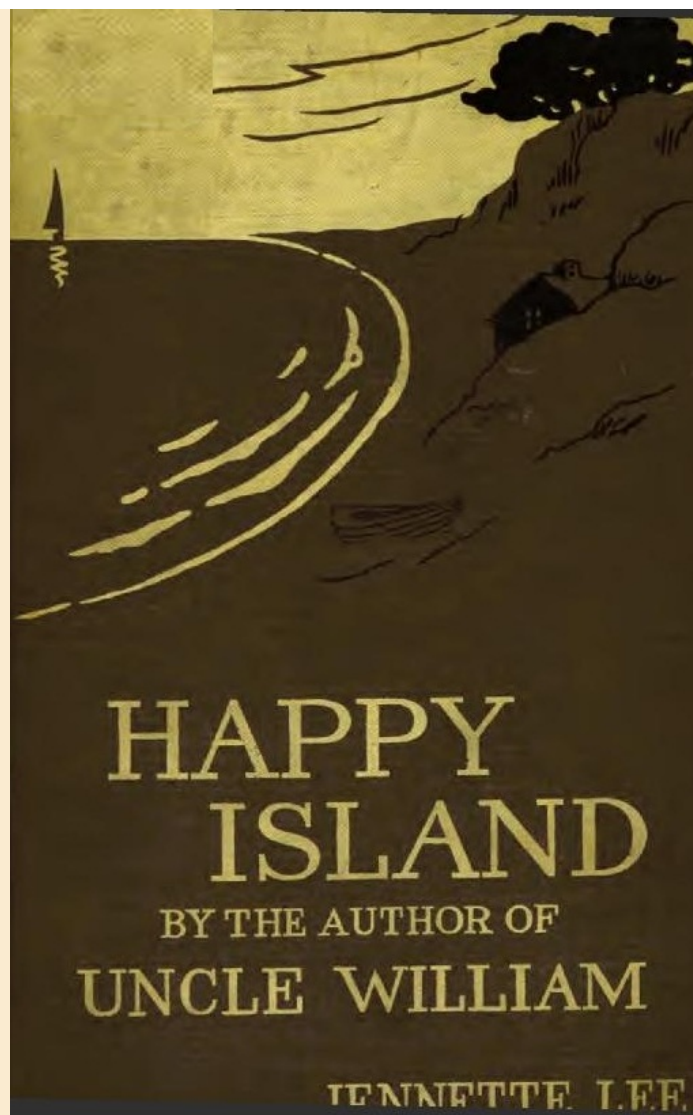
HAPPY ISLAND

A New "Uncle William" Story

By Jennette Lee

New York The Century Co.

1911





Happy Island

A new “Uncle William” story

By
Jennette Lee



TO

GERALD STANLEY LEE

"To make the young world move—He has eyes,
And ears, and he can read the sun....

In tune with all the children who laugh best
And longest through the sunshine, though far off
Their laughter, and unheard."

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HAPPY ISLAND

I

THE sunlight got in Uncle William's eyes. He looked up from the map spread on the table before him. Then he got up slowly and crossed to the window and drew down the turkey-red curtain—a deep glow filled the room. Juno, on the lounge, stirred a little and stretched her daws, and drew them in and tucked her head behind them and went on sleeping.

Uncle William returned to his map. His big finger found a dotted line and followed it slowly up the table with little mumbles of words.... The room was very still—only the faintest whisper of a breeze came across the harbor—and Uncle William's head bent over the map and traveled with his finger.... "They 'd run in here, like enough, and..."

A shadow crossed the curtain and he looked up.

Andy was in the doorway, grinning—a bunch of lobsters dangling from his hand, stretching frantic green legs into space. Andy looked down at them.

Uncle William shook his head. "You 'll get into trouble, Andy, carryin' 'em that way, right in broad daylight—you can put 'em out there under the bucket—so 's 't the sun won't hit 'em."

Andy departed and the scraping of the bucket on the hard rock came cautiously in the window.... Juno lifted her ear and flicked it and went on dreaming. Uncle William returned to the map.

"What you huntin' up?" asked Andy. He was looking in the window.

"D you put a stone on top the bucket?"

"Yep—What you lookin' for?" asked Andy.

"I was just seein' where they 'd got to.... They must be up along Battle Harbor way, by this time—"

"You heard from 'em?" said Andy. He came in and sat down.

"We've had a letter to-day—me and Benjy—"

"Where's *he* gone?" asked Andy.

"He's up to *his* place—seein' about some plans they're makin'—they bother him quite a consid'abul."

Andy's face showed no concern. "They goin' to begin working next week?" he said.

Uncle William pushed back the map a little and took off his spectacles.... "They don't just seem to know," he said slowly, "Benjy wants it one way, and the man that's doin' it—Ordway—he says it can't be done—so they're kind o' stuck. *I* wish he 'd have George Manning." Uncle William's face expanded. "George 'd do it—and do it for him good. You see, Benjy, he wants—"

"He 'll want money," said Andy shortly—"unless he looks out—keeping that contractor and fussing about whether they 'll have the roof two inches up or two inches down—or some such matter as that—and Harr'et feedin' the contractor and getting board money right along whether he works or don't work."

"I guess I'll do the lobsters for supper," said Uncle William. "Benjy likes 'em." He stirred about, gathering a few bits of kindling and paper and striking a careful match.

Andy watched him with gloomy eye while he dived under the sink and brought out a large kettle.

Uncle William lifted the tea kettle a little and drew it forward. "Most full," he said contentedly. "That's good—and it ain't fairly cooled off since dinner—I didn't wash any dishes this noon, you see."

Andy's eye roamed about the room.

"They're tucked under the sink," said Uncle William, "I don't like 'em clutterin' round. I can't seem to set so easy if I see 'em." He opened the sink door and peered in. "I guess there's about enough left for a meal—You goin' to stay—?" He looked back hopefully over his shoulder.

Andy wriggled a little and looked at the door. "I didn't say nothin' to Harr'et," he said feebly.

"Well, I guess you better stay—" said Uncle William, "You don't get a chance to eat lobsters every day."

"I don't get 'em any day," said Andy gloomily, "She won't cook 'em for me—and she says she won't have 'em scrawling round."

Uncle William looked at him sympathetically. "Now, that's too bad—it's just come on, ain't it?"

Andy nodded. "She says it's the law and she's going to keep it, and we hain't had tip nor claw for much as a week now."

"My... my!" Uncle William's tongue clicked in sympathy. "Well, you stay right where you be, Andy, and we 'll have one good meal." He brought in the lobsters. "Seem's if women keep the law a little harder 'n men—when they *do* keep it," he said thoughtfully, swashing the lobsters happily down into the kettle.

Andy nodded. "She got scared 'bout the fish-warden last week. She says we can't pay no three hundred dollars for lobsters—and I do' 'no's we can." His eye was on the steam that rose genially about the lid of the kettle.

"Well, there won't be any three hundred this time," said Uncle William, "—not without the fish-warden's legs are longer 'n my spy-glass. Seems kind o' mean business—being a warden," he added kindly.

"I don't mind his bein' a warden," said Andy, "if they 'd let us have Jim Doshy. We 'd got used to him—knew his ways, and he gen 'lly sent us, word anyhow—day or two beforehand—But this one—" He looked at Uncle William with reproachful eye. "The' wa 'n't one of us ready for him when he come."

Uncle William nodded. "I know—lively work wa 'n't it?"

Andy grinned. "Lively—they was flyin' round like hens with their heads off—dumpin' 'em out and scratchin' 'em under and getting things shipshape." He grinned again. "I wa 'n't to home, you know—I'd gone off the Point—to haul a mess for dinner, and Harr'et had to run a mile in the hot sun to yell at me to dump 'em out." He drew a long breath as he heaved the lobsters overboard and righted himself.

"Now, that ain't right," said Uncle William, "making Harr'et run in the hot sun like that—all for them little squirming things,—and 'tain't reasonable. We ought to know how many lobsters we o't to eat—much as any fish-warden. Ain't they *our* lobsters?" He shoved up his glasses and looked at Andy kindly.

Andy's eye was on the kettle. "You think they're most done?" he said.

Uncle William took off the lid and peered in. The steam rose about his big head like a halo and rolled away in light whiffs. Down on the beach they could hear the washing of the little waves as the tide came up. Uncle William's face looked out of the steam, like a happy moon. "Just about—" he said, "You run and see if Benjy's anywhere in sight." He lifted the kettle and Andy got up stiffly and went to the door.

"I don't see him nowheres," he said indifferently.

"You can't see him there, Andy. You got to go round the corner." Uncle William carried the kettle to the sink and Andy departed, reluctant—When he returned the lobsters were on the middle of the table, red and steaming, with their little white clouds over them. The map had been hung on the wall and the table was scantily set—"There's one spoon apiece," said Uncle William cheerfully, "—though I do 'no's we need spoons. I'm going to have a real good washin' up after dinner—'D you see him, Andy?"

"He's comin'," replied Andy—"up the road a piece."

"He 'll be right along then," said Uncle William, "—if he don't meet somebody—that wants to advise him 'bout his house. I'd come home round by the lots, if I was him, I tell him. It's further—but he 'd get here quicker. You sure 't was him?"

"The' ain't anybody else got that kind o' high-stepping walk, has the'." said Andy scornfully.

"I do 'no 's the' has," said Uncle William. "You draw right up, Andy. He 'll be here any minute now."

II

BENJAMIN BODET stood in the doorway and looked in. He was tall and thin and distinguished—in spite of his rough suit and slouch hat and the week's growth of beard on his thin cheeks and pointed chin. His eye fell on the steaming red mound in the center of the table and his face lighted. "Lobsters!" he said.

Uncle William, who had been watching him, chuckled a little. "Andy's lobsters," he said politely.

Andy shuffled in his chair. "They're your claws, William—they're on your premises—"

"Yes, yes," said Uncle William soothingly, "I know 'bout that. You just eat all you want and I'll pay the bill—when it comes in. You all ready, Benjy?"

"All ready—and hungry for anything you've got—especially lobster."

They drew up to the table and reached out to the red pile—breaking it down slowly.... Juno, from her lounge, came across and rubbed against Uncle William's big leg. Then she sat up. When Uncle William's hand reached down with casual motion, and a hard, red morsel, she snuffed at it daintily before her teeth opened on it. Then she bent her head and growled a little, and crouched over it, crushing it under her paw and moving her tail in swift, restrained joy... to eat was good—but to hold it—there under her paw—caught fast—and growl a little.... Up above Uncle William rumbled on—about the weather and fishing and house building and lobsters.... Presently he reached up and took down a spy-glass and went to the window. The red curtain was up and the sun came in with soft, side slants. Down below, the water of the harbor slowly filled with dusk and reached away. Uncle William looked out across it toward the west.

"I've been kind o' watching her," he said, "for some time—I guess she's goin' by."

Benjamin Bodet came and stood beside him, looking out.

Uncle William glanced at him affectionately as he handed him the glass. He was not quite used—even yet—to having Benjy around. Sometimes he waked in the night and remembered Benjy was there—before he heard the sound of the waves on the beach or the wind coming across the moor behind the house.... This sometimes gave him a feeling that perhaps it might be heaven instead of Arichat... and it kept him from getting used to Benjy's presence in the house.

Andy, from his seat at the table, looked at them with grudging eye. "You see anything?" he said.

"She's running by," said Uncle William. He came and sat down and looked contentedly at the untidy table. "That was a pretty good meal, Andy."

Andy nodded, without enthusiasm. "The last one I'll have this season—like as not," he said.

"Oh, you bring 'em up here any time and we 'll help you out, Benjy and me." The tall man had come back from the window and he smiled down at them. "I'll do *my* share," he said.

Uncle William looked at him, as if fearing a little that he might vanish in his thinness. "You set down, Benjy," he said, "I'm going to clear the table and then we 'll get down the map—"

"Have you heard—?" asked the man quickly.

"It come today—while you was gone, and it's to both of us," said Uncle William.

He held the pan of red shells in his hand, looking at it doubtfully. Juno, with her back to the stove, licked her paw and rubbed it down her nose and rubbed again—and licked it and rubbed again—in gentle rhythm.

Uncle William glanced at her with benignant eye. "She does set store by lobster," he said, "much as anybody I ever see. I guess I'll save 'em for her." He moved toward the sink.

Andy's eye followed him with disapproving glance. "I'd heave 'em out," he said.

"Don't you worry, Andy, I'm goin' to put 'em under the sink—way back. The' won't no fish-warden get 'em in there. It's much's I can do to find things myself—when they get under here—" He emerged from the depths with serene face. "I see some things in there now, I've been looking for quite a spell. Tomorrow I'm going to have a real good clarin'-up time—You see!"

"I wanted you to go up to my place tomorrow," said Bodet whimsically. "I thought perhaps you could work that contractor around to let me have my house the way I want it."

"Well, I'll go if you want me to," said Uncle William placidly, "The dishes can wait a spell—some of 'em can wait," he added, with a touch of conscience.

Benjamin smiled. "You might do them before we go."

"And you could wipe," said Uncle William cheerfully.

Benjamin's face was perhaps a trifle less glowing than Uncle William's, but his assent was cheerful. "All right, William, I'll do my part—You help me with that contractor and I'll wipe dishes for you—all day, if you say so."

Uncle William regarded him thoughtfully. "You ought to have George Manning to help you about your house, Benjy. He could do it for you—nice."

"Manning?" Bodet looked at him with lifted eyebrows—"You mean that boy—?"

"He ain't a boy exactly, Benjy. He looks kind o' young—not having any whiskers, and chewing a piece of grass the way he does when he's thinking. But he's old enough. He's built a good many houses on the Island, fust and last—much as eighteen or twenty, I should think, counting barns—and hen-coops and fish-houses."

Bodet smiled. "My house isn't a hencoop, William."

"I know, Benjy—it's going to be a nice house—when you get it started," said William.

Bodet sighed and threw out an impatient hand.

Uncle William looked at him sympathetically. "Does bother ye a good deal, don't it?—You might *talk* with George about it," he added hopefully, "'Twon't hurt any to talk to him—he's chuck full of ideas. He's about the best man we've got on the Island, I guess," he added slowly. "The' ain't but one thing wrong about George."

"What's wrong with him!" asked Bodet with a little, skeptical smile.

"He ain't married," said Uncle William.

Bodet laughed out. "Neither are you, William."

"No, I ain't married and you ain't married. But that's different—we're old men."

"Just tottering around," laughed Bodet.

"It ain't the tottering, Benjy—It's the hevin' had your chance—and lost it.... That's what's happened to us." He was looking at him with affectionate eyes, over the big spectacles.

Bodet nodded. "That's what's happened to us. And George Manning, I suppose—"

"George never *had* a chance," said Uncle William thoughtfully.... "I don't mean that nobody would 'a' had him. I guess the' ain't a girl on the Island but what's set her cap for George, one time or another—set it kind o' modest, you know. But George don't see 'em. He just goes around looking at the sky and things—kind o' thinkin' in his mind—might bump right up against a girl and not know she was there—" Uncle William chuckled. "I've talked to him about 'em," he added conscientiously—"I've told him, a good many times, how interestin' they be—but it don't seem to do any good." Uncle William sighed a little.

Bodet stood up, shaking himself. "Did you say there was a letter—?" he suggested.

Uncle William blinked a little and took it from his pocket, regarding it fondly. "You read it," he said, "whilst I get down the map."

Andy watched him, a little morosely, as he mounted a chair and reached for the map on its nail—"When you two going to get a girl!" he said.

Uncle William looked down at him with open mouth. "Now that's an idea!" he said slowly.

"What's an idea?" asked Andy.

Uncle William's mouth closed firmly. "Nothin'—I didn't mean nothin', I guess. I was just a-thinking." He chuckled softly. "We've got a girl," he added kindly. "We heard from her yesterday." He reached again to the map.

"When's she coming?" demanded Andy.

"Well—?" Uncle William climbed slowly from the chair with his map, "She can't *come*—exactly—"

Andy stared at him. "Then you ain't got her, Willum—"

"Oh, yes, we've got her—and she wants to come—worst way. She's the one I told you about—down to New York?" He looked at Andy over his spec-tades. "She's a nice girl," he added. His face held a deep glow. "'Bout the nicest girl you ever see, I reckon."

"I don't know her," said Andy coldly. "Well, mebbe you forget—But I remember well enough telling you about her one day—down to your house—when Harr'et had gone fox-berrying—and you and me was there alone, and we was makin'—"

"Like enough I do remember," said Andy hastily.

"That's the one," said Uncle William, "the one I kind o' helped to get home from New York—and she 'd come—any day—if there was a place to sleep. Benjy's in the other room and I'm in this one—and the' ain't any

other—" His forehead wrinkled at the problem. "She's got to come—and she's got to hev a place," he said with decision.

"She could sleep down to my house," said Andy.

"Why, so she could—She could sleep down to his house, Benjy," said Uncle William.

The tall man swung his glasses from his nose and looked at them—first one and then the other. Then a smile came into his face. "The Lord bless you, Andy," he said, "I think I had come about to the end of my dish-washing powers—"

"All you've done, was wipe 'em, Benjy," said Uncle William anxiously.

"I know, William—and it's all right—and I *liked* it!"

"You 'd pay a little suthin'," suggested Andy.

"Oh, anything reasonable," responded the tall man. "Now let's see the map."

III

THEY bent over the table, following Uncle William's finger. The room was filled with light smoke from Uncle William's pipe and the cigarette that Bodet held in his fingers and whiffed from time to time. The dusk outside crept in and mingled with the smoke.

"It's along up here somewheres...." said Uncle William, peering at the map—"Here—! Here it is!" He glued his finger to a tiny spot—"They stopped here, they said—off St. Pierre, and then run along up through Placentia Bay and stopped off two-three times, and back to St. Mary's—kind o' edgin' along—They struck a squall here—off Lance Point—and that kep' 'em back a spell—"

"The boat's all right!" said Bodet quickly.

"Oh, she's all right, I guess. They didn't say nothin' about the boat. They was writin' about the scenery and about their feelings, and so on; but I managed to make out their course—puttin' this and that together. Your boat's all right, Benjy. She 'll stand any weather they 'll get this time o' year."

"Yes—she 'll stand it—with good handling—"

"Well, you've got a captain knows his business.... They 'll bring her 'round to your back door some day, safe and sound.... You ain't worryin' to have 'em back, Benjy?"

The other shook his head. "Not a bit—I'm contented here." He gave a little puff to the cigarette and wrinkled his eyes, smiling across the map and dreaming a little.

Uncle William's eyes were on his face, kindly and glad. The pipe in his lips gave out a gentle volume of smoke and rumbled a little down below—"You can't find a much better place 'n this is, can you?" He moved his hand toward the window where the dusk was coming in... and across the harbor where the lights glowed faintly—like stars.

Benjy's eye rested on them. "Best place in the world," he said.

"We all like it," said Uncle William, "Andy likes it, too—"

The green in Andy's eye retreated a little—"I'd like to see some of them other places," he said.... "Now, that," he shoved his finger at a point on the map—"That's the farthest north I ever went." Uncle William bent to it.... "Dead Man's Point." He chuckled a little. "'Tis kind o' rough, Andy, ain't it!"

"I've started times enough," said Andy—"once for Labrador and once in a whaler 'twas going way up—they said. Seem's if we always got stuck or got a cargo—or suthin'—before we're fairly under way—and had to turn around and come back."

Uncle William nodded. "You've had a hard time, Andy—and I do' 'no's I'd risk taking you along *myself*—not if I wanted to get anywhere."

Andy grinned. "You've been," he said. "You don't care."

Uncle William's eye swept the map and he laid his great hand on it affectionately, spreading the fingers wide. "It does feel good to think you've seen it," he said, "But I'd rather be right here with you and Benjy a-traveling *this* way—after them young things, that don't know where they're sailing or what kind of waters they're comin' to—and not trusting the Lord even—not fairly trustin' him, so to speak—just kind o' thinkin' of him as suthin' to fall back on if a storm comes up—a real hard one—kind of a tornado like."

"She's a good boat," said the tall man.

"She's all right, Benjy—and they're nice children," responded Uncle William, "and I hope they won't hurry a mite about getting round the earth.... The rate they're goin' now—when they wrote—I reckon it 'll take just about twenty-five years," he said reflectively.... "They don't say how far North they plan to make, but I kind o' reckon they 'll cut across from here—from Battle Harbor to Disco, and then skirt along down the Cape, and up,"... His finger followed the course with slow touch and the smoke curled about his head with deep, contemplative puffs. His eye ran back over the course and lingered on a bit of clear water to the North. "It does seem a pity not to go up there—when they're so near," he said regretfully, "and best kind of weather, too."... His eye grew dreamy—"It was along '71, I sailed there—along with Captain Hall—You know that last voyage of his? We had one eye on whales and one on the Pole, I reckon... and the Polaris, she edged and edged, up and up. Some days I didn't know but she *would* strike the Pole—run smack into it.... We 'd got up here through the Strait and up Smith's Sound... and on beyond—the farthest of anybody't that time—and Captain Hall, he was for pushing on—and all of 'em, except Buddington—he was sailing master and that slow,

cautious kind—no sort o' timber to go after the North Pole with—but he said we 'd winter right there—'twas somewheres along in August then—and we run back a little to a good place—and that's where it got its name now, 'Polaris Bay'—we was the ones that named it." Uncle William looked at it, with the pride of possession, and rubbed his finger on it. "Well, we stayed there.... But Captain Hall—you couldn't hold him still, and he was all the time sledgin' off, one way and another—to see what the earth was doin' up that way—and it run along into October—the last of the month—It all seems like yesterday," said Uncle William slowly.... "I was a young fellow, you see—not more 'n twenty-two-three, and I'd left Jennie down here, and gone up there—so's to make money faster."—His eye traveled about the red room... and came back to the map... "and there we was, settin' down up there—waitin' for winter and not a whale in sight—and then, all of a sudden, before you could say Jack Robinson—Captain Hall died.... There was whisperin's around among the crew about the way he was took and the Navy went into it later—but nothin' was proved... and Captain Buddington wa' n't the kind of man you could stand up to—captain or sailin' master, or what, he 'd have his way... and we stayed there best part of a year. Then he said we was goin' home—I remember,'. if it was yesterday, the day we got wind what he was plannin' for. I'd been out off from the boat all day.... and when I came in George Pelman, he whispered to me we was goin' home—and then, all in a minute, out there in the snow, I see Jennie's face looking to me and smilin', and my eyes kind o' blurred—with the snow and all that—and that was the last time I see her—" said Uncle William slowly. "She died that winter.... When we got home, along in the spring, they told me she had waited—seems 's if she kind o' *made* her body wait till I'd come—They said it was like her spirit died out, faint, till it just wa' n't there.... So that's the way I come to be here alone... and it seemed pretty good when Benjy come back so, one day, all out o' nothin'—and there he was standin' in that door...."

The tall man went to the window and stood with his back to the room looking out. When he turned about, his eyes were shining—like the lights across the water. "It was like getting home," he said.

"Yes,'.was home," said Uncle William contentedly. "Of course, any place where you happen to be is home,—but if there's somebody there waitin' for ye and needin' ye, it's more homier than any of 'em." Andy got slowly to his feet. "Harr'et's waitin' for me," he said, "and I might's well go—" He cast a lingering look at the table. "You boys going to sit up all night, talking and gabbling!"

"Why, no, Andy. I do 'no 's we 'll light up," responded Uncle William. "I was thinkin' of going down to look after the boats a little and then we 'll go to bed—like enough."

"Well, good night," said Andy, "I've got to go,"

"Good night, Andy." They sat listening to his footfalls on the rocky path below. "He's a good boy," said Uncle William. "He 'll stan' a lot—without whimpering—but he don't know it—no more 'n that cat there."

Juno rose and stretched her back, yawning. Then she walked indifferently to the door and passed out—as if a summons had come to her from the night out there.

IV

UNCLE WILLIAM finished the last saucepan and carried it, with careful flourish, to the stove, where the top was piled high with pots and kettles. He found a place for the saucepan and deposited it with cautious touch. Then he stood back and surveyed the topply pile with hopeful eye.

Benjamin, seated on a rock outside, was whistling softly. "You most ready, William," he called.

Uncle William glanced hastily toward the window, then his glance traveled about the room. "Pretty near, Benjy," he said. "You wait a minute whilst I chuck two-three more things out o' sight."

Benjamin rose and stretched his long legs. The sun shone brilliantly and the salt air was alive with the freshness of summer. He strolled to the window and looked in.... Uncle William, on his knees by the red lounge, was poking things under with swift, efficient touch.

He looked up and nodded. "Don't you wait, Benjy. I'm most done. The's just two-three things got strayed around—" He gathered up a plate and saucer, with the remnants of Juno's supper, and carried them across to the sink. He opened the cupboard door underneath and thrust them in.... "The's a *few* things left," he said apologetically, "if I raked way in under for 'em, mebbe. But we've got enough to run along—quite a spell now." He glanced affectionately at the stove and the rows of shining cups and plates ranged on the shelf above the sink.

Benjamin's eye followed the glance with a touch of amusement and a little impatience, "Oh, come on, William. You 'd let things run a week and then you 'd scrub all day—"

Uncle William's face beamed. "That's right, Benjy. That's just the way I like it—now, how 'd you know!"

"Well, I have eyes," said Benjamin dryly, "and I've been living with you a month or so, you know."

"That's so, Benjy—and don't it seem good!" Uncle William came to the window and patted the thin hand resting on the sill. "I'm coming right along, now, soon's I get my apron off—" His fingers tugged at the strings of the big oil cloth pattern that encompassed him.

Benjamin's eye waited, impatient—"You 'll get rid of all that fuss when the new girl comes," he said.

Uncle William's mouth opened and looked at him. Then it closed and Uncle William shook his head. "I'd clean forgot her," he said slowly, "and if I don't send her word today, she can't come for two weeks—nor four, mebbe. The boats don't run right." He reached up to the clock for the pen and bottle of ink that stood there.

Benjamin moved with restless indecision and Uncle William glanced at him. "You run along, Benjy," he said kindly, "That contractor 'll be waiting for you—"

"He's *been* waiting," said Benjy quickly, "—an hour at least."

"Yes, yes—I know. Don't you wait—" Uncle William's eye was on the paper and he was mumbling words to the ink bottle.... "I'll be—right along—Benjy—sometime—"

The tall man turned from the window and strode over the rocks.

Uncle William's face smoothed to its genial smile as the steps died away. His fingers traced big, comfortable words on the paper and his head nodded in a kind of cheerful, all-round assent while he wrote. The clock struck ten and he looked up, blinking a little. His eyes strayed to the window and he looked out. Then he got up and went across. After a minute he took down the spy-glass and fixed it on a distant point. His face radiated in little wrinkles of interest. "I do' 'no's I ever see Andy run like that—and cross-lots, too—Harr'et wants suthin'—bad—like enough.... My—my! He hadn't ought to run like that!"... He bent from the window. "Hello, Andy!—what you runnin' for?"

Andy halted, panting—"He's *come!*" he said. The words sank to a whisper and he wheeled about, glaring at a man who was coming up the path from the shore, trundling a bicycle before him. He was a young man, with keen, quick glance and a look of determination. He glanced indifferently at Andy and rapped sharply on the side of the door.

Uncle William came across with easy gait. "Good morning," he said—looking down from his height...

"You're the owner of this house!" said the young man.

Uncle William's eye traversed it kindly, "I reckon it belongs to me—yet awhile. Will you come in—sir!" The figure towered still higher and Uncle William's presence exhaled dignity and welcome.

The young man stepped over the sill. Andy followed sulkily.

"Sit down, sir." Uncle William's hand motioned to the red lounge.

The stranger crossed and sat down, holding his hat in his hand and glancing with quick eye about the little room.

Uncle William sat down opposite him, a hand on either knee, and looked at him over large spectacles.

"I'm the new fish-warden," said the young man—as if he answered a polite question.

"I kind o' reckoned you might be a fish-warden, or something like that," said Uncle William. "I'm glad to see you."

The young man smiled a little. "You're the first one that's glad, I guess—" The quick look had relaxed a little in his face. The warm, sunny room seemed to reach out and surround him.

Juno, from her place on the lounge, leaped down and walked with deliberate step across the room. She seated herself in the sunshine, with her back to the company, and looked steadily into space.

Uncle William's eye rested on her kindly.

"I'm looking for lobsters," said the young man.

Uncle William nodded. "It's a poor time of year for 'em," he said, "—close season, so."

The man's eyebrows lifted a little.

"I didn't get your name, sir," added Uncle William, leaning forward.

"My name is Mason," said the young man.

"I'm glad to meet you, sir," said Uncle William. He came across and held out a big hand. "My name is Benslow—William Benslow."

The young man took the hand, a little dazed, it might seem. "I knew it was Benslow," he said, "I inquired before I came up—down in the village."

"Now, did ye? That was kind in you!" Uncle William beamed on him and sat down. "I ain't ever had the fish-warden up here," he said thoughtfully—"not as I can remember. I'm real glad to see you."

The young man nodded stiffly—a little color had come into his face—as if he did not propose to be tampered with.

"I've thought a good deal about fish-wardens," went on Uncle William comfortably, crossing his legs, "when I've been out sailing and lobstering and so on—'Seems's if it must be kind o' unpleasant business—knowing likely enough folks don't want to see you come sailin' into a harbor—night or day."

The young man turned a little in his place, looking at him curiously.

"—And kind o' havin' to brace yourself," went on Uncle William, "to do your duty—feelin', I suppose, as if there was spears always reachin' out from the shore and pinting at ye—to keep you off—sort of?"

The young man stirred uneasily. "I don't know that I ever thought about it that way," he said.

"Like enough you didn't," said Uncle

William, "I do' 'no 's I'd 'a' thought of it myself—only I'm al'ays kind o' possessed to know how folks feel inside—other folks, you know—and one day, as I was comin' in from lobsterin', I says to myself—'Supposin', instead o' bringing in these lobsters, nice and comfortable, I was a fish-warden, a-sailin' in to catch somebody, there on the shore'—and then, all of a sudden, I seemed to see them spears, hundreds of 'em, pointin' right at me, kind of circle-like, from the shore. There was a minute in that boat when I wouldn't 'a' known whether it was you or me, and it felt uncomfortable—real uncomfortable," said Uncle William.

Andy's face held a wide, half-scared grin.

The young man looked at Uncle William curiously. "I could imagine things like that—if I wanted to," he said dryly.

Uncle William nodded. "I don't doubt you could—a good deal better. But I wouldn't if I was you."

"I don't intend to," said the young man. He half rose from his seat.

"It's cur'us, ain't it," said Uncle William, "Now, I suppose you've got a family—a wife, like enough, and children—"

The young man's hand sought an inside pocket, as if by instinct. Then it dropped to his side.

Uncle William smiled and chuckled a little. "Now, I never thought you 'd have pictures of 'em with you. But why shouldn't yet Why shouldn't a fish-warden hev pictures of his wife and babies, same as other folks?" He had turned to Andy, and sat, with spectacles pushed up on his forehead, looking at him inquiringly.

"I do' 'no' why he shouldn't," said Andy feebly—but not as if convinced.

"Of course you 'd have 'em," said Uncle William, turning 'to the young man, "And I like you all the better for it. I'd taken a liking to you anyhow—before that."

The face opposite him was non-committal. But there was a look of firmness about the chin.

"I'd like to see 'em," said Uncle William, "if you wouldn't mind my seein' 'em." The tone was full of interest and kindly hope.

The young man took out a small leather case and handed it to him, without speaking.

Uncle William received it in his big, careful fingers, and adjusted his glasses before he bent to it.

Andy sat silent, with grudging, watchful eye, and the young man let his glance wander about the room. Juno, seated in the sunshine, blinked a little. Then she rose and moved toward the cupboard door and snuffed the crack. She seated herself beside it, turning a reproachful, indifferent eye in Uncle William's direction.

Andy, from across the room, glared at her.

The young man's eye had followed her with half-cynical smile.

Uncle William looked up from the leather case and pushed up his glasses. "You've got a good wife, Mr. Mason."

"I know about it," said the young man quietly. He stood up, holding out his hand for the case. Uncle William beamed helplessly at the baby—handing it back.

The young man replaced the case in his pocket without comment, but the comers of his smile softened a little—as if in spite of judgment.

"Well, now, you want to look round a little, don't ye?" said Uncle William, standing up, "'Seems a pity to hev to—things are kind of cluttered up so—if I'd known you was comin' I'd 'a' had 'em fixed up."

The young man's face broke a little. "I don't doubt it," he said.

Uncle William chuckled. "You're used to havin' 'em fixed up for you, I suppose?—Well—let's see. I'll tell you the best places to look.... The's under the sink—"

Andy's chair scraped the floor with sudden sound.

Uncle William looked at him mildly. "The's under the sink," he repeated firmly, "and under the lounge and under the bed and up chimbley and down cellar... but they're all kind o' hard places to get to.... That's another thing I never thought of, about being a fish-warden—havin' to scooch so much."

"Never mind that," said the young man, and there was a little impatient flick to the words, "I'll begin wherever you say—"

"Why, I don't mind," said Uncle William kindly. "If I was advising you, I should say, 'Don't look *anywheres*.'rdquo;

Juno moved over and rubbed against Uncle William's leg. Then she returned to her seat by the cupboard and lifted her lip in a silent miaouw.

"Bye-by, Juno," said Uncle William cheerfully. "She's hungry, like enough," he said, turning to the fish-warden.

But the man had stooped and was lifting the cover of the red lounge.

"It's a dreadful clutter," said Uncle William aside to Andy, "'Seems's if I hadn't o't to let him see it looking like that—"

"You 'd better wring *her* neck," said Andy between his set teeth.

"Why, Andy!—You don't find anything there, Mr. Mason?" said Uncle William.

The man emerged with red face. "I didn't expect to," he said—"But it's my business to look—"

"Yes, it's your *business*. That's what I was sayin' to myself when I was out sailin'—"

"I'll take the bedroom next," said the man shortly.

They disappeared in the next room and the murmur of their voices, with the moving of a heavy chest and the stir of papers, came out.

Andy cast a vicious eye at Juno. He half rose and took a step on tiptoe. But the bedroom door opened again and he sat down.

"I haven't hauled a trap—nor set one—since the season closed," said Uncle William's voice.

"That's all right, Mr. Benslow. But I have reason to think.... I'd better make a thorough search—since I am here," he finished quietly.

"You search all you want to," said Uncle William cordially—"Get away, Juno." He pushed her aside with his foot. "This is my sink cupboard," he opened the door hospitably. "Lucky I washed some of the dishes this morning," he said, "You *would* 'a' had a time if I hadn't!" The man reached in and drew out a pile of plates. His nose lifted itself as he set them down and reached in again. He emerged with a quiet look in his face—"I shall have to trouble you to take out all the things in that cupboard," he said with a motion of his hand.

Uncle William's face had dropped a little. "I most knew you 'd want me to do that," he said, "I o' 't to 'a' done it, this morning, before you came."

The man laughed out. "That's all right, Mr. Benslow. I don't mind your bluffing—as long as you play fair. But that cupboard is a give-away, dead easy."

Uncle William sighed a little. "I wish had my clam-rake," he said.

The man stared at him—

"I gen'ally use my clam-rake to haul 'em out," explained Uncle William kindly. "I can shove 'em in with the broom or a stick of wood or most anything, but it's kind o' hard gettin' 'em out—specially for a big man like

me—" He reached in and drew out an ample armful—dippers and pans and plates and spoons and bowls—then another armful—mostly tinware and kettles—and then a third—spreading them on the floor about him with lavish hand. Now and then he stopped to exclaim over some lost treasure as it came to light. If doom must come, Uncle William did not propose to meet it more than half way nor with gloomy countenance.

The fish-warden watched him with his little cynical smile, and Andy hitched uneasily in his chair.

"There—" Uncle William drew a breath and emerged from the cupboard. "That's the last one I can reach—without my rake. *You* get in, Andy. You're smaller 'n I be."

Andy took firm hold of the seat of his chair. "I don't want to, Willum."

"Oh yes, you get right in and fetch 'em out, Andy. I'll hold the candle for ye."

Uncle William lighted a candle and Andy crawled miserably into the depths. His voice came out, gloomy and protesting, as he handed out a few last articles. Then there was a long pause and a sound of scraping on the boards.

Uncle William withdrew the candle.

"He's comin' out," he said.

The fish-warden bent forward, a look of quick interest in his face.

Slowly Andy backed into the room and lifted an awed face. In his hand he held a small monse-trap. "There ain't a durned thing left," he said, "except this." He held it up and looked at it—and blinked. Then he laid it down on the table and looked at it again, fondly—and blinked. A large grin stole into his face. "I put that monse-trap there—time Juno run away," he said—"the time you was down to New York." He had turned to William.

Uncle William was looking at the fish-warden, a kindly smile on his face.

The warden ignored it. "I'll trouble you for that candle," he said, "I'll take a look myself."

Uncle William handed it to him and he held it far into the cupboard, peering at the top and sides and floor. He withdrew it, blowing it out with a quick puff—"You've got off this time," he said, "but that smell ought to convict you—if there was any justice in law."

"Well, I do 'no 's there is," said Uncle William, "do you? It does smell good." He sniffed a little. "'Seems's if they ought to put that in the schedule they send us, 'Any lobsters, claws *or* smells found in the possession of any person whatsoever.'rdquo; Uncle William marked off the count on his fingers with kindly eye and beamed. "You could fine me fifty dollars, or some such matter as that—for that cupboard, I should think." The eyes behind the big spectacles twinkled with good fellowship.

The fish-warden looked at him. Then he looked at the empty cupboard and at Andy and the mouse-trap—He smiled a little. "You might speak to them about the law yourself," he said. "I can testify it ought to be changed."

"We 'd like to speak to 'em," said Uncle William, "—about a good many things. About this lobster-law, now," He motioned toward the mouse-trap, "*We* don't want any such law. *I* ain't a canning factory. We ain't pirates, nor lawbreakers here—"

The young man smiled a little.

"Not without we *have* to be," said Uncle William quickly. "They're *our* lobsters, and mostly we know what's good for 'em—and what's good for us, and if we want to ketch a few and eat, now and then, we don't need no inspector.... Not but what we're always glad to see you," he said. He held out his hand kindly. "I know—by the looks of your wife and babies—you're a good man."

The young man took the big hand, smiling a little. "I'm glad to have met you, Mr. Benslow," he said slowly. He looked at him a minute, as if something in the big face puzzled him. Then he turned away with a little shake of his head. "I shouldn't want to meet you regularly—not if I'm going to keep on being fish-warden," he said.

Uncle William chuckled a little. "Don't you worry, Mr. Mason—there's lots of jobs for them that needs 'em—some of 'em right and some of 'em wrong—and I reckon the main thing is to do what we *hev* to do as well as we can and not worry."

He watched the young man down the rocky path, trundling his wheel beside him. Then he turned back to the red room. He stooped and ran his big hand along Juno's back, as it arched to his touch, smoothing it slowly.

Andy looked at him with sheepish grin. "Where 'd you put 'em, Willum?" he said.

Uncle William glanced out of the window at the dimpling harbor. A little breeze blew across it and the waves darkened and ran. He smiled at them and then at Andy. "I see his lights last night," he said, "along about midnight, off the Point, and I says to myself, 'Least said, soonest mended,' so I took 'em down and heaved 'em. It hurt Juno some—" He smoothed the gray back gently, "But she feels all right about it now, I guess, same as we do."

UNCLE WILLIAM was wondering whether he could leave the frying-pan another day. He had promised Benjy he would come up... the sun was shining and Benjy needed him. He went to the door, with the pan in his hand, and looked out. He took in great sniffs of salt air, looking over his spectacles at the moor and the sky light on the rocks and the stretch of his face was mild and happy, and his look rested casually on a figure that had left the beach and was coming up the rocky path. Presently he leaned forward, waving the frying-pan back and forth. "Morning, George," he called.

The young man came on, with even, swift steps that did not hurry. He held an envelope in his hand. "Letter for you, Uncle," he said.

Uncle William laid down the frying-pan and held out his hand. A mild and benevolent curiosity held the big face. His look welcomed the whole world shut up in the bit of envelope. He took it and studied the inscription and pushed up his spectacles, looking at the young man with satisfaction. "Set down, Georgie," he said—"It's from Celia."

"Who's Celia?" asked the young man. He seated himself on a rock and plucked a stem of grass, taking it in his teeth.

Uncle William looked at him again and settled slowly into the doorway—filling it, with the big, checked apron about him—"You ain't ever seen Celia, I reckon?" he said.

"Don't believe I have," responded

George. He was looking across the harbor, turning the bit of grass between his teeth. His glance sought the envelope again, "Come from around here?" he asked.

Uncle William opened it with slow, careful fingers. "Well, not exactly *round* here." He drew out the sheet and smoothed it on his knee and rubbed his fingers on his apron, and took up the paper, holding it arm's length. "It's somebody 't 's coming to live with us," he explained kindly.

"Oh—?"

Uncle William read on. He laid down the paper and took off his glasses, waving them at the landscape. "Some like a woman!" he said.

George turned and looked behind him.

"I don't mean off there," said Uncle William, "I mean here—what she says," He took up the letter, "She says she can't come yet—not just yet." He mumbled to the words kindly... "It's her clothes," he volunteered, "She's got to get some new ones or fix her old ones, or suthin—I don't just understand what 'tis she's doin'."

"Don't need to, do you!" said the young man. His tone was even, and a little contemptuous.

Uncle William eyed him a minute. "You wa 'n't ever much acquainted with women, was ye, George?"

"I don't know as I was," said the young man. "Too busy, I guess."

"Yes—you al'ays keep a-doin'—same as I do," said Uncle William. "But I've kind o' watched 'em—between times—women. They're interestin'," he added, "—a leetle more interesting 'n men be, I reckon."

A little smile held the face opposite him. "Men are good enough for me," he said.

"You can talk to men—sensible—know what they mean."

"That's it," said Uncle William, "I reckon that's what I like about women—you can't tell *what* they mean—it keeps you guessing, kind of—makes you feel lively in your mind."

"My mind's lively enough without that," said George carelessly. His eye was on the dark water and the little white-caps that rode on it.

"Well, I do 'no'. I like to have a good many things to think about—when I'm settin'," said Uncle William, "and when I'm sailin'. I keep quite a lot of 'em tucked away in my mind somewheres—and fetch 'em out when I have a minute or two, quiet-like, to myself." He touched the letter in his hand, almost reverently, "The's suthin about women 't I can't make out—" he said, "If it's a wedding or a funeral or going away, or whatever 'tis—most the first thing they think about is their clothes—like Celia here—" he touched the letter again.... "Now, that's interestin'—'bout their clothes, ain't it!" He beamed on him.

The young man returned the look tolerantly. "Foolishness," he said.

Uncle William nodded. "I know—foolishness for you and me and Andy—and for Benjy, mebbe. But 'tain't foolishness for women. You can see that, the way they do it. It's kind o' like goin' to church to 'em and they don't really feel right without they're doing it.... It's kind o' pretty to see 'em—al'ays a-makin' and plannin'—and makin' 'em for the little ones 'fore they come—turning 'em over, and showin' 'em to other women, like enough—not sayin' much—just lookin' at 'em."

The young man on the rock stirred uneasily.

Uncle William went on hastily. "I reckon it ain't wrong for Celia to think about getting her clothes ready." He was smiling at the letter. "It's when they *stop* thinkin' about 'em that it's wrong.... Why, it's kind o' awful!" he added severely.

The young man laughed out. Suddenly he stopped and looked at Uncle William. "—Like Andy's wife's!" he said.

"Like Harr'et," assented Uncle William. "Harr'et 'll wear anything—anything 't covers her, that is. She 'd wear sailcloth, I reckon, if 't wa 'n't so hard to sew—old ones, you know, 't was wore out for sailin'. Harr'et wouldn't waste new sails on her.... And that kind o' hard way she has of doin' her hair—like a doughnut—only harder—" Uncle William rubbed the back of his head reflectively. "I do 'no' what 'tis about Harr'et. I al'ays feel's if the woman part of her was gone off somewheres.... It's the woman part 't makes 'em interestin', I reckon. You al'ays kind o' wonder—"

"Andy don't wonder much," said the young man. "He's learned mostly." He was regarding Uncle William curiously and his face had an alert look. "I never thought about women that way before," he said, turning the bit of grass in his teeth. "You make 'em seem interesting, Uncle William—as interesting as a boat—or fishing—or doing arithmetic." He laughed out.

"Celia's letter reads to me 's if she 'd kind o' keep you guessing," said Uncle William, taking it up.

"I've got to be going," said George. He stood up.

"Now, don't you go yet awhile, Georgie." Uncle William got to his feet, looking about him, "The's two-three little things I wanted to ask you about. The ketch to my cupboard door don't work good."

They went into the house and Uncle William tucked the letter behind the clock.

The young man examined the lock and took a file from his pocket and filed the catch a little, whistling softly. His face had a keen, happy look.

Uncle William filled the tea-kettle and put it on and came across and bent over the young man, a hand on either knee. "I al'ays like to watch ye doin' things, George. You do 'em so kind o' neat."

The young man snapped the catch two or three times in the lock—"That 'll work," he said. He got to his feet, slipping the file into his pocket.

"Benjy needs somebody like you up to his place," said Uncle William.

"I thought he 'd got a man from Boston." The tone was non-committal and dry. The young man was looking at the window.

"Well, I guess he's got somebody—He's from Boston—yes. Benjy's a good deal bothered," added Uncle William hopefully.

George shook his head. "I don't want to be building—as long as the fishing suits me."

"Cod—so far," said Uncle William.

"You can 't tell what 'll be along any day now," said the young man. He moved toward the door.

"You think it over, George," said Uncle William—he held up a benignant hand and cut off the answer—"You just think it over. Mebbe he won't need you. But if he does—you 'll hev to help him out, I guess. He's livin' on the Island now, you know, same as the rest of us."

VI

UNCLE WILLIAM and Benjy had been away all day—up at the new house—and Andy's wife had sent dinner to them.... They came home in the dusk, hungry and tired. "Harr'et's cooking 'do 't to be e't hot," said Uncle William. He looked up at his own house. "Hello! somebody's visitin' us."

Benjy's eye lighted. A glow from the red room shone in the dusk. "It's the new girl," he said. They quickened their pace a little.

Uncle William went ahead and opened the door. The little room was full of warm light and the pleasant smell of cooking. By the stove knelt a young girl, her hand on the oven door. She looked up as they came in and closed the door carefully. Then she got to her feet—a little smile on her face. "I've come, Mr. Benslow," she said.

"We're glad to see you," said Uncle William heartily. He glanced at the table. "'D you find dishes enough for a meal?"

A little dimple in her cheek came out, and ran away. "I washed a few," she replied.

Uncle William's eye ran along the shelf over the sink. "You've done 'em all!"

"Not quite—I put some of them outside by the door—pots and kettles and pans—"

"That's what I fell over," said Uncle William, "I gen'ally keep 'em under the sink—out o' sight—kind of—?" He looked at her.

"I saw where you kept them." She had dear, searching eyes and quick little movements that ran ahead of her and did things for her. "Supper is ready," she said. "The biscuit are just right." She took the biscuit from the oven and set chairs for them at the table and flitted about, with quick, soft steps. Juno, on her lounge, huddled herself a little and turned her halfshut eyes on the swish of skirts. By and by she got down and came over to Uncle William.

He fed her a bit of fish and she returned to her lounge, closing her eyes. "She knows suthin' 's happened," said Uncle William, "Her mind's going round and round."

Bodet smiled. "She looks placid enough."

"You can't tell that way," said Uncle William. "Women ain't like men-folks—not just like 'em. They 'll smile and look polite and fix their faces—and then, all of a sudden, things 'll happen."

A little laugh bubbled over from the sink.

Uncle William turned in his chair and looked at her. He adjusted his glasses and looked again. "'D you say anything, Celia?"

"No, sir—I just thought it was kind of funny about women—"

"So 'tis," said Uncle William, "It's funny's anything I know—the way women be. I take a sight o' comfort thinkin' about women and the way they be."

"Yes, sir—would you like some more tea?"

Uncle William waved it away—"Not another mite. We've had a good supper." He pushed back from the table. "Now, we 'll help you clear up a little—" He looked about him.

"I don't want anybody to touch my dishes," she said promptly.

Uncle William looked at her over his glasses. "I was going to show you where things be," he said.

"I know where everything is." The little smile played about her lips. "And I don't need any help." She whisked the cloth from the table and bore it away.

Uncle William's eye followed her.

"There's a letter for you." She took it from behind the dock and laid it on the table.

Uncle William took it up with slow fingers. "I gen'ally read my letters first thing," he said reflectively.

"It's better to have your supper first." She disappeared out of the door and they heard a little rattle of pans. Uncle William chuckled. "Some like the sou'-west wind," he said. "You read it, Benjy."

Bodet held out his hand. "They're in Greenland," he said, glancing at the postmark.

"I reckoned they 'd be." Uncle William reached down the map and they bent over the table, talking and tracing the line of travel and reading bits from the letter.

The girl, as she moved about the room, glanced at them contentedly now and then. When she had finished her work, she took off her apron and folded it up. "I'm going now," she announced, "I'll be up in the morning—along about six." She moved toward the door.

Uncle William looked up, blinking. He had come from Labrador at a lively rate.... "Why—you can't go—alone, Celia. You wait a minute whilst I see about getting ready to go with you."

"I know the way," she said promptly, "I came up."

"The's rocks," said Uncle William. He was lighting a lantern.

"I know about the rocks—I'll take the lantern—thank you, sir." She went out of the door and the light of her lantern flitted along down the path over the cliff.

Uncle William's eye followed it. He chuckled softly and looked at Benjy. "A good deal like the sou'-west wind," he said, "a little west-by-sou'-west, mebbe—and blowin' hard."

"She's a pretty girl," said Bodet, watching the light out in the dark.

"She's a *good* girl," said Uncle William. He looked silently at the shining rows of dishes over the sink—He crossed the room and opened the cupboard door under the sink and looked in—"The' ain't a dish left," he said solemnly, "She's washed 'em all!"

VII

I 'VE got a fire made, Celia. You come right along in," said Uncle William. He regarded her kindly as she stood in the doorway, her curls freshened in the wind and her cheeks touched with clear pink—like the morning outside.

She cast a quick glance at the disordered room and came in.

Uncle William retreated a little. "I was cal'ating to clear it up 'fore you got here," he said. He gathered in an armful of boots and shoes and slippers that had strayed away and looked about him a little helplessly—

A smile crept into her face and lingered in it. "You've got somebody to take care of you now," she said. "You put those right down and bring me a pail of water and some wood—" she looked in the box, "—and a little fine stuff—to hurry with. Nobody could hurry with that—" She cast a scornful hand at the wood in the box.

"'Tis kind o' green," admitted Uncle William. He took the water-pail and went outside, looking at the morning with slow content and moving in supreme restfulness toward the well. When he returned the room was in order, a smell of coffee filled the air, and the table by the window was set, in the sunshine, with plates for two.

"Benjy up?" asked Uncle William. He glanced toward the inner door as he set the pail on its shelf.

She nodded quickly. "I called him," she said.

"I gen'ally let him sleep," replied Uncle William.

"Better for him to be up." She filled a dipper of water and carried it to the table, filling the glasses.

"Ain't you going to have breakfast with us?" asked Uncle William, glancing at the table.

"I've had mine—I brought in the kindling-wood myself," she added pointedly.

Uncle William's face fell. "I did kind o' forget—" The door opened and Benjy came out—yawning, but brisk. "Well, we've got a good start," he said. He nodded to the girl and sat down.

Uncle William looked relieved. "I thought you 'd kind o' mind getting up so early?" he said.

Bodet laughed out. "I don't mind getting up—It's waiting for breakfast that I mind."

Uncle William looked out of the window. "I go kind o' slow on breakfasts," he admitted. He craned his neck a little—"Guess George is going out." He glanced behind him. The girl had stepped outside the door a minute and Uncle William leaned forward with a confidential whisper, "She 'd make a dretful good wife for a *young* man, wouldn't she!"

"You 'd better eat your breakfast, William—and be thankful," said Bodet severely.

Uncle William made no reply. A look of deep craft was in his eye. When Bodet started off, he lingered behind.

"I'll be'long byme-by, Benjy," he said. He nodded to him kindly. "You go tell Ordway what you want and I'll talk to him 'bout it when I come. I reckon he 'll do it the way you want it," he said hopefully.

Bodet disappeared up the road, and Uncle William pattered about the door. By and by he went in.

The girl glanced up quickly. "I thought you 'd gone."

"No, I ain't gone." Uncle William's tone was cheerful. "The's two-three little things I want to tend to." He strayed into the bedroom and when he came out she was seated by the window paring potatoes. "I'll have to soak 'em an hour," she said briskly, "You ought to buy some new ones."

"They be kind o' old," said Uncle William. He glanced past her, out of the window. "Nice place to set," he suggested.

She did not look up.

"Guess George Manning's going out," said Uncle William.

"Who's George Manning?" said Celia. She finished another potato, with efficiency, and dropped it into the pan of water beside her.

"George Manning—He's about the nicest young man on the Island, I guess," said Uncle William innocently.

A little laugh flitted at the potatoes.

She glanced out of the window and returned to her work.

Uncle William's look deepened. "He 'd make a dretful good husband for somebody."

"I don't believe much in husbands," she replied. She held the knife in her hand, and she was looking at him with candid, laughing eyes.

Uncle William returned the look reproachfully. "You don't have no call to say that, Celia!"

"I've been engaged," she replied promptly. She took up another potato with a little glance of scorn at it.

Uncle William leaned forward. "When you goin' to be married?" he asked happily, "I might 'a' known you was engaged—nice as you be!"

She looked at him. "I'm not engaged any more," she replied, "I just was."

Uncle William's face was full of sympathy. "I didn't know 't you 'd lost anybody," he said. "You poor little girl!"

She looked up again—a little puzzled line between her eyes, "He wasn't so much—to lose—" she said slowly.

"When was it he died?" asked Uncle William.

She stared at him. Then she laughed and threw out her hands in a quick gesture. "You thought he died!" she said.

"Didn't you say so?" demanded Uncle William.

"I didn't mean that—" She returned, a little guiltily, to her potatoes.

Uncle William looked at her.

"I just meant I wasn't going to marry him—nor *anybody!*" She lifted her head with a little defiant movement.

Uncle William's gaze was sober. "You don't mean you promised him and then wouldn't—?" He was looking at her over his spectacles.

She nodded her head over the potatoes, biting her lip a little. "I only loved his hair anyway," she said. There was silence in the room, and the faint sound of voices came from the beach.

"He had curly hair," she said, "and it was yellow—like gold—and all the other girls wanted him—"

"George's hair is black," said Uncle William hopefully, "—most black."

She looked at him—and the eyes danced a little behind their mistiness, "I wouldn't marry a man—not if his hair was coal-black, nor if 'twas yellow, nor brown, nor any color—I've got *you* to take care of and that's enough!" She glanced at him, almost tenderly, and carried the potatoes to the sink. "It makes you feel foolish," she said, splashing the water into the pan and moving the potatoes about—"It's foolish caring about folks and thinking they're beautiful—and then finding out that they're selfish—and stupid and lazy—!"

Uncle William looked out at the sun. "It's getting late," he said.

He moved toward the door and stood with his back to her. "I like to have folks get married, Celia—" he said slowly, "I like to think about homes and buildin' 'em on the Island—and little ones coming—Don't you like to think about it that way?"

Her hands dabbled in the water thoughtfully. "I don't know's I do," she said. "I've got a home now—with you—"

"It ain't real—not a real home," said Uncle William quickly.

"It's the nicest one I ever had," she said. A little laugh lighted her face—"and it will be the nicest one that ever was when I've cleaned up a little." She dried her hands on the towel, looking down at them. "I know what you mean, Mr. Benslow—about 'little ones'—I guess every woman knows about that—and wants 'em," she added, under her breath, to the towel. "But there's some things we can't have!" She took down the broom from the wall. "Now, if you're going out, I'll sweep up a little."

Uncle William did not look back. "Andy's coming," he said, "I guess we 'll go see how Benjy's getting on—Don't you mind anything I said, Celia. I'm kind o' old and foolish, like enough." The girl did not reply. But when he had gone, she came to the door and stood looking after him—and the dancing look in her eyes grew wistful and sweet.

WE used to meet on this rock when we was boys," said Uncle William, sitting down, "—You remember them times, Andy?"

"I don't remember nothin'," said Andy. Uncle William looked at him. "I do 'no' how you forget so easy.... I can see it all, just as plain as you be—settin' there—you and me and Benjy, racing to get to this rock first—and planning suthin'—suthin' 't we hadn't o't to.... Seems kind o' good to have Benjy back—just 's if he 'd never been off the island?"

"He's changed some," said Andy. "Well—outside he's peaked up a little—but inside, I can't see a mite o' difference. He gets mad just about 's easy 's ever," said Uncle William contentedly.... "Now, this morning—" Uncle William moved his hand toward the horizon, "He's gone over to his place, all kind o' boilin'-like. He stopped and gazed at a figure that loomed on the horizon at the end of the long road. They watched the light, high-stepping figure come swiftly down the road.

"He's got something on his mind," said Uncle William, "I can see by the way his elbows act—kind o' stiff so. I reckon that contractor does bother him—a good deal," he added thoughtfully.

The man came on quickly, lessening his gait a little as he neared the rock, and taking off his hat to the breeze. "Feels good," he said, nodding. He seated himself on the big rock. "Well—I've done it." He turned his head slowly, taking in great whiffs of the fresh, bracing air. "I've fired him," he said.

"You hev!" Uncle William's face beamed. "That's good—He's fired him, Andy—"

"When's he going to leave?" asked Andy.

"He's going to leave just as soon as he can pack," said Bodet with satisfaction, "He's stood all he can—and so have I." He threw out his thin legs and looked at them. "I don't think I ever knew a man that irritated me the way he did," he said reflectively.

"I see he kind o' did," said Uncle William.

Andy looked out to sea. "Harr'et was boardin' him," he said, "She was cal'-lating on the board money—right along." His eye dropped to Bodet.

The man threw out an impatient leg.

"Now, don't you mind about that," said Uncle William hastily, "Benjy 'll fix it up all right—He's got to have *somebody* to build his house, and it's got to be somebody that 'll eat—somebody with a stomach."

The thin man sat up, smiling a little.

"I wish to the Lord I knew whose stomach it was!" he said, "It's like trying to build a house in heaven—having to import contractors and masons and plumbers—"

Uncle William chuckled— "We gen'ally use the home-folks, round here," he said after a pause.

Bodet looked at him a little. "You wouldn't build a twenty-thousand dollar house just with the home-folks, would you!"

"I do 'no' why not," said Uncle William, "It ain't so much different from any other house, fur as I see—just more *of it*—more spread. There's George Manning," he suggested.

"The carpenter?" Bodet's lip smiled.

"Well—he ain't exactly a carpenter—not exactly," said Uncle William. "He's a fisherman too—first-class—and he can steer any kind of a craft you want to rig up. He was captain on the Halifax Line one spell." Uncle William's eye followed the boats passing across the harbor. "An' he's a kind o' mason, and a first-rate painter—I do 'no's you could git a man knows more 'n George Manning does.... I never see the thing yet George wa 'n't willing to tackle. Seems's if he kind o' liked to try his hand at things folks said couldn't be done. I've seen him sit up night after night figgering on things—"

"He 'll have to figure some on this," said Bodet. He drew the plans from his pocket. "This is what we've just split on—Ordway and I—" He spread out the paper, holding it between his hands. Uncle William moved over a little toward it. Andy dropped an eye from above.... "This is it," said Bodet. "You see how that roof-line comes down, don't you?"

"Uh-huh," Uncle William looked at it with pleased smile—"Comfy, ain't it—Sort o' makes a house look like an old hen with her chickens."

"That's it," said Bodet quickly, "It's the very thing I want—a house that settles down among the rocks as if it belonged there—The architect got the idea all right—from photographs. But he hadn't been here and we hadn't allowed for that dip to the south—You know it?"

Uncle William nodded. "Drops fo'-five feet, I should think?"

"Six—: a little over six," replied Bodet, "and this is the kind of thing *he* wanted—Ordway wanted!" He took out a rough pencil sketch and held it at arm's length. "He wants to run it out here in the air, this way, and put a lattice-work underneath.... paint it green, I suppose." He snorted a little.

"Does look kind o' funny—don't it, Andy?" said Uncle William.

"Looks good enough—far as *I* see," said Andy, "I've seen a lot of houses built that way."

"—So have *I*," broke in Bodet. He crushed the paper in his hand. "It's a seaside cottage," he said, "—a regular seaside cottage!"

"I do 'no' what you feel that way about it for," said Andy, "if 'tis a cottage and 'tis built on the sea—right along side—"

Bodet got impatiently to his feet—"Ordway couldn't see, either. That's why I fired him—'*seaside cottage!*'—" He fizzed a little and straightened his garments and shook his legs.

"There, there, Benjy,—don't you mind. I'm a-thinkin' about it," said Uncle William soothingly.

Benjy smiled—the thin, sweet smile that seemed to come of itself from somewhere behind the high, nervous features, when Uncle William's voice spoke to it, "All right, William, I won't mind—now I've got Ordway off

my hands. I thought one time he would drive me crazy—”

“I didn’t know but he would, too,” said Uncle William, “You acted kind o’ queer.”

“Well, I felt kind o’ queer,” responded Bodet dryly. “Now, about Manning—We ’ll go talk things over with him.... He *might* do—with a little watching.”

IX

BENJY thought mebbe you ’d do the *whole* thing, George!”

The three men stood on the site of the new house. Across the rocks and moor Uncle William’s chimney showed against the sky, and below them the water of the harbor dimpled in little waves of light.

Benjamin Bodet stood looking across it, a kind of quiet satisfaction in his face.

“He’s been a good deal bothered,” said Uncle William to the younger man. They moved a little aside and looked at him. “What he wants,” said Uncle William, “is somebody that ’ll take everything off him—do all the figgerin’ and plannin’ that comes up and trot round and get things—men, you know—and things you run out of and can’t get on the Island. It’s kind o’ hard building out at sea,” he said tentatively, “But *you* could do it?” He turned to him.

“Yes, I could do it—if he wants me to,” said Manning. He held the stalk of grass between his teeth and it turned slowly as he talked, “I’d like to build a house like this one—such as he’s planning for.... There must be a good many things come up, you won’t know how to do.” He moved his hand toward the circumference about them, with a half gesture.

“That’s it,” said Uncle William, “That’s just what I told Benjy.... You take the whole thing over—tell him how much ’twill cost, and so on—figger it out?”

“Beforehand!” said the man with a slow look.

Uncle William nodded. “He wants to know before he begins. I told him mebbe you couldn’t do it—but he’s kind o’ set on it.” He looked at the other a little anxiously. The man chewed the bit of grass in silence.

“Ordway ’d done it,” said Uncle William simply.

Manning turned a slow eye on him. “How ’d he know he could get men—here on the Island—and keep ’em!” he demanded.

“Well, he *didn’t* know it, George.” Uncle William chuckled a little. “I reckon he ’d ’a’ learned quite a few things about the Island—if he ’d ’a’ kep’ on it.”

“I reckon he would,” said the man with a slow smile. “I can’t tell Bodet what it ’ll cost—What if a barge-load of lumber should be held up, getting here?—Might have to wait weeks—Suppose I can’t get anybody to board ’em—”

“Andy ’ll board ’em,” said Uncle William.

“Umph,” said the man.

“An’ Andy’s wife—you want to put her in. She might up an’ say she wouldn’t, any day?”

Manning shook his head. “I can’t sign any contract, and I can’t tell him what it will cost—not within a good many dollars—a house like that—but if he wants me to build it, I’ll take it and do my best for him.”

“The’s a good many things might happen,” allowed Uncle William, turning it slowly in his mind. “The Widow Deman’s well might go dry and then where ’d you be, with your mortar and plaster and cement, if that well run dry?”

The man looked at him.

“You ’d want to put the well in,” Uncle William suggested, “if you *should* make the contract—”

“You can’t clutter up a contract that way. I’m not going to make any contract to build a house on this Island.”

“He ’ll want to do what’s fair,” said Uncle William. “S’pose you go see about the well whilst I talk with him,” he added diplomatically.

The man moved in the direction of a little house a few rods away and Uncle William turned toward the tall figure pacing back and forth on the short-cropped turf.

Bodet turned as he came up. “Who cares about building a house!” he said. “Look at that sky and water and all this—!” His gesture took in the rocks and turf and the flock of sheep feeding their way up the hill to the horizon.

Uncle William’s eye followed it all placidly. “You do get over being in a hurry—up here,” he said slowly, “I reckon it’s because the Lord’s done so well by it—got a chance to finish things up—without folks meddling too much—it seems kind o’ foolish to hurry ’bout things.... Well, George ’ll do your house for you—if you want him to.”

“I’m willing to try him,” said the man with a little note of condescension. “Where’s he gone!”

“He’s just stepped over to the Widow Deman’s well,” said Uncle William.

“He ’ll sign the contract, of course!”

“Well—” Uncle William hesitated. “He ’ll sign one, I guess, if you say so—If *I* was buildin’ a house, I’d just

go ahead and build—if I could get George Manning.”

The tall man fidgeted a little. “Suppose he takes a notion—feathers his own nest while he’s building my house,” he said at last.

Uncle William’s eyes grew large—then they laughed. “George Manning ain’t a bird of the air, Benjy—and he’s pretty well past feathers now.... Curious, I didn’t understand about that contract,” he said after a little pause. “It never come over me that you thought George wouldn’t do the square thing by you... and I guess he wouldn’t ‘a’ got it through his head all summer—that you thought he was going to cheat you—! Lucky I didn’t think of it,” he added, “I’d ‘a’ made a muss of it somehow and you wouldn’t ‘a’ got your house built—not this year, anyhow.” He looked at him sympathetically.

Bodet smiled. “I didn’t suppose there was a man left, you could trust like that,” he said.

“Well, George ain’t *left* exactly. He’s just here with the rest of us,” said Uncle William—“Folks mean to do ‘bout what’s right up here, I guess. And I do ‘no’ but that’s about as easy way as any. I’ve tried both kinds of places—honest and say nothin’—and places where they cheats and signs papers, and I do ‘no’ ‘s it’s any better ‘n our way—just going along and doing as well as you can and expectin’ other folks to.... He’s coming back,” said Uncle William. They watched the young man move across the rocks toward them—thin and spare-built and firm. His face, tempered fine like a piece of old bronze, held a thoughtful look, and the stalk of grass between his teeth turned with gentle motion as he came.

“How ‘d you find it?” said Uncle William.

He looked up. “It’s all right—fourteen feet of water, I guess.” He drew a slip of paper from his pocket and turned to Bodet—“I’ve been running it over in my mind a little,” he said slowly “and if that’s any use to you, I’m willing to sign it.”

Bodet took the paper in his thin fingers and swung his glasses to his nose. Uncle William looked at him with pleased smile.

The glasses swung down from the long nose. “*What* has the Widow Deman’s well got to do with *my* house!” he said expressively?

Uncle William leaned forward. “That’s my idee, Benjy.” He looked over the high shoulder—

“I will build your house for \$25,000, provided and allowed the Widow Deman’s well holds out.

“(Signed) George Manning.”

“That’s right, George—that’s fust-rate,” said Uncle William, “You’ve put it high enough to cover you—and Benjy, too.”

“It would seem so,” said Bodet. “Ordway had figured twenty thousand—and he’s not cheap.”

“I *told* George to make it high—more ‘n it could possibly figger up to,” said Uncle William with satisfaction, “so ‘s ‘t you ‘d get something back—stead o’ having to pay out more ‘n you expected to. I thought that was what you wanted the contract for,” he added significantly.

“I see—Well, it’s a bargain—and without any pieces of paper.” He tore what was in his hands through, and handed it back with a little courteous gesture of decision—“If I’m going to build on the Island, I’ll build as the Island builds.”

“That’s right, Benjy. Now, let’s have a look at them plans.” Uncle William found a rock and sat down. The other two men moved from point to point, driving in stakes, and pulling them out, measuring lines and putting down new ones. While they were doing it, a big wind blew in around and proceeded to pile up clouds and roll them up the hill behind them. Uncle William watched the clouds and George Manning and Bodet, moving to and fro before them.

“Manning says it can’t be done,” said Bodet, walking over to him. Two straight wrinkles stood between his eyes.

“I don’t see how it can be—not yet,” said the man. He held out the plan. “He wants his chimney—”

Uncle William nodded. “I know—where the old one was.”

“But that chimney isn’t any good. You’ve got to build from the ground up—You can’t use the old foundation—?”

“Well, not exactly *use it*, mebbe.” Uncle William looked at him thoughtfully. “I do ‘no’s I can tell you, George, what he wants it that way for—You see he *set* by that chimney when he was a boy—and the’s something about it—about the idee, you know?”

The carpenter looked at him with slow, smiling eyes. “‘Tain’t the chimney, then—He kind o’ likes the idee of a chimney—does he?... He didn’t say anything about the idee,” he added, “He just kind o’ fussed around when I tried to shift her—” He looked at the paper in his hand. “Well—I can’t tell—yet. I’ve got to figure on it—I’ll go down now and order my lumber, I guess.” He moved away toward the road and Uncle William got up.

He crossed over to the old chimney and stood looking toward the hill that mounted above it. The sun had disappeared and the dark turf was soft.... Long reaches of turf and the cropping sheep that moved across it in slow shapes. Uncle William drew a deep breath and turned to the man who stood silent beside him—his eyes on the hill. “Does seem like home, don’t it, Benjy?” he said quietly, in the big, deep voice that boomed underneath like the sea.

THE young carpenter approached Bodet cautiously with his solution of the roof-line. They had talked it over a dozen times and Bodet had become restlessly impatient.... Ordway might be right, after all.... He looked at different forms of lattice-work and stone foundations and swore softly at a terrace—Ordway's idea—with morning glories alongside.... Uncle William, any day, at any time of day, was in favor of a new plan altogether. He stood ready to furnish details—like his own house, mebbe, only bigger.... After this suggestion, every time it came up, he went out and sat on the rocks a long while and looked at the water. Andy coming by hailed him. "What you doing?" he called.

"Just a-settin' here a little," replied Uncle William.

"Ain't Benjy to home?" demanded Andy.

"Yes, he's to home," admitted William.

Andy looked toward the house.

"I wouldn't go in, if I was you," said William, "He's kind o' tending to things—in his mind."

But if Bodet fretted at delays and slow decisions and failure of material to arrive, he caught the spirit of the place, after a little, and settled down to it and held up work—a week at a time—while he changed details or pottered over new ones. Uncle William—in his element—went back and forth between the old chimney-place and his house, carrying ideas and bricks with impartial hand. George Manning, with one eye on his plans and the other on his men, pushed the work or held it back, as the wind blew. When the men grumbled over a foundation wall torn out and put in again, with a hair's breadth of difference, he looked at them with slow, sympathetic eye and admitted that it wasn't so very much different, maybe—just enough to look different, somehow.

It was when he had studied on the roofline a week or more, that he came in one morning—a look of cautious elation in his face.

Bodet sat before the fire reading day-before-yesterday's paper. Uncle William was pottering about, finishing the last of the dishes, and Celia was down at, Andy's helping Harriet who was ill.

Bodet looked up as the young man came in, and laid down his paper. "How is it coming on?" he said. The tone was mild. He had had a good night's rest, and he had come somehow to share Uncle William's belief that Manning would find a way out—"only give him time enough and suthin' to figger on."

The young man seated himself on the red lounge, his hat between his knees. "I don't suppose you 'd like going up and down stairs?" he said.

Bodet looked at him a little quizzically and swung his glasses to his nose. "That depends," he replied.

"It won't be stairs exactly," said Manning, "just steps, maybe. You drop the floor of the south room to get your level and then put some steps here—" He came over with the paper.

Bodet took it in cautious fingers.

Manning bent over him. "There's the living-room and the fire-place," He indicated the rough lines, "—just where you want them—You kind of look down into the room, you see, when the door's open—instead of all on a level—?"

"I see." Bodet studied it with lifting face.

Uncle William came over and stood by them, his dish towel on his arm and his glasses alert—"The house sort o' climbs down the rocks, don't it?" he suggested. "I've seen them that way—foreign parts—a lot." The glow in his face swept the room. "I do 'no' how we didn't come to think of it, fust thing—easy as settin'."

"Just about," said Bodet. "How did you get it?" He looked at the young man. "You never saw a room like that, did you?"

"No, I never saw one," he replied slowly—"but *something* 'd got to give way somewheres. You wouldn't let the roof-line be touched, nor the ground, and there wasn't anything left to give way—but the floor. I guess it kind of dropped down by itself—while I was figuring on it." He looked at it fondly.

"It improves the thing fifty per cent," said Bodet. He held off the paper, scanning it with happy vision, "We 'll have a little railing here, with carving on it, and something leading up to it—It's the feature of the place." He handed it back. "Go ahead with it. There isn't anything else to decide, is there?"

"No. Things are coming on." He took the paper, tucking it in his pocket. "The 'Happy Thought' got in last night with her lumber and the new masons came this morning. I was kind of bothered about their not getting here, and the Widow Deman's well going dryer and dryer all the while, and no brickwork getting done. I'll go set 'em to work." He nodded and was gone.

Uncle William looked after him with smiling face. "He's a nice boy," he said, "You just can't *find* a thing George can't figger out."

"He's a genius," said Bodet thoughtfully, "He ought to be somewhere besides on this island—somewhere he 'd have a chance."

"Chance for what?" asked Uncle William, with simple interest.

"A chance to rise," said Bodet with emphasis. "It's all right for you and me, William—old men—with our work done—"

"Mine ain't quite done," said William, "—your bed and two-three things," and he flaxed around softly as if he were doing something.

Bodet smiled at him. "Now what do you think you are doing, William?" he said. "We're out of it. We've had our day—we've worked and fought and suffered—"

"That's it, Benjy." Uncle William nodded, "We *hev* had a good time, ain't we? But I do 'no's I ever had a better one 'n I'm having right here on the Island—specially since you come," he added.

The other shook his head. "It won't do, William. A young man must go out into the world—and do things."

Uncle William hung his dish towel on the line. The big face in its tufts of beard glowed at Benjy over the top—"I suppose folks 'd say there's bigger things I could be doin'—than wash dishes—but I do 'no' what they

be," he said thoughtfully. "There's things I'd like better—it's terrible fussy—getting 'em clean and keepin' ahead, so 's 't you 'll have enough for a meal—and I'm putty glad Celia's coming back.... I've thought about it, Benjy—a good many times—" He came over and sat down, "'bout living here on the Island. We don't hurry much, but seems to me we *get* about as much—about as much living as other folks do." He looked at him over his glasses. "We've got enough to eat, and beds—putty *good* beds—and things to wear.... I keep a-thinking and a-thinking about it," he went on, "and I don't see just what 'tis we o't to scratch around so for."

"There's education," said the other, swinging his long glasses on their slender chain.

"Yes, *you've* got eddication, Benjy. I can see it—kind o' the way you set in a chair—different from my way." Uncle William regarded his great legs with kindly eye. "But I do 'no' 's you're any happier—or your legs any happier?" he said slowly.

"You know I'm not happier." The man turned with a quick smile, "There are not many men happier than you are, William."

"No, I suppose the' ain't. Sometimes I wake up in the night and think how happy I be—Seems kind o' shiftless," he added thoughtfully, "Like enough, I ought to be out hustling for suthin'—But I do 'no' what it 'd be?"

"Manning ought to get out into the world—and he's going to—when he's finished my house.... It's all right for you, William. You've earned a rest."

Uncle William smiled. "I don't want any rest, Benjy—no more 'n George Manning—I like to keep a-doing—kind o' gradual-like—al'ays did.... I can't see 's the Lord hurries much," he added, with a glance at the little window.

"You're *not* the Lord, William," said Benjy.

William smiled at him—his broad, kind smile, "'Twas a kind o' funny idea—my saying that—wa 'n't it? I do 'no' *why* I get to thinking about things—and about me and the Lord.... I reckon it's because I'm out in a boat so much—kind o' sailin' around and watching how he does things—and kind o' enjoying his ways," he added softly.... "The's suthin'—about it—suthin' about the way the tides come in and the sun goes down and the stars come out—that makes you feel glad. I've seen George Manning, a good many times—when we was out, and had a ketch, and was coming along in, towards dark—I've seen him set and look... and I knew he wa 'n't thinkin' 'bout how many fish we 'd got—any more 'n. I was. You can't think how many fish you've got—more 'n about so long—" said Uncle William thoughtfully.

He glanced down the road. "There's Celia comin'," he said happily. He went over and watched her come—"Don't she kind o' skim along good, Benjy!" The smile on his big face kindled and deepened. "It's most too bad George ain't here." He looked back into the room with a shrewd glance. "He never see anybody just like her—I reckon."

Bodet shook his head. "You better let well enough alone, William."

"Well, mebbe I will," said Uncle William. "'Twon't hurt none for him to see her—will it?... You got back pretty quick, Celia."—He looked kindly at her glowing cheeks, "How's Harr'et?"

"She's feeling better," said the girl. She glanced about the room, "You did the dishes!—I didn't mean you to do the dishes."

"I didn't do 'em so very well," said Uncle William. "We had company whilst you was gone," he added craftily.

She looked at him—"That young fellow that's building his house for him?" She nodded at Bodet, who had taken his hat and gone outside.

Uncle William nodded back—"That's the one, Celia—You ain't ever seen him, have you?"

"I've seen him out of the window," she said shortly, "That's near enough for me—seeing him go by."

Uncle William's face fell a little. "I guess I'll go 'long up with Benjy," he said.

XI

GEORGE MANNING looked about him with satisfaction. The walls of the new house were up and boarded in—so much was safe. He knew Bodet might appear any minute with a completely new plan—unless it could be staved off—but he reflected comfortably, as he looked up at the great broadside of boards before him, that he probably would not tear down the whole thing any more.... The sound of saws and hammers came with a cheerful falling rhythm—now together, and now in hurried broken notes—and the men on the roof were singing—a great blond Swede leading them.

Manning stepped into the living-room and stopped and gave a few directions to the masons and then moved over to the window and looked out. Far below him, the harbor reflected the dear sun and he squinted across it, scanning the horizon for the little black steamer that was to bring Portland cement and a consignment of windows. The windows had been due three weeks now—and the work would be handicapped if they did not come soon. He turned away and attacked his work, whistling softly.

"Morning, George." It was Uncle William—big and happy—in the doorway, beaming down upon him.

"Morning, Uncle—Mr. Bodet come up with you?"

"He's outside somewheres. He's got a new idee—about the well."

Manning smiled a little—a shrewd, dry smile—and drew the plane toward him, "I don't mind his having new

plans for *wells*," he said.

Uncle William sat down on a nail-keg and picked up a bit of pine, feeling in his pocket for his knife. He drew it out, and squinted across it, and opened the smaller blade, running it casually along his thumb.

George Manning's plane followed a curling shaving down the length of the board and withdrew. There was a clean smell of pine mingling with the salt air.

Uncle William whittled a few minutes in silence. Then he looked through the great window-space, to the harbor. "I feel queer," he said thoughtfully—"I feel dretful queer."

The plane skirled its shaving off and Manning stopped—looking at him—"Anything wrong, Uncle William?" he asked.

William shook his head. "I don't mind so much having things wrong.... I'm kind o' used to it—having to fuss and fiddle some. It's when things are comfortable-like—what most folks call comfortable—that I get grumpy, I guess.... We've got a new girl down to the house," he added kindly.

"Yes—I heard about her." Manning's eyes laughed. "Puts you out, don't it?"

Uncle William nodded. "I'm a good deal surprised to see how I feel. I cal'lated I'd come along up here—like a colt turned out to grass. Just set around and watch things—same as ever—feeling kind o' light in my mind.... I don't feel a mite light." He sighed and returned to his whittling.

"You 'll get used to it," said Manning consolingly.

"I do' 'no' whether I shall or not. It's been quite a spell now—" Uncle William held off his pine stick and looked at it. "I'm kind o' wondering if I didn't *like* to have them dishes—"

"To wash—?"

"Well—not to wash exactly—but to leave around behind—suthin' I'd o't to, and didn't.... All the way up the road I keep kind o' missing 'em—wishing I'd find 'em under the sink, mebbe, when I get back.... I wouldn't want to do 'em exactly, when I got there, I suppose. But I do miss 'em." He shook his head.

Manning pushed a heap of shavings aside with his foot and bent to his plane again. "I can find things enough, most any day—things I ought to do—and don't—easy job, Uncle William."

Uncle William looked at him. "You ought to be considerable happy, George," he said slowly.

"Well—I am happy—as happy as most folks, I guess." His shrewd, thin face followed the plane with even look. "I've got enough to do—if that's what you mean." He unscrewed his board from the bench and carried it across the room.

Uncle William's eye followed him. "I suppose you never thought of getting married, George?" he said casually.

The young man shook his head at the board he was trying to fit in place. "Never was tempted," he said. He measured a length on the board and took up his saw.

Uncle William retired into his mind. Benjamin Bodet came and stood in the door and looked at the two, and disappeared. The sound of the hammers trooped in and out through the silence.

Uncle William stood up, snapping his knife together. "I guess I'll go find Benjy," he said. He wandered out and sat down on a rock near by. Over the top of a scattered pile of lumber he could see Benjy's head moving back and forth.

"Best kind of weather," murmured Uncle William. He sat down.

By and by Benjy appeared around the corner of the lumber.

"We're going to have dinner up here," announced Uncle William. "Celia sent word by Gunnion's boy she 'd have it here by twelve, sharp." Uncle William's face was guileless.

Benjy sat down. "I can't get it through Marshall's head—what I want about that well," he said testily. "I'll have to see Manning about it."

"George 'll fix it for ye all right," said Uncle William.

"Have the windows come?" asked Bodet.

"Not yet, I reckon—He didn't say—You're going to have a nice house, Benjy!" His eyes rested on the rough frame, "It's getting to look like I thought 'twould—nice and low—kind o' like an old hen, you know—spreading her wings and settling down."

Bodet's face followed his look. "It's coming out all right. Your George Manning knows his business—knows what he's about."

"He's a nice boy," said Uncle William. "The's things about him might be different—might be a little different," he added cautiously.

"I don't know what they are. But I shall have a chance to find out, I suppose—before we're through."

"Oh, he 'll do *this* all right."

Bodet stared at him a little. "He's not likely to have a much bigger job on hand—is he?"

"Mebbe not," said Uncle William hastily, "I do' 'no' *what* I mean, like enough. I just had a feeling—kind of a feeling, that George wa 'n't perfect."

Bodet laughed out. "I should hope not—if I'm to have dealings with him. Come on in and talk with him about the well."

They went toward the house. Through the window they could see the young man across the room, measuring a space on the wall. He stood back and looked at it thoughtfully—then he turned and saw them. "I was thinking about the width here," he said, "If your picture you're going to put here is five by nine—I'll have to get the space on this side—somehow."

"We're coming in," said Bodet, "I wanted to talk to you—Marshall's all at sea with that well of his."

"I told him—" said Uncle William. His mouth closed on the word, and a little smile crept up to it. "Why, Celia—I didn't think you 'd be along yet—not quite a while yet."

"It's dinner time," she said. She stood in the doorway, looking in. She wore no hat, and her hair was blown in little curls by the wind. "You going to have your dinner in here?" she asked.

"Why, yes—I guess we might as well—have it here—right here on the bench—can't we, George?"

"For anything I care," said the young man, "I've got to go—" He turned toward the door.

"Oh—George—" Uncle William stopped him. "I want you to see Celia. This is our new girl—Celia."

The young man stood very straight and stiff, regarding her. "How do you do," he said.

"Oh, I'm pretty well, thank you." A little laugh nodded in the words and whisked them away. "I'm very glad to see you," she said. She looked down at her hands. Then she held out one of them.

The young man marched across and took it—he shook it a little and laid it down. "It's a nice day," he said briefly.

She smiled at him—straight and quick. Then she lifted the basket and set it on the table. "I couldn't 'a' got it here, ever, if Jim Gunnion's team hadn't come along," she said. She opened the basket. "There's your pickles—and biscuit—and pie—and cheese—" She set the things on the table, at one side—"and here's your tablecloth." She blew the bits of shavings from the bench and spread a red cloth across its width.

Uncle William's eyes followed her, with a little twinkle—somewhere below them.

"It's nice not to have to come home to dinner," said Bodet impersonally.

"Yes, sir—I couldn't have you all down there to-day. I'm too busy." She stood back, looking at the table. "That's all you need—Here's the salt—and the pepper—and the stew is nice and hot." She took the lid from the smoking pail and peered in. "I put coals under the pail," she said. "You want to look out and not set things afire.... I'm going now. You can bring the dishes tonight when you come—" She stood in the door—and was gone.

Uncle William laughed out—and looked at Manning. The young man was regarding him soberly.

"Draw up, George," said Uncle William, "It looks to me as if the ' was enough for three—easy."

"I've got mine—outside," said the young man. He lingered a little, apparently examining the bricks in the fireplace.

Uncle William looked at him and then drew up to the table. "Celia's a dretful good cook," he said. He helped himself to the stew.

The young man went slowly toward the door. "I guess I'll go see Marshall—about the well."

Uncle William looked over his shoulder. "Oh—and—George—?"

"Yes, sir?"

"If you happen to be goin' by this evening, you know, along after dark, you might stop in. I've got suthin' to tell you—kind of an idee—'bout the well."

"You might tell me now—before I see Marshall—?" suggested Manning.

Uncle William shook his head. "I can't tell ye—not yet. It's suthin' about the old well—and pipes and things. I'm kind o' thinkin' it out—"

"All right. I'll be in—along after supper."

"Yes, that's a good time. I'll have it thought up—by that time, like enough." The young man went out and Uncle William continued to chew slowly, his eyes on the red table cloth. Presently he looked up and his eye met Bodet's—He shook his head.

"I do' 'no' *what* I'll tell him about that well," he said.

"Tell him the idea you had just now—the one you spoke of. It will come back to you by that time, maybe."

Uncle William shook his head again—slowly. "That idee can't come back to me, Benjy—I ain't ever had it."

Bodet stared at him. "You told him—"

"I know I told him, Benjy." Uncle William was a little testy. "I do' 'no' *what* I lie so easy for.... Seems 's if sometimes there was lies all round in the air—just waiting to slip in.... I never had no idee 'bout that well—I'll have to have one."

Bodet's eye rested on him reflectively. "You must have had *some* reason—"

Uncle William looked up hastily, "I don't believe I did, Benjy. I say things like that sometimes—things that don't mean a thing—things that ain't so. It makes me a lot of trouble."

He got up and went to the window. "There's your Portland cement, out there, and your windows. I thought the sky was gettin' kind o' smudgy."

Bodet followed him and they stood together, looking down at the big harbor where the sails went to and fro and the little black steamer was coming in.

XII

THE little room was shining-clean. The window shone, the stove shone, and the boards of the floor were sand-white. Uncle William, standing in the door, looked at them cautiously. Then he looked down at his feet and wiped them on a piece of sacking spread on the step. "Clean enough to eat off of," he said, stepping carefully on to the white floor.

The girl at the sink nodded, the little curls bobbing about her face. "I've been scrubbing," she said.

"I should say you had!"—He stepped forward gingerly. "You've done a lot to it."—He was looking about vaguely, as if to find a place to put his feet down.

The girl's look relaxed subtly. "I thought you 'd like to have it clean—I wanted to do it the way you like?" She was looking at him a little wistfully—"You do like it, don't you?"

"It's just right, Celia—I shouldn't know anybody 'd lived in it—ever. You ain't seen Juno anywheres round, have you!"

A subdued look flitted in the girl's face. "She went off when I began to beat the lounge. I saw her flying over the rocks—I had to beat it hard, you know?"

"'Twas kind o' dusty, wa 'n't it?" said Uncle William, looking at it affectionately. "I've been meaning to do it myself—but when I was thinkin' and settin' on it, I couldn't do it and when I wa 'n't settin' on it, I wa 'n't thinkin' about it." He moved toward the sink.

"I've put your washing-duds outside," said Celia, "your wash-basin and towel and soap and things—out by the door, you know." She motioned him off.

Uncle William stopped and looked at her. "That's the way Harr'et has 'em," he said. "How 'd you come to think of that, Celia?"

The girl bubbled a little laugh. "I didn't think very hard—Is Mr. Bodet coming?"

"He 'll be right along," said Uncle William. "He stopped to talk with George Manning—about plans and so on. He 'll be here pretty quick now." He went out of the door, and the room was very quiet. The girl stood twisting a corner of her apron in her fingers and looking about the shining room. There was a little dimple in her cheek that came and went.

"What you thinking about, Celia?" asked Uncle William, coming in. His face glowed from its washing and the tufts of hair stood up straight.

The girl started a little. "I wasn't thinking about anything—I guess." She looked at the stove—"They 'll cook all to pieces if he doesn't come pretty quick," she said.

"He's coming." Uncle William went to the window. "He's right up the road a piece—You ain't had time to get homesick, have you, Celia?" He was standing with his back to her.

"No, sir—Is that man coming, too?"

"That man—?" Uncle William wheeled about.... "Oh, George? You mean George Manning, I guess."

"That's his name—the one that was up there this morning—fussing around." Uncle William nodded, his shrewd eyes on the little curls that were bending over the sink. "That's George Manning—He's a nice boy," he added, seating himself on the lounge. "He's a putty good boy—George is."

Her interest was absorbed in something in the kettle on the stove—that steamed and swirled about her. She took a fork and tested it tenderly. Then she glanced at the window. "He's coming—Mr. Bodet—You go show him where to wash—while I take up the dumplings—" She lifted the kettle, and Uncle William went meekly to the door. "You wash up out here, Benjy," said Uncle William. He waved his hand at the toilet articles ranged on the bench by the door—"It's a nice place, you see—soap, and there's your towel.... She 'll let us come in rainy days and cold days, maybe," he said thoughtfully.

Bodet gave a dry chuckle. "Suits *me*," he said.

Uncle William's face lightened. "I don't mind a mite myself—" he explained, "but I was kind o' 'fraid you 'd want to be inside—where folks can't see you doing things so."

"Never!" said Bodet, "—with the sky for a ceiling and the clouds for frescoes—what more could a man want?" He waved his towel briskly at the landscape.

Uncle William tiptoed back to the house. "He likes it—out there," he said.

Her face twinkled and she set the dumplings on the table with a brisk movement. "He's a nice man," she said.

"You comin', Benjy?" called Uncle William.

While they ate, the handmaiden flitted in and out. She looked out for their wants and washed pots and kettles on the bench by the door and hummed bits of song—and once a little whistle was wafted in the door—but it stopped suddenly, as if quick fingers had cut it off.

Uncle William looked at Benjy and chuckled. "Some like having a canary around, ain't it? Kind o' bubbles and goes along by itself!—She likes doin' 'em," he added. "The's a lot of comfort having folks around you that *like* doin' things.... Now, Harr'et—you ain't ever seen the way Harr'et does 'em, hev you?"

Bodet shook his head.

Uncle William smiled, looking at something in his mind. "Harr'et don't really like doin' 'em," he said confidently, "I've seen her look at the bottom of a pan as if she hated it, kind of.... She gets 'em clean, you know, but she don't really enjoy her cleanness—not really.... If you're down there a spell, watchin' her and kind o' settin' round—you get to feelin' 's if nobody 'd o't to live—men-folks, special.... I do' 'no' *what* it is about her," said Uncle William reflectively—"about Harr'et.... She's kind o' straight in the back and her shoulders don't bend much.... Seems's if the' was suthin' wrong about a woman—an old woman like Harr'et—if her shoulders don't give a *little*." He sat looking before him.... "The's suthin' about 'em, I do' 'no' what it is—about women—when their shoulders get a little mite bent, that makes me feel happy inside—Seems 's if the Lord had made 'em that way a-purpose—kind o' gentle-like, you know—so 's 't they could bend easy—and stay kind o' curved over, and not mind. I've set and watched 'em in meetin', a good many times, when they didn't know I was looking—and I've took a sight o' comfort with 'em."

Bodet looked at him critically. "I don't see that *you* bend very much, William." Uncle William's broad shoulders spread themselves and he drew a deep breath. "That's different, Benjy.... Men hadn't o't to bend—not without they have rheumatism or cramps and things."

Celia whisked in at the door and out. Benjy's eye followed her and returned to William.

"I know what you're thinkin', Benjy," said Uncle William. "She's straight as one o' them rushes, up 't the

pond—and she ought to be.... She won't bend for a spell yet—she's got to know things first—Hello!—There's George!"

They pushed back from the table and went outside.

XIII

THE three men looked across the harbor—far in the distance something troubled the surface of the water—as if a bit of the dusk had fallen on it and traveled with little restless waves.

Uncle William's eye grew round.... "Mackerel!" he said solemnly.

"Been schooling all day," answered Manning. His teeth closed on the bit of grass between them and held it hard.

Uncle William looked at him sympathetically. "Any luck?" he asked.

"Bergen seven barrel—and Thompson about three, I guess. He set for a big school, but they got away—all but the tail end.... They're running shy."

"They've been bothered down below," said Uncle William. "That's why they're here so early, like enough—It's much as your life is worth—being a mackerel these days—Steve get any?"

Manning shook his head. "He started out—soon as Uncle Noah give the word—Uncle Noah 'd been up on the cliffs since daylight, you know—smelled 'em comin', I guess." Manning smiled.

Uncle William nodded. "He's part mackerel, anyway, Noah is—Went out, I suppose?"

"Everybody went—except me." The young man's eye was gloomy. "That's a big school." His hand moved toward the harbor and the reddish bit of dusk glinting on it.

"Too late tonight," said Uncle William. He felt in his pockets—"Now, where 'd I put that paper—must 'a' left it inside—You go look, George—a kind o' crumpled up paper—with figgers on it." He felt again in his pocket and the young man went obediently toward the door.

Uncle William's eye sought Benjy's. "It 'll take him quite a few minutes to find it, I reckon," he said placidly.

"Isn't it there?"

"Well—it's there if it's anywheres, I guess—" His eye returned to the water. "It's a dretful pity George can't go—He's just aching to—You can see that plain enough—"

"He 'll make more money," said Bodet decisively, "—working on my house."

"Well—I do 'no' 'bout that—He 'd make a good many hunderd out there—" Uncle William motioned to the harbor, "a good many hunderd—if he had luck—"

"He 'll make a good many hundred on the house. It's steady work—and sure pay," said Bodet.

Uncle William smiled. "I reckon that's what's the matter with it—The 's suthin' dretful unsatisfyin' about sure pay." Bodet smiled skeptically.

"You don't understand about mackerel, Benjy, I guess—the mackerel feelin'." Uncle William's eye rested affectionately on the water.... "The's suthin' about it—out there—" He waved his hand—"Suthin' 't keeps sayin', 'Come and find me—Come and find me—' kind o' low like. Why, some days I go out and sail around—just sail around. Don't ketch anything—don't try to, you know—just sail right out.... You ain't ever felt it, I guess?"

Benjy shook his head.

"I kind o' knew you hadn't.... You've al'ays had things—had 'em done for ye—on dry land—It's all right... and you've got things—" Uncle William looked at him admiringly, "Things 't George and me won't ever get, like enough." He smiled on him affectionately, "But we wouldn't swap with ye, Benjy."

"Wouldn't swap what?" asked Bodet. His little laugh teased the words—"You haven't got anything—as far as I see—to swap—just a sense that there's something you won't ever get."

Uncle William nodded. "That's it, Benjy! You see it—don't you?—Suthin' 't I can't get—can't *ever* get," he looked far out over the water... "and some day I'll sail out there and ketch—twenty barrel, like enough—and bring 'em in, and it's all hurrah-boys down 't the dock—and sayin' 'How many 'd you get?' and 'How 'd you do it?' and runnin' and fussin'—and then, come along toward night, and it 'll get kind o' big and dark out there... and I'll forget all about the twenty barrel and about gettin' money for 'em sensible—I'll just want to heave 'em out and go again." Uncle William paused—drawing a big sigh from some deep place.... "That's the way George feels, I reckon.... If he stays and works on your house, Benjy—'twon't be because he wants money."

The young man appeared in the door—"I can't find any paper in here," he said. There was a little note of defiance in the words and the color in his face was dear scarlet.

Uncle William looked at him quizzically. "Maybe you didn't look in the right place, Georgie," he said. "We're coming right in, anyway."

In the clear, soft dusk of the room Celia's face had a dancing look. She stood by the sink, her dish towel caught across her arm and her chin lifted a little as if she were listening to something pleasant—that no one had said. She turned away—hanging up the towel and brushing off the top of the stove with emphatic little movements and a far-away face.

"Now, maybe I left that figgering up to Benjy's." Uncle William glanced casually about him. "You sit down, George, and I'll look around a little for it." He fumbled with some papers by the window and went into the

bedroom and came out, humming gently to himself. He glanced at the two men who sat on the red lounge—The younger one had drawn some lines on a scrap of paper and was leaning forward talking earnestly—his hat on the floor beside him and his hair pushed carelessly back. He had forgotten the room—and Uncle William—and all the little movements that danced. His fingers moved with the terse, short words, drawing new lines on the paper and crossing them out and drawing new ones.

Uncle William's placid face held no comment. "D you see a piece of paper, Celia!" he asked, "—a kind of crumpled-up piece!"

She shook her head. Her eyes were on the two figures on the lounge and on Juno, who rose and stretched herself, drawing her feet together and yawning high and opening her pink-curved tongue. "I left some scraps for her—on the plate by the sink," said Celia in a low voice. She untied her apron and hung it by the door. Then she put on her hat and a light jacket and stood looking about her—as if there might be something in the red room—something that would keep her a minute longer.

"Set down, Celia," suggested Uncle William.

"I've got to go," she said. She moved a little, toward the door.

Uncle William bustled about and knocked down the tongs and three or four sticks of wood, and picked them up. He grumbled a little. Bodet looked up, with a smile. "What's the matter, William!"

Manning got to his feet, crowding the scrap of paper into his pocket, "I'll have to go," he said. "It's getting late."

"Why, yes—'tis kind o' late—" assented Uncle William: "Gets late dretful early, these days.... If you're going right along, George, you might's well walk along with Celia—so 's 't the' won't anything happen to her—"

"I don't need anyone," said the girl quickly, "I've got my lantern." She held it out.

The young man searched for his hat.

"I don't need any company," repeated the girl. She passed quickly from the open door and vanished.

George stood up, gazing after her light flickering on the path. He had found his hat and was twirling it in stiff slow fingers.

"Run along, George," said Uncle William kindly. "You can ketch her, easy."

"I don't run after any girl," said George. There was a deep glint in his eye.

Uncle William looked at it and then at the lantern, flicking and dancing on the path. He stepped to the door. "O-ho! Celia!" he called sternly.

The light wavered a little and paused and danced.... Then it went on.

Uncle William stepped out into the night. "Cel-i-a!" he called and his big voice boomed over the rocks. The lantern stopped. It came back—with little wavering steps and halted before him.

"What 'd you go running off like that for?"

Her face, above the lantern, was demure. "I didn't run," she said.

"Well, you might jest as well 'a' run—I wanted you to take suthin' for me." Uncle William was feeling about in the darkness by the door.

"Oh—I didn't know—" Her voice was very contrite now, and meek.

"I didn't suppose you knew—but you could 'a' waited.... Here they be!" He dragged forward a heavy sack of potatoes and untied the neck—"I told Harr'et I'd send her down a mess of new potatoes for breakfast," he said. He dipped into the sack with generous hand—filling a basket that stood by the door.

The girl looked at it with round eyes.

"You 'd just as lives carry it along, wouldn't you, Celia?"

She reached out her hand and lifted it a little. Then she looked at him.

"Like enough you need a little help with it," said Uncle William wickedly. "Oh—George—" he stepped to the door. "You just give Celia a lift with this basket, won't you!—It's a little mite heavy for her."

The young man appeared in the door. He lifted the basket with decisive hand and held out the other—"I'll take that lantern," he said.

She hesitated an instant—holding it a little behind her. Then she gave it up. "I can carry lanterns well enough."

"I'll take it," replied George. He strode away over the rocks and she followed with little tripping steps that half ran to keep up.

Uncle William, standing by the open door, followed the flicker of the lantern with benignant eye—Then he went into the house. "Sent Harr'et quite a mess of potatoes," he said comfortably.

Benjy looked at him. "—Not the new ones," he said quickly.

Uncle William nodded. "I kind o' felt as if suthin' had to be sent to Harr'et, and that bag of potatoes was the fust thing I laid hold of." He chuckled a little. "She 'll be some s'prised, I guess—s'prised *and* pleased—Harr'et will—to get a new mess of potatoes and all—and not having to pay for 'em, or anything," said Uncle William thoughtfully.

HERE you be, Juno!" Uncle William set the plate of scraps on the floor, and Juno walked across with leisurely gait.

He watched her a moment, smiling—then he reached for his lantern. "Guess I'd better go see 't everything's all right," he said. "I've got to make a putty early start."

Bodet looked at him inquiringly. "Where are you going?"

"Now?—Down to see t' the Jennie."

"You're not going out?"

Uncle William laughed. "Not tonight, Benjy—I jest want to get a start, you know—have things ready." He lighted the lantern and threw the match on the floor.

Benjy watched him soberly. "You 'll be gone a week, I suppose."

"Well, I do 'no'." Uncle William put his lantern on the floor and sat down. "I come in every day—Soon's I get a catch."

Bodet scowled at his cigarette—and threw it aside. "It's the last I'll see of you—this season."

Uncle William crossed his legs. "Won't run more 'n a day or two, mebbe," he said consolingly. "You can't tell about mackerel. You look out and see little patches of 'em wrinkling around and the next day you won't see a wrinkle." His hand felt for its lantern.

Bodet's eye was on the clock. Suddenly he got up and crossed over to it and took down something, almost tucked in around behind the dock. He glared at it a minute and threw it on the table. "It's a letter!" he said.

"Why, so 'tis!" Uncle William leaned forward with a pleased look of interest. "Celia didn't tell us about it, did she?" He looked at Benjy for sympathy. But there was no sympathy in Benjy's eye.—He lifted the letter and tore it open—"It might have lain there a week," he said sternly.

"Like enough 't would—if you hadn't seen it. You've got terrible good eyes, Benjy." Uncle William all but patted him on the back.

Benjy shrugged his shoulders. His eyes ran over the letter—"It's from the children. You want to read it—now?" He was holding it out.

Uncle William looked down at his lantern. He took it up.... Then he looked at the letter. "I kind o' hate to have you read it first—without me."

"I'll wait," said Bodet obligingly.

Uncle William shook his head. "I do 'no 's we 'd better wait." He blew gently into his lantern and set it down. "Might as well have it whilst we can....I've come to think that's the best way, mebbe. The's two-three things I didn't take when I could 'a' got 'em—easy. They've been always tagging me around since." He settled a little more comfortably in his chair and stretched his big legs. "Go ahead, Benjy," he said.

Bodet fixed his glasses on his nose and cleared his throat. Juno jumped on Uncle William's knee, and his hand traveled thoughtfully up and down the grey back while the letter was being read.

A pleased, puzzled look held his face—"Goin' right to Russia, be they? I can't seem to understand that, Benjy—What was it she said?"

Bodet turned back and found the place.

"We have decided to go straight to St. Petersburg and then to Vilna, taking a house and spending the winter. Captain Spaulding will take the boat around to Yokohama and we shall join him in the spring—going overland."

Uncle William's face still held its puzzled look—"They won't touch Iceland... nor Norway 'n' Sweden?" He shook his head. "Jumped the whole thing—far as I see—Europe, Asia 'n' Africa, *and* the Pacific Isles.... Now, what do you suppose they're up to, doin' that, Benjy?" He looked at him anxiously.

Bodet folded the letter in his slim fingers and creased it a little. "Perhaps she was homesick—thought how good it would seem to have a home for a little while again."

"Mebbe she did..." Uncle William lighted the lantern, peering at it with shrewd, wrinkled eyes. "Don't you set up for me, Benjy." He looked at him kindly. "The 'll be a moon, byme-by, you know—Like as not I'll be putterin' round quite a spell. You go to bed."

"Well—I'll see." Bodet had taken up the newspaper and was scanning the lines—his glasses perched high. Juno, on the floor beside him, looked up as if she would like to be invited.

Uncle William looked at them both affectionately. Then he stepped out into the night, closing the door with gentle touch.

The night was softly dark, with high stars, and a little breeze blew up from the water.... His lantern swung down the path—his great legs keeping shadowy time to it. Now and then he paused, listening to the little waves that splashed up below, and drawing deep, full breaths of the darkness. He looked up to the stars and his face cleared. The little puzzled look that had come into it with the reading of the letter disappeared. He hummed to himself, as he went, little booming songs that began, and broke off, and ended nowhere—traveling along ahead....

On the beach he disappeared into the little black fish-house and came out bearing a great net that he stowed away in the dory, folding it down in under with watchful eye. He swung his lantern over the mound of net and gave a little running push and leaped in.... The oars in the thole-pins creaked and chugged, as he faded out in the night, and little phosphorescent gleams waked up along the water and ran in flocks behind him.

He rowed steadily out, his eyes on the stars. The night held a stillness—somewhere, through it, a voice might come. He held the boat, dipping the oars lightly and bending his head. He often waited—in the darkness or off on the moor.... Little sounds came—vague stirrings of quiet—and off a little way, the lights on the fishing boats bobbed at anchor. He dipped his oars and rowed again—long, restful pulls that drew on the strength of the night.... Alongside, in a minute, the stem of the Jennie loomed mistily and Uncle William

scrambled aboard, fastening the dory and hanging his lantern to the mast—It threw its swaying light on the big figure as it moved about the boat. Over the eastern rim of hill the sky grew mysteriously thin and glowed—and a flood of light dropped on the harbor. The water darkened and the distant boats grew to shapes as the moon rose high, filling herself with light. Uncle William looked up. He put down the coil of rope he was stowing away and leaned back, looking at the clear, yellow ball riding over the hill. His eye traveled to the water and to the dim boats shaping themselves out of the dusk.... A contented smile held the big face.... He had been thinking of Sergia and Alan and his thoughts traveled again—following the track of the moon, out over the water, across the ocean—stretching to Russia and the far east.... Slowly the look grew in his face—a little wonder and a laugh. Then he sat up, looking about him. The filtering moonshine played on his face and he laughed—with low, quiet chuckles—and fell to work, giving the last touches to the boat—making things fast. He rowed back in slow silence. Along the beach, as he came near, little black shapes stood up and greeted him—lobster traps and barrels piled high, ends of dories, and boxes washed by the tide, and fantastic sprawls of net and seaweed. Uncle William stepped among them, with long, high step, and the smile still played on his face. Up on the cliff he could see the red glow of the window. Benjy might be up—might be awake.... Uncle William quickened his steps—

The man looked up with a satisfied, drowsy smile. The paper had dropped from his hand and his head was bent a little toward it. Uncle William nodded to him and hung up the lantern. "I've thought of something."

"Have you?" Bodet sat up, yawning a light breath and feeling for his glasses. He put them on his nose and looked at William. "You were gone long enough to think," he said.

"Yes—I was gone—quite a spell. I got to looking round," said Uncle William. "Time gets away putty fast when you're looking round and kind o' thinkin'." He chuckled again, with the big, kind smile that flooded his face. "What do you reckon made them want to go straight to Russia, Benjy?" He was looking at him shrewdly.

Bodet shook his head. "I told you I didn't know—just a whim, perhaps—"

"Something nicer 'n a whim.... You 'd kind o' like to think of it yourself—It makes things big somehow—big and kind o' goin' on forever-like—" His face was full of the glow now and the eyes behind the spectacles had a misty look—like the blue of the sea when the fog is traveling in.

Bodet got up and came across to him. "What is it, William!" he said gently.

"Just more folks on-the Island—" said Uncle William. "Little ones, you know—travelin' round...; The's suthin' about it—I do 'no' what 't is, Benjy—but it makes you all kind o' happy inside—thinking there's goin' to be more folks always, when you're gone—living along in the same places and doin' things.... I can kind o' see 'em," said Uncle William slowly, "—everywheres I go—there they be—plain as if I touched 'em. some of 'em—getting up in the morning and havin' breakfast and goin' out and looking at the sun and the rocks and the water and being happy—same as me—unhappy, too, some of the time—thinkin' things ought to be different.... It makes it all seem big, don't it, Benjy?" He reached out a hand.

The tall man took it. "So you think—?"

Uncle William nodded. "They 'll be comin' back some day—sailing into the harbor—Sergia and Alan—and there 'll be a little one traveling with 'em. It's al'ays the little ones,—Benjy—I do 'no' *what* the Lord made 'em that way for... they're so kind o' queer and little... but I don't ever see one of 'em runnin' down the beach—arms goin' that kind o' way they have, and hair flyin'—I don't ever see 'em without feelin' real good somewheres inside. Everything breaks out all new—lights up, you know—'s if the fog had blown off suddenlike and you looked way out where the sun is." Uncle William's face held the glory of it all, but his voice had dropped a little.... He got up and went to the door and stepped into the night. Presently he reappeared and crossed over to the wood-box and looked in. "Guess I'll bring in an armful of wood," he said. "It might rain before morning."

Benjy's smile was very gentle as it followed him. "It can't rain—a night like this, William."

Uncle William returned to the door and Bodet followed him.... The moor was flooded with light—a magic world, hushed and waiting under its veil.... Uncle William's eyes dwelt on it fondly. "I reckon I'll bring in the wood," he said. "Mebbe it won't rain. But I kind o' like to bring in wood when I've been thinkin'." The great figure passed into the transparent night.

XV

CELIA looked up from her work. "Did you have good luck?"

"Putty good," said Uncle William, "Six-seven barrel, I should think." He stood in the doorway and cast an eye back at the beach. "I picked out some good ones for dinner," he said regretfully, "I must 'a' left 'em down there in the fish-house, or somewheres."

Celia's look was mild. "I'll go down for them myself pretty quick. I'm about through, anyway." She swirled a little clean water into the sink and took down a pan from its nail. "I sha 'n't be gone long," she said kindly as she passed him in the doorway.

"No, the' ain't anybody interesting down there," assented Uncle William.

The look in her face dimpled a little, but she made no reply.

Uncle William looked after her as she flitted down the path, the wind blowing the little curls about her face, and the pan on her arm glinting in the sun. He turned and went into the house, a contented look in his face. "Seems's if we had most everything," he said comfortably. Juno came across and rubbed against him and he

stooped to pet her. Then he went into the bedroom and came out with a plan of the new house. He spread it on the table and sat down, studying it with pleased, shrewd smile. The clock ticked and Juno purred into the stillness and a little breeze came in the window, clean and fresh. By and by Uncle William pushed up his spectacles and looked at the clock. His mouth remained open a little and he went to the door, looking down the path. "Seems's if she o't to be back by now—" He stared a little and reached for his glasses and adjusted them, and took a long look.

A man was coming up the rocky path from the beach. He was a large man, with a full paunch and light, soft steps. "He comes up there putty good," said Uncle William, watching him thoughtfully. "You can't hurry on them rocks." The man had come to the top and paused to take breath, looking back. "Holds himself kind o' keerful on his toes," said Uncle William, "some 's if he was afraid he 'd tip over and spill suthin'.... I do 'no' who he is."

The man turned and came toward the house. He had taken off his hat, and his bald head shone in the sun.

Uncle William stood in the doorway, looking him over with keen, benignant eye.

"Good morning," said the man, "Mr. Benslow, I believe?" He held out a round hand. "My name is Carter—Milton Carter from Ipswich."

Uncle William took the hand, and looked down at the stout man. "I don't seem to remember your being here before?" he said.

"No—It's my first visit to this region. I'm only here for a day or two." He turned, on the doorstep, and looked over the moor and rocks. "You have a pleasant place here." He had a smooth, flatted-out voice that gave the words no color.

Uncle William nodded. "It's a putty good place—Will you walk in, sir?"

The man stepped over the sill. "I didn't expect to go quite so far when I started. It's quite a walk—" He wiped his forehead.

"You come from Andy's?" asked Uncle William.

"From Halloran's—yes, Andrew Halloran's—You know him?"

"I know Andy," said Uncle William. "Set down, sir."

They sat down and looked at each other. "I was going through—" said the man, "up the Lakes and I thought I'd stop off and look around—It's pleasant country about here."

"Yes, it's pleasant," said Uncle William.

"Not much business doing, I suppose," said the man.

"Fishing," said Uncle William, "—mostly."

"There's some kind of building going on, I see—further up." He moved the round hand.

"That's my friend—Benjamin Bodet," said Uncle William. His head gave a little lift. "He's going to have nineteen rooms—not countin' the gal'ry." He laid his hand affectionately on the blueprint spread on the table beside him.

The man's eyes narrowed. "I see—Seems to be quite a house," he said affably, "I was talking with the contractor this morning—a man by the name of Manning—a very intelligent man," he added kindly.

"His name's Manning," assented Uncle William.

The man's eye strayed to the window. "Your friend must have considerable land with his place—I should think?" He spoke casually.

Uncle William sat up a little. "He's got enough to set his house on," he said dryly.

The man's eyes held no rebuff. They dwelt on Uncle William kindly. "I am interested in the region—" he admitted, "I might buy a little—a small piece—if I found something I liked."

Uncle William looked him over. "I don't believe you will," he said, "—not anything to suit you.... I've bought most of it myself," he added.

The stranger looked at him—and then out of the window. "You don't own all of it—?" He gave a little wave of the round hand at the moor and sky and rocks.

Uncle William nodded, with a pleased smile. "I bought it all—fo'-five years ago," he said.

The man's mouth was very mild. "You bought it for investment, I suppose? You put money into it—"

"Well," said Uncle William, "suthin' like that, perhaps. I put in all I could scrape up. Some I had—and some I just wished I'd had."

"I see—? What would you take for it?—How much did you say you owned?" He bent toward the window.

"'Bout a mile," said Uncle William.

The head withdrew itself. "A mile—! You hoped it would rise, I suppose?"

"Well—I was more afraid someone 'd be coming along and setting on it," said Uncle William.

"You could sell the whole?"

Uncle William shook his head.

"I shouldn't care—so much—for a part of it," said the man thoughtfully, "But I might make you an offer—"

"I wouldn't advise you to," said Uncle William, "I might just as well tell ye, Mr. Carter—there ain't money enough in this country—nor any other—to buy that land!" Uncle William sat up.

The other man shook his head. "Land values are skittish things," he said. "It's good judgment to look ahead a little."

"That's where I'm lookin'," said Uncle William.

"This Bodet—" said the other smoothly, "whom did he buy of?"

Uncle William smiled. "I give him *his* piece—He's a friend of mine."

"I see." The man got to his feet, adjusting his weight nicely.

"Well, think it over, Mr. Benslow. I *may* stop over on my way back from the Lakes and—" His hand advanced a little.

Uncle William's gaze did not take it in. He was moving toward the door—and the man moved with him—his light, smooth steps hearing him along. "Good day, sir," said Uncle William.

"Good morning, Mr. Benslow. I *may* stop over—on my way back." He moved easily off up the road and Uncle William stood watching him.

"There's Benjy now," said Uncle William.

The two men stopped in the road and talked a few minutes. The fat man moved his hand and Bodet nodded once or twice.

Uncle William watched them a little anxiously. Then he went in and gathered up the plan. When he came out Benjamin was approaching with quick, long strides.

"I'm coming right along, Benjy," said Uncle William, "I was most ready—a man come along and hindered me a little—"

"Who is he?" said Bodet.

"His name is Carter—I reckon he's real-estate," said Uncle William.

"I 'reckon' he is—Maiming told me and I came right down. What did he offer you?"

"Well, he didn't exactly offer—I kind o' held him off. But I guess he 'd 'a' gone high—" Uncle William's mouth closed in a happy smile. "'Tis a nice island. I don't wonder 't folks want to come to it—But they can't," he added gently, "The' ain't room.

"I 'most hope he won't see Andy," he added after a minute, "Andy's got a little piece—down to the east there—kind of out of sight, you know, that I didn't buy."

"I bought that piece last week," said Bodet.

"You did!—How 'd you come to get it, Benjy?"

"The same way you got yours, I guess. I offered him a little more than he would stand."

Uncle William smiled.... "And I suppose likely this man 'll go higher 'n *you* did?"

"I suppose he will."

Uncle William chuckled. "Poor Andy!"

"He's ready to buy anything in sight you know," said Bodet restlessly.

"The' ain't very much in sight, is there?" said Uncle William, "—except what I own." He cast a proud eye over his acres.

"I've been thinking, William—"

Bodet looked at him keenly, "why don't you turn it over to me—the whole of it? I told you I'd give you twenty thousand,—I'll give you thirty—more if you say so—and you can live on it just the same?"

Uncle William shook his head. "I couldn't do it, Benjy. I reckon the Lord cal'lated I'd buy up a mile—so's to keep it from being cut up in little fiddling bits—and I guess I've got to hold on to it. I'd like to have thirty thousand," he said reflectively, "The's two-three little things I could do with thirty thousand—!"

Bodet smiled. "You ought to have it—whether you deed me the land or not—I have just as much good of it as you do."

"Yes, you enjoy it—some," admitted William.

"Well—I'm going to hand over the interest to you—pay your living—if you 'll let me?" He looked at Uncle William curiously. There were new regions in Uncle William, perhaps—at least the thirty-thousand-dollar region was unexplored as yet.

Uncle William surveyed the offer with impartial eye. "You can pay my livin' if you want to, Benjy—I've gen'ly paid it myself, but I'd just as lives *you* did, if you want to—or I'd pay yours."

XVI

ANDY was subdued after the real-estate man's visit. "You and Benjy might sell me back some," he suggested. He was sitting in Uncle William's door, looking out over the moor. Uncle William was busy inside.

He came and stood in the doorway, his spectacles on his forehead, and looked at the landscape. "What 'd you do with it, Andy—if we give it back to you?" he asked.

"I'd sell it to that Carter man—quick as scat—'fore he changed his mind."

Uncle William looked down at him. Then he looked at the moor.

"It's val'able property," said Andy.

"I do' 'no' as I know what val'able property is." Uncle William's eyes rested fondly on the moor, with its rocks and tufted growth and the clear, free line of sky.

"Val'able property?" said Andy. He gazed about him a little. "Val'able property's suthin' you've got that somebody else wants and 'll pay money for—right off—That's what I call val'able property."

The clouds were riding up the horizon—the breeze from the moor blew in and the cloud shadows sailed

across. Uncle William lifted his face a little. "Seems to me anything's val'able 't you kind o' love and take comfort with," he said slowly.

Andy grunted. "Guess I'll go 'long up the road," he said.

"Up to Benjy's?" Uncle William looked at him wistfully. "I told Benjy *I* was coming up," he said, "But it's kind o' late—" He looked at the sun, "and it's warm, too."

Andy made no reply.

"I reckon I'll go 'long with you," said Uncle William—"You wait a minute whilst I get my plans."

They went up the road together in the clear light, the sun shining hot on their backs. The little breeze had died out and the clouds were drifting toward the horizon. Uncle William glanced wistfully at a big rock by the roadside. "We might set down a spell," he suggested. He moved toward the rock. "I've been stirring since daylight," he said, "It don't seem quite right to keep goin' every minute so. Benjy's a pretty active man—for his years," he added. He seated himself on the rock and stretched his great legs in the sun—He drew a long breath. "I do take a sight o' comfort—not doin' things," he said. "Set down, Andy." He patted the rock beside him.

Andy glanced at the sun. "We 'll be late," he said.

"Yes, we 'll be late, like enough. Smells good up here, don't it!" Uncle William snuffed the salt air with relish. "I al'ays like to stop along here somewheres. It makes a putty good half-way place."

Andy sat down. "Benjy's wastin' time on that house of his," he said glumly.

"Yes, he's wastin' time." Uncle William looked about him placidly. "Benjy don't mind time—nor wastin' it. What he wants is a house that he wants. I do 'no's I blame him for that—I like a house that suits me, too." His eye traveled back to the little house perched comfortably on its rocks.

Andy's face held no comment.

Uncle William sighed a little. "You can't help wantin' things the way you want 'em," he said. "And Benjy ain't ever been married—no more 'n me. Now, *you've* been married—"

"Yes, I've been married—a good many year," said Andy sombrely.

"That's it! An' *you* know what 'tis to want things—'t you can't have! But Benjy 'n' me—" Uncle William looked around him—at the great rocks on either side and the big, cloudless sky and the road running to the horizon and dipping beyond—"Me and Benjy—we've missed it—somehow."

Andy cast a scornful eye at him. But his face, set toward the horizon line, was non-committal.

"I can see it in Benjy plainer 'n I can in me," went on Uncle William, "how it acts—wanting things jest so—and kind o' dancing all round if you can't have 'em.... I reckon that's what marryin' 's for—to kind o' steady ye like—ballast, you know. You can't ride quite so high, maybe, but you can steer better..."

"*Somebody* 'l steer," said Andy.

Uncle William cast the flick of a smile at him. "Well, you wouldn't want *two* captains, Andy—not on the same boat, would ye? That's what makes all the trouble, I reckon—" he went on thoughtfully, "wantin' to go two ways to once. Seems 'f folks didn't know *what* they got married for—some of 'em."

"Well, *I* do 'no'," said Andy without enthusiasm.

Uncle William looked at him with a quiet smile. "You wouldn't want to get a divorce, would you, Andy?"

"Lord, no!" said Andy.

Uncle William's smile grew deeper. "I reckoned you 'd feel that way—Seems 'f the rivets all kind o' loosen up—when folks talk about separatin' and divorce and so on—things get kind o' shackly-like and wobble some."

Andy grinned. "They don't wobble down to our house. I'd like to see Harriet wobblin' a minute—for once."

"No, Harr'et's firm," said Uncle William. "An' I guess you really like it better that way." He spoke encouragingly.

"You have to settle down to it when you're married," went on Uncle William, "settle down comfortable-like—find the easy spots and kind o' make for 'em. It's like the weather, I reckon—you expect *some* weather—rain and thunder and so on." Uncle William's gaze rested contentedly on the cloudless, far-reaching sky.... "We 'd grumble a little, I guess—any way you 'd fix it.... But we wouldn't want biling-hot sunshine *all* the time. Why, climates where they have that kind o' weather—" Uncle William sat up, looking about him, "It's terrible tryin'—dust and fleas and scorpions—and it's dreadful dull living, too.... I like a good deal of weather myself. It keeps things movin'—suthin' to pay attention to."

"What's that you've got in your pocket?" demanded Andy, peering towards something blue that stuck up over the edge of William's pocket.

Uncle William's hand reached down to it—"That's the plans," he said, "for Benjy's house. It's the plans—as far as he's got," he added conscientiously.

Andy's eye turned away—grudging.

Uncle William drew out the blue paper and looked at it fondly. "I'm helping Benjy decide what he wants—from time to time." He spread out the paper on his knee.

Andy turned his back and looked out to sea—sideways.

"Want to see 'em, Andy?" asked Uncle William.

"I don't care."

"It's a good place to see 'em." Uncle William glanced at the flat rock. He laid down the blue paper and smoothed the curly edges with big, careful fingers.

"You get two-three stones, Andy—to anchor 'em down—"

Andy got up with an indifferent air and wandered off, gathering in a handful of small rocks.

"That's good—put one of 'em here—and one here—and here. That's good!" Uncle William leaned back and

looked at it with simple delight.

Andy's air was detached.

Uncle William glanced at him. His gaze softened. "This is Benjy's room," he said. His finger followed a white dotted line on the paper.

Andy bent a little.

"An' here the lib'ry—and the gallery—"

"The what?" Andy ducked a little toward the plan.

"That's the gallery—didn't I tell ye, Andy?"

"No." Andy's mouth was open at it.

"It's for picters, you know, and marble things—kind o' standing round."

"Huh!" The mouth closed.

"It 'll be quite nice, I reckon—when it's done. I can see he sets store by it—" Uncle William's finger hovered dubiously about the spot. "An' this part here—all this wing—is for Sergia and him—Alan—"

"They ain't here," said Andy.

"But they're going to be here sometime," said Uncle William cheerfully. "It 'll be quite a fam'ly then." He gazed at the blue paper fondly. "I do like a fam'ly—seems kind o' foolish to build a house and not have a fam'ly."

Andy said nothing. His eye was studying a corner of the plan. "What's that?" he demanded.

Uncle William bent to it. He lifted his face, beaming. "'W's room'—That's *my* room," he said.

Andy glared at it. "You going to *live* there—with him!"

"Why, no, Andy—not just live there—It's a kind o' place for me to stay nights, you know—if I get caught up there—stormy weather?" Uncle William looked at him a little anxiously.

Andy got up. "I've got to go 'long," he said.

Uncle William's face held him sympathetically. "I was goin' to show you the rest of the plans," he said.

"I don't care about 'em," said Andy. He moved away.

Uncle William's big fingers found a stub of pencil in his pocket and brought it out. "I was thinking, Andy—" he said slowly.

Andy turned back—a little.

"I was wondering if you 'd mind havin' the same room as me—up to Benjy's?"

"I don't want no room," said Andy.

"I couldn't stay away nights." He looked at the paper with gloomy eye.

Uncle William wet the pencil with careful tongue and bent over the paper. His fingers traced a large, scrawling A. "There!" He leaned back, looking at it with satisfied gaze. "'A and W's room'—looks good, don't it!" His face beamed on Andy.

The gloom relaxed a little. "It don't mean nothing," said Andy.

"Well, I do' 'no'," said Uncle William. "It sounds nice, and when things sound nice, seems 's if they must mean suthin'—down underneath somewheres."

"Huh!" said Andy.

XVII

THE real-estate man and Andy were out behind the barn. There was a glimpse of the harbor in the distance, and behind them the moor rose to the horizon.

The real-estate man's little eyes scanned it. "You haven't much land," he said casually.

"I own to the top—pretty near an acre," said Andy. "And there's the house and barn—and the chicken-coop." He cast an eye toward it.

A white fowl emerged and scurried across in front of them.

The man's small eyes followed her, without interest. "I found a number of houses down in the village," he said smoothly, in his flat voice, "and plenty of land—Almost any of them will sell, I fancy."

"Yes, they 'll sell." Andy's eye was gloomy. "'Most anybody around here 'll sell—except William," he added thoughtfully.

The narrow eye turned on him. "How much did you say you sold to him?"

"'Bout four hundred acre, I reckon," said Andy.

"Five hundred dollars is what he paid you, I believe?" The man's voice was smooth, and patient.

Andy wriggled a little. "'Twa 'n't enough," he said feebly.

"Well—I don't know—" The man glanced about him, "I was looking at a house down in the village this morning—eight rooms—good roof—ten acres of land, and barn. I can have the whole thing for six hundred."

"That's Gruchy's," said Andy quickly, "He wants to move off the Island."

"He said he wanted to move—that's the name—Gruchy—I'd forgotten." The small eyes looked off at the

distant glint of water. "In some ways I like that place better than this," he said thoughtfully. "It's on the shore —"

"I've got a right of way," said Andy.

"To the shore!" The man's eyes looked at him an instant, and a little light flicked in them, and was gone.

"It's down here," said Andy. He moved over to the right. "Here's my entrance—and it runs from here straight across to the shore. We never measured it off—I al'ays cut across anywheres I want to. But it's in the deed—and anybody 't buys the land 'll have it." He looked at the other shrewdly.

"I see—" The real estate man's gaze followed the right of way across Uncle William's moor. "I see—Well, of course, that makes a difference—a *little* difference. It would be foolish to buy on an island and not have access to the shore—I presume *you* could buy the Gruchy place," he suggested.

"That's what I was thinking of," said Andy, "—unless William wanted to give me a little piece." His gloomy eyes rested, almost fondly, on the big moor that stretched away under its piled-up clouds.

"Better for business down in the village, I should think," said the man briskly.

"Yes, it's better for business," admitted Andy. "Only I've got kind of used to it up here." His eye sought the house. "I was born in there, you know—and my father lived there and my grandfather."

The real-estate man's hand reached to his pocket and found something and drew it out, slowly.

Andy's eyes rested on it, fascinated.

The man seemed to hesitate. He looked down at the roll in his hand, and half returned it to his pocket. Then he looked again, doubtfully, at the house and barn and chicken-coop. He had turned his back on the right of way and the horizon line above them. "I'll tell you how it is, Mr. Halloran—" His voice was frankly confidential—"I have taken a liking to your place and I'd be willing to pay a little more for it than for some place I didn't fancy. I'm made like that." He expanded a little. "Now, value for value, Gruchy's place is worth twice what yours is—and I know it." He looked at him narrowly. "But I'm going to offer you a thousand dollars—five hundred down and five hundred the first of the month—if you want to close now." He fingered the bills a little.

Andy's eyes grew round. "I'll have to ask Harr'et," he said. "She ain't very well." He glanced toward a darkened window at the rear of the house—"She's havin' neuralgia—off and on—I wouldn't want to ask her when she has it. She has a bad spell today." He shook his head.

The other looked at him sympathetically. "I have to go to-night—and I couldn't be sure I'd want to offer a thousand in the morning—even if I stayed—not if I came across something I like better." He returned the bills decisively to his pocket.

Andy's glance followed them. "I don't really *need* to ask her." His glance flickered. "She's said, time and again, she 'd be glad if I'd sell. She comes from northeast of Digby. I reckon she 'd like to go back."

"Digby's a fine place," said the man. "Well, good day, Mr. Halloran. I'm glad to have met you." He held out a round hand.

Andy took it without enthusiasm. "I do 'no' but I might as well sell," he said feebly.

The other waved it away. "Don't think of it—not without your wife's consent—not if you're accustomed to doing what she tells you."

"I ain't," said Andy indignantly.

"Of course not—I only meant that you 'd be better satisfied—"

"I'm satisfied now," said Andy. "You pay me the five hundred down, and the place is yours."

The man cast a cool glance at the house and barn and the white fowl strutting before them. "Well—if you really want to sell—" He drew the roll from his pocket and counted out the bills slowly, handing them to Andy with careless gesture.

Andy's hand closed about them spasmodically and he looked down at them with half-open mouth and grinned a little.

"Now, if you 'll sign the receipt—" The man drew a fountain pen from his pocket and wrote a few lines rapidly. "There you are. Sign here, please."

Andy's fingers found the place and rubbed it a little and traced his name slowly. He looked at the crumpled bills, and a deep smile filled his face. "Harr'et *will* be pleased!" he said.

"That's good!" The real-estate man beamed on him benignantly. "Tomorrow we will draw up the papers, and you can look about you for a place. You 'll find something to suit, and I sha 'n't hurry you—Take your time." He moved off slowly, waving his hands in a kind of real-estate benediction, and Andy stared after him, entranced.

"Oh, by the way—" The man came back. "I wouldn't say anything about it if I were you—not for a while. There are always people ready to make trouble—and you 'll be able to buy cheaper if they don't know you've *got* to buy." He beamed on him. "Of course, if you have to tell your wife—?"

"I *don't* have to," blurted Andy.

"All the better—all the better. The fewer women know things, the better." The man smiled genially, and his light, smooth steps bore him away—out of Andy's sight.

When he had disappeared, Andy looked down at the bills. He drew out from his coat a large rumpled handkerchief and tied the bills skillfully in one corner and thrust it back into his pocket. Then he walked, with firm step, past the darkened window, into the house.

XVIII

HERE was a gathering cloud in the air—brooding, like a storm. Uncle William looked up to it, then he went on dragging his dory down the beach to the water's edge. A voice sailed through the air, and he paused and looked up. Benjy, coming down the rocky path, was signalling to him violently. Uncle William dropped the dory and stood up. He advanced up the beach and the two men faced each other. Great clouds were rolling up from the horizon, and down behind them the sea boomed.

"Have you heard what's going on?" demanded Bodet. He was breathing a little grimly.

"I kind o' got it out of Andy this morning," admitted Uncle William.

Bodet looked at him in silence.

"I do 'no' why I didn't get the idee sooner," went on Uncle William. "Their lumber must have been lying around here fo-five days, now. But you've had such a lot of stuff clutterin' up the dock, that I didn't take no notice. I do 'no' 's I'd 'a' seen it this morning—only Andy looked so kind o' queer and meachin' down 't the dock—that I said plain out to him, I said, 'What you been doing, Andy?' An' he had to tell me. He hated to—like pizen. Uncle William smiled a little. I told him he 'd been putty foolish," he added slowly.

"Foolish!" Bodet fizzed. "It's a crime! Building a hotel!—up there!" He waved his hand up over the great cliffs.

Uncle William looked up to them with kindly eye. "'Tain't a hotel—exactly—"

"Seventy-five rooms," said Bodet.

"'Tis a good many," said Uncle William.

"Traipsing all over the place—I'll shoot 'em," said Bodet savagely.

"Shootin' won't do any good, Benjy." Uncle William was mild. "I thought about shootin' 'em myself—whilst I was bein' mad this mornin'."

"They sha 'n't step on my land—nor yours," said Bodet. "Do you think I'd have come up here—to the ends of the earth—to be tramped on?"

"Why, no, Benjy—an' you ain't goin' to be tramped on." Uncle William's voice was soothing. "But, you see—they've got a *right* to go acrost your land, and across mine."

Bodet looked at him. He took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead and put the handkerchief back. "What do you mean William?" he said.

"Set down, Benjy." Uncle William found a convenient rock. "It's in the deed. You see, Andy, he wanted it that way and I never thought much about it, one way or the other—I reckon he wouldn't ever 'a' sold it without," Uncle William added slowly. "Anyway I give it to him, and it runs right by your place—near as I can make out. I've been kind o' thinking about it since I found out."

Benjy groaned a little.

"I know jest how you feel, Benjy." Uncle William's voice held a deep note in it, "—about rusticators, and havin' 'em go by your windows, all hours, day and night, a-gabbling and so kind o' cheerful-like. I do 'no' 's I could stand it myself."

"I'm not going to stand it," said Bodet, "I'll sell out—leave the Island."

"Mebbe that's what he wants—what he's countin' on," said William slowly. Benjy glared at him.

"Don't you worry, Benjy." Uncle William looked out to sea where the big waves tumbled under the wind and the whitecaps gathered and bobbed and rode high—"Don't you holler 'fore you're hurt. The' ain't anybody gone past your windows yet.... I'm figgerin' on it," went on Uncle William, "an' I can't stan' it, no more 'n you can—to have 'em a-settin' on the beach here—" Uncle William's gaze dwelt on it fondly. "'Twouldn't be the same place—if I'd got to look up, any minute, and see two-three of 'em settin', or kind o' gettin' into the boats, and squealin'.... It's partly the clo'es, I reckon," said Uncle William after a minute, "—the women's things like men's—and the men's like women's. Can't tell which from 'tother, half the time. Look up, and see a hat and coat and shoes, mebbe, and think it's a man and get your mind all fixed for a man—and it turns into a woman.... There was a young man over to Pie Beach one summer," said Uncle William slowly, "that had a green veil onto his hat. I'd hate to have a young man with a green veil a-settin' on my beach."

Bodet snorted.

Uncle William cast a mild eye at him. "They're nice folks, too—some of 'em," he said conscientiously, "and they're always polite. They talk to me real kind—and encouraging." His eyes rested on the dark horizon line beyond the tumbling waves. "But the's suthin' queer about the way I feel when I'm talking with 'em. They're polite and I'm polite—real polite, for me. But sometimes, when we're a-settin' here—as close as you be—and talkin' real comfortable, I get to feelin' 's if I was alongside a chasm—kind of a big, deep place like—and standin' on tiptoe, shouting to 'em." Uncle William wiped his forehead. "I gen'ally go out and sail a spell after I've talked to 'em," he added. Bodet laughed out.

Uncle William smiled. "Now, don't you mind, Benjy. I'm figgerin' on it. I reckon we 'll manage to live along—somehow."

"The place is his," said Bodet, "bought and paid for—"

"A thousand dollars," said Uncle William.

Bodet looked at him—then he groaned softly. "And he 'll use your land, and mine, for a door-yard—and the beach for a sand-pile. All he needs is land enough to build his hotel on—and he's got it."

"Yes, he's got it," admitted William, "and they must have quite a piece of building done, by this time—They're adding on and raising up, Andy said." Uncle William got to his feet. "I reckon I'll go take a look at it." He glanced at the harbor. "No kind o' day to fish—George Manning working?" he asked casually.

"Yes—he's working." Bodet's tone was a little stiff.

"Um-m—" Uncle William moved off a little distance. He drew his dory up the beach, and potted about a little. "I was just going out to see to the *Jennie*," he said. "But she's all right—and mebbe it 'll blow over." He looked up at the sky. "I o't to get some things down 't the store—" He felt in his pockets. "You got any money, Benjy?"

Benjy shook his head. "I can give you a cheque if you want it." There was a little, quizzical smile with the words.

Uncle William paused, his hand half drawn from his pocket—a light filled his face, and a little laugh. "That 'll do, Benjy—that 'll do fust-rate," he said.

Bodet drew out his cheque book and opened it. "How much do you want!" he asked.

Uncle William paused. He looked at the cliffs, and at the sky—"I might want a considabul," he said slowly—"Couldn't you just sign your name down there, Benjy, the way you do, and let me get what I need?"

Bodet looked at him a minute. Then he signed the cheque and handed it to him—a little smile in his eyes. "Tell me what you make it," he said.

"Oh, I'll tell you," said Uncle William cordially. "I'd tell you now—only I don't know how much it 'll cost—what I'm going to buy." He moved off up the beach.

At the foot of the cliff he paused and looked back. "Mebbe I'll see Harriet," he said. "Her temper ain't good. But she's firm, and she's got sense."

Bodet shook his head. "The thing is tied tight, William. I looked into it before I came down."

"D you see Moseley?" said William. "He could tell ye. He knows the Island—and everybody on it."

"Yes, I saw him. He said the papers were drawn and signed—two weeks ago—in his office. You're not dealing with Andy—this time, William."

"I guess I'll go see Harr'et," said Uncle William cheerfully. "And don't you worry, Benjy. The' ain't nobody going to set on your land without you want 'em to—it ain't right—and it ain't goin' to be."

Uncle William smiled—a great, reassuring smile—and mounted the zigzag path to the cliff. For a minute his figure loomed against the sky at the top. Then it disappeared over the edge, headed toward Andy's house.

XIX

THE large man came softly along the beach, treading with light, smooth steps.

Uncle William, mending his net, did not look up.

The man paused beside him, and looked about—with pleased, expansive eye.

Uncle William's glance rested on him.

The man looked down. "Good morning, Mr. Benslow—I've come back, you see."

"I see ye," said Uncle William.

The man filled his chest. "I've come to see how they're getting on—over at my place. I bought a small piece, of Halloran, you know—You heard about it, I presume?"

"Andy said suthin' about your wantin' to buy of him," said Uncle William discreetly.

"Yes, I bought his house and what land goes with it. It's small—but there didn't seem to be much land for sale around here—" He dropped a casual eye in Uncle William's direction.

Uncle William's face was placid.

"I'm building a little," said the man.

"So I heard tell," said Uncle William.

"It's a great place," said the man. His chest expanded a little more. "I shall advertise, of course, and I expect a good class of patrons for this place." He balanced himself on his toes and looked down on Uncle William benignantly.

Uncle William went on mending his net. His blue eyes squinted at the meshes and his big arms moved hack and forth in even rhythm.

The man looked down at him doubtfully. Then he found a nail keg—a stout one—and sat down. "I want to be on good terms with my neighbors, Mr. Benslow," he said genially. He was leaning forward a little, toward Uncle William, one arm resting on his knee and the hand spread out toward him.

Uncle William looked at it a minute. Then he pushed up his spectacles and looked out to sea. "The' ain't many neighbors round here," he said, "—jest me and Benjy—and Andy."

"That's what I meant," said the man, "only *I'm* the neighbor now instead of—Hallo!—There's Halloran himself. I want to speak to him," He rose cautiously from his keg and motioned to Andy who was disappearing behind a pile of lumber down on the dock.

Andy came out, a little grudgingly, it seemed, and the man moved forward to meet him.

Uncle William went on mending his net.

When the man returned his face had a reddish look and his voice was a little controlled and stiff. "Halloran tells me you've put an injunction on my work up there?" He moved his hand toward the cliff.

Uncle William held up his net and squinted at it. "We-l-l," he said slowly, "we told 'em they better not do any more building—not till you come." He looked at him mildly.

There was silence on the beach. The gulls sailed overhead and the waves lapped softly, rippling up and back, with little salt washes. Uncle William looked about him with contented gaze. "We don't really need a hotel on the Island, Mr. Carter—not really," he said slowly.

The man looked at him a moment. Then he sat down on the keg, adjusting his weight nicely. "I understand your feeling, Mr. Benslow, I understand it perfectly—and it's natural. But you don't foresee, as I do, what a hotel will do for this Island. I've had experience in these matters, and I can tell you that in three years—" he looked about him proudly, "you wouldn't know the place!"

Uncle William cast a quick glance at the cliff—"I don't suppose I should," he said hastily.

"And as for values—" The man's hand swept the horizon. "You could sell at your own price. I'm really doing you a favor, Mr. Benslow—" he leaned toward him, "if you had foresight."

"Yes, I reckon it takes foresight," said Uncle William. He looked at him mildly. "I might just as well tell ye, Mr. Carter—you can't build no hotel—not up here. You can build down 't the village, if you want to," he added.

"In that hole—?" The man looked at him cynically. "Do you think anybody would board in that hole?"

"I shouldn't want to myself," admitted William, "but folks are different—some folks are different."

The man rose to his feet. "I shall be sorry to have any ill feeling with you, Mr. Benslow. But you can't expect me to sacrifice my plans—not unless you are willing to buy the place yourself." He dropped a narrow eye on him for a minute.

"That's what I was thinking," said Uncle William cordially.

The man smiled a little. "What would you consider it worth?" he asked pleasantly.

"Well—" Uncle William considered, "I do 'no' just what 'tis worth. We *paid* Andy two thousand for it."

The man's mouth looked at him for a minute, then it closed, in a little smile. "You mean you *would* pay that," he suggested.

"I mean we *did* pay it," said Uncle William stoutly, "—last week. An' then I told 'em not to drive another nail, or I'd sue 'em!" He was sitting erect now and there was a little glint in the blue eyes. "Set down, Mr. Carter." He motioned to the nail keg. "I might jest as well tell ye—plain out—so 's 't you can understand. Andy didn't own that place. He ain't owned it for years. He don't own stock nor stone on the Island—Don't own his own boat out there—" Uncle William nodded to the dark boat, rocking beside the *Jennie*. Andy, on the deck, was busy hauling up the sail and making ready to cast off. Uncle William's eye rested on him, with a little humorous gleam. "You see, Andy, he got scared, fo-five years ago, 'bout his property. He's a kind o' near man, Andy is, and he got the idee he 'd make everything over to Harr'et—to have it safe. So that's what he done. He give her a paper saying he 'd made it all over to her—everything. Nobody knew it, I guess—except me. And I wouldn't 'a' known it if it hadn't been for one day, when we was out sailin'—We got to talking about one thing and another—and fust thing he knew, he 'd told me. He made me promise not to tell, and I ain't told—not a soul—not till now." Uncle William beamed on him. "I reckon 'twon't do any harm now."

The man's gaze was fixed on him. "I shall see what the law has to say about it," he said quietly.

"Well, I would if I was you," said Uncle William cordially, "I did, when I bought my piece. I see a lawyer—a *good* one—and he said my deed wa 'n't wuth the paper 'twas writ on if Harr'et didn't give a quit-claim deed—So she give it."

The man's gaze was looking out to sea.

Uncle William looked at him benevolently. "It ain't a *just* law—*anybody* can see it ain't just! How was you going to know 't Harr'et owns Andy? I wouldn't 'a' known it if we hadn't been sailing that way. And *you* couldn't 'a' known it—You *didn't* know," said Uncle William with conviction.

The narrow eyes turned on him for a minute. "There's such a thing as law," he repeated.

"Law's ticklish," said Uncle William. "Far as I make out, the man that's got the most money, beats—after a spell."

There was silence again. "I suppose you know I paid Halloran five hundred down," said the man.

"Yes, Andy told me about the five hundred down—and five hundred the first of the month." Uncle William's hand sought his pocket. "Andy give that five hundred to me. I reckon he kind o' hated to hand it to ye." Uncle William's eye sought the dark boat that had lifted sail and was creeping out of the harbor. "I told him I'd just as lives give it to you as not—I'd be real glad." He held out the roll of bills.

The man took them, in thick fingers, and counted them.

Uncle William watched him, with deep, detached eye—"I'll tell you how it is, Mr. Carter—You wouldn't ever 'a' been happy here on the Island—not really happy. You see, here on the Island, we gen'ally fish, or cut bait, or go ashore. You 'd like it better to go ashore."

The man moved away a few steps. "To tell you the truth, I am glad to be out of it," he said, "I was making your land altogether too valuable—and nothing in it for me."

"That's the way I felt," said Uncle William cordially. "I don't like things 't I own to get too val'able. It makes a lot of bother owning 'em.... You 'll just about get the boat—if you was thinkin' of going today," he suggested.

The man looked at him—then he smiled and held out his hand. "Good-by, Mr. Benslow. I think I know a gentleman—when I meet him."

Uncle William rubbed his hand down his trouser leg and took the one that was held out. "Good-by, Mr. Carter. I don't suppose I'll see you again. You won't be comin' back to the Island, I suppose. But we 'll buy your lumber—we can work it in somehow, I reckon."

The man moved away, and Uncle William returned to his net. Now and then his eyes sought the little dark boat that sailed back and forth against the misty horizon—and a smile crept up to the eyes and lingered in them—a little smile of humor and gentleness and kindly pity and strength.

XX

I 'd LET him go, Benjy, if I was you." Two weeks had gone by and the mackerel continued to run. George Manning had stayed by the house, driving nails with big, fierce strokes and looking out over the harbor with his set face.... The house had come on rapidly—the shingling was done and most of the inside woodwork was up. A new set of men had been put on, to replace the mackerel men, and Manning drove them hard. It had not been easy to get men, or to keep them—with the mackerel schooling red out there in the harbor. But something in Manning's eye held them to their work.

"I'd let him go, Benjy," said Uncle

William. The two men stood in front of the new house, looking toward it. "He's got her closed in tight—" went on Uncle William, "Windows all in. The' can't anything happen to her now.... He's stood by ye putty well," he suggested craftily—"better 'n I'd 'a' done—with all that goin' on out there!" He waved his hand at the water.

Bodet's eye followed the motion. "I want him for the inside work," he said.

Uncle William looked at him benevolently. "I know you *want* him, Benjy. But here on the Island we al'ays kind o' give and take—Ain't you been taking quite a spell?" he added gently.

Bodet turned a little. "A contract's a contract," he said uneasily.

"Well, mebbe," said Uncle William, "I reckon that's why we ain't ever had many contracts here on the Island—We've al'ays liked to live along kind o' humanlike."

Bodet smiled a little. "I'll let him off," he said, "—if he 'll get things along so we can paint—I can look after the painting for him myself—" his chest expanded a little.

Uncle William's eye was mild. "I reckoned you 'd come around to doin' it, Benjy. We wouldn't ever 'a' felt comfortable, sitting in your house—when 'twas all done," Uncle William looked at it approvingly—"We wouldn't 'a' wanted to set there and look at it and remember how George Manning didn't get a chance to put down a net all this season.... I reckon I'd al'ays kind o' remember his face—when I was settin' there—the way he looks in there, and the mackerel ripplin' round out there in the water—and him hammerin'."

Bodet grunted a little. "All right—I'll let him off—tomorrow."

Uncle William beamed on him. "You 'll feel a good deal better, Benjy—now 't you've done it. I see it was kind o' making you bother?"

"I could have stood it—quite a while yet—if you could have," said Bodet dryly.

Uncle William chuckled and looked toward the house—"There's George in there now—You go tell him—why don't you, Benjy."

He moved away and Bodet stepped toward the house. He disappeared inside and Uncle William seated himself on a rock and studied the boats that dotted the harbor. Only two were at anchor—the new Jennie, riding in proud, fresh paint, near by, and George Manning's great boat—dark green, with crimson lines and gleams of gold along the prow. She was a handsome boat, large and finely built, and Maiming had refused more than one offer for her for the mackerel season....

He would take her out himself—or she should ride the season at anchor.

Uncle William turned toward the house—The young man was coming from the door. "Hello, George—I hear you're going out!"

The sombre face smiled a little. "'Bout time!" His eye dropped to the big boat and lingered on it. "She's all ready—and I've got my pick of men." He gathered a stem of grass from the cliff and took it in his teeth. "I don't believe I was going to hold out much longer," he said.

"Oh, yes—*you 'd 'a' held out.* I wa 'n't a mite afraid of your not holdin' out," said Uncle William. "All I was afraid of was that *Benjy 'd hold out*—I kind o' thought he 'd be 'shamed byme-by—when he come to see how 'twas on the Island.... It's different, living on an island, George. We can't expect everybody to see what we do—right off, I guess. There's something about living on an island, perhaps. You just get little handy samples o' things and see how 'tis—right off. Bein' born on an island's a dretful good thing—saves you hurryin' and repentin'." Uncle William gazed at the horizon. "Benjy don't like repentin' any more 'n you do. He 'll be real glad 'bout your going—byme-by."

"I'm going down to fix things up a little—I'll be back along towards night."

"Oh—George—?" Uncle William's fingers fumbled in his pocket.

The young man held his step.

"I've got it here—somewheres—" murmured Uncle William. "Yes—here 'tis.... You just give this to Celia, will you?" He held out a torn envelope. "You tell her to put it behind the clock for me." Uncle William's face was impassive.

The young man eyed it a minute....

"All right." He held out his hand. "I wasn't expecting to go by your place. But I can—if you want me to." He tucked the note in his pocket and moved off.

Uncle William looked after him with a kindly smile—"Just hates to do it—worst way," he murmured.... "Don't none of us know what's good for us, I reckon—no more 'n he does."

Celia, moving about the room like a bird, paused a moment and listened. Then she went cautiously to the window and pushed back the red curtain and looked out... her eyes followed the line of road, with eager, glancing look—little smiles in them and bubbles of laughter. She dropped the curtain and went back to her

work, shaking out pillows and dusting the quaint room, with intent, peering looks that darted at the dust and shook it out and rebuked it as it flew.

A shadow blocked the door, but she did not look up. She held a pillow in her hand, looking severely at a rip in the side and Uncle William's feathers fluffing out.... The young man scraped his feet a little on the stone step.

She looked up then—the severe look still in her face. "Mr. Benslow is not here," she said.

"I know he is not here." He stepped over the sill. "He asked me to give you this." He fetched the foolish paper out of his pocket grimly and looked at it and handed it to her.

She took it gravely. "What is it for?" she asked.

"He said you were to put it behind the clock—I don't know what it's for—" he said a little gruffly.

Her laugh scanned the bit of paper. "I can put it behind the clock—if he wants it there—" She walked over and tucked it away. "But I think it's a funny idea," she said.

"So do I," said George.

"Will you sit down?" She motioned to the disorderly room.

"I've got to go," he replied. He looked about him—sitting down.

A little smile played through Celia's face and ran away. "I didn't thank you for carrying the potatoes for me—that night—" she said politely. "You went off so quick I didn't get a chance."

"I'm going mackereling tomorrow," responded George.

"You are!" Her eyes opened. "Did Mr. Bodet say you could?"

His face darkened. "I'd have gone before—so far as he is concerned." He straightened himself a little.

"Oh—I—thought—he didn't want you to go."

"He didn't—but that isn't what kept me."

"What was it—kept you, then?" She had seated herself and her hands, holding the dust-cloth, were crossed demurely in her lap.

George looked at them. "I stayed because I thought I ought to," he said.

"I'd have gone." She gave a little flit to the dust-cloth and folded it down.

He turned his eyes away. "Likely enough you would—" he said, "you're a woman—"

"I don't know what you mean by that!" She had got to her feet and was looking at him.

"I don't know just what I mean myself," said George. "But I guess I didn't mean any harm—women are just different, you know.... I've got to go now—" he said, crossing his legs.

"You've got a nice boat," said Celia. The teasing look had left her face.

"Do you think so?" He flushed a little and lifted his eyes to the window.

"Uncle William says she's the best boat on the harbor," said Celia.

"Well—I guess she is.... He's got a good one, too—mine's bigger," said George.

"It's a beautiful boat, I think," said the girl. She had gone to the window and was looking down. The wind came in and blew past her curls a little and ruffled around through the room.

"I'd like to take you out in her some day," said George.

"Would you!" She turned to him, with a quick little flutter of curls and the color dabbing her cheeks. "I'd love to go!"

"All right." He got up. He went toward the door slowly—as if fingers held him.

The girl did not stir....

He turned at the door and looked at her—"Good-bye," he said—

"Good-bye." She moved a step, "Oh—I—"

He paused a minute—waiting.

"I thank you for bringing the paper," said Celia.

"That's all right." He moved away down the path.

She stood where he had left her—the dust-cloth in her hand, the little clear color in her cheeks. Slowly the look changed. By and by she went to the window and looked out. Down below, a young man had drawn a dory to the water's edge and was shoving off. She watched him seat himself and pull out with long, easy strokes.

Presently he looked up. He crossed the clumsy oars in one hand and lifted his hat.

The dust-cloth fluttered a moment and was gone.

With a smile the young man replaced his hat and resumed the oars. The dory moved through the water with long, even motion—and overhead a gull followed the dory, hanging on moveless, outspread wings.

XXI

THE day was alive—pink dawn, moving waves, little tingling breaths of salt, and fresh, crisp winds. Celia, up in the little house, was singing bits of song, peering into closets and out, brushing and scrubbing and smiling, and running to and fro.... Uncle William, out on the big rock near the house, turned his

head and listened to the flurry going on inside.... There was a pause and a quick exclamation—and silence. Through the open door he could see the curly head bent over an old plate. She was standing on a chair and had reached the plate down from the top shelf. Uncle William's face fell a little. She jumped down from the chair and came toward the door, holding it at arm's length. "Look at that!" she said.

Uncle William looked. "That's my boot-grease," he said a little wistfully. "I put it up there—kind o' out of your way, Celia."

She set it down hard on the rock. "I'll make you some fresh—when I get to it." She disappeared in the door, and Uncle William looked at the plate. He half got up and reached out to it—"The's suthin' about real old grease—" he murmured softly. He took up the plate and looked at it—and looked around him—at the sky and moor and sea.... "I do' 'no' *where* I'd put it 't she wouldn't find it," he said regretfully. He set the plate down on the rock and returned to his harbor. A light wind touched the water and the little boats skimmed and shook out sail. Down on the beach George Manning was bending over his dory, stowing away nets. The other men on the beach went to and fro, and scraps of talk and laughter floated up. Uncle William leaned over, scanning the scene with happy eye—"When you goin' out, Georgie?" he called down.

The young man lifted his head and made a hollow of his hands—"Waiting for Steve," he called up.

"He goin' out with ye?"

The young man nodded and pointed to a figure loping down over the rocks.

The figure joined him and stood by him. The two men were talking and scanning the sky. Uncle William gazed over their heads—out to the clear horizon.... "Best kind o' weather," he murmured. He looked a little wistfully at the *Jennie* rocking below.

Celia came to the door, "You going out today, Mr. Benslow?"

Uncle William shook his head and looked at the sky.

"It's a good day," said Celia.

"Best kind o' day—" assented Uncle William. He looked again at the heavens. Little scallops—rays of clouds, shot athwart it.

"I'd go if I was you," said Celia.

"I thought mebbe I'd stay and help Benjy—byme-by. George Manning's going out." The corner of his eye sought her face.

It dimpled a little. "He told me he was going out—when he brought the paper yesterday," she said. "It's behind the clock—when you want it," she added.

"I don't want it—not now," said Uncle William absently.

Celia returned to her work and Uncle William was left in the clear, open peace of the morning. Along the horizon the boats crawled back and forth, and down on the beach the clutter and hurry of men and oars came up, fresh. He bent forward and watched it all—his big, round face full of sympathy and happy comment....

"Much as ever George 'll make out to set this morning," he said. His eye scanned the distant boats that crept along the horizon with cautious tread. "He ought to 'a' known Steve Burton 'd be late. Steve 'd miss his own funeral—if they 'd let him." Uncle William chuckled.... The great, dark boat had lifted sail and was moving a little, feeling her way to meet the mysterious power that waited somewhere out in the open—Uncle William watched her swing to the wind and lift her wings....

He stepped to the door—"Oh, Celia—Want to see suthin' pretty?"

The girl went to the window and looked out. She gazed at the sky, and swept the horizon with a look. "Anything different from usual?" she said. Her eye kept away from the harbor.

Uncle William came and stood behind her, looking down. "Just look down there a minute, Celia." He took the curly head in his hands and bent it gently.

She gazed at the boat—pacing slowly with the deepening wind—and her eyes glinted a little.

"Looks nice, don't it?" said Uncle William.

She nodded, her fingers on her apron traveling with absent, futile touch. "I always like to see boats start off," she said happily.... "Look, how she takes the wind—!" She leaned forward, her eyes glowing, her face lighted with the same quick, inner light that touched the breeze and the sails.

Uncle William, behind her, smiled benignantly.

"He's a good sailor," he said contentedly, "I taught George how to sail a boat myself."

He leaned forward beside her. The boat had come opposite them—gathering herself for flight. The full sails tightened to the breeze, and the bow rose and dipped in even rhythm.... The girl's eyes followed it happily.

Uncle William's hands made a trumpet about his words—"Oh-o—George! Oh-lo-ho!—Ship ahoy!" he bellowed.

The young man looked up. He took off his hat and swung it about his head. The boat was moving faster and the wind blew the hair from his forehead.

"Give him a kind of send-off, Celia!" said Uncle William. He untied the little starched bow of her apron. "Wave it to him," he said. "It 'll bring him good luck, mebbe—!"

She pulled at the apron and flung it wide—shaking it up and down with quick little movements that danced.

"That's the way," said Uncle William, "That's right."

The young man looked up with eager eyes. He leaped on the rail and ran along with quick, light step, waving back. Then he sprang to the stem seat and took the tiller. He was off to the mackerel fleet—with the sun shining overhead—and up on the cliff the girl stood with eager eyes and little freshening curls that blew in the wind.

She tied on the apron soberly and went back to her work.

Uncle William, standing up over the sink, was looking for something.

"What is it you want?" she asked.

Uncle William dimbed down and peered under the sink. "I used to have a paintbrush," he said. He looked about the room vaguely and helplessly—

"Covered with red paint?" asked Celia.

"—Mebbe 'twas red," said Uncle William thoughtfully, "I do 'no' *when* I used that paint-brash—But it's a good brush and Benjy said they was short of brushes. I thought mebbe—"

"It's out behind the woodpile," she said crisply, "I put it there yesterday—fifty old rags with it—I was going to burn them up," she added, "but I didn't get to it." Her eyes danced.

"They're perfectly good paint rags, Celia." Uncle William looked at her reproachfully. "I was tellin' Benjy this morning I'd got a nice lot of rags for him. I do 'no' *what* I'd 'a' done if you 'd burned *them* up."

"There are plenty more around," said the girl. She looked meaningly at a bit of wristband that showed below his sleeve.

Uncle William tucked it hastily out of sight. "I gen'ally trim 'em off," he said. "But I couldn't find my scissors this morning—I thought the knife had cut it putty good?" He peered down at it distrustfully.

"Knife!" The word was scornful—but the little look that followed him from the door held only gentleness and affection.

Uncle William, outside the door, looked at the sky and the harbor, with the mackerel fleet sailing on it—and at the *Jennie* rocking below. Then his eye traveled, half guiltily, over the moor toward Benjy's, and back.... "Best kind o' weather," he murmured. "No kind o' day to—" He took a step toward Benjy's house—another, and another, and moved briskly off up the road. Suddenly he turned, as if a hand had been laid on his shoulder, and strode toward the rocky path that led to the beach. A big smile held his face. "—No kind o' day to paint," he said softly as he dragged the dory to the water's edge and shoved off. Five minutes later the *Jennie* had hoisted anchor and was off to the fleet. Benjy, painting with Gunnion up in the new house, looked out now and then from the window as if hoping to see a big figure rolling toward him along the white road.

Celia, in the little house on the cliff, brought a roll of cloth from the shelf over the sink and undid it slowly. Inside was a large pair of scissors. She smiled a little as she took them up and spread out the cloth. It was a great garment, the size and shape of Uncle William. Sitting by the window, where the breeze blew in from the water, her thimble flew in the light. Now and then she glanced far out where the boats sailed. Then her eyes returned to her needle and she sewed with swift stitches... a little smile came and went on her face as the breeze came and went on the water outside.

XXII

IN the clear morning light the mackerel fleet stood out against the horizon. Only one boat had not gone out—a dark one, green with crimson lines and gold along her prow. The girl on the beach looked at it curiously as she selected her fish from the dory, transferring them to the pan held high in the hollow of her arm. The silver scales gleamed in the sun—lavender, green and blue, and violet-black, as she lifted them, in running lines of light. The salt tang in the air and the little wind that rippled the water touched her face. She lifted it with a quick breath and looked out to the mackerel fleet upon the sea... Uncle William had promised to take her—some day. She returned again to her fish, selecting them with quick, scrutinizing glance... A shadow fell across the pan and she looked up. The young man had paused by the dory—and was regarding her with sombre eyes.

The little curls shook themselves and she stood up. "Aren't you going out?"

The sombre eyes transferred themselves to the sky. "By and by—maybe—no hurry." He smiled down at her, and the blood in her cheeks quickened.

"Everybody else has gone—" She waved an impatient hand at the distant fleet that sailed the horizon.

"I haven't gone," he said. He continued to study the sky with serene gaze.

"Why don't you?" she asked severely.

He looked at her again, the little, dark smile touching his lip, "I'm waiting for luck," he said.

"You won't find it here—" Her eye swept the beach—with its tumbling fishhouses and the litter of dories and trawls.

"Maybe I shall," he said. He looked down at the dory. "There are more fish right there than I've caught in three days," he said quietly.

Her wide eyes regarded him—with a little laugh in them somewhere. "They call you 'King of the Fleet,' don't they?" she said demurely.

"That's what they call me," he replied. He moved a little away from her toward a dory at the water's edge. "Want to go out?" he said carelessly.

Her eyes danced, and she looked down at the fish in her pan and up to the sky, and ran lightly to the fish-house and pushed the pan far inside and shut the door. "I ought to be getting dinner," she said, coming back, with a quick smile.

"Never mind dinner." He held out his hand and she scrambled into the dory, her eyes shining and the little curls bobbing about her face. She was like a child—made happy.

He pulled out with long strokes, looking contentedly at her as she sat huddled in the end of the boat. "I am

taking you along for luck, you know.”

“I’ll never bring anybody luck,” she replied. Her eyes followed the great gulls overhead. “I’m like the birds, I guess,” she lifted her hand, “I just keep around where luck is.”

“That’s good enough for me,” he replied. He helped her into the boat and lifted anchor, running up the sails and casting off. The breeze freshened and caught the sail and filled it and the great boat crept from the harbor and rounded the point.... Out in the open, it was blowing stiff and the boat ran fast before it, little dashes of spray striking the bow and flying high. The girl’s laugh sounded in the splashing water, and the salt spray was on her arms and cheeks and hair.

The young man looked at her and smiled and turned the bow—ever so little—to take the wave and send it splashing about her, and her laugh came to him through the swash of the spray. It was a game—old as the world... pursuit and laughter and flight and soft, shining color and the big sun overhead, pulling the whole game steadily through space—holding the eggshell boats on the waves and these two, riding out to sea.

He turned the bow again and the splashing of the water ceased. She was looking at him with beseeching, shining eyes, and he bent a little forward, a tremulous smile of power on his lip. He was drinking life—and sky and sea were blotted out. The boat ran heedless on her way... and he talked foolish nothings that sounded important and strange in his unstopped ears.... The girl nodded shyly and spoke now and then—but only to the sky and sea....

The sky had darkened and the distant fleet bore toward home—casting curious glances toward the dark boat that moved with random hand.... George Manning could be trusted in any blow, but he was up to something queer off there—with a sky like that. They drew in sail and ran close, making for harbor....

The young man looked up and blinked a little and sprang to his feet. He had pushed the tiller as he sprang, and one leg held it firm while he reached to the guy rope and loosed it. “Get down,” he said harshly.

Her quick eyes questioned him and the little head lifted itself...With a half-muttered word he had seized her, crowding her to the bottom of the boat and ducking his head as the great boom swung past.

She gazed at him in swift anger, pulling herself free. But her wrath spoke only to the winds—He had run forward, dragging down the foresail, and was back to the tiller—his dark face set sternly, his eyes on the horizon.

When she tried to get up, he did not look at her—“Stay where you are,” he said roughly.

She hesitated a minute and sank back, biting her lip close. The line of gunwale that rose with heavy sweep to the sky and fell through space, cut her off. There was only the creaking of the boat, straining against the sea, and the figure of the man, above her, who had thrust her down—the great figure of the man and the blackened sky. By and by the rain fell and drenched her and the wind blew fiercely past the boat, driving them on. She could see the great hand on the tiller tighten itself to the wind, and force its will upon it, and the figure of the man grow tense. One leg thrust itself quickly and struck against her and pushed her hard—but she would not cry out—She hated him and his boat and the great sea pounding about them.... She wanted to get her pan of fish and go home to Uncle William and cook the dinner. The tears were on her face, mingling with the rain and the salt water that drenched it.

By and by the pounding waves grew less and the boat ceased to strain and creak and the great hand on the tiller relaxed its hold a little.

“You ’d better get up now,” he said—his voice sounded rough and indifferent and she lifted indignant eyes, but he did not see her. His gaze was still on the horizon, holding it with intent look.

She got up and gathered the little loose curls in her hands, wringing the water from them and shaking them apart.

Then she got to her knees and crawled to the seat, shivering a little. Off to the left, the woods of the Point shut off the main force of the wind, but the breeze was still fresh. He took off his coat and tossed it to her. “Put that on,” he said briefly.

It fell on the seat beside her, but she did not touch it or look at it. Her little face had a firm look.

His gaze left the horizon, for a flash, and came back. “You put on that coat,” he said.

“I don’t want it—” The words trailed away in a sob.

He did not look at her again. “You ’ll do as I tell you,” he said quietly—“or I shall make you.”

She reached out for the coat and put it on, drawing it miserably about her chin—“I think you are horrid.” She was wiping away the tears that ran quickly down.

“I don’t care what you think—You might have been killed,” he added after a pause.

“I’d rather—have been—killed.” The breath she drew was a quick sob.

He looked at her a minute. Then he looked away to the horizon. “There can’t be two captains on a boat,” he said dryly—“I didn’t mean to hurt you—I had to speak quick.”

She did not reply. She did not look at him again—not even when he helped her into the dory and rowed her ashore.

“I didn’t mean to hurt you,” he repeated, as he held up his hand to help her from the boat. She leaped to the beach. “I wish I’d never gone with you.” She stamped her little foot on the sand. “I’ll never go again—never, never—not as long as I live!” She turned her back on him and walked toward the fish-house.

He looked after her, a curious glint in his eye. Then he looked at his boat, riding at anchor, and the look changed subtly, “You needn’t worry,” he said softly—but not too softly to reach the pink ears—“You needn’t worry, Miss Celia—there will never be but one captain on a boat.”

She opened the door into the fish-house and took her pan and went up the rocky path without a look behind her.

XXIII

ANDY stepped up the road, a sombre look in his face. Now and then he cast an eye at the mouth of the harbor where the mackerel fleet sailed. Then he strode on with stately step. He had been fishing for a week and had caught nothing—twice his net had been hung up on the rocks and yesterday the dog-fish had run it through—and Harr'et's temper was worn thin.... He looked his grievance at the horizon.

Harriet had been firm. If he could not fish, he should paint, and Bodet was offering three-fifty a day. She had rented the boat, over his head—*his* boat—and she had talked about Jonah, and had sent him out of the house—with his paint brushes!

Andy fizzed a little and stepped higher and looked ahead up the road.

A figure, seated in the sunshine, was making strange pantomimic gestures with a paint brush. Andy stopped a minute to look at it—then he came steadily on.

Uncle William looked up and nodded. "Hello, Andy—goin' to help?"

"Guess so," said Andy. He glared at the harbor.

Uncle William spat his brush along the rock and dipped it again in the tin can beside him.

"What you doin'." asked Andy.

Uncle William squinted at the brush and rubbed it thoughtfully back and forth—a deep red smudge followed it. "Kind o' getting my brush ready," he said.

Andy sniffed. "Bodet inside?"

"Why, yes—he's there—" Uncle William hesitated—"Yes—he's there—"

He drew a long flourish of red on the rock and looked at it approvingly.

"It 'll take you an hour to get that brush clean," said Andy.

"Do ye think so?" Uncle William beamed. "That's just about what I cal'-lated—an hour."

"I'm going to work," said Andy virtuously. He moved toward the house.

Uncle William cast an eye at him. "I do 'no's I'd go in, Andy, if I was you—not just yet."

"Why not?" He wheeled about.

"Well—" Uncle William hesitated a second—and looked at the little clouds and the big moor, "I don't think Benjy's ready," he said, "not just ready."

"What's he doing?" asked Andy.

"Kind o' stewin'," said Uncle William, "He's got suthin' on his mind—about paint."

"Come—ain't it!" Andy's eye was curious.

"Yes—it's come—loads of it has come—" Uncle William drew the brush thoughtfully back and forth, making little red dabs along the rock. "The's a good many kinds—and colors—and sizes—piled up in there—but the' ain't any of 'em what Benjy wants." He lifted his brush with a flourish.

"What does he want, then!"

"I do 'no 's I can tell ye—exactly, Andy." Uncle William gazed at the harbor. "Benjy knows—somewheres in his mind—but he can't seem to find it on dry land." Uncle William chuckled.... "Gunnion's mixin' 'em, you know."

Andy nodded.

"An' he's got a green mixed up in there—that's along kind o' east by no'-east, I should think.... An' what Benjy wants, far's I make out, is a green that's kind o' no'-east by east." Uncle William chuckled again.... "Jim puts in the color, you know, and daubs some of it on a stick they've got there—and Benjy looks at it and says, no—'twon't do—needs more yellow or suthin'—and Jim chucks in a little yellow and then they both look at it and Benjy kind o' hops around—swears some. I thought I'd come out and do my brushes."

"Gunnion's a good painter," said Andy.

"Well—yes—he can lay it on putty good.... But they ain't got to layin' on yet. I do 'no's they ever will get to it," said Uncle William thoughtfully—"It 'd be easier if Benjy knew a little how the colors are liable to act together, I guess—when you put 'em in." Uncle William's eye was reflective. "I reckon that's what makes him lose his head so," he said, "—he ain't prepared in his mind for how Jim 'll make them colors act together. You see, Jim—he puts in the yellow and Benjy peeks in the pail, expecting to see suthin' kind o' yellow and, 'tead o' that, the thing's turned blue—sort o'."

"Like enough," said Andy carelessly—"He 'd ought to know yellow and blue will run towards green," he said contemptuously, "—anybody 'd know that."

"Benjy don't know it," said Uncle William, with an accent of decision. "You can tell by the way he acts—lookin' in the pail. You see he's after a green that's a little mite more on the yellow—so he says, proud as Punch, 'Put in more yellow,' he says, and then—when he sees it—he says things."

A voice sounded from the window and they turned around. Bodet stood in it, beaming at them and at the landscape. "Come on in and see the color we've got," he said triumphantly.

Uncle William gathered up his brush and turpentine and they moved slowly toward the house.

Benjy waved them toward the stairs. "Go up and look," he said.

Jim Gunnion, on the floor, was stirring a pot of paint with a stick. There was a set look in his face as he stirred.

Uncle William looked at him and winked. The look in Jim's face moved a little.

"There's a color for you!" said Bodet. He moved his hand proudly toward the door panel.

Uncle William put on his glasses and inspected it—"...is a good color, Benjy," he said cordially, "I'm glad ye held out—both of ye."

Bodet, with his head thrown back, stared at the streak of old-fashioned green on the panel. The man on the floor stirred the pot of paint. Uncle William looked at them both with benignant eye.... "I reckon I'm all ready to begin." He drew the paint brush down the leg of his trousers and looked at it inquiringly—"Putty clean," he said with satisfaction. "Now, where 'll you have me?"

The man on the floor handed him a pot of paint in silence and pointed to the mop-board. Uncle William sighed a little and let himself down. Andy, seizing another pail, attacked the unfinished panel. The painter went on mixing color. Benjy, over by the window, studied the harbor.

Presently he looked back into the room. "Fog's setting in," he said. Andy came across and looked out.

"Uh-huh," he said.

Uncle William, from the floor, looked up. "They've had quite a spell of weather," he said cheerfully, "and this 'll give 'em a chance to rest up a little and overhaul their tackle....'...is too bad about George—I kind o' reckoned he 'd ketch suthin' today." He got up and came to the window. A great blanket of white was moving toward them, over the water. All the little distant boats were hidden behind it.... "They 'll hev to come in keerful," said Uncle William. "I reckon I won't paint any more today." He laid his brush carefully along the top of the pail.

Andy looked at him and looked at his panel and hesitated. "You better stay here, Andy," said Uncle William encouragingly. "You 'll get quite a lot done if you stay."

He went cheerfully out, and Benjamin, watching from the window, saw him enter the blanket of fog and disappear.

XXIV

UNDER its white garment, the Island lay muffled and still. Tiny specks moved about on it—under some great canopy of space—they emerged and drifted and ran—calling into the fog. Out at sea the bell sounded its note, swinging to and fro with a deep, sharp clang. Men on the shore listened to it and peered into the fog.... The boats had come creeping in, one by one—some of them loaded to the rail—some grumbling at fog, and riding high. Only two were out now, and the day had come on to dusk—the dusk of the fog and of the night sliding silently in together.

The whole Island had gathered on the beach, looking into the fog—peering for glimpses of water, and the darker shapes of the boats out there.... George Manning had not come in—and about noon Uncle William had lifted anchor and drifted out, looking for absent boats—"Sometimes I kind o' sense where they be without seein' 'em," he had said.... The boats were all in now, swinging at their moorings under the soft dusk—all but Manning's and Uncle William. The last boats in had had glimpses of the *Jennie* and had heard Uncle William's voice booming through the fog. "He was off the Point, last I heard," said a voice on the beach.... "He was drifting along, sort o' looking out—told us how things was ahead—then the fog drove in and shut him off—then we heard him quite a spell after we couldn't see him"... the voice ran along the beach and ceased.

Someone had lighted a bonfire, and the children went fitfully back and forth in the glow.... The night was coming down.... "I don't mind a blow," said a complaining voice, "I don't care how hard a gale it blows, but I can't, stan' fog.... I wish they was in."

Up in the little house on the cliff, the ship's lantern was lighted—and a dull eye glowed at the night.... In the room, the girl moved with light feet, stopping now and then and bending her head for steps on the path or for some sound of the sea. She crossed once to the window and put her hands about her face and looked out into the grayness. She drew back with a little quick breath, and went again to her work.

On the beach, men strained their ears to listen... oar-locks creaked faintly, marking the fog. The beach listened and drew to its edge.... "That's William!"

"Uncle William's come!"—The children rushed down the beach and stood alert at the fog.

The oar-locks creaked leisurely in and the big form grew to them—over the dory's bow. Hands reached out and drew it up on the sand as the wave receded. Uncle William stepped out, without hurry—"No, I didn't find him—He must 'a' gone out considabul far—put in-shore, like enough." He drew a hand down his length of face and flicked the moisture from it. "Putty thick," he said cheerfully.

The children drifted off, with running shouts. Someone threw fresh staves on the fire and the flames leaped up, playing against the great curtain of fog and showing strange shapes. The faces took on mystery, and moved in the leaping light—as if they were all a big play. The calling tones deepened to the fog and the even-clangling bell rang its note—and stopped—and rang again.

Men went home to eat, and came back to the beach, and Uncle William climbed to the house on the cliff. "It's been a putty good day," he said placidly. "They've had quite a run o' luck—forty-fifty barrel, all told, I should think."

"Are they all in?" said the girl. She had placed the plate of fried fish before him, and stood beside him, waiting—a wistful look in her face.

"Where's Benjy?" asked Uncle William, helping himself to fish with leisurely hand.

"Down to the beach—hours ago," said the girl.

"Um-m—I didn't see him.... Yes, they're all in now—except George. He 'll be along pretty quick, I guess." He chewed with easy relish, reaching down a hand to Juno as she rubbed alongside. "She had her supper?" he asked.

"No, sir—I was waiting for you—I guess I kind of forgot her, too," said the girl with a little laugh. "Here, Juno—!" Juno walked across with stately mien to the plate of scraps.

The girl lifted a sober face. "You going back down to the beach, Uncle William!"

"Well—mebbe I'll go down a little while, byme-by. I didn't leave the *Jennie* all snug—You want some wood!" He peered into the box.

"I brought some in—while I was waiting."

"You hadn't ought to 'a' done that, Celia—"

"I hadn't anything else to do," said the girl, "and I was tired—waiting." She bent over the sink, scrubbing vigorously at the kettle.

Uncle William glanced at her. "If I was you, I wouldn't do any more tonight, Celia. I gen'ally chucked 'em under the sink—nights like this—" His gaze sought the window. "You ought to be getting back to Andy's pretty quick—'fore it gets any darker. The fog's coming in thick."

"I'm going—by and by. You through your supper?" She glanced at his plate.

"Yes, I'm through." He looked at the plate a little guiltily. "It was cooked nice," he said.

She smiled at him. "You didn't eat much." She carried the plate to the sink.

Uncle William took up his hat. "I'll be going down, I guess." He went to the door—her glance followed him—

"Uncle William—?"

"Yes, Celia."

She was looking down at her hands.

Uncle William came back. He reached out a hand and rested it on her shoulder. "There ain't any danger 't the Lord can't take care of, Celia," he said smiling. "I s'pose if *I* was takin' care of him, I'd be worried—a night like this.... But, you see, the Lord's got him."

"Yes, sir," said Celia.

"You go right home—and you go to sleep," said Uncle William.

"I'd rather stay here," said the girl quickly, "this is home."

"Why, so 'tis," said Uncle William, "—and the 'ain't any reason why you can't stay as well as not. You just lie down on the lounge here.... Juno's good comp'ny and there's the fire, and lights.... You won't get lonesome." He patted the shoulder and was gone.

The girl finished the dishes and sat down in the big chair by the stove. Juno came and jumped on her lap, and the girl gathered her up, hiding her face in the thick fur.... Out in the harbor she could hear the stroke of the fog-bell, and the voices from the beach, muffled and vague. Something was in the air—her fingers tingled with it—the electricity in Juno's thick fur—or was it something out there with the voices? She put down the cat and sat erect, gazing before her. Then she got up and took a little shawl from its nail and flitted from the room... down the steep path, stumbling and catching her breath—hurrying on, her face toward the sea and the little shawl gathered closer about her.

A great form loomed from the mist and came close to her—"That you, Celia?" It was Uncle William's voice, with a deep note in it, and she turned to him, catching at something in her throat, "I couldn't stay up to the house—" It was a breathless cry—

"There—there—You come right here." He gathered her hand, laying it on his arm and patting it a little. "Now we 'll run along," he said, "and see what's doing."

Down the beach they could hear the voices talking, calling—dying away. The fire had flared up, and the faces danced in and out.... "I kind o' sense suthin' coming," said Uncle William.

There was a long, gruff sound—a big whistle, like low thunder—and silence... then the whistle—sharper, and seeking—and the muffled chugging of big screws.... The faces, toward the sea, waited—intent. "She's off her course—"... The vague sounds came in nearer—and sheered away.... Through the veiling fog they could see red lights—and green—of the steamer. Then the whistle broke shrilly and moved off... the churring waves followed her.... On the beach they had thrown fresh brush on the fire, great armfuls that flared high—and the sound of the steamer dwindled through the mist.

"Looks as if the moon might break through," said Uncle William. The eyes looked up to a luminous spot in the fog—and came back to the beach.... "He 'd 'a' been in hours ago," said Andy, "—if he was coming—"

"Put in-shore—like enough," responded Uncle William.

The men gathered about the fire, squatting on the sand or sitting on boxes and kegs.... The fire was dying down now, but no one rose to throw on fuel.... The girl wandered to the water's edge and stood listening. The little waves touched her feet, but she did not draw back... Glances, by the fire, sought her and looked away. A dense stillness had settled on them—only the little moving waves broke it, as they ran up and ran back.... A muffled creak out of the dark, like the whisper of a sail turning, half-asleep—Then the rattle of cords, and a voice that laughed—"A-hoy!" The mist was still again, and then the call, coming through its blankness, "A-hoy! Ship ahoy!"

The mist parted and the boat came gliding through—her lights little points in the night—Slowly the mists lifted—rolling up, like great curtains into the darker night. A soft light that was not of moon or stars grew about them—The fire had died out and only the gentle light shone everywhere and through it the dark boat, seeming motionless, crept softly in.

XXV

THE group on the beach went swiftly toward the dock, Uncle William's lantern leading the way and swinging toward the end. He leaned over toward the boat in the mysterious light, "What 'd you ketch, Georgie?"

The young man looked up and a rope swirled through the air—"Twenty-six-seven barrel," he said easily.

A shout went up from the dock, broken sounds, bits of scoffing disbelief that piled down into the boat and shouted back and made a marvel of the catch.

Uncle William, with his big smile, moved back along the wharf—looking for someone.... He went toward the beach, swinging his lantern—far in the distance, towards Andy's, something flitted, and paused, and went on, and drifted past the horizon, out of sight. Uncle William's eye followed it, smiling. "Cur'us the way women is—running after ye, one minute—till you're most scared—and then."... He waved his lantern at the misty, moonlit hill, where the little figure flitted toward the sky. He shook his head.... Out at the end of the wharf there was calling and creaking, and the thumping of barrels and blocks of ice. Uncle William watched them a minute—then he turned toward the cliff. "What he 'll need more 'n anything's a good hot meal," he said. He climbed to the little house and opened the door cautiously. Bodet, across the room, glanced at him. "He's come," he said.

"Yes, he's come." Uncle William bustled about, getting out the kettle. "I thought mebbe you 'd be in bed." He placed the kettle on the stove and went over to the cupboard.

"In bed?" Bodet laughed—"I came up to get my coat. I don't go to bed tonight—not while things are stirring down there."

Uncle William turned his head to listen—Sounds of thumping came up faintly. "'Tis interesting," he said. "The's times when it seems's if more things was happening on this island than anywheres in the world—big things, you know.... Where do you s'pose Celia put that fish?" He peered under a bowl and brought out a piece of pie and looked at it fondly and set it on the table and went back.

"You might look down cellar," suggested Bodet.

With a sigh, Uncle William took up his lantern, and lifted a trap door in the floor. "I most hoped it wa 'n't down cellar," he said. He put his foot on the steep ladder and disappeared in inches.... He emerged triumphant. "The's quite a lot o' things down there—I didn't know where she kep' 'em."

"Just as lief you didn't," said Bodet.

Uncle William chuckled. "She looks after me putty well. I don't believe I've over e't once since she come!" He surveyed the table.

"You going to make coffee?" asked Bodet.

Uncle William looked at him. "You 'd like some, wouldn't you, Benjy?"

"I shouldn't object," said Bodet, "—if you're making it."

"Well, I might's well make some—'twon't take long—if you 'll go fetch a pail of water."

Benjy laughed and took up the pail. Uncle William watched him benignantly. "—And you might kind o' holler to George—tell him to come up when he's done."

"All right." Bodet departed with his pail and Uncle William potted about, singing a little, a kind of rolling chant, and grinding coffee—measuring it with careful eye.... "She couldn't 'a' run faster if the 'd been snakes after her." He chuckled into the coffee pot and looked up—Benjy had come in. "He says he 'll be right up," he said, finding a place for his pail on the sink.

"I'd better hurry," said Uncle William. He made coffee and cut bread and served the fish, with accustomed hand. "The's suthin' about cooking your own things," he said, "I do' 'no' what 't is—Hallo, George!" he looked up. "Come right in. We're all ready for ye."

They drew up to the table and Uncle William beamed on them. "Seems like old times, don't it!—Help yourself, George—You made a putty big catch—!"

"Pretty fair," said the young man with a twinkle.

"What 'll they figger up?" asked Uncle William.

"Twenty-nine barrel—on ice—" responded Manning.

Uncle William's eye sought Bodet. "That 'll give you two thousand dollar—putty near—?"

"I'm counting on twenty-three hundred—if I take them over myself."

"When are you coming back?" asked Bodet quickly.

The young man turned to him—"Back here?"

"Back to my house?"

"You can't have him yet awhile," said William.

Bodet shrugged his shoulders. "Gunnion's a fool!" he said.

"Well—I do' 'no' 's I'd say that." Uncle William considered—"He's colorblind, mebbe, but he's got sense."

Benjy looked at him—"Do you mean to tell me that man can't tell color?" he said sternly.

"He can tell some colors," said Uncle William, "I forget just which they be—but if you happen to strike 'em, he can tell 'em—good as anybody."

"I didn't happen to strike them," said Bodet dryly—"I want you," he said. He was looking at George.

Uncle William leaned back in his chair. "You comin' back, Georgie?" he asked.

"Give me three more days and I'm with you," said the young man. He rose and took up his hat. "I'm off now—Thank you for the supper, Uncle William." He was gone and they heard his leaping feet on the rocky path.

Uncle William looked at Bodet. "I reckon you better let him go, Benjy?"

"I don't see that I have any choice in the matter," said Bodet. He had pushed back from the table and was looking about him, a little fretfully. "We sha 'n't get done by Christmas—the rate we're going now," he added.

Uncle William looked at him. "What makes you in such a hurry, Benjy—?"

"Hurry!—Christmas—!" said Benjy. There was a little sniff in the air.

"What you going to do with your house when you get it done!" asked Uncle William casually.

Benjy stared at him. "I'm going to *live* in it," he said with emphasis. "—Providence permitting."

"I've been kind o' thinking about that," said Uncle William slowly, "—whilst you've been hurrying—Seems to me maybe 'twon't be near so much fun living in your house as 'tis building.... I've got a sight of comfort out of building your house," he added gently.

Bodet looked at him. "You 'd get comfort out of an earthquake, William."

"They're interesting," admitted Uncle William, "I've been in 'em—three of 'em—little ones, you know." He gazed before him.

"I'd rather be in three quakes—three big ones—than build on this Island," said Bodet firmly.

Uncle William's gaze broke. He pushed up his spectacles and leaned forward. "That's just where 'tis, Benjy. It's different—on the Island. When you've lived here a spell, you don't want to finish things up lickety-cut, and then set down and look at the water.... You kind o' spin 'em out and talk about 'em—paint one end, mebbe, and go out fishin' or suthin'—not paint the other for fo-five months, like enough—not ever paint it." He beamed on him.

Bodet moved restlessly. "Did you ever do any painting with Gunnion!" he demanded.

Uncle William's smile deepened. "I've painted with him—yes... 'tis kind o' fiddlin' work, painting with Jim Gunnion." He pushed back the dishes and rested his arms on the table—"This is the way I see it, Benjy.... I woke up the other night—along in the night—and got to thinkin' about it. We 'd have a real good time buildin' your house if you wa 'n't so kind o' pestered in your mind. You see—the's you and me and George and Gunnion—and Andy some days—and we could visit along whilst we was working—have real good times.... Like enough the boys 'd sing some—they most al'ays do sing when they're building on the Island—Sounds nice, when you're out on the water to hear 'em—two or three hammers goin', and singin'... I don't believe they've done much singin' on your house, Benjy?" He looked at him inquiringly.

"I don't believe they have," said Bodet.

His face was thoughtful. "They might have got along faster if they had sung," he added. He looked up with a little smile.

Uncle William nodded. "I do 'no's they 'd 'a' got along any faster—but you 'd 'a' liked buildin' better. The's suthin' about it—" Uncle William gazed about the little red room—"suthin' about the Island—when you're settin' up nights and the wind's a-screeching and howling and the waves poundin', down on the beach.... You get to thinking about how snug the boys made her, and you kind o' remember 'em, up on the roof, and how the sun kept shining and the sou'-west wind blowing and the boys singing.... It all seems different, somehow." Uncle William's gaze dwelt on it.

Bodet took up his hat. "I think I'll go down to the beach," he said soberly.

Uncle William's eye followed him.

"You don't think I'm scoldin' ye, Benjy, do you?"

Bodet paused beside him and laid a hand on the great shoulder. "I'd rather have you scold me, William, than have any other man I know praise me."

Uncle William's mouth remained open a little and the smile played about it. "I do 'no' why you say that, Benjy. I ain't any different from anybody—'cept't I'm fond of ye," he added.

"You're fond of everybody," declared Bodet laughing.

Uncle William's face grew guilty. "There's Harr'et," he said slowly. "Some days I can't even *abide* Harr'et!"

XXVI

BODET had taken largely to sitting about on nail-kegs, listening to the men talk and joining in now and then.... The little fretted look had left his eyes, and his voice when he spoke had a quiet note.

"You're doin' fine, Benjy!" Uncle William confided to him one morning. It was the week before Christmas. A fire had been built in the big living-room and the men had gathered about it, talking and laughing and thawing out. A fierce wind from the east was blowing and fine sleet drove against the windows. The room had a homelike sense—shut in from the storm.

"It's a great thing to have building goin' on, a day like this—when the's a big storm from the east," said Uncle William cheerfully. "If 'tw'an't for the building, you might not have a soul in to see you all day." He glanced complacently at the group about the fire.

"Costs me twelve-fifty a day," said Bodet dryly.

"Wuth it, ain't it?" said Uncle William, "I do 'no' what money's for if ye can't be happy with it...." He glanced affectionately at the quiet face opposite him. "You're getting happy every day, Benjy.... I do 'no's I ever see anybody get along as fast as you do—gettin' happy."

The tall man laughed out. "It's a choice between that and everlasting misery—on your old Island," he said.

"Yes, I guess 'tis." Uncle William's voice was contented.

The group about the fire broke up and moved off. Uncle William's eye followed them—"They're going to work now. You 'll get quite a piece done today—" He came back to the fire. "I was thinking—how 'd it do to have dinner up here!" He was looking about the room.

Bodet's glance followed his—"Who 'll cook it?" he said.

"We could send for Celia," said Uncle William. "Gunnion's team's out in the shed—he didn't unhitch. We could send down, easy enough, and fetch her up—dinner and all—and she could cook it out in your kitchen—" Uncle William beamed. "You 'd like that, wouldn't ye?"

"It's not a bad idea—I'll tell Gunnion to drive down and get her."

Uncle William laid a hand on his arm. "I reckon you 'd better let George fetch her up," he said.

"I can't spare him," said Bodet decisively. "Gunnion can drive back and forth all day if he wants to—" Uncle William got in his way, "I guess you better let George go, Benjy—he won't be no time driving down there and back."

With a little smile, Bodet yielded the point and Uncle William rolled off to find George Manning and send him out into the storm.

"You tell her to wrap up good," he called into the sleet... "and you see she's tucked in, George, and tell her to bring plenty of salt and pep-p-er." The last word was whirled apart by wind, and Uncle William retired into the house, a deep smile on his face.

Within an hour Celia was there, little beading moisture on the bobbing curls, and the pink in her cheeks like a rose—the kind that grows wild and red among the rocks. Uncle William looked at her approvingly. "Did you good to get out a spell, didn't it?" he said kindly.

"I didn't know you were worrying about my health—" She shook the little curls. "I thought you were hungry."

"Well, I wa 'n't—not altogether," Uncle William's face was placid, "—but I wouldn't 'a' wanted you to get cold—I guess George tucked you in pretty good—"

"I tucked myself in," she said. "Have you got a fire made for me?"

"Everything's all ready, Celia." Uncle William led her out to the tiny kitchen, tiled in white and fitted with all the contrivances for skill and swiftness. She stood looking about her—the little color in her face. "Well, this *is* a kitchen!" she said. She drew a deep breath.

Uncle William chuckled. "I knew you 'd like it. You see you can stand right here in the middle and throw things. 'Twouldn't suit me so well—" he said reflectively. "I like to roll around more—but this is about right for you, Celia." He looked at her.

"Just right," she said emphatically—"But there isn't room for two—is there?" She looked at him and he retired, chuckling, while she examined the range, taking off lids and peeking into the oven.... George Manning appeared in the doorway. "Uncle William told me to ask you if there's anything you want?" he said, looking about the shining little room.

Celia whisked her apron from the basket and put it on. "You can tell him there isn't a thing I need—except to be left alone," she added severely, "and I just told him that."

The young man withdrew—a heavy color rising in his face.

"She didn't want anything, did she?" said Uncle William casually.

"No." Manning took up his plane and attacked a piece of board screwed to the bench. Uncle William watched the long, even lunge of the plane and the set of the square shoulders. He moved discreetly away.

In her kitchen, Celia spread the contents of the basket on the white shelf, and settled to her work—like a bird to its nest.... Out in the rooms beyond—amid the swirl of planes and the smell of paint and shavings and clean, fresh wood, they heard a voice singing softly to itself... and against the windows the sleet dashed itself and broke, and the great storm from the east gathered. By and by Uncle William looked into the kitchen. "You couldn't just go out in the other room, Celia, and fetch me my coat, could ye?" He was standing in his shirt sleeves, looking at her kindly.

She glanced up from her work and paused, "No, Mr. Benslow, I couldn't—and I do wish you 'd stop acting so.... You're just—ridiculous!" She lifted a pie and whisked it into the oven and Uncle William retired.

He went for his coat himself and put it on, shrugging his great shoulders comfortably down into it—"If they want to act like that, they 'll have to get along best way they can," he muttered to himself.

His face resumed its calm and he strolled from room to room, giving advice and enjoying life. "I do like a big, comfortable storm like this," he said, standing at the window and looking out across the black-stretched harbor. "Everything snug down there," he waved his hand to the bleakness, "—and everything going all right up here to your house—going along putty good, that is," he added conscientiously.

Bodet came and stood beside him, looking out. "It suits me," he said. "I don't want anything better than this—except to have the children back," he added after a minute.

"They 'll be'long byme-by, Benjy." Uncle William's gaze was on the blackened water. "They 'll be'long—and the little one with 'em.... You ought to have somebody to keep house for you, Benjy—till they come—" He turned and looked at him—"Want me to lend you Celia awhile?" he said craftily, "—just whilst you're finishing up? She likes it out there—" he nodded to the kitchen. "She likes it fust-rate out there and I don't mind letting you have her—you can have her just as well as not." He studied the keen face opposite him.

The man shook his head. "I don't need her, William—I've sent for some one—a Jap that I knew years ago. He took care of me over there when I was with the Embassy. He said he 'd come to me any time I sent for him—so I sent."

Uncle William beamed. "Now, ain't that good! And it's good his bein' a *man!*" he added thoughtfully. "I *like* women. I do' 'no' anybody't I like better 'n I do women—but sometimes they're kind o' trying." His ear listened to the clink of dishes from the kitchen.

Bodet laughed—"Well, he's a man—Jimmu Yoshitomo's a man—though you don't think about it—either way."

Uncle William nodded. "I know what you mean, Benjy—they've got way past that—Japs have—past being men and women—they're just old, and kind o' human—and not just human either," he added slowly, "I do' 'no' *what* it is... but I feel different when they're round—kind o' sleepy, somehow—the way I feel on the Island, still days—when the sun shines?" He looked at him inquiringly.

"That's it. I've always meant to have a Jap when I had a home, and now I have the home." He looked about the big room contentedly.

Celia came to the door and looked in. "I'm going to set the table in here," she announced, "—by the fire."

She set the table and called the men and returned to her kitchen. Uncle William followed her with inquiring step—"You come and eat your dinner out here with the rest of us, Celia, whilst it's hot," he commanded.

"I've got things to do—I can't be bothered to eat now." She shut the door on him.

Uncle William returned to the living-room with subdued face, but when he saw the group at table and the leaping fire and the plates and piles of steaming food, his face grew round again and he smiled. "Does seem good, don't it?" He sat down, helping himself to potato and salt and butter. "The's suthin' about eatin'—that's different," he said. "—You can't have a home without you eat in it.... I've seen folks try it—eatin' one place and livin' another, and 'twa 'n't home. They seemed kind o' stayin' round—not livin' anywheres. If I was a young man, the *fust* thing I'd do 'd be to have a home." His eyes looked over Manning's head, into space, and he chewed slowly.

Manning ignored it. "Mr. Bodet says *he's* going to have a Jap keep house for him," he said to the table in general. Andy looked up quickly. "I wouldn't have one of them things around."

"I do' 'no' why," said Uncle William, "They're nice little folks."

"They're different," said Andy.

"Some places you couldn't send for one that way," said Manning. "They 'd call it 'contract labor' and send him back pretty quick where he came from."

"That's what I'd do—'pretty quick.'rdquo; said Andy.

"Now, what makes you talk like that, Andy," said Uncle William. "You ain't ever see one."

"They 'll work for nothing—and live on dirt," said Andy glibly.

"I guess you didn't ever see how they live, did you, Andy?" said Uncle William. His eyes were on something now and they smiled to it. "I do' 'no's I could just make you see it—if you wa 'n't ever there—But they're about the nicest little houses you ever see—and clean—You feel kind o' 'fraid to step in 'em, they're so clean and fixed-up.... I do' 'no' 's I ever feel so big and clutterin' as I do times 't I'm in Japan," he said reflectively. "Seem's if there 'd have to be a lot done to me 'fore I was pared down fit to live in Japan.... Nice ways, too—bowin' and ridiculous, like monkeys, maybe,—but doin' things quicker 'n Jack Ro'binson."

"They 'll work for nothin'," muttered Andy.

Uncle William turned and regarded him over his spectacles—"If anybody wants to do *my* work for nothin', I do' 'no' why I should hinder 'em," he said kindly. "They can come on to the Island and do *my* gardenin' all they want to. It don't hurt my feelin's any to see 'em digging." He waved his hand out to where the storm drove—"Why we should shove 'em off the edge when they're just aching to do our work for us, is what I can't see. I never see the time yet when the' wa 'n't work enough to go round."

Andy shifted uneasily in his chair.

"—The's too much!" said Uncle William with conviction.

"I guess we 'd better be doing a little of it," laughed Manning. He got up from the table and went toward the other room... and Uncle William's eye came back from Japan and followed him hopefully.

But the young man passed the kitchen door without a glance. Uncle William sighed and got up from the table. "You make yourself ridiculous talking about foreign folks, Andy—folks 't you ain't ever seen," he said severely. The sound of the hammers came through the open door and Celia's voice, singing gently to itself.... Outside, the rain roared hoarse, running across the moor and blotting out the sky and the boats tugging at anchor below.

XXVII

IN March Jimmu Yoshitomo arrived and, soon after him, a cablegram from Alan and Sergia. "Hurray!" Uncle William leaned out of the window, waving it, "It's come, Benjy—Didn't I tell you it 'd come!" Bodet hurried up and took it from him, reading it aloud, Uncle William leaning over him—

"Wilhelmina Bodet Woodworth and Mother both doing well."

Uncle William leaned out further, reading it over his shoulder. "Wil-helmina Bodet—Kind o' queer, ain't it, Benjy?"

"It's a girl—and she's named for you," said Bodet proudly.

"Why, so 't is—Willie-Meeny." Uncle William regarded the paper fondly. "—and it's a girl, you think, do you, Benjy?... I'm glad it's a girl. I al'ays like little girls—they have ways with 'em." He took the paper and handled it tenderly—turning it over and looking at it as if something further might crop up. "Jest think how it come to us, Benjy—scootin' round the world—"Twa 'n't twenty-four hours old and here 'tis—and we knowin' all about it—and seeing her lying there, all kind o' quiet, and the little one—and folks steppin' around soft and doin' things.... I reckon that's what the Lord made 'em for—" He held off the telegram and looked at it—"so 's 't we could be happy everywheres—seeing folks all in a minute—Seems like all one fam'ly. You don't need to travel—just sit still and look."

"There's considerable travel going on still—" said Bodet smiling. He was looking out across the harbor, to the world of steamboat lines and railroads and automobiles threading the earth off there. "People don't sit still a great deal," he said. "There's quite a lot of machinery humming." His hand motioned from the top of the world where they stood, off to the sun-lit space below.

Uncle William nodded, looking at it thoughtfully. "I've thought about 'em—when I've been sailin'—all them machines. I reckon they're made for folks that can't travel in their minds—don't know how—it kind o' makes feet and legs for 'em so 's 't they can get around faster. They feel sort o' empty in their minds, and lonesome, like enough, and then they take a train and go somewheres—or a toboggan slide, or suthin', and they feel better—Don't you reckon that's the way 'tis, Benjy?" He looked at him hopefully.

"I shouldn't wonder at all," said Bodet—"There ought to be some excuse for clatter."... The Japanese servant appeared around the corner of the house, moving a mysterious, respectful hand and Bodet joined him.

Uncle William looked at them a minute. Then he tucked the telegram in his pocket. "Guess I'll go tell folks about it," he said.

Jimmu Yoshitomo took possession of Bodet and his belongings as thoroughly as Celia had taken possession of Uncle William—though with possibly a little less flurry. He made a little garden for him out by the house, and raised flowers and vegetables and planted flowers alongside the house and among the rocks—and found a sheltered corner where wisteria would live through the winter—if carefully protected.

By September the wisteria had sent great shoots against the house, and the flowers among the rocks were a brilliant mass of bloom. The Japanese moved among them like a dusky blossom in white coat and trousers—his century-old face turned always toward Bodet and his needs.

Andy, coming up the road, regarded him with disfavor—"Monkey man and monkey clo'es," he said scornfully.

"Benjy takes a sight o' comfort with him," responded William.

They made their way toward the house, and Jimmu Yoshitomo approached from the garden, bowing low.

Uncle William bowed low in return. Andy remained stiffly erect, detached from all these things.

"Don't you stop workin', Jimmie Yosh," said Uncle William kindly—"We're just goin' to set 'round a spell." They went on toward the house and Jimmu Yoshitomo returned to his flowers.

Inside, the house was a bit of tropic-land that had floated over seas, and lighted on the Island. Colors in the old rugs glowed dully, and little gleams of metal and glass caught the light and played with it. The tiny kitchen was a white-set gem, and through the long vista of the living-room doors there were hints of the art gallery and a scattered horde of pictures.

"Like enough he's in there," said William.

The gallery was the only room in the house that had not been put in order. Even Sergia's and Alan's rooms were ready—the beds made and a little basket cradle swinging in the apple-wood frame that George Manning had made for it—in his off hours.

Uncle William could never pass the door without looking in. He peeked in now, on tiptoe, and withdrew.

"Looks nice, don't it?" he confided to Andy.

"Kind o' odd," admitted Andy.

They stood in the door of the gallery and looked in on its emptiness. Pictures stood on the floor and on boxes and chairs. Some of the boxes were still unopened—and only a small part of the pictures taken out had been hung up.

Uncle William looked around him with pleased eyes. "He's got some new ones out, Andy."

"Uh-huh." Andy bent over and peered at one—a little behind the others. He straightened himself quickly and shut his eyes. "They ain't fit to look at," he said.

Uncle William bent over and drew the picture out and regarded it with interest. He set it against a box and stood off and looked at it, and looked at it again. "She's dreadful pretty, ain't she, Andy?"

Andy opened his eye a crack and withdrew it. "She ain't decent," he said firmly.

"You can set with your back to it, Andy," said Uncle William kindly. "You don't need to go stun-blind—not to see it."

"They won't let him have it on the Island," said Andy. He sat down and glared at the picture of an innocent cow—of the Dutch school.

"Well, I do 'no', Andy." Uncle William studied the picture with lenient eyes. "She's kind o' young and pretty—The' ain't much about this climate in it—" He glanced casually up at the glass roof above them. "Come along winter, now—when the winds get to shrieking and blowing up there—it 'll seem kind o' queer to see her standin' on a hank—like that—all ready to jump in so, won't it?"

Andy turned his head a little and craned his neck.

"I've *been* in countries," went on Uncle William, "where that 'd seem putty good—Italy, now—best kind of place—warm and summery always—year 'round. Seems 's if in this climate we 'd ought to paint furs and woolen goods more. I don't suppose Benjy knew *where* he was going to hang his pictures when he bought 'em—just gathered 'em up most anywheres—without thinkin' how they 'd look hung up."

"He's coming," said Andy. He wheeled about on his box.

The man stood in the doorway, looking at them with pleased eyes. "I thought I should find you here." The glasses dangled from their long chain and he swung them a little, smiling.... "What do you think is down in the harbor?" he said quietly—

Uncle William got to his feet—"Hev they come, Benjy?"

"Looks like it," said the man. "If I know my own yacht—she's just dropped anchor off the Island."

Uncle William cast a quick glance at the glass roof overhead.

"You can't see anything there," said Bodet smiling. "Come on out."

They went quickly from the house—out to the edge of the cliff. Beneath the cliff, close to the *Jennie*, a big white boat swung at anchor, and on the deck a man and woman stood looking up to the Island.

"She's got it with her, Benjy!" said Uncle William. He leaned over the cliff. Little white garments in the woman's arms fluttered softly.

The woman looked up and saw them and raised the child high in her arms, lifting it to them in the shining harbor light.

XXVIII

THEY were sitting about the fire-place in the big living-room, and a fire burned briskly for the cool September morning. In front of the fire, on a great rug, Wilhelmina Bodet Woodworth, fresh from her bath, gurgled and reached out cooing hands to the fire. Her language could not be understood—not even by the dusky Jimmu Yoshitomo, who came and stood in the doorway and looked in with unfathomable eyes. But the words were very pointed and sweet and quick and had little laughs and chuckles behind them—all about things she used to know.... By and by—when she had learned proper ones, she would forget the things she used to know—or remember them only in her dreams, or some day when she met a stranger in the street—and half stopped and went on—listening to the little bells that were ringing somewhere—far off.... She lunged toward the fire and fell afoul of her toes and laughed and seized them and gazed at them intently.

Uncle William, a hand on either knee—gazed in rapt content. "She's about the littlest and the nicest—" he said, "I didn't reckon she 'd be like that."

He looked at Bodet for sympathy. Benjy smiled and swung the long glasses playfully toward the rug.... The person on the rug regarded them a minute—then she adjusted her muscles and made a little hitching motion toward the glasses—they were round and they glittered and went back and forth—and ought to be stopped.... She reached up a hand and laughed and toppled over—and looked up and saw Andy's grin somewhere.... For a long minute she gazed back at it—then she went on hands and knees across the rug—flying from fate.

Sergia reached down and gathered her up, smoothing the white dress. "I put her into short clothes a week ago," she said proudly....

"She couldn't stan' up a little now, Sergia, could she!" suggested Uncle William.

"Never!" Sergia looked at him and patted the round legs. "She won't walk for ten weeks probably," she said kindly.

Uncle William's face had fallen a little. "She 'll be quite a spell gettin' down to my house," he said wistfully.

"I'll bring her tomorrow." The baby gurgled and reached out fat hands and Uncle William bent forward.

"Kind o' takes to me!" he said. He held out tentative hands, wagging the fingers, and the child looked at them gravely, and leaned forward a little, and broke into glee as Uncle William seized her and swung her toward the ceiling.

"She's not afraid of you," said Sergia proudly.

"Afraid of me!... I reckon she couldn't be afraid of Uncle William—!" There was something a little misty behind the big spectacles... the blue eyes looked out at the child from forgotten seas. She grasped the tufts of beard and tugged at them, rocking hard, and making remarks to them.

Uncle William smiled in triumph and seized the hand. "I reckon I might as well take her down to my house," he said. "She's got to learn the way sometime."

Sergia's face was a little alarmed—"You couldn't take care of her."

"I don't know why," said Uncle William, "I reckon I can take all the care she needs—*She* don't need any entertainin'." He gazed at her fondly and chucked her a little.

"She has to be fed," said Sergia.

"I'll tend to feedin' her myself," said Uncle William, "Nobody ever starved—to my house. You got a little bunnet for her somewheres?" He put his big hand on the shining head.

Sergia looked at them reflectively. "She has to have special milk, you know—?"

"I get mine to Andy's," said Uncle William. "It's just as special as any, ain't it—Andy's milk?"

Sergia smiled a little. "It isn't that—It has to be prepared—sterilized, you know."

Uncle William looked at her sympathetically—"Now, that's too bad—and she looks so healthy, too!" He held her off, and looked at her, and danced her a little as an experiment—and broke her all up into little laughs.... He chuckled softly. "I reckon I'll hev to take her," he said.

"We-l-l—" Sergia went slowly toward the kitchen and returned with a bottle in each hand. "I'm going to let you take her," she said magnanimously. She laid the bottles on the table and brought the little bonnet and put it on, patting it and talking little, foolish words to it—"There!" She stood off and looked at them, doubtfully. "You must feed her as soon as you get there, and then again in three hours." She held out the bottles.

"Yes'm." Uncle William stored a bottle in either pocket—where they would balance—and started toward the door.

"You must bring her back before dinner, you know." She was following them protectingly, "—and I think I'll come down by and by," she added.

Uncle William turned and laid a hand on her shoulder. "Don't you worry a mite, Sergia—There's me and Celia to take care of her and we're goin' to hev the best time 't ever was—The' can't anything happen to her—not whilst I'm round."

He strode proudly out of the door and over the rocks, the little figure riding on his arm. The wind blowing softly across the Island touched the small figure, and Uncle William snuggled it down in his arm, covering it with a great hand. The head nestled to him and drowsed a little and fell asleep.

Uncle William came in the door with hushed step.... "Sh-h—?" he said. He held up a warning finger.

Celia stopped singing and came over and peeked at it. "Isn't she a dear!" She held out inviting arms.

But Uncle William, proud in possession, marched across to the red lounge and sat down.

"Aren't you going to put her down?" whispered Celia.

Uncle William shook his head. "Not yet." He sat very quiet and the fire crackled in the stove—with the kettle humming a little—and leaving off and beginning again.... Juno came across and leaped up. She rubbed against him and waited a minute—then she purred towards his knee. Uncle William watched her benignantly, holding very still.

She purred softly, kneading her claws and talking.... Presently she paused, with fixed gaze—her tail switched a question and was still. She leaped down and went across and sat down, her back to the room, and communed with space.

Uncle William's chuckle was very gentle.... "Juno's makin' up her mind," he said.

Celia turned and looked at the grey back and laughed—"She's jealous!" she said in surprise.

Uncle William nodded. "Women-folks."

She made no response and the room was still again. The baby stirred and stretched an arm and saw Uncle William's face bending over her—and laughed.

Celia came across and held out her arms—"Give her to me!" she said.

She gathered in the child, with little inarticulate words, and Uncle William watched her gravely. "You ain't treated him right, Celia," he said gently.

She looked at him over the baby's frock—and her eyes had little stars in them.

"You 'd ought to go tell him, Celia, 't you didn't mean anything," said Uncle William, "—actin' that way. He's a good deal cut up—the way you've been.

"I don't know where he is," said Celia. She was smoothing the white frock and smiling to Wilhelmina and whistling little tunes.

"He's down to the beach," said Uncle William. "He come along down when I did—You ain't treated him right," he said slowly.... "I like fam'lies, and I like folks to have houses and fam'lies of their own—not be livin' round, Celia." He looked at her kindly.... "She 'll be kind of a fam'ly to me—" He nodded to the little figure in her arms, "You needn't worry a mite about me, Celia.... You just wait till I get her suthin' to eat and then you can go.... George said he was going out sailing," he added.

He drew the bottle from his pocket and looked at it critically.

"You ought to heat it," said the girl quickly.

"'D you think so?" Uncle William held it out, "—Feels kind o' warm, don't it—bein' in my pocket sot Guess I'll keep the other one there till it's time."

He seated himself and reached up for the baby.... Celia hesitated—looking out at the shining water and the clear sun and the big boat down below—"I don't like to leave you alone," she said.

"I ain't alone," said Uncle William, "—and like enough Sergia 'll be here byme-by. She said suthin' about it—You run along now, Celia. You remember he kind o' hinted he wanted to take you out today. You tell him you 'll go—tell him right off—fust thing—'fore anything has time to happen—" he said severely.

"Yes, sir." She flitted from the door and he looked after her, a little dubiously.... "I 'most ought to go with her," he said.

Then his eye fell on the gurgling face and he laughed.

He sat looking about the room with contented gaze.... "Seems 's if I had most everything," he said.... "Juno —"

He called the name softly, but there was no response.... "Juno!" The grey tail switched once on the floor and was still. "You come here to me, Juno!"... Presently she got up and came over to him and jumped up beside him. Uncle William put out a hand and stroked her. She settled down with her gloomy green eyes.... The baby dozed tranquilly over her bottle and finished it and sat up.... Juno's back tightened—ready to spring. "You lie still, Juno," said Uncle William.... "Nice kitty!" He smiled to the child and stroked the soft fur.... She reached out a willing hand and drew it back—there was a sound as if there were a small, muffled tornado in the room. Uncle William stroked the great back steadily. "You behave, Juno," he said sternly. The child reached out the wavering hand again—and drew it back—and cooed softly.... There was a moment's breath—then the green-

eyed Juno bowed her head, closing her eyes, and allowed the small hand to travel down her grey back—and down again—and again—and the red room was filled with little, happy laughs.

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HAPPY ISLAND: A NEW "UNCLE WILLIAM" STORY ***

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