

CAPTAIN CHUB

RALPH HENRY BARBOUR

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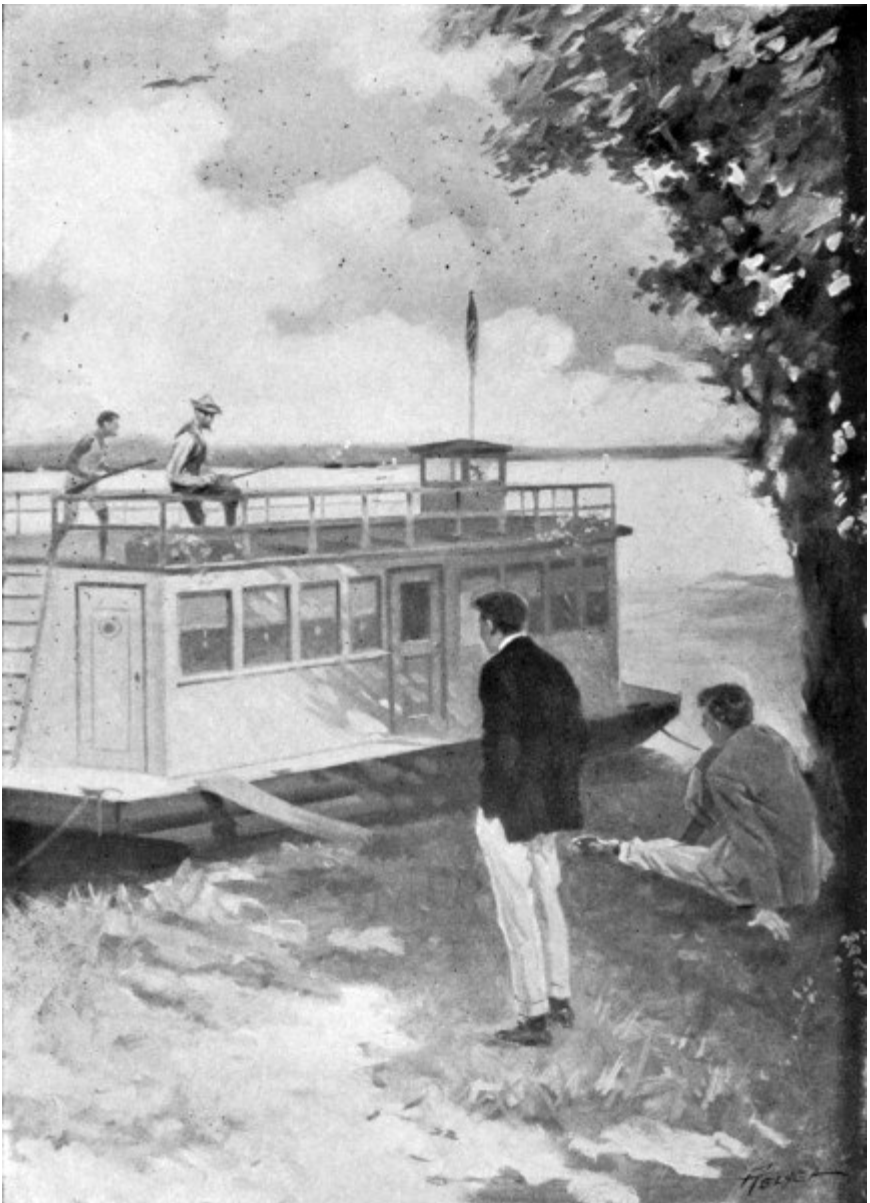
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CAPTAIN
CHUB

RALPH HENRY BARBOUR

Captain Chub



The boys entertain Mr. Ewing

Captain Chub

By

Ralph Henry Barbour

Author of "The Crimson Sweater," "Tom, Dick, and Harriet,"
"Harry's Island," etc.

With Illustrations

By C. M. Relyea



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TO J. P. M.

WITH THE AUTHOR'S REGARDS
AND BEST WISHES

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CAPTAIN CHUB

CHAPTER I

THE STOLEN RUN

“**T**hat settles that,” groaned the captain of the Crimson nine as the long fly settled gracefully into the hands of the Blue’s left-fielder. The runner who, at the sound of bat meeting ball, had shot away from second base, slowed his pace and dropped his head disconsolately as he left the path to the plate and turned toward the bench.

“Come on, fellows,” said the captain cheerfully. “We’ve got to hold ’em tight. Not a man sees first, Tom; don’t lose ’em.”

Pritchett, the Crimson pitcher, nodded silently as he drew on his glove and walked across to the box. He didn’t mean to lose them. So far, at the beginning of the ninth inning, it was anybody’s game. The score was 3 to 3. Pritchett had pitched a grand game: had eight strike-outs to his credit, had given but one base on balls, and had been hit but three times for a total of

four bases. For five innings, for the scoring on both sides had been done in the first part of the game, he had held the Blue well in hand, and he didn't mean to lose control of the situation now. The cheering from the stands occupied by the supporters of the Crimson team, which had died away as the unlucky hit to left-fielder had retired the side, began again, and continued until the first of the blue-stockinged batsmen stepped to the plate.

It was the end of the year, the final game and the deciding one. The stands, which started far beyond third base and continued around behind first, were filled with a gaily-hued throng, every member of which claimed allegiance to Crimson or Blue. Fully eight thousand persons were awaiting with fast-beating hearts the outcome of this last inning. The June sun shone hotly down, and the little breeze which came across the green field from the direction of the glinting river did little to mitigate the intolerable heat. Score-cards waved in front of red, perspiring faces, straw hats did like duty, and pocket-handkerchiefs were tucked inside wilting collars.

Half-way up the cheering section sat a little group of freshmen, hot and excited, hoarse and heroic. At every fresh demand from the cheerleader they strained their tired lungs to new excesses of sound. Now, panting and laughing, they fell against each other in simulated exhaustion.

“I wish a thunder-storm would come along,” said one of the group, weakly.

“Why?” asked another.

“So they'd call the game and I wouldn't have to cheer any more,” he sighed.

“Why don’t you do the way Chick does?” asked a third. “Chick just opens his mouth and goes through the motions and doesn’t let out a single yip.”

“I like that!” exclaimed the maligned one. “I’ve been making more noise than all the rest of you put together. The leader’s been casting grateful looks at me for an hour.”

There was a howl of derision from the others.

“Well,” said a tall, broad-shouldered fellow, “I don’t intend to yell any more until something happens, and—”

“Yell now, then, Porter,” said Chick gloomily as the first of the opponents’ batsmen beat the ball to first by a bare inch. But instead of yelling Roy Porter merely looked bored, and for a while there was silence in that particular part of the stand.

The next Blue batsman bunted toward third, and although he went out himself, he had placed the first man on second. The Blue’s best batters were coming up, and the outlook wasn’t encouraging. The sharp, short cheer of the Blue’s adherents rattled forth triumphantly. But Pritchett wasn’t dismayed. Instead, he settled down and struck out the next man ignominiously. Then, with two strikes and two balls called by the umpire, the succeeding batsman rolled a slow one toward short-stop and that player, pausing to hold the runner on second, threw wide of first. The batsman streaked for second and the man ahead darted to third and made the turn toward home. But right-fielder had been prompt in backing up and the foremost runner was satisfied to scuttle back to third. The Blue’s first-baseman came to bat. He was the best hitter on the team, and, with men on second and third, it seemed that the Blue was destined to wave triumphantly that day.

“Two down!” called the Crimson captain encouragingly. “Now for the next one, fellows! Don’t lose him, Tom!”

“Two out!” bawled the coaches back of first and third. “Run on anything! Well, I guess we’ve got them going now! I guess we’ve got them going! He’s sort of worried, Bill! He’s sort of worried! *Look out!*” For the “sort of worried” one had turned quickly and sped the ball to third.

“That’s all right!” cried the irrepressible coacher. “He won’t do that again. Take a lead; take a lead! Steady!”

Pritchett glanced grimly at the two on bases and turned to the batsman. He was in a bad place, and he realized it. A hit would bring in two runs. The man who faced him was a veteran player, and couldn’t be fooled easily. He considered the advisability of giving him his base, knowing that the next man up would be easier to dispose of. It was risky, but he decided to do it. He shook his head at the catcher’s signal and sent a wide one.

“Ball!” droned the umpire, and the blue flags waved gleefully.

The next was also a ball, and the next, and the next, and—

“Take your base,” said the umpire.

“Thunder!” muttered Chick nervously as the man trotted leisurely down the line and the sharp cheers rattled forth like musketry. “Bases full!”

“He did it on purpose,” said Roy Porter. “Burton’s a hard-hitter and a clever one, and Pritchett didn’t want to risk it.”

“Well, a hit now won’t mean a thing!” grieved Chick.

“It’ll mean two runs; just what it meant before,” answered Roy. “Who’s this at bat?”

“Kneeland,” answered his neighbor on the other side, referring to his score-card.

“What’s he done?”

“Nothing. Got his base twice, once on fielder’s choice and once on balls.”

“That’s good. Watch Pritchett fool him.”

They watched, breathlessly, in an agony of suspense. One ball; one strike; two strikes; two balls; a foul; another foul.

“He’s spoiling ’em,” muttered Chick uneasily. But the next moment he was on his feet with every one else on that side of the field, yelling wildly, frantically. Pritchett had one more strike-out to his credit, and three blue-stockinged players turned ruefully from their captured bases and sought their places in the field.

The Crimson players came flocking back to the bench, panting and smiling, and threw themselves under the grateful shade of the little strip of awning.

“Easy with the water,” cautioned the trainer as the tin cup clattered against the mouth of the big water-bottle.

“Who’s up?” asked some one. The coach was studying the score-book silently. Pritchett was up, but Pritchett, like most pitchers, was a poor batsman. The coach’s glance turned and wandered down the farther bench where the substitutes sat.

“Eaton up!” he called, and turning to the scorer: “Eaton in place of Pritchett,” he said.

The youngster who stood before him awaiting instructions was a rather stockily-built chap, with brown hair and eyes and a merry, good-natured face. But there was something besides good nature on his face at this moment; something besides freckles, too; it was an expression that mingled gratification, anxiety, and determination. Tom Eaton had been a substitute on the varsity nine only since the disbanding of the freshman team, of which he had been captain, and during that scant fortnight he had not succeeded in getting into a game.

“You’ve got to get to first, Eaton,” said the coach softly. “Try and get your base on balls; make him think you’re anxious to hit, see? But keep your wits about you and see if you can’t walk. If he gets two strikes on you, why, do the best you can; hit it down toward third. Understand? Once on first I expect you to get around. Take all the risk you want; we’ve got to score.”

“Batter up!” called the umpire, impatiently.

Eaton selected a bat carefully from the rack and walked out to the plate. The head cheerleader, looking over his shoulder, ready to summon a “short cheer” for the batsman, hesitated and ran across to the bench.

“Who’s batting?” he asked.

“Eaton,” he was told. “Batting for Pritchett.”

“A short cheer for Eaton, fellows, and make it good!”

It was good, and as the freshman captain faced the Blue’s pitcher the cheer swept across to him and sent a thrill along his spine. Perhaps he needed it, for there is no denying that he was feeling pretty nervous, although he succeeded in disguising that fact from either catcher or pitcher.

Up in the cheering section there was joy among the group of freshmen.

“Look who’s here!” shrieked Chick. “It’s Chub!”

“Chub Eaton!” cried another. “What do you think of that?”

“Batting for Pritchett! Say, can he bat much, Roy?”

“Yes; but I don’t know what he can do against this fellow. He hasn’t been in a game since they took him on. But I guess the coach knows he can run the bases. If he gets to first I’ll bet he’ll steal the rest!”

And then the cheer came, and the way those classmates of Chub’s worked their lungs was a caution.

In the last inning of a game it is customary to replace the weak batsman with players who can hit the ball, and when Chub Eaton stepped to the plate the Blue’s catcher and pitcher assumed that they had a difficult person to contend with. The catcher signaled for a drop, for from the way Chub handled his bat it seemed that he would, in baseball slang, “bite at it,” and Chub seemed to want to badly. He almost swung at it, but he didn’t quite, and the umpire called “Ball!” Well, reflected the catcher, it was easy to see that he was anxious to hit, and so he signaled for a nice slow ball that looked for all the world like an easy one until it almost reached the plate; then it “broke” in a surprising way and went off to the left. Chub almost reached for it, but, again, not quite. And “Two balls!” said the umpire. Chub swung his bat back and forth impatiently, just begging the Blue pitcher to give him a fair chance. The pitcher did. He sent a nice drop that cleared the plate knee-high. “Strike!” announced the umpire. Chub turned on him in surprise and shook his head. Then he settled back and worked his bat in a

way that said: “Just try that again! I dare you to!”

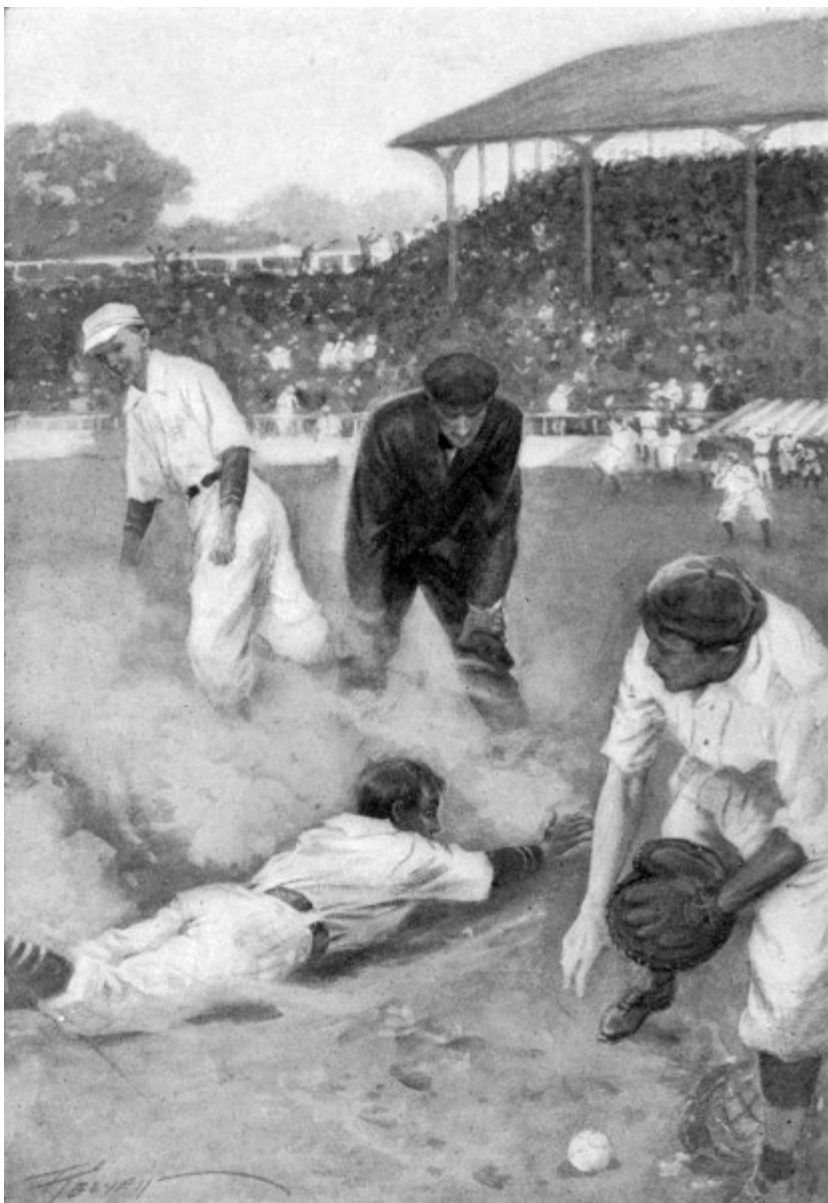
The pitcher did try it again; at least, he seemed to, but the ball dropped so low this time that it failed of being a strike by several inches. Chub looked pained. On the bench the coach was smiling dryly. The Blue pitcher awoke to the fact that he had been fooled. He sent a high ball straight over the plate and Chub let it go by. “Strike two!” called the umpire. The Blue stands cheered mightily. Two strikes and three balls! Chub gripped his bat hard. Again the pitcher shot the ball forward. It came straight and true for the plate, broke when a few feet away and came down at a weird tangent. Chub swung desperately and the ball glanced off the bat and went arching back into the stand. “Foul!” growled the umpire. Chub drew a deep breath of relief. Once more the pitcher poised himself and threw. The ball whirled by him and Chub dropped his bat and started across the plate, his heart in his mouth.

“Four balls! Take your base!”

The umpire’s voice was drowned by the sudden burst of wild acclaim from the Crimson stands, and Chub trotted to first, to be enthusiastically patted and thumped on the back by the coacher stationed there. Up in the cheering section five freshmen were hugging each other ecstatically. The head of the Crimson’s batting list was coming up, and things looked bright. The cheering became incessant. The coach shouted and bawled. But the Blue’s pitcher refused to be rattled. He settled down, held Chub close on first and, before any one quite realized what was happening, had struck out the next man.

But Chub had made up his mind to go on, and he went. He made his steal on the first ball thrown to the new batter and, although catcher threw straight and fast to second-baseman,

Chub slid around the latter and reached the bag. Then, while the cheers broke forth again, he got up, patted the dust out of his clothes, and took a fresh lead. The pitcher eyed him darkly for a moment and then gave his attention to the batsman. *Crack!* Ball and bat met and the short-stop ran in to field a fast grounder, and as he ran Chub flashed behind him. Gathering up the ball, short-stop turned toward third, saw that he was too late, and threw to first, putting the batsman out by the narrowest of margins. "Two out!"



[Chub Eaton was lying in a cloud of dust](#)

The Crimson captain stepped to the plate, looking determined, and hit the first delivery safely. But it was a bunt near the plate and, although Chub was ready to run in, he had no chance. The captain stole second and Chub looked for a

chance to get home; but they were watching him. The Crimson supporters were on their feet, their shouts imploring victory. The next man up was an erratic batsman, one who had made home runs before this in time of stress and who had, quite as often, failed to “make good.” Amid the wildest excitement, the Blue pitcher pulled down his cap, calmly studied the signal, and sped the ball toward the plate.

“Strike!” Again, and the batsman swung and the ball glanced back against the netting.

“Foul! Strike two!”

Then came a ball. The batsman was plainly discouraged, plainly nervous. Chub, dancing around at third, worrying the pitcher to the best of his ability, decided that it was now or never for him. Taking a long lead, he waited poised on his toes. As the ball left the pitcher’s hand he raced for home.

“Hit it! Hit it!” shrieked the men on the bench. The batsman, awakening suddenly to the demands, struck wildly as the ball came to him, struck without hitting. But the catcher, with that red-stockinged figure racing toward him, made his one error of the game. The ball glanced from his mitt and rolled back of the plate, and although he had thrown off his mask and was after it like a cat after a mouse, he was too late. [Chub Eaton was lying in a cloud of dust](#) with one hand on the plate, and the crowd was streaming, shouting and dancing, onto the field.

CHAPTER II

LETTERS AND PLANS

That 4 to 3 victory took place on a Thursday, in the third week of June.

Some two hours later the hero of the conflict lay stretched at full length on a window-seat in the front room of a house within sound of the college bell. His hands were under his head, one foot nestled inelegantly amidst the cushions at the far end of the seat and the other was sprawled upon the floor. The window beside him was wide open and through it came the soft, warm air, redolent of things growing, of moist pavements, of freshly-sprinkled lawns. The sounds of passing footsteps and voices entered, too; and from across the shaded street came the tinkle of a banjo. The voices were joyous and care-free. Tomorrow was Class-Day; the year's work was over; books had been tossed aside, and already the exodus from college had begun. The twilight deepened and the long June day came unwillingly to its end. The shadows darkened under the elms and here and there a light glared out from an open window. But in the room the twilight held undisputed sway, hiding the half-packed trunks and the untidy disorder of the study.

Chub lay on the window-seat and a few feet away, where he could look through the wide open casement, Roy Porter was stretched out in a morris chair. We have already caught a brief glimpse of Roy in the cheering section during the game, but in the excitement we did not, I fancy, observe him very closely. He is a good-looking, even handsome, boy, with light, curly

hair and very blue eyes. He is tall and well developed, with broad shoulders and wide hips. Roy and Chub have been firm friends for three years: for two years at Ferry Hill School and for one at college. In age there is but a month or two of difference between them. Both are freshmen, having come up together from Ferry Hill last September, since which time they have led a very interesting and, withal, happy existence in the quarters, in which we now find them. And they have each had their successes. Chub has made the captaincy of the freshman Nine, they have both played on the freshman foot-ball team, and each has been recently taken into one of the societies. In studies Roy has accomplished rather more than his friend, having finished the year well up in his class. But Chub has kept his end up and has passed the finals, if not in triumph, at least without disgrace.

“Another big day for you, Chub,” said Roy. Chub stretched himself luxuriously and yawned.

“Yes. There have been quite a few ‘big days,’ Roy, since we met at school, haven’t there? There was the day when you lammed out that home run and won us the game from Hammond, two years ago. That was one of your ‘big days,’ old chap, but it was mine, too. Then, last year, when we won on the track. That was Dick’s ‘big day,’ but we all shared in it, especially since it brought that check from Kearney and brought the affairs of the Ferry Hill School Improvement Society to a glorious close. And then there was the baseball game last year—”

“That was your day, Chub, and none other’s.”

“Well, if I recollect rightly, there was a little old two-bagger by one Roy Porter which had something to do with the result,”

returned Chub, dryly.

“Oh, we’d have won without that. Say, do you remember Harry after the game?”

“Do I! Shall I ever forget her? She was just about half crazy, wasn’t she? And wouldn’t she have loved to have been here to-day?”

They both chuckled at the idea.

“By the way,” said Chub presently, “did we get any mail this evening?”

“I don’t think so,” said Roy; “but I didn’t look. Expecting a check?”

“Go to thunder! We ought to hear from Dick to-day or to-morrow. And Mr. Cole, too, about the boat.”

“That’s so. Maybe we’ll hear in the morning.”

“Light the gas and have a look around,” begged Chub. “Sometimes Mrs. Moore picks the letters up and puts them on the table, and we don’t find them for weeks and weeks.”

“If you’d keep the table picked up,” said Roy, severely, as he arose with a grunt and fumbled for matches, “such things wouldn’t occur.”

“Listen to him!” murmured Chub, apparently addressing the ceiling. “I’d like to know which of us is the neat little housekeeper! I’d like to know—”

The study was suddenly illuminated with a ghastly glow as Roy applied the match to the drop-light. Chub groaned and turned his face away.

“I give you notice, Roy, that next year we’re going to have a different shade on that thing. Green may be all very nice for the optic nerves, but it’s extremely offensive to my—my sensibilities. Besides, it doesn’t suit my complexion. I’ve mentioned that before. Now a red shade—”

“Here’s a whole bunch of mail,” exclaimed Roy, mildly indignant. “I wish she’d let it alone. Here’s two for you and one for me. This looks like—yes, it’s from Dick. And I guess this one—” he studied it under the light—“I guess this is from the artist man. Anyway, the postmark’s New York, and—”

“Well, hand ’em over, you idiot,” said Chub.

“Come and get them. You can’t see to read over there,” replied Roy tranquilly. Chub hesitated, groaned, and finally followed the suggestion.

“Yes, this is from Dickums,” he muttered as he tore off the end of the envelop. “I hope he can come. Who’s yours from?”

“Dad,” answered Roy, settling into his chair and beginning to read. But he wasn’t destined to finish his letter just then, for in a moment Chub had rudely disturbed him.

“It’s all right!” he cried. “Listen, Roy; let me read this to you.”

“He’s coming?” asked Roy eagerly, abandoning his own letter.

“Yes. Listen.” Chub pulled up a chair, sat down, and began to read: “Dear Chub: Yours of no date—”

“Stung!” murmured Roy. Chub grinned and went on.

—“received the day before yesterday. I’d have answered

before, but things have been pretty busy here. If we can get the house-boat, I'll go along in a minute. It will be a fine lark. I'm leaving here to-morrow for New York. My dad's there now, and we're going to stay somewhere around there for the summer, he says. You let me know just as soon as you can. Send your letter to the Waldorf. I can start any time. I haven't written to Dad about it, but I know he will let me go. I hope we can get the boat. I told Harry about it yesterday, and read your letter to her, and she's wild to go along. Says we might wait until she gets back from her Aunt Harriet's. I told her there wouldn't be room but she says she'd sleep up on top! So I had to tell her I'd see what you fellows thought about it. Maybe we might have her along for a little while. What do you think? I suppose her father or mother could come, too, as—”

“Chaperon,” said Roy. “Harry's getting ‘growed up,’ you know.”

“Well, we'll see. Here, where's that other letter? Let's find out what Mr. Cole says.” He opened the second epistle and glanced through it quickly, his face lighting as he read. “It's all right!” he cried. “We can have her! Only—” he looked through the brief note again—“only he doesn't say anything about the price. ‘When you get here we'll talk over the matter of terms.’ That doesn't sound encouraging, does it?” Chub looked across at Roy dubiously, and Roy shook his head.

“Not very,” he answered; “but you can't tell. I guess he will let us down easy. He's a good sort, is the Floating Artist.”

“Well—” Chub tossed the note aside and went back to Dick Somes's letter. “I suppose her father or mother or some one would have to go along, but that needn't make much difference. She's wild to know, so you'd better drop her a line

pretty soon and tell her what you think about it. If you don't she's likely to explode!"

"And that's so, too, I guess!" chuckled Roy. "Say, it would be awfully jolly if we four could get together again this summer, wouldn't it?"

"Dandy!" answered Chub. "And we'll do it, too," he added stoutly.

"I don't believe so. Something will happen at the last moment," said Roy dejectedly. "You'll see."

"My gentle croaker, let me finish this.... 'I got through exams O. K. and got my diploma to-day. So I'll see you fellows in the fall if we don't make it before. That is, if I can pass at college. I wish you'd speak a good word for me to the president. I suppose you know we won the boat-race by almost three lengths. That makes up for losing the ball-game. We missed you on the team this year. They've elected Sid Welch captain for next year. Sid's so pleased he can't see straight. To-day was Class-Day and we had a fine time. You ought to have heard me orate. How's old Roy? He owes me a letter, the scoundrel. Write as soon as you can to the Waldorf. I'll be there to-morrow evening. Tell Roy to come and see me as soon as he gets home. You, too, if you stop over there. I've got lots of news for you that I can tell better than I can write. Hope you fellows win your game to-morrow. They'd ought to have taken you on, Chub. But next year, when I get there, I'll fix that for you. So long. Don't forget to let me know whether we can have the house-boat. Yours, Dick.'"

"Good old Dickums," murmured Chub as he folded the letter. "Well, it's all settled," he went on animatedly. "We'll take the midnight train to-morrow, Roy; see Mr. Cole; look up

Dick, and get ready for the cruise! Won't we have fun, though?"

"Did Mr. Cole say whether he'd let the boat to us furnished?"

"Yes." Chub referred to the note. "'The *Jolly Roger* is quite at your disposal as soon as you want her. I'm going abroad in August, and won't want her at all this summer. She needs paint, but you'll have to attend to that if you're fussy. You'll find her all ready for you. I won't say anything about the engine, for you know that engine yourself. Treat it kindly and perhaps it will stand by you. When you get here we'll talk over the matter of terms. Regards to your friend and to you. Very truly yours, Forbes Cole.' That's all he says. I don't believe he will want us to pay him much if he's going abroad and can't use the boat himself anyway, do you?"

"I hope not," answered Roy, "for it's going to be rather an expensive trip, Chub."

"Nonsense! We can run her on ten dollars a week, I'll bet."

"You forget that we have to eat. You forget your appetite, Chub."

"Well, if we have Harry along she can make doughnuts for us!"

"Well, if she does," laughed Roy, "I'll see that there's no almond flavoring aboard. Do you remember last summer when she put almond into the doughnuts and—"

"Do I remember! I thought I'd never get that taste out of my mouth!" Chub grinned reminiscently. Roy arose determinedly and threw back the lid of his steamer trunk.

“What are you going to do?” asked Chub.

“Finish my packing. There won’t be any time to-morrow, and—”

But alas for good resolutions! There was a charge of feet outside on the brick walk, a hammering at the door, and a covey of happy, irresponsible freshmen burst into the room. There was no packing that night. But what did it matter? There was to-morrow and many, many other to-morrows stretching away in a seemingly limitless vista of happy holidays, and the fact that when the visitors finally took their departure the few things that the roommates had already packed had been seized upon by rude hands and strewn about the study worried no one. Nothing matters when “finals” are over and summer beckons.



CHAPTER III

AN INVITATION TO MISS EMERY

Two days later three boys were seated about an up-stairs room in a house in West 57th Street, New York City. The room was large and square and tastefully furnished, but you would have guessed at once that it was a boy's room; and the guess would have been correct. Roy Porter was the host, and his guests were Mr. Thomas H. Eaton, otherwise known as Chub, and Mr. Richard Somes, better known as Dick. Dick, as we have learned through his letter, has just graduated from Ferry Hill School, and for the present is staying with his father at a New York hotel. While Roy lives in New York, and Chub hails from Pittsburg, Dick claims the distinction of living nowhere in particular. If you ask him he will tell you that he lives "out West." As a matter of fact, however, he is a nomad. Born in Ohio, he has successively resided in Nebraska, Montana, Colorado, Nevada, London, and one or two other places. His father is a mining man whose business of buying, selling, and operating mines takes him to many places. Dick's mother has been dead for three years.

Dick himself is big, blond, and seventeen. He isn't exactly handsome, judged by accepted standards of masculine beauty, but he has nice gray eyes, a smile that wins you at once, and a pleasant voice. Somehow, in spite of the fact that nature has endowed him with a miscellaneous lot of features he is rather attractive; as Chub has once remarked: "He's just about as homely as a mud fence, only somehow you forget all about it." It is the crowning sorrow of Dick's young life that, owing to

his nomadic existence, his schooling has been somewhat neglected, with the result that he is a year behind his two friends and that when he reaches college in the fall—if he’s lucky enough to get in—he will be only a freshman, while Roy and Chub are dignified and superior sophomores. Chub, however, tries to console him by telling him not to worry, that like as not he won’t pass the exams!

Chub is staying with Roy, as his guest, and Dick has taken dinner with them this evening. And now, having left Mr. Porter to his paper in the library and Mrs. Porter to her book, they have scurried up to Roy’s room for a good long talk; for there is much to be said. At the present moment Roy, sprawled on his bed, is doing the talking.

“It was Chub’s scheme in the first place, Dick. He thought of it two months ago when we were down by the river one day. There’s an old boat-house on a raft down there, and Chub said it reminded him of the *Jolly Roger*. I said I didn’t see the resemblance, and he said all you had to do was to turn it around and it would be just like the *Jolly Roger*.”

“Turn it around?” asked Dick, mystified.

“Sure,” said Chub. “Turn a boat-house around and you have a house-boat. See?”

“College hasn’t taught you much sense, Chub, has it?” laughed Dick. “Then what, Roy?”

“Oh, then Chub got to talking about what fun Mr. Cole must have in his house-boat and how he’d like to go knocking around in one. And then we remembered that Mr. Cole had told us last summer that the *Jolly Roger* was for sale. Of course, we knew we couldn’t buy it, but we thought maybe

he'd be willing to rent it for the summer. And, finally a week or so ago, we wrote him—”

“We?” queried Chub.

“Well, then, *you* wrote him, Chubbie my boy; but I supplied the stamp. And yesterday—no, the day before yesterday—we got his note; and to-morrow we're all going to call at his studio and find out how much he wants for it for the summer.”

“Bully!” cried Dick enthusiastically. “And where are we going in it?”

“I thought it would be fun to go down Long Island Sound, but Chub wants to go up the river.”

“Up the Hudson? That would be great! We could go away up to—to Buffalo—”

“Yes, we'd get there about November,” laughed Chub. “The *Jolly Roger* goes about as fast as—as a mule walks!”

“Bet you Dick really thinks Buffalo is on the Hudson,” said Roy.

“Isn't it?” asked Dick in surprise. “I did think it was; honest. Where is it, then?”

“It—it's on—you tell him, Roy.”

“It's on a lake.”

“It's on Niagara Falls,” added Chub knowingly. “Bounded on the north by Canada, on the east by the St. Lawrence River, on the south by the United States of America and on the west by—by water. Its principal exports are buffaloes and—and—”

“Oh, dry up!” said Roy. “Anyhow, we could go up as far as

Troy—”

“And get our laundry done,” suggested Chub.

“And we could stop for a while at Ferry Hill and see the school and the Doctor and Mrs. Em and Harry—”

“What I want to know—” began Dick.

“And we could stay at Fox Island a day or two. It would be like old times.”

“You mean Harry’s Island,” corrected Dick. “What I want to know, though, is whether we can take Harry along.”

“Chub thinks we can,” answered Roy; “but I don’t see how we could manage it.”

“Easy enough,” said Chub. “There’s three rooms we can use for sleeping. Harry and her mother, or whoever came along with her, could have the big room up front or the little room at the rear, the one Mr. Cole used as a studio.”

“It’s only as big as a piece of cheese,” said Dick.

“Well, they’d only want to sleep in it. They could have that, and the rest of us could have the bedroom and living-room. We’d need some cot-beds—there’s a bully bed in the bedroom now, you know—and some sheets and blankets and things. Pshaw, we could fix it up easy!”

“Well, she’s crazy to go,” said Dick; “and she made me promise to ask you chaps.”

“When does she go away to her aunt’s?” asked Roy.

“The day after to-morrow; and she’s going to stay two weeks. That is, if she can come with us. If not she’ll stay three,

I believe. Did you write to her, Roy?"

"Not yet," Roy answered. "I thought we'd get together and talk it over. If you fellows think we can arrange it I'd be mighty glad to have her. She's a whole lot of fun, Harry is."

"Then let's take her along," said Dick eagerly.

"Sure," said Chub. "Let's write to her now. Where's your paper and things, Roy?"

They all had a hand in the composition of that letter, and when finished and signed it ran as follows;

Miss Harriet Emery,
Ferry Hill School,
Ferry Hill, N. Y.

MY DEAR MISS EMERY: You are cordially invited to join us in a cruise up the Hudson River in the good ship *Jolly Roger*, which will call for you at Ferry Hill in about three weeks, the exact date to be decided on later. Please bring your doughnut recipe, and any one else you want to. Come prepared for a good time. All principal foreign ports will be visited, including Troy, Athens, Cairo, and Schenectady. The catering will be in the hands of that world-renowned chef, Mr. Dickums Somes, formerly of Camp Torohadik, Harry's Island. Kindly reply as soon as possible to address above. Trusting that you will consent to grace the house-boat with your charming presence, we subscribe ourselves your devoted servants,

CHUB, Master,
ROY, A. B.,
DICK, Steward.

“What’s A.B. mean?” asked Roy, suspiciously.

“It means Able Seaman,” replied Chub. “I put it that way because it’s probably the only chance you’ll ever have of getting your A.B.”



Writing the invitation to Harry

“You don’t suppose, do you,” asked Dick anxiously, “that she’ll take that literally: about bringing any one else she wants to? She might think we meant her to bring a crowd, a bunch of

girls from that school of hers.”

“Maybe we’d better change that a little,” agreed Roy.

“Well, we’ll say ‘Bring your doughnut recipe and any other one person you want to.’ How’s that?”

“All right; although, of course, a doughnut recipe isn’t a person.”

“Oh, that’s just a joke,” laughed Chub.

“Hadn’t you better label it?” asked Dick innocently. “How is she going to know it’s a joke?”

“She has more discernment than some others I wot of,” replied Chub loftily.

“Well, if she wots that that’s a joke,” muttered Dick, “she’s certainly a pretty good wotter.”

“Who’s got a stamp?” asked Chub as he finished scrawling the address on the envelop. “Thanks. What a very nasty tasting one! I wonder why the government doesn’t flavor its stamps better. It might turn them out in different flavors, you know; peppermint, vanilla, wintergreen, chocolate—”

“Almond,” suggested Roy.

“And then when you went to the post-office you could say: ‘I’d like ten twos, please; peppermint, if you have it.’”

“You’re an awful idiot,” laughed Dick. “Give me the letter and I’ll post it on the way to the hotel. Now, let’s talk about what we’ll have to buy. Let’s figure up and see what it’ll cost us.”

“Go ahead,” said Chub readily. “I’ve got a pencil.”

“First of all, then, we’ll need a lot of provisions.”

“Unless we can persuade Chub to stay behind,” suggested Roy.

“Who thought of this scheme?” asked Chub indignantly. “I guess if any one stays behind it won’t be Chub. And likewise and moreover if Chub doesn’t have enough to eat he will mutiny.”

“Then you’ll have to put yourself in irons,” said Dick, “if you’re in command.”

“I never thought of that!” Chub bit the end of the pencil and frowned. “Maybe I’d rather be the crew than the captain. If you’re captain you can’t mutiny, and I’ve always wanted to mutiny. Say, wouldn’t it be great if we could be pirates? We could put up that skull-and-cross-bones flag and board one of the Day Line steamboats. Think of the sport we could have! We’d swipe all the grub on board of her and make the officers walk the plank! Then—then we’d scuttle her!”

“How do you scuttle a boat?” asked Dick curiously.

Chub for a moment was at a loss, and glanced doubtfully at Roy. But finding no assistance there he plunged bravely.

“Well, you first get a scuttle, just an ordinary scuttle, you know; and I think you have to have a coal-shovel, too, but I’m not quite certain about that. Armed with the scuttle you descend to the—the cellar of the ship—”

“You bore holes in it,” said Roy contemptuously. “Thunder! I’m not going to ship under a captain who doesn’t know the rudiments of navigation.”

“I’m not talking navigation,” said Chub with dignity. “I’m

talking piracy. Piracy is a much more advanced study. Anybody can navigate, but good pirates are few and far between, these days.”

“Oh, come on and talk sense,” begged Dick. “How much will it cost us for grub?”

“Well, let me see,” responded Chub, turning to his paper. “I suppose about two cases of eggs—But, look here, we haven’t decided how long we’re going to cruise.”

“A month,” said Roy.

“Two months,” said Dick. “Anyway, we can’t buy enough eggs at the start to last us all the time. Eggs should be fresh.”

“We’ll get eggs and vegetables as we go along,” said Roy. “What we have to have to start with are staples.”

“Mighty hard eating,” murmured Chub. “Why not use plain nails?”

This was treated by the others with contemptuous silence.

“We’ll need flour, coffee, tea, salt, rice, cheese—”

“Pepper,” interpolated Dick.

“Baking-powder, sugar, flavoring extracts—”

“Mustard,” proposed Chub, “for mustard plasters, you know.”

“And lots of things like that,” ended Roy triumphantly.

“What we need is a grocery,” sighed Chub. “Aren’t we going to have any meat at all? I have a very delicate stomach, fellows, and the doctor insists on meat three times a day. Personally, I don’t care for it much; I’m a vegetarian by

conviction and early training; but one can't go against the doctor's orders, you know. Now, for breakfast a small rasher of bacon—"

"What's a rasher?" Roy demanded.

"For luncheon a—er—two or three simple little chops, and for dinner a small roast of beef or lamb or a friendly steak. Those, with a few vegetables and an occasional egg, suffice my simple needs. I might mention, however, that a suggestion of sweet, such as a plum-pudding, a mince-pie or a dab of ice-cream, has always seemed to me a proper topping off to a meal, if I may use the expression."

"You may use any expression you like," answered Roy cruelly, "but if you think we're going to have roasts you've got another guess coming to you. Why, that kitchen—"

"Galley," corrected Chub helpfully.

—"is too small for anything bigger than a French chop!"

"When Chub gets awfully hungry," observed Dick, "we might tie up to the shore and cook him something over the fire; have a barbecue, you know."

"Cook a whole ox for him," laughed Roy. "I guess that's the only way Chub will ever get enough to eat."

"You quit bothering about me," said Chub scornfully, "and study seamanship. Remember you're to be an able seaman and if you don't come up to the standard for able seaman I'll do things to you with a belaying-pin."

"Isn't he the cruel-hearted captain?" asked Dick. "I don't believe I want to ship with him, Roy."

“Oh, you’ll be all right. Chub won’t dare to touch you for fear he won’t get his dinner.”

“There you go again!” Chub groaned. “You fellows simply talk a subject to death. Your conversation lacks—lacks variety, diversity. If you are quite through vilifying me—”

“Doesn’t he use lovely language?” murmured Roy in an aside to Dick.

“We will now proceed with our estimate,” concluded Chub. “As I was saying, eggs—”

“I tell you what we might use,” interrupted Dick. “Have you ever seen any of this powdered egg?”

“Is this a joke?” asked Chub darkly.

“No, really! You buy it in cans. It’s eggs, just the yolks, you know, with all the moisture taken out of them. It’s a yellow powder. And when you want an omelet you just mix some milk with it and stir it up and there you are!”

But Chub was suspicious.

“And how do you make a fried egg out of it?” he asked.

“You can’t, of course, because the whites aren’t there; but —”

“Then we want none of it! An egg that you can’t fry isn’t a respectable egg. If I can’t have real eggs I’ll starve like a gentleman.”

“Well, let’s leave the eggs out of it for the present,” suggested Roy. “Let’s figure on the other things.”

“Let’s not,” said Dick, rising. “I’m going home. We’ve got

lots of time to figure. Besides, the best way to do is to buy the things and let the groceryman do the figuring. We've got to have them, no matter what they cost. What time are we going around to see the Floating Artist?"

"Right after breakfast," answered Chub. "You come up at about ten o'clock—"

"What's the matter with you fellows coming to the hotel and having breakfast with me?" asked Dick.

"All right, then, luncheon. I'll be around at ten in the morning. See if you can at least get him up by that time, Roy."

"With a glance of scathing contempt," murmured Chub, "our hero turned upon his heel and strode rapidly away into the fast-gathering darkness."

But where he really strode was down the stairs, with one arm over Dick's shoulder, while Roy brought up the rear and gently prodded them with the toe of his shoe.



CHAPTER IV

LEASING A HOUSE-BOAT

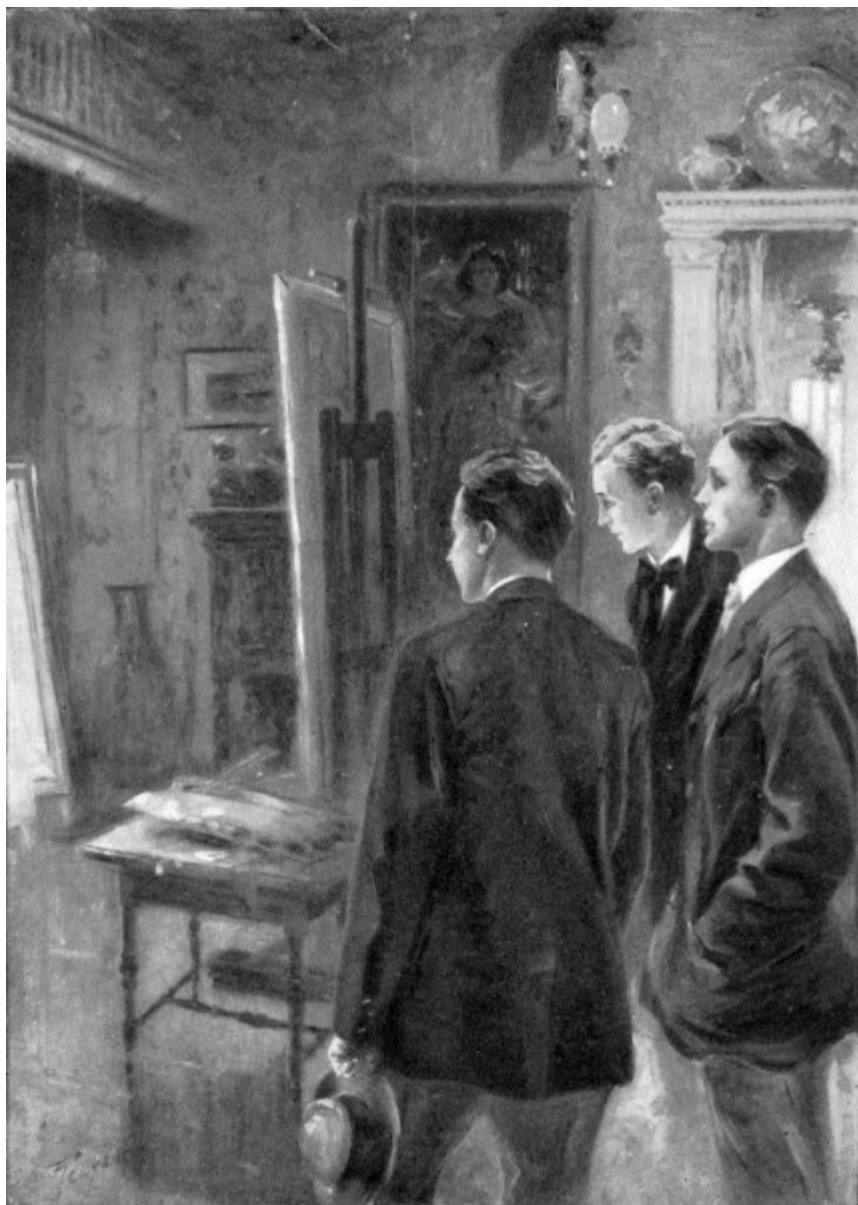
The preceding summer, while camping out on Fox Island—or Harry's Island, as they called it now—the boys had made the acquaintance of the Floating Artist. He had appeared one day in his house-boat, the *Jolly Roger*, in which he was cruising down the Hudson, sketching as he went. His real name was Forbes Cole, a name of much importance in the art world, as the boys discovered later on. He had proved an agreeable acquaintance, and when camp had been broken the three boys, together with Harry Emery, the daughter of the school principal, had voyaged with him as far as New York.

Mr. Cole lived in a rather imposing white stone house within sight of the Park. The entrance was on the level with the sidewalk. Bay-trees in green tubs flanked the door which was guarded by a bronze grilling. The three boys were admitted by a uniformed butler and conducted into a tiny white-and-gold reception-room. As the heavy curtain fell again at the doorway after the retreating servant the visitors gazed at each other with awed surprise. Chub pretended to be fearful of trusting his weight to the slender chairs, and all three were grinning and giggling when the man appeared again, suddenly and noiselessly. Down a marble-tiled hall carpeted with narrow Oriental rugs in dull colors they were led to an elevator. When they were inside, the butler touched a button and the tiny car, white-and-gold like the reception-room, shot up past two floors and stopped, apparently of its own volition, at the third, and the boys emerged to find themselves [in a great studio](#) that

evidently occupied the whole fourth floor of the house.

“Talk about your Arabian Nights!” murmured Chub in Roy’s ear.

The grating closed quietly behind them, the car disappeared and they stood looking about them in bewilderment and pleasure. So far as they could see the big apartment was empty of any persons save themselves, but they couldn’t be certain of that for there were shadowy recesses where the white light from the big skylights didn’t penetrate, and a balcony of dark, richly carved oak, screened and curtained, stretched across the front end of the studio.



[In a great studio](#)

At the other end a broad fireplace was flanked by a tall screen of Spanish leather which glowed warmly where the light found it. A white bearskin was laid in front of it. Other rugs were scattered here and there, queer, low-toned prayer

rugs many of them, with tattered borders and silky sheen. The walls were hung with tapestries against which was the dull glitter of armor. Strange vessels of pottery and copper and brass stood about, and two big, black oak chests, elaborately carved, half hidden by silken cushions and embroideries, guarded the fireplace. There was a dais under the skylight, and on it was a chair. At a little distance was a big easel holding a canvas, and beside it a cabinet for paints and brushes. There were few pictures in sight, but over the room hung a faint and not unpleasant odor of paint and oil and turpentine.

At one of the broad, low windows—there were only two and both were wide open—was a great jar of yellow roses. Under the window was a wide seat upholstered in green leather and piled with cushions. And amidst the cushions, a fact only now discerned by the visitors, lay a red setter viewing them calmly with big brown eyes.

“It’s Jack,” Chub whispered. “I’ve met him before. He’s sure to chew holes in us if we stir. Little Chub stays right here until help comes.”

But evidently Jack had become interested, for he slowly descended from the window-seat and came across the room, his tail wagging slowly.

“We’d better run,” counseled Chub in pretended terror.

But the red setter’s intentions were apparently friendly. He sniffed at Roy and allowed himself to be patted. Then he walked around to Dick and Chub and completed his investigations, finally becoming quite enthusiastic in his welcome and digging his nose into Chub’s hand.

“Bet you he knows us!” cried Chub, softly and delightedly.

“The rascal forgets that the first time we met he made a face at me and growled. Well, all is forgiven, Jack. Where’s your master, sir?”

“I suppose we might as well sit down,” said Roy, “instead of standing here like a lot of ninnies.”

“Did you ever see such a place in your life?” asked Dick. “It looks like a museum and a palace all rolled into one!”

“Gee, but I wish I was an artist!” sighed Chub. “I wonder what’s on the easel. Do you think we could look?”

“No, I think we’ll go over there and sit down and not snoop,” answered Roy severely. “Come on.”

But at that moment the elevator door rolled softly open and with a start the boys turned to see their host step out of the car. Forbes Cole was one of the biggest men they had ever seen. He was well over six feet high and, it seemed, more than proportionately broad. He was a fine, handsome looking man with a big head of wavy brown hair, kindly, twinkling blue eyes, and a brown beard trimmed to a point under a strong chin.

“Sorry to keep you waiting,” he said as he shook hands all around. “I was just finishing breakfast. And how are you all? Let me see, this is Roy, isn’t it? I remember every one of you perfectly, but I have a bad memory for names. Chub, though, I recollect very well; that name happens to stick. And this is Dick Some. Yes, yes, now I’ve got you all. Jack seems to have remembered you, too. Come over here and sit down and tell me what great things have happened to you since we parted last year. I suppose each one of you has done something fine for your school or college. Dear, dear, what a beautiful thing it

is to be young! We never realize it until it's too late. Now what's the news?"

They perched themselves side by side on the broad window-seat and the artist lifted the heavy chair from the dais with one hand as though it weighed but an ounce and sprawled his great body in it. Jack settled back amongst the cushions with his head on Dick's knee.

"I guess there isn't much to tell," said Roy. "Chub and I have been at college and Dick here is coming up in the fall."

"If I can pass," muttered Dick.

"And Miss Harry? How is she?" asked Mr. Cole.

"Fine," said Dick. "I saw her the other day. We often talk about you, sir, and the good times we had on the *Jolly Roger*."

"And so you think you'd like to have more good times on it, eh?" laughed the artist in his jovial roar. "I wish I could go along, if you'd have me; but I'm going across after awhile. But the boat's yours when you want it, and I hope you'll have the jolliest sort of a time, boys."

"It's mighty nice of you to want us to have it," said Roy. "We'll take very good care of it, Mr. Cole, and—"

"Oh, don't bother about that," laughed the painter. "You know I've got tired of it, boys. Besides, it's well insured and if it happens to go to the bottom, why, I sha'n't mind a bit—as long as you get out first! She's at Loving's Landing, if you know where that is; about fifteen miles up the river. You'll find her in good condition, I guess. I wrote the man day before yesterday to open her up and get her in shape. She needs paint, as I wrote you; but I don't believe I want to go to the expense

of having her done over. But if you think you'd rather have her freshened up it won't cost much to have Higgins put on one coat for you."

"I guess she's all right as she is," said Chub. He looked at Roy and that youth took the hint.

"We were wondering," he began, "how much you'd want for her for a couple of months, Mr. Cole."

"You can have her all summer for the same price," answered the painter with his eyes twinkling.

"Well, I suppose we couldn't stay in her more than two months, sir; but of course we realize that if we took her we ought to pay for the whole time, because it would be too late to rent her again after we were through with her, I guess. About how much would she be, sir?"

Mr. Cole looked at them thoughtfully for a moment. Finally,

"Well, I was going to ask you to take her and use her rent free," he answered, "but there's something in Roy's expression that tells me I'd get sat on if I did." He laughed merrily. "Am I right?"

"We wouldn't sit on you," answered Chub, "but we'd feel—feel better about it if we rented it regularly from you. It's mighty good of you, though."

"No, it isn't, Chub. It isn't mighty good for anyone to be generous when it doesn't cost him anything. The boat's of no use to me this summer and I shouldn't rent it under any conditions—except to you boys. But if you'd rather not take it as a gift, why, I'll have to put a price on it." He thought a moment. "Suppose we say fifty dollars for the summer?"

Chub eyed Roy doubtfully and Roy eyed Dick.

“That sounds like an awful little bit,” said Roy at last.

“I don’t think so,” replied their host. “I doubt if the *Jolly Roger*’s worth much more, fellows. I’m satisfied and I don’t see why you shouldn’t be. You won’t let me do you a favor, although I thought we were pretty good friends last summer, but, on the other hand, I don’t think you ought to insist on my driving a hard bargain with you. Fifty dollars is my valuation, and there you are; I refuse to go up another cent!”

“In that case,” laughed Roy, “I guess we’d better accept your terms, sir. And we’re very much obliged.”

“That’s all right then. I’ll give you a note to Higgins; the boat’s in his yard up there; and you can take her over as soon as you like and keep her as long as you wish. That’s settled. Now tell me what you’ve been doing the three of you. How do you like your college?”

The boys stayed for another hour and talked and were shown over the studio and were invited to luncheon. But although Chub frowned and nodded his head emphatically Roy politely declined. They finally left with the lease of the house-boat *Jolly Roger* in Roy’s pocket, promising to call again after they had looked over the craft. Then they shook hands, entered the elevator car and were dropped to the street floor.

On the sidewalk [Roy](#) turned to the others.

“Let’s go up and see the boat this afternoon,” he said.

“Let’s go now!” exclaimed Chub with enthusiasm.

“Can’t; after making up that fifty dollars there isn’t enough money in the crowd to pay the car-fares. No, we’ll go along

with Dick and have luncheon. When we get to the hotel we'll find out how to get to Loving's Landing, and then we'll start out right after luncheon. What do you say?"

Chub and Dick agreed to the plan and the three strode off toward Dick's hostelry.



Roy



CHAPTER V

A TRIP OF INSPECTION

It turned out when they got there that the real host was not Dick, but Dick's father. Neither Roy nor Chub had met Mr. Somes before. Like Mr. Cole he was a large man, but his size was rather a matter of breadth and thickness than height. He had a round, clean-shaven, jovial face lighted by a pair of keen steel-gray eyes, and a deep, rumbling voice that seemed to come from the heavy-soled shoes he affected. But he was kindness itself, and by the time they had gathered about the table beside the open window in the big hotel dining-room Roy and Chub were quite captivated. And that luncheon! Chub talks of it yet! There was ice-cold cantaloupe to start with, and then cold bouillon, and tiny clams lying on shells no larger than half-dollars, and chops not much larger than the clams—so small, in fact, that Chub viewed them with dismay until he discovered that there were many, many of them,—and potato croquettes, and pease no larger than birdshot, and Romaine salad, and—but, dear me, no one save Chub can give the entire program at this late day! I know there were lemon tarts and strawberry ice-cream and all sorts of astonishing cakes at the end, though; and I know that Chub was never much more miserable in his life than when he was obliged to stop eating with half his portion of ice-cream unconsumed! Of course such a repast took time, and after it was over no one seemed in any very great hurry to leave the table. So they sat there contentedly while Mr. Somes, craftily led on by Dick, told marvelous stories of mines and discoveries, until Chub was for abandoning the cruise in the

Jolly Roger and starting west to prospect for gold. It was almost the middle of the afternoon when they finally left the dining-room, and then a hasty consultation of the time-table showed them that to reach Loving's Landing that day and return in time for dinner was quite out of the question. Roy and Dick were a little disappointed, but Chub took it philosophically.

“We can go up in the morning just as well,” he said. “We can go any day, but it isn't every day a chap gets the chance of a feed like that. It's all right for you fellows to make fun, but you haven't been in training for two months, living on beef and potatoes and rice puddings! I'm not kicking though,” he added softly and reverently, “for that luncheon pretty nearly made up for it all!”

So instead of going to Loving's Landing they ambled downtown, feeling very contented and peaceful, and obtained a price-list from one of the big grocery houses. Armed with this they returned to Dick's room and made out a long list of purchases. There is no use in setting it down here, for when they reckoned up they found that it came to over ninety dollars! In disgust Roy crumpled it up and threw it into the waste-basket.

“We're awful idiots,” he said. “What's the good of wasting our time up here when we might be out of doors? Let's go and have a walk in the Park.”

Chub, reclining at full length on Dick's bed, groaned dismally.

“‘Strenuous' is a much over-worked word, Roy,” he said, “but it certainly applies to you. Just when I'm beginning to feel comfortable you ask me to get up and walk! *Walk!* If you'd

said ride, now—”

“Well, let’s,” said Dick. “Let’s get on the top of one of those silly Fifth Avenue stages and bump uptown. It’s lots of fun, honest; you think every minute that the fool thing’s going to topple over!”

“What joy!” murmured Chub. “Let us go. I’m the neat little toppler. Besides, maybe it will help settle my luncheon and give me an appetite for dinner.”

“Great Scott!” exclaimed Roy. “You’re not thinking about dinner already are you?”

“I’m thinking of nothing else,” responded Chub. “Hang it, you fellows don’t seem to realize that I’ve got two months of starvation to make up for! Come on and let us topple.”

But although they went to the end of the route in both directions the coach failed to turn over, but there were several occasions when Chub screamed with delight and told the others that the moment was at hand.

“Now we’re going!” Chub cried. “Stand back, men! Women and children first!” And when the danger was over he shook his head disappointedly. “I shall ask for my money back,” he declared warmly. “What kind of service do you call this, anyway? Here I am out for a pleasant afternoon topple and nothing doing! I believe I could have some one arrested for this.” He looked darkly about him in search of a victim. “The first policeman I see I shall make complaint to. It’s an outrage, a perfect outrage!”

But when they reached Roy’s house the prospect of dinner had restored his good-humor. Dick dined with them, and in the evening they went to the theater.

Theoretically it is a simple matter to journey from New York to Loving's Landing. Actually it is much more difficult, especially when you mistake the train as the three did the next forenoon and find yourself hurrying off in quite the wrong direction. By the time they were able to get out of that train they had wasted fourteen miles. By the time they were back in the station, ready to start over again, they had squandered nearly three quarters of an hour. Roy was inclined to be angry, laying the blame, by some remarkable method of reasoning, on the railroad company.

“What did that fellow tell us Track 12 for?” he asked irascibly.

“There, there,” said Chub soothingly, “don't waste your time trying to find out why anybody does anything in a railroad station. They have laws of their own, Roy, laws that you and I will never comprehend. It was our fault. We ought to know by this time that no one in a station ever tells the truth on any subject. I'll just bet you that if I go over there and ask that gateman how to get to Loving's Landing he will tell me all wrong.”

“Well, we've got to ask someone,” said Dick, “and it might as well be him. He looks as intelligent as most of them I've seen.”

“Then I'll ask him, but of course he will lie to me.” Chub was back in a minute shaking his head dismally. “He says Track 8, and that there's a train in about four minutes, but of course—”

“Come on,” said Roy impatiently, “don't let's lose another.”

They sought Track 8, Chub expostulating against the folly of

believing the gateman. But both the conductor and the brakeman assured them earnestly that the train did go to Loving's Landing, and after some persuasion Chub allowed himself to be dragged aboard.

“Have your own way,” he sighed. “But when you get out in Chicago or Cincinnati or New Orleans don't blame me, don't blame me! I wash my hands of the whole undertaking.”

“I guess it won't hurt them,” answered Dick cruelly.

Loving's Landing, at first sight, didn't appear to be worth the trouble they had taken to find it. It was largely composed of lumberyards, machine-shops and wharves in front of which dirty little canal-boats were lying. Higgins's Boat Yard was difficult to discover, each informant directing them differently, but at last they found it tucked away between the railroad and the river and hidden by a lumberyard. They presented their credentials at the office and were directed to where the *Jolly Roger* lay ready for launching. By that time Chub was speculating on the chances of obtaining luncheon in such a “one-horse metropolis.”

The *Jolly Roger* lay at the top of the way, one end tilted high in air. It was something of a feat to board her and more of a feat to move around after they were there. The doors and windows had been opened but the interior still had a musty odor that caused Roy to sniff in displeasure. For the next half-hour they roamed around in and out, planning and making memoranda of things to buy. The boat was furnished just as when they had last seen it, although the hauling out had seriously displaced many of the articles. In the forward cabin, —or living-room, just as you had a mind to call it,—chairs and table had congregated against one wall as though holding a

conference.

“Seems to me,” said Chub, “we’re going to need a lot of things. We ought to have new curtains all over the shop, cot-beds, bedding, some more chairs—”

“Well, we’ve got those all down,” answered Roy shortly. “What is most important. I fancy, is to have someone go over the engine.”

“You bet,” Dick agreed. “We can do without new curtains better than we can do without an engine. I’ve been looking at the batteries and wiring and they’re all out of kilter. We’d better consult Higgins and find some one who can fix up that part of it.”

“She doesn’t look much as she did last summer,” said Chub disappointedly.

“Oh, she will when she gets in the water and we have her fixed up,” Dick replied. “How about painting her outside?”

They climbed down and had a look at her from the wharf, finally agreeing that a coat of white on the house was necessary. Then they found the boat builder and talked it all over with him. As soon as he found that there was a prospect of work to be done he was all attention. He agreed to take charge of the matter, paint her as directed, have the engine and batteries thoroughly gone over and deliver her at a certain dock in the North River, New York, in one week’s time.

“Of course he’s lying, too,” said Chub gloomily as they made their way out of the yard, “but it’s a sweet lie. I don’t suppose he will have her ready before the middle of July. Some one of us will have to come up here every day or so and get after him.”

“Don’t you worry,” answered Dick, “Roy and I will camp on his trail, and by the time you come back she’ll be all ready.”

Chub allowed himself to be comforted, and they set forth in search of luncheon. They found it, but the least said of it the better. The next morning Chub left for Pittsburg, having bound himself as one condition of the agreement with his father to spend a week at home before beginning the cruise in the house-boat. While he was away Roy and Dick fulfilled their promise to keep after Mr. Higgins, and that worthy responded finely to encouragement. The boys went to Loving’s Landing three times during the week, the last time bearing with them the new curtains which had been purchased by Mrs. Porter and made under her directions.



[Chub descended at the Porter's bag and baggage](#)

There were other purchases, too; cot-beds that folded into almost nothing when not in use, blankets, sheets, mattresses, and pillows, dishes and a few extra cooking utensils, new records for Mr. Cole's talking machine, two brightly-hued and

inexpensive Japanese rugs for the upper deck and numerous lesser things. The provisions were left to the last. They kept up an incessant and animated correspondence with Chub who hated to have anything done without getting a finger in it, and altogether that was a busy week. At the end of it, strange to say, the *Jolly Roger* actually appeared in her berth in the river, and the next afternoon [Chub descended at the Porter's bag and baggage](#).



CHAPTER VI

THE JOLLY ROGER

When I say that Chub arrived “bag and baggage,” I mean every word of it.

It was a delightful afternoon—July was almost a week old—and Roy, pausing before his front door and fumbling for his latch-key, looked westward along the street into a golden haze of sunlight. And as he looked, suddenly there appeared, huge and formless in the sunset glow, something that arrested his attention. For a moment he couldn't make it out, but presently, with a rattle of wheels, it drew near and resolved into a “four-wheeler” piled high with luggage. It pulled up at the curb before the door, and Chub leaped out, bringing with him numerous packages.

“Hello,” greeted Roy; “come to spend the rest of your days with us? Why didn't you bring the grand piano? Or is it in the big trunk there?”

Chub grinned and directed the transfer of his belongings from cab to house. There was a small steamer trunk, a whopping wicker trunk, a suit case, a case containing fishing rods, a case containing a shot-gun, three brown paper parcels, an umbrella, and a rain coat. The largest trunk was placed in the rear hall down-stairs, but the other things were carried up to Chub's room. And when the confusion was over and the cabman, liberally rewarded, had rattled away, Chub deigned to explain.

“Isn’t that a raft of stuff?” he asked, throwing himself into a chair. “You see, Roy, after I’d got all packed up I came across two or three things I thought would be nice for the boat, and as there wasn’t time to do anything else, I just wrapped them up and brought them along. That big bundle is a corn and asparagus boiler, and—”

“A *what?*”

“Corn and asparagus boiler. It’s a great thing. I found it in the kitchen cupboard. It’s sort of oblong, you know, and there’s a tray that lifts out with the corn on it when it’s done. You see, we’re likely to have a lot of green corn and I was pretty sure we didn’t have anything big enough to cook it in. Good idea, wasn’t it?”

“Splendid!” said Roy. “Did they know you were taking it?”

“They do by this time,” laughed Chub. “I forget whether I made any special mention of it. There were so many things at the last moment, you see. That littlest bundle is a barometer. Every boat ought to have a barometer, so I borrowed it from the front porch. And the other—”

“Oh, you needn’t tell me,” sighed Roy. “I know what’s in that. It’s a sewing machine.”

“You run away and play! It’s a pair of white canvas shoes. I found them after the trunks had gone and there wasn’t room for them in the bag.”

“And, without wishing to appear unduly inquisitive,” said Roy, “may I ask what the large trunk down-stairs contains? You said it wasn’t the piano, I believe?”

“I’ll show you after dinner,” answered Chub. “I’ve got a lot

of useful things in there. What time is it? After six? Then I must wash off some of this dust. My! it was a grimy old trip.”

“It must have been. How are the folks?”

“Splendid! They’re getting ready to go to the Water Gap. My, but I’m glad I don’t have to go too! I suppose, though, I’ll have to go there for a while in September. Is the boat done yet? Have you seen it?”

After dinner Dick appeared and Chub solved the mystery of the wicker trunk. The entire household gathered in the back hall while he displayed his treasures.

“What do you say to those?” asked Chub, pulling four sofa cushions out. “They’ll be just the thing for the window-seat in the forward cabin, eh?”

“We’ve got pillows for that window-seat,” said Dick.

“How many?” asked Chub, scathingly. “About six! We need a lot. Mother said I could have these just as well as not for the summer, so I bagged them. And look here! Camp-stools, don’t you see? You open them out like—like this—no, like this!—yes, this must be the way they go—how the dickens?—there we are! See? When we don’t need them they fold up out of the way—*ouch!*” Chub had folded one of his fingers in the operation.

“They’re fine!” laughed Roy. “We can use them on the roof.”

“Upper deck, please,” Dick requested. “What’s the red blanket, Chub?”

“That’s a steamer rug, and it’s a fine one. Feel the warmth of it. I thought maybe we’d want extra covers some time. And

there's an old foot-ball—”

“What's that for?” asked Roy.

“Oh, we may want to kick it around some time when we're ashore. It'll be something to do. And this is an old sweater; I thought I'd just bring it along. And here's a small ice-cream freezer. It only makes a quart, but that'll be enough, I guess. And that's a bag of salt. Mother thought I might as well bring it as buy new.”

By this time the audience was frankly hilarious.

“But do you know how to make ice-cream, Chub?” asked Mrs. Porter.

“Oh, anybody can make ice-cream,” he answered carelessly. “You just mix some cream and sugar and flavoring stuff up and freeze it. I've seen our cook do it lots of times. Here's my electric torch. That'll be handy, you'll admit. And here's a collapsible bucket. It's great! I saw it in a store window one day. See how it folds up when you aren't using it? That's a box of soap; I knew you fellows would forget to put soap on your list.”

Neither Dick nor Roy had anything to say; they *had* forgotten.

“Those are some books I want to read. Have you read that one, Roy? It's a thriller! Take it along with you. It'll keep you awake half the night. These old trousers I thought might come in handy in case anyone fell in the water.”

“Dear me!” exclaimed Roy's mother. “You don't expect to fall overboard do you?”

“No, Mrs. Porter, but you never can tell what will happen,”

replied Chub, wisely. “Those are shells for the shot-gun and that’s my fly-book. I should think we might find some good fishing, eh? Here’s a ‘first aid’ case. Mother insisted on my bringing that. I don’t know what’s in it, but I suppose there’s no harm having it along. Here are some curtains; I used to have them in my room until they got faded. I thought maybe we’d find a place for them. And this is an extra blanket. I just put it in so that the bottom of the trunk would be soft. And a hair pillow; it’s rather soiled, but that’s just shoe-dressing I spilled on it once. The laundress couldn’t get it all out. And I guess that’s all except this thermometer. Oh, the mischief! The plaguey thing’s broken! Throw it away. It was just a cheap one, anyhow. There, that’s the lot. What do you say?”

“I don’t know how we’d have got along without those things, Chub,” said Roy, very, very earnestly. “How we could have expected to go on a cruise without a foot-ball and a hair pillow and a collapsible bucket—”

“And a pair of old trousers and a thermometer,” added Dick.

“I don’t see. Do you Dick?” Dick shook his head gravely.

“We must have been crazy,” he said, sadly.

“Oh, you say what you like!” responded Chub. “You’ll find that all these things will come in mighty handy before we get back.”

“Of course,” said Roy, “even if we have to load them in another boat and tow it along behind.”

“Oh, get out; there’s plenty of room for this truck. You fellows are just jealous because you didn’t think of them.”

“I quite approve of the ice-cream freezer,” remarked Mr.

Porter, “but I don’t just see how you’re going to work it without the dasher.”

“*What!*” exclaimed Chub. “Didn’t I put that in?”

“Well, I don’t see it anywhere; do you?” Then followed a wild search for the dasher. At last Chub gave it up and looked a trifle foolish.

“I remember now,” he muttered. “I took it out of the can so that it wouldn’t rattle around. I—I must have forgotten to pack it.”

He joined good-naturedly in the laugh that arose.

“Anyhow,” he said presently, “I dare say we can get along without ice-cream. It’s a bother to have to freeze it. And maybe we can use the tub as a bucket and keep something in the can; we could keep our milk in it.”

“I imagine that most of the milk we’ll have will come in cans,” said Roy. “You don’t expect fresh milk, do you?”

“I surely do. We can buy it at the farm-houses.”

“Condensed milk is cheaper, though,” said Dick, “because you don’t have to use much sugar with it.”

“Listen to Dickums!” jeered Chub. “He’s getting economical!”

It was finally decided to leave the ice-cream freezer behind, and the bag of salt was donated to Mrs. Porter “as a slight testimonial of esteem from the master and crew of the *Jolly Roger*.” Then the boys went up to Roy’s room and sat there very late, planning and discussing.

The next morning found them at the wharf bright and early,

even Chub disdainful for once what he called his “beauty sleep.” The wharf belonged to a company in which Mr. Porter was interested and accommodations for the *Jolly Roger* had been gladly accorded. She lay in the slip looking very clean and neat. The new coat of paint had worked wonders in her appearance. Each of the boys had brought a suit case filled with things, and Chub carried besides the two camp-stools and a large crimson pillow. And while they are aboard unloading let us look over the house-boat.



The boys arrive at the wharf

At first glance the *Jolly Roger* looked like a scow with a little one-story white cottage on top, and a tiny cupola at one end of that. The hull was thirty-three feet long and thirteen feet

wide and drew about four feet. There was a bluntly curving bow and the merest suggestion of a stern, but had it not been for the white cupola on top, which was in reality a tiny wheel-house, it would have been difficult to decide which was the bow end and which the stern end of the craft. The hull was painted pea-green to a point just above the water-line. Beyond that there was a strip of faded rose-pink, and then a narrow margin of white. The decks were gray, or had been at one time, the house and railings were white and the window and door trimming was green. So she didn't lack for color.

Small as the boat was she was well built and, in spite of having been in use for several years, was in first-rate condition. It was nothing short of a miracle that so many rooms and passages and cubbyholes were to be found on her. Chub, in commenting on this feature, had said once:

“If you gave this hull to a regular carpenter and told him to build one room and a closet on it he'd be distracted. And if he did do it he'd have the closet sticking out over the water somewhere. But just look what a boat-builder does! He makes three rooms, a kitchen, and an engine compartment, all sorts of closets and cupboards, puts a roof garden and a pilot-house on top and runs a piazza all around it! Why, a fellow I know at home has a little old launch about twenty feet long and six feet wide and I'm blessed if he hasn't pretty nearly everything inside of her except a ball-room! I'm blamed if I see how they do it!”

On the *Jolly Roger*, beginning forward, there was a living-room nine feet by ten. There were five one-sash windows in it, two on each side and one in front. Under the front window and running from side to side was a broad window-seat

comfortably upholstered and supplied with pillows. Between two of the windows was a bookcase, in one corner was a cabinet holding a talking-machine and records, in the center of the room was a three-foot round table, and three wicker chairs were distributed about. Forward, in front of the window, a tiny spiral stairway of iron led up into the wheel-house above. It had been decided that if Harry and her father or mother joined them, a cot-bed was to be placed in this room, which, with the window-seat, would give accommodations for two persons. The living room gave into a narrow passage which traversed the boat. Across the passage at the other end was a door leading into a little bedroom, nine feet by five. This held a three-foot brass bedstead, one chair, and a lavatory. Above the bed drawers and shelves and a mirror had been built.

Back of the bedroom, opening from the deck, was the engine-room. The engine was of six horse-power and a very good one, in spite of Mr. Cole's aspersions. The gasolene tank was on the roof above. The *Jolly Roger* had a guaranteed speed of five miles an hour, but the boys soon discovered that the guaranteed speed and the actual speed didn't agree by a whole mile. The engine-room had no window but was lighted by a deadlight set in the roof. Beyond the engine-room, on the other side of the boat, was a tiny kitchen, or, as the boys preferred to call it, galley. This opened into the after cabin and was so small that one person entirely filled it. But in spite of its size it was a model of convenience. There was an oil-stove, a sink—you forced water from a tank under the deck by means of a little nickel-plated pump—an ice-chest, shelves for dishes, hooks overhead for pots and kettles, cupboards underneath for supplies and a dozen other conveniences. As Dick said, all you had to do was to stand in front of the sink and reach for

anything you wanted. There was a window above the sink and Dick discovered that it was very handy to throw potato peelings and such things out of.

The remaining apartment was a room nine by seven which the owner had used principally to store his painting materials in. Previously it had contained only a cupboard, table, chair, and a small, green chest. But now two cot-beds were established on opposite sides. There wasn't much room left, but it was quite possible to move around and to reach the galley. This after cabin opened on to the rear deck, about five feet broad, from whence a flight of steps led up to the roof, or, again quoting the boys, the upper deck.

This was one of the best features of the little craft. It was covered with canvas save where panes of thick glass gave light to the rooms below, and was railed all around. Outside the railing were green wooden boxes for flowers. Last summer these had been filled with geraniums and periwinkle and had made a brave showing. And the boys had decided that they would have them so again. Stanchions held a striped awning which covered the entire deck. At the forward end was the wheel-house, a little six by four compartment glassed on all sides, in which was a steering wheel—the boat could also be steered from the engine-room—various pulls for controlling the engine, a rack for charts, a clock, and a comfortable swivel chair. Near the stairs there was a little cedar tender, but this was usually towed astern. Stowed away below were some inexpensive rugs which belonged up here, and three willow chairs and a willow table. A side ladder led from the upper deck to the lower so that one could get quickly from engine-room to wheel-house. Topping the latter was a short pole for a flag. Such was the house-boat *Jolly Roger*, Eaton, master.

“Tell you what I’m going to do,” said Dick, when they had unloaded their bags and distributed the contents. “I’m going to try the engine. We’d better find out as soon as we can whether she’s going to run.”

“What do you mean?” asked Roy, anxiously. “Go monkeying around here among all these ferry-boats and things?”

But Dick explained that his idea was to keep the boat tied up. So they looked to their two lines which ran from bow and stern and Dick slipped into the engine-room. Presently there was a mild commotion at the stern of the boat which gradually increased as Dick advanced the spark. The lines tightened, but held, and Roy and Chub joined the engineer.

“How does she go?” asked Chub.

“All right,” Dick answered, cheerfully. The engine was chugging away busily and Dick was moving about it with his oil-can. “I didn’t have any trouble starting it. I don’t believe Mr. Cole knows much about engines.” There was a tone of superiority in Dick’s voice that caused the others to smile, recalling, as they did, his own vast ignorance of the subject less than a year ago. The summer before Dick had purchased a small launch and what he now knew of gas engines had been learned in the short space of a few months’ experience chugging about Ferry Hill in the *Pup*.

“Oh, Mr. Cole always said he didn’t understand that engine,” answered Roy. “Turn her off, Dick, or we’ll break away from the dock.”

“Wait till I see how she reverses,” said Dick.

“Well, start her back easy,” Chub cautioned, glancing

anxiously at the lines which held them to the wharf. So Dick slowed the engine down and then threw back the clutch. The *Jolly Roger* obeyed beautifully, and Dick was finally persuaded to bring the trial to an end. Then they went over the boat again.

“If Harry brings her mother with her,” said Roy, “they’ll have to have this room.” They were in the forward cabin or living room. “We can put up a cot along here for Mrs. Emery and Harry can have the window-seat!”

“That’s all right,” said Chub, “but the only place to wash is in the bedroom. We’ll have to put a bowl and pitcher in here, and a looking-glass, too; ladies can’t get along without a looking-glass.”

“If her father comes with her,” said Dick, “Harry can have the bedroom, Doctor Emery can sleep in here on the cot and one of us fellows can have the window-seat. Then the other two can sleep in the after cabin.”

“Where’ll we eat our meals?” Roy asked. They looked at each other in perplexity.

“Mr. Cole ate in the after cabin,” said Chub, finally, “but there isn’t room there with those two cots set up.”

“I tell you,” said Dick. “While we’re alone we’ll take the cots out of the after cabin and use it for a dining-room. Roy can have the cot in here and I’ll sleep on the window-seat. Chub can have the bedroom; he’s captain, you know.”

“That’s a good scheme,” answered Roy, “but how about when the others come?”

“Oh, we’ll fix it somehow. Besides, maybe they won’t

come. We haven't heard a word from Harry yet."

"Well, the letter had to be forwarded from Ferry Hill to her aunt's, I suppose," explained Roy. "We'll probably hear from her to-day or to-morrow. Half the time we'll be tied up to the shore, any way, and we can easily enough set that little table on the ground."

"Maybe there'd be room for it on the rear deck," suggested Dick. "Kind of under the stairs, you know. Let's go and see."

A survey of the space showed that the plan was quite feasible, especially as Dick volunteered to sit on the railing.

"There's another thing we'll have to have," said Chub, "and that's a place to wash when Harry's with us. Suppose we haul that little green chest out here and put a tin basin on it. We could bring water from the kitch—the galley."

"That's all right," laughed Roy, "but why not use your precious folding bucket and dip the water out of the river?"

"I hadn't thought of that," Chub responded. "That's a good scheme. We'll hang it on a nail, over the basin."

"Where the mischief are we going to keep those extra cots when we're not using them?" Dick asked.

"I found just the place for them," Chub replied. "We'll lean them up in the passage beyond the bedroom door and keep the outside door at that end closed. We don't need to use it anyway."

Other problems were solved, and then luncheon, which they had brought with them, was spread on the table in the forward cabin and they set to with a will. Before they had finished the florist appeared on the scene with geraniums and periwinkle

for the flower boxes. By the time he had transferred the plants from pots to the boxes along the edge of the upper deck, he had managed to mess the new white paint up pretty badly and the boys spent the better part of half an hour cleaning up with water and brushes. By that time it was well toward the middle of the afternoon and they were quite ready to go home.

“If we can get the rest of the supplies in to-morrow morning,” observed Chub as he locked the last door and slipped the key in his pocket, “I don’t see why we shouldn’t start to-morrow after luncheon instead of waiting until the next morning. We could easily get up the river far enough to spend the night. What do you think?”

Both Roy and Dick were quite as eager to get off as he was, and it was agreed that if the groceries arrived in time they would begin their cruise at one o’clock on the morrow. When they reached Roy’s house they found a letter from Harry. Roy read it aloud.

Miss Emery accepts with pleasure the kind invitation of Messrs. Chub, Roy, and Dick, and will be ready to embark on the *Jolly Roger* at Ferry Hill at the time appointed.

P. S. Isn’t it lovely? Mama says I can come home the 20th and papa will go with me, although he says we can’t stay with you more than two weeks. But perhaps you didn’t want us for more than that. Did you? Do you think I might take Snip along? He will behave beautifully. Aunt Harriet says I’m certain to be drowned and wants me to carry a life preserver around in my hand all the time. Isn’t that funny? She’s taught me to

make pie-crust and so I'll make you all the pies you want. Won't that be fine? I can make three kinds: apple, cherry, rhubarb. I can make mince, too, if I have the mincemeat. Don't forget to write at once and let me know when you will get to Ferry Hill. Remembrances to Chub and Dick.

Yours truly, HARRY.

“Well, I'm rather glad it's the Doctor that's coming and not Mrs. Emery,” said Dick. “Mrs. Emery is charming and kind, but a man will be less trouble. Hello, what's the matter with you, Chub?”

Chub was gazing into space with an ecstatic smile on his face.

“Me?” he asked, coming out of his trance. “Nothing! I was just thinking of those pies!”



CHAPTER VII

THE CRUISE BEGINS

Behold, then, the *Jolly Roger* proceeding, as Chub phrased it, “under her own sail” up the Hudson River in the middle of a glorious July afternoon. There was a fresh little breeze quartering down the river and the surface of the broad stream was merry with whitecaps. The long, blue pennant which Dick had discovered in the wheel-house snapped and waved from the pole. Chub said he didn’t know what a blue pennant meant, but that since it looked mighty well they’d fly it. Roy hoped it wasn’t a demand for assistance or a token of sickness on board. They wanted to dip it as they passed Grant’s tomb, white and stately on the crest of the hill, but the halyards had got twisted, and by the time they were righted there was nothing to salute but a dingy little tugboat.

With both tide and wind against her the house-boat made slow progress, and Chub was inclined to be impatient.

“We’ll never get to Ferry Hill this side of Christmas!” he declared. “I vote we name her over, and call her the *Slow Poke*.”

Dick and Roy applauded instantly. Chub was at the wheel and the others were standing behind him at the open door of the wheel-house, ready with suggestions and assistance, Dick having been dragged away from the engine almost by main force.

“Fine!” said Dick. “Only she’s got *Jolly Roger* painted on

her bow.”

“That’s all right,” said Chub. “Mr. Cole said we could do anything we liked with her. When we get to a town we’ll buy some paint and rename her.”

“It’s a good name,” laughed Roy. “I wonder Mr. Cole never thought of it himself.”

“Maybe he did; she’s had all sorts of names; he said so. Now what’s that little sail-boat trying to do? If she doesn’t look out she’ll get run over.” Chub blew the whistle warningly.

“We’ve got to get out of her way,” said Dick.

“What for?” asked Chub, haughtily. “Let her get out of our way.”

“Law requires sailing craft to give way to dories and such and steamboats to give way to sail-boats,” responded Dick, knowingly.

“Listen to the Ancient Mariner,” jeered Chub. But he pulled a lever that slowed down the engine, and so allowed the sail-boat to bob out of harm’s way. Chub had a chart spread out in front of him, and now and then he pointed out the places along the way with the manner of a discoverer, though Roy said it seemed more like a ride in a sight-seeing automobile.

“Manhattanville on our right, gentlemen. On the left historic Fort Lee.”

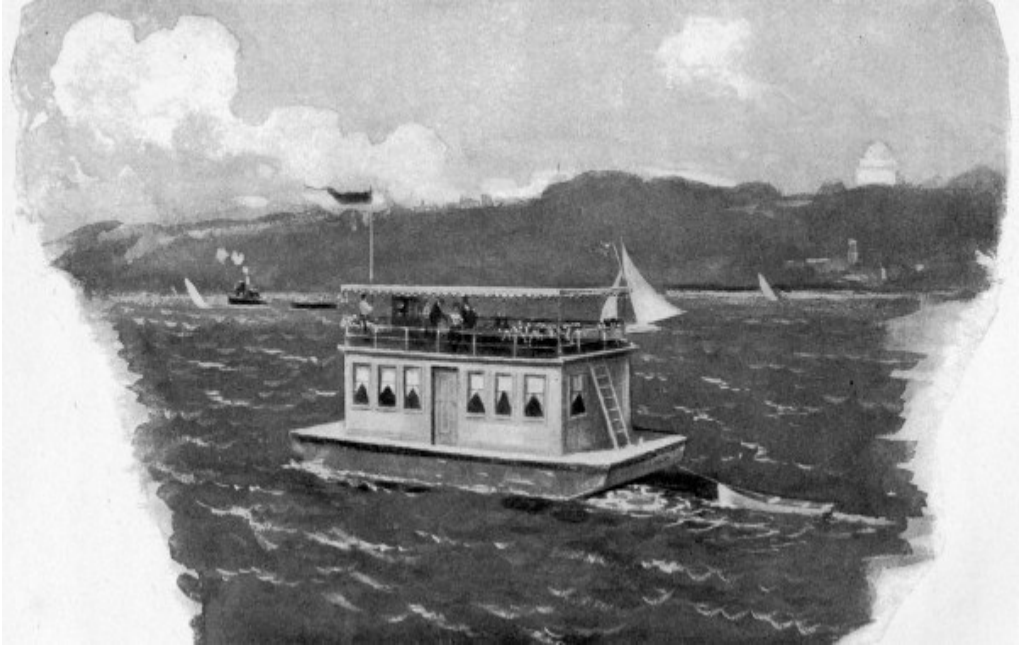
“What happened there?” asked Dick.

“I don’t know.”

“Then how do you know it’s historic?”

“All forts are historic,” answered Chub, loftily. “Across the river are historic Fort Washington and historic Fort George.”

“I suppose the next fort is historic Fort Cherry-tree,” muttered Dick, skeptically. “I don’t see any forts, anyhow. I’m going down again—”



The “Jolly Roger” begins her cruise up the Hudson River

“To throw more oil on that poor old engine,” mourned Roy. “Dick, let me remind you that oil costs money. You’ve already squandered about a gallon.”

“Get out! We only had a quart to begin with. I’m not going to put any more oil on, anyway; I just want to see how she’s working.”

“Dick thinks that if he isn’t sitting beside that engine holding its hand it’ll get mad and quit work,” laughed Chub. “Let him go, Roy, for goodness’ sake!” So Dick climbed over the side and disappeared into the tiny engine-room to sit on a

camp-stool with a bunch of dirty waste in his hand and watch the engine fascinatedly.

The departure of the house-boat had been quite devoid of brilliant features. The groceries and supplies had been delivered early, suit cases and other luggage had been brought across town in a cab, and by noon all was in readiness. The boys had returned to the house for an early luncheon and afterward, accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Porter and Mr. Somes, had come down to the sea in two bright red taxicabs. The older folks had been shown over the boat and had then stood on the end of the wharf and waved good-by while the *Jolly*—pardon me, the *Slow Poke* had been warped out of the slip and had started up the river. But Roy's parents and Dick's father had not been the only spectators, and many and sarcastic had been the comments from the assembled wharf hands and loiterers. But the boys hadn't cared. They had been far too excited and busy. The *Slow Poke* didn't answer very readily to her helm, and as a result Chub, gallantly assisted by Roy, had run into the end of a pier and narrowly escaped colliding with a lighter.

At four o'clock Chub announced that the *Slow Poke* had accomplished about four miles. They were then off what Chub called "picturesque Tubby Hook." Roy had to see the name on the chart before he would believe in the existence of any such place.

"What I want to know," said Dick, who had again momentarily separated himself from the engine, "is where we're going to lie up for the night."

"Well, there's no hurry," said Roy. "By six we ought to be—where, Chub?" Chub did some lightning calculating.

“At Yonkers.”

“The mischief! That’s no place to spend the night,” said Dick, disgustedly.

“Why not?” Roy asked. “Some folks have to live there all the year round!”

“We don’t have to stop there,” said Chub. “We’ll cross the river and find a nice, quiet spot along the Palisades.”

“And as we’ll have to have some dinner—”

“Supper,” corrected Chub.

“You’d better start about now to get your hands clean, Dick. I never cared for the flavor of cylinder oil.”

“Seems to me,” said Dick, “I’m in for a lot of work. When I signed for this trip I didn’t know I was to be engineer and cook, too.”

“Oh, yes, you did, Dickums. You knew it, but you didn’t realize it.”

“Well, then, you fellows needn’t complain if you don’t get all your meals on time,” answered Dick, morosely.

“No, we won’t complain; we’ll simply throw you overboard. But I think Roy had better take lessons in engineering so that you can have your Thursday afternoons off. Dickums, take him down with you now and give him his first lesson.”

“I want to steer for a while,” said Roy. But Chub shook his head.

“I don’t feel that I can trust you,” he answered. “With all these young lives depending on careful navigation—”

The others howled.

“Considering that you hit everything in sight when we started out,” said Roy, “you’d better—” Chub viewed them scowlingly.

“This sounds to me like mutiny,” he muttered. “Kindly put yourselves in irons.”

Roy spent the next half hour studying “Somes on the Gas-Engine.” Toward six o’clock the *Slow Poke* chugged across to the Jersey shore and after some discussion a place was selected for anchorage. There was a break here in the rocky wall of the Palisades and a little stream meandered down through a tiny valley. The woods came closely to the river’s edge, and after getting the *Slow Poke* as near shore as her draft would permit, they carried lines from stern and bow and made them fast to trees. Then all hands set to to prepare supper. Chub established himself on the railing of the after deck and pared potatoes, pausing in his task whenever a boat went up or down the river.

“Say, Dick,” he called, “you ought to bestir yourself tomorrow and clean that oil stove. I can smell it out here.”

“Oil stoves always smell,” answered Dick from the galley.

“Not if you keep them clean. Maybe it needs new wicks.”

“Maybe it does. And maybe if you don’t finish paring those potatoes in the next hour or two we’ll have them for breakfast instead of supper.”

“I like your cheek,” murmured Chub resuming his task with a sigh. “I’m fairly working my hands off out here. What’s that loafer Roy doing anyhow? Why don’t you put him at work?”

“Don’t you worry about him. I’ve got him busy all right,”

was the reply. "Say, did we order any salt, Chub? If we did I can't find it."

"Send Roy out here to pare these potatoes and I'll look for it," responded Chub insinuatingly.

"We've found it," called Dick. "Aren't you nearly done?"

"Sure; all done; been done for hours." Chub slid off the railing and bore the potatoes indoors and watched them disappear into the pot of boiling water. Then he and Roy set the table. As each of them had his own convictions regarding the arrangement of knives, forks and spoons there was some confusion for a while. But half an hour later, all differences of opinion were forgotten. Sitting about the table in the tiny after cabin, they had their first meal on board. Through the open windows wandered a little evening breeze which, as Chub poetically remarked, "caressed their cheeks, flushed with the toil of the long day." On one side the shadowed woods showed, on the other the broad expanse of the river, deeply golden in the late sunlight.

"It's a perfect shame," sighed Chub, "to spoil such an appetite as this. I feel as though I ought to keep it and treasure it as something valuable. Pass the ham, Dick."

"I guess there's no doubt about our being in New Jersey," muttered Roy, slapping the back of his neck. "The place is full of mosquitoes."

"That's so," said Chub. "I've been wondering what was getting after me so. I thought it was the bite of hunger."

"I guess it is," laughed Dick. "The bite of hungry mosquitoes. Say, they won't do a thing to us to-night. Let's move on."

“Pshaw, we’ve got to get used to them sometime and we might as well start now. Mosquitoes don’t pay any attention to you after a while. Where’s the bread gone to?”

“You ought to know, Chub,” replied Dick, rising to cut a fresh supply.

“It’s a funny thing about mosquitoes,” continued Chub, helping himself to half a slice of bread which Roy had left unguarded. “Just you let them bite you a day or two and they get tired of you. I suppose they like a change of diet the same as the rest of us. Is there any more of the excellent tea, Dickums?”

Presently Chub pushed back his chair with a sigh of contentment.

“Come on, Roy,” he said. “Let us go up and sit on deck and watch the pageant of Nature while the hireling cleans up the dishes.”

“No you don’t!” retorted the hireling. “You and Roy will stay right here and help. You needn’t think I’m going to do everything on this blooming boat!”

“That smacks of mutiny, methinks,” said Chub. “What do you say, Roy? Still, I’ll stay and add my feeble assistance. I choose to wipe the dishes.”

Half an hour later they were sitting on the upper deck, their feet on the railing, feeling very much at peace with the world. To be sure, the mosquitoes were somewhat troublesome, but they strove to take Chub’s advice and bear the annoyance philosophically. A white light hung from the flag-pole above the wheel-house and from the after cabin a feeble glow spread itself over the water. They had left a lighted lamp there to fool

the mosquitoes.

“They’ll think we’re going to sleep in there,” explained Chub. “And after they’re all on hand, sharpening their bills, we’ll sneak down and close the door.”

“And lock it,” counseled Roy.

“And stuff up the keyhole,” added Dick. “Only thing I’m afraid of, though, is that they’ll eat up all the provisions.”

But after a while Chub was obliged to acknowledge that his plan wasn’t proving entirely successful.

“I guess some of these mosquitoes haven’t seen that light,” he muttered, waving his hands about his head. “Suppose you run down and turn up the lamp, Dick.”

“I wouldn’t venture in there among all those angry mosquitoes for the world!” answered Dick. “They’d just simply tear me to pieces. I wish I had some pennyroyal.”

“I wish you had,” Roy agreed. “I’d borrow some. I wonder why mosquitoes always go for a fellow’s ankles.”

“They go for the biggest things they see,” explained Chub, “which, of course, are your feet. As they can’t bite through leather they tackle your ankles. They never trouble my ankles.”

“No, I suppose they go for your *cheek*,” retorted Roy. “What are you rubbing your ankles together for, if they don’t bite them?”

“Er—one of my feet is asleep.”

“So am I—almost,” said Dick, drowsily. “What time is it?”

“About half past eight,” said Roy. “What time do we have

breakfast?”

“At eight, sharp,” answered Dick, yawning.

“That means getting up at seven,” murmured Chub. “Then I must go to bed at once or I shan’t have half enough sleep.”

“Being on the river certainly does make a fellow sleepy,” laughed Roy. “I suppose we’ll get used to it after a day or two, though.”

“Like the mosquitoes,” said Dick. “I wish I could believe that tale of Chub’s; it would help me to bear my present troubles with more—more—”

“Equanimity,” said Chub, helpfully. “It’s a scientific fact, though, Dickums. Why, after a week or so—”

“You said a day or two!”

“Or thereabouts, the mosquitoes simply won’t look at you. They won’t touch you even if you go down on your knees and beg ’em to!”

“I have a funny picture of myself doing it!” growled Dick.

“I don’t approve of these low expressions you use,” said Chub regretfully. “I suppose you learn them at school. You should choose your companions very carefully, Dickums.”

“I have since you fellows left,” answered Dick with a grin.

For a while the conversation turned to Ferry Hill and the fellows there, but as each of the three evinced an inclination to fall asleep in the middle of a sentence, the talk wasn’t very brilliant or interesting. Finally, Roy dropped his feet with a thud from the railing and stood up.

“There,” he said, calmly.

“Eh? What?” asked Chub, with a start.

“They’ve completed the circuit.”

“Circuit? What circuit? Who’s completed—”

“The mosquitoes have completed the circuit of my ankles. They have been around both and I am now going to bed. I’ve done my duty by them.” Roy stood on one foot and rubbed busily with the other.

“How nice,” murmured Chub. “Something accomplished, something done to earn a night’s repose. That’s me too. Let us go quietly and leave Dick to slumber peacefully on.”

“The yawning youth, scarce half awake, essays
His lazy limbs and dozy head to raise,”

observed Dick.

“Hello! I thought you were asleep!” said Chub.

“I was until some noisy brute awoke me,” complained Dick.

“Where’d you get the poetry?” Roy asked.

“That? I don’t just recall,” replied Dick sleepily. “I think I composed it myself. It was either I or Dryden.”

They stumbled down the steps to the lower deck, Chub begging them to go softly so as not to attract the attention of the mosquitoes in the after cabin, and sought their beds. Chub had the bedroom and the others shared the living-room, Roy using a cot and Dick the window-seat.

“Is everything all right for the night?” yawned Roy.

“I think so,” replied Chub from across the little passage. “I don’t know just what you do on a house-boat when you go to bed.”

“You lock the front door, fix the furnace, and turn down the gas in the front hall,” murmured Dick.

Sleepy as they were, slumber didn’t come to them at once. It was all rather new as yet.

“How’s your divan, Dickums?” asked Chub.

“Fine! I like a hard bed. How’s yours?”

“Great! Good-night.”

“Good-night. Oh, I say!”

“Well?”

“Got any mosquitoes where you are?”

“Have I. Plenty! Want some?”

“No, thanks.” A few minutes later,

“For goodness’ sake, you fellows,” called Chub, “what’s all that squeaking in there?”

“It’s my bed,” answered Roy. “It squeaks every time I turn over.”

“Well, don’t turn over then,” grumbled Chub.

And finally, just when Dick and Roy were on the borderland of slumber, Chub’s voice floated across again.

“Say, Dick!”

“What?”

“Did you let the cat in?”

Then there was peace and silence save for the contented,
humming of the mosquitoes.



CHAPTER VIII

DRIVEN TO COVER

The next day after breakfast was over the *Slow Poke* took up her journey again. It had been decided that the proper thing to do was to get up the river to the neighborhood of Peekskill where, according to Roy, there was fishing to be had.

“Besides,” said Chub, “we want to get away from all these towns. Civilization is wearying. I pine for the virgin forest.”

“I don’t believe you’ll find much of that around Peekskill,” responded Dick. “Look at the map!”

“Oh, you mustn’t believe all you see on the map,” answered Chub, cheerfully. “Something tells me—” placing a finger on the chart—“that here I shall find virgin forest. Also trout. Let us up and away.”

They chugged unhurriedly up the river all the morning, the engine much to Dick’s delight, working beautifully. At noon they tied up near Ossining and had dinner.

“I’d hate to travel on that,” said Chub, pointing with his fork to a steamer which was gliding by out in the river. “It goes so fast those people can’t begin to see the beauties of the country. Now with us it’s different. We catch sight of an object of interest at ten in the morning. At eleven we approach it. At twelve we reach it. At one we are by but still have it in plain sight. It fades from view at four in the afternoon. That’s something like. We have time to study and—er—assimilate, you see. Why, every feature of the landscape we have passed is

indelibly engraven on my memory.”

“Oh, come now,” laughed Roy, “the *Slow Poke* hasn’t done so badly. We’ve come a good thirteen miles since breakfast.”

“What I’m afraid of,” said Dick, “is that if we keep on going like this we’ll be at the end of the river before we know it. How much more is there?”

“Only about two hundred and twenty-five miles,” replied Roy, dryly. “If we keep on at the present rate of progress we’ll reach the end of it in about eleven days—if we don’t stop on the way.” Dick looked relieved.

“Oh, that’s all right, then. Because we are going to stop, of course.”

“We’re going to do more stopping than anything else,” said Chub. “House-boats are intended primarily to stop in. As—as vehicles of travel they are not to be taken seriously.”

“My!” murmured Dick, “what a college education does do for a fellow!”

“English A is a great course,” agreed Roy, smilingly. “You’ll be so happy next year with your little daily themes, Dick!”

Dick groaned.

They wandered on again in the afternoon, Roy taking another lesson on the gas-engine, and stopped for the night in a little cove on the east side near Cortlandt. As it still lacked almost an hour of supper-time, they left the boat to stretch their legs on shore. They found a road and tramped along it for a quarter of an hour without finding anything more interesting than a farm-house. But the farm-house put an idea into Chub’s

head. He stopped at the gate and pointed.

“Milk,” he ejaculated.

“Yes, but we didn’t bring anything to put it in,” Roy objected.

“It doesn’t matter. They’ll lend us a can, maybe. Come on.”

So they trudged up the long lane and knocked on the front door. Receiving no answer after a decent interval of waiting, they proceeded around back. At a little distance stood a big barn. Near-by was a well with a number of big milk cans beside it.

“There you are,” said Chub. “Maybe they’ll lend us one of those. Come on.”

The back door was open and from the little covered porch they had a glimpse of a very clean and tidy kitchen. Chub knocked. There was no answer.

“All out, it seems,” he muttered. He knocked again and then raised his voice. “Any one at home?” he asked.

There was. A big, rough-coated yellow dog bounded across the yard, the hair along his back bristling unpleasantly. His onslaught was so sudden and fierce that Dick, who saw him first, was the first one inside the door. But Chub and Roy were tied for second place, and the dog—well, the dog would have made a good third if Roy hadn’t had the presence of mind to slam the door a few inches in front of his nose.

“I say!” gasped Chub. “Did you see him? Isn’t he an ugly brute?”

“He certainly is,” agreed Dick, with an uneasy laugh. “Hear

him, will you?"

The dog was growling savagely and sniffing along the bottom of the door.

"Nice doggie," called Chub, soothingly. "Nice doggie! Go away, Rover!"

"Try 'Prince,'" Roy suggested.

"Try it yourself! I wonder if there's any one in here. You fellows look after the door and I'll go and see."

Chub walked through the kitchen into a little narrow entry and called loudly. But there was no answer.

He returned to the others.

"Still there?" he asked, in a whisper.

"I don't know," muttered Roy. "I don't hear anything. Maybe he's gone. Can you see from the window?"

Chub walked over to the nearest casement and looked out.

"He's lying on the porch with his nose about half an inch from the door," he reported, disgustedly. "He's a Saint Bernard, I guess."

"I don't care what he is," said Roy. "He's a nuisance. What shall we do?"

"Put your head out of the window and yell," suggested Dick. "They're probably in the barn."

"All right, but not that window," Chub answered. He went to the farther side of the kitchen, raised the window there and yelled loudly.

"Hello! You in the barn! Call off your dog! Hello! Hello!"

But the dog started such a barking that Chub's efforts were quite wasted.

"I suppose we'll just have to make ourselves comfortable and wait for Mr. Farmer to come back," he said, closing the window again.

"I tell you what," said Dick, in a hoarse whisper. "We'll get out the front door. If we close it quietly he won't hear us."

They looked at each other doubtfully. The plan didn't seem to awaken much enthusiasm.

"That's all right," said Roy, "but if he did hear us—"

"I don't believe he'd actually attack us," said Dick.

"It didn't look like it, did it?" asked Chub, sarcastically.

"Oh, no, he's a nice little playful pet, he is."

"Well, we can't stay here all night," said Dick. "And for all we know there may not be anybody in the barn."

"Of course there is! Do you think they'd go away and leave the back of the house all open like this?"

"Well, with that animal out there I guess they'd be safe to put the family silver on the front piazza," retorted Roy. "But I guess there's some one around somewhere. There's a fire in the stove and that looks as though they meant to get supper." The mention of supper brought back Chub's valor.

"Well, come on, and let's try the front-door trick. Go easy, fellows."

They tiptoed across the kitchen, through the entry, and reached the front door only to find that it was locked and that there was no key in sight.

“Sometimes they hang it on a nail alongside the door,” muttered Chub, running his hand around the frame.

“Or put it under the mat,” said Roy.

“There isn’t any mat. Let’s try a window. Come on in here.”

He led the way into a dim and deserted parlor, a stuffy, uncanny apartment in which the curtains were closely drawn at the three windows.

“See if you can see Fido,” counseled Chub. Roy raised the shade at one of the windows on the front of the house and looked out. Beneath was a bed of purple phlox and beyond was a walk and a little space of grass. At the right was the lane—and safety.

“He isn’t in sight,” Roy answered in whispers. “But he may come.”

“That doesn’t matter,” answered Chub, recklessly. “I want to go home to supper. Push up the window.”

Roy obeyed. The sash creaked and screamed as he forced it up and they paused and held their breath, expecting to see the dog come bounding into sight. But nothing happened.

“You go first, Roy,” said Chub. “Dick and I can run faster than you.”

“Want me to have the first bite, eh?” laughed Roy, as he put a knee over the sill.

“Be quiet! Don’t make so much noise,” said Chub. “Get on out.”

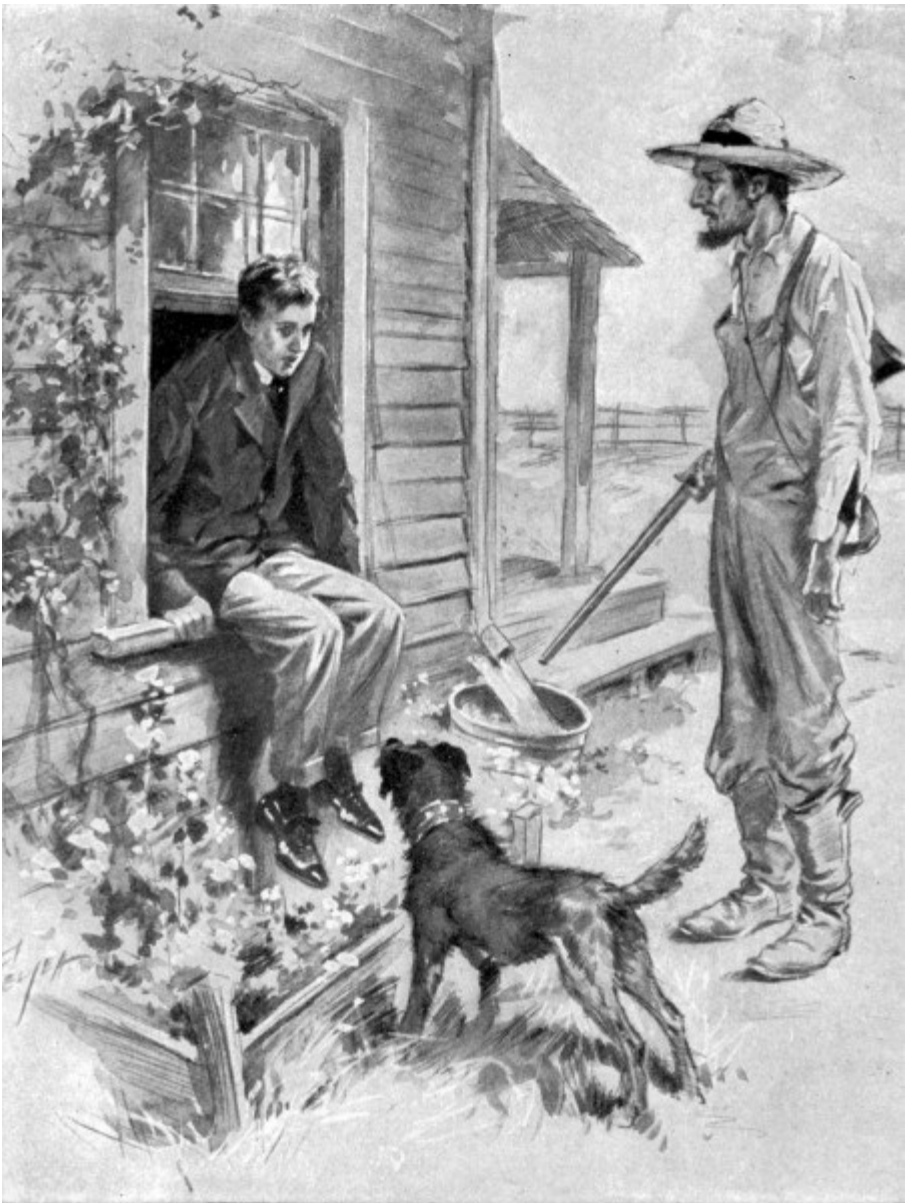
Roy was sitting on the sill, his feet dangling above the flower bed.

“That’s all right,” he muttered, “but—say, Dick, go back and take a peek out of the window and see if he’s still there.”

“All right.” Dick tiptoed back to the kitchen.

“I don’t know,” said Chub, “that I should want the family to walk in now and discover us. We might have some difficulty in—*Hello!*”

He darted away from the window, leaving Roy blankly confronting a very tall man with a tangled black beard, who had suddenly and noiselessly come around the corner of the house. He wore dirty brown jumpers, carried a single barreled shot-gun, and wasn’t at all prepossessing. And beside him, still growling and bristling, was the yellow dog. Roy stared silently with open mouth.



[Roy stared silently, with open mouth](#)

CHAPTER IX

PRISONERS

The farmer smiled, but it wasn't a pleasant smile, and it exposed half a dozen yellow fanglike teeth that made Roy wonder whether there could be any relationship between the dog and his master.

"Tell the other feller to come back," said the farmer. "I seen him."

"You mean you saw me," murmured Chub, stepping into sight behind Roy.

"What's that?" asked the farmer, suspiciously.

"How do you do?" asked Chub, affably.

"You'll see how I do and *what* I do," was the grim reply. "What you doing in my house?"

"We—we were just getting out," answered Roy, with a sickly smile which was intended to be propitiating.

"With your pockets full, I guess. You stay where you are, understand?" He brought the shot-gun up and laid it over his arm in a suggestive way that made Roy wish his legs were inside the window rather than out.

"If you mean that we've been stealing anything," said Chub tartly, "you're making a mistake. We came up here to buy some milk and your fool dog ran at us and drove us into the house. And here we are. If you'll take him out of the way we'll get out."

“Guess you will,” chuckled the farmer. “Guess you’d be pretty glad to. But you won’t, understand? You get on back into that room.” This to Roy in a threatening growl that fairly lifted the boy’s legs over the sill and deposited them on the parlor carpet. “And you stay there till I come, understand? Watch ’em, Carlo!”

Carlo growled and looked longingly at the boys. The farmer tucked the shot-gun under his arm and disappeared around the corner of the house. Roy and Chub looked at each other in comical dismay.

“Doesn’t this beat the Dutch?” asked Chub. “Say, where’s Dick? I’ll wager he heard the old codger coming and has hidden. What are we going to do, Roy?”

“Tell the truth. He hasn’t any business to keep us in here. If it hadn’t been for his old dog—”

The farmer’s footsteps sounded in the entry and he entered the room, his shot-gun still under his arm. He looked around suspiciously, as though expecting to find the marble-topped center table and the cottage organ missing, and cast shrewd glances at the boy’s pockets.

“Well, you see we haven’t stolen anything,” said Chub.

“Well, I ain’t taking your word for it,” said the farmer, dryly. “Maybe if I hadn’t come when I did—”

“Now, don’t be unreasonable,” begged Chub. “I’ve told you how we came to be here. We were passing along the road and wanted some milk—”

“Thought you’d find it in the parlor, did ye?”

“No, but your dog chased us in the back door and we

couldn't make any one hear by shouting—”

“You shouted pretty loud, didn't ye?”

“Yes, I did,” answered Chub, defiantly, “but that idiotic dog made such a row with his barking that you couldn't hear me. So then we came in here to get out the window, because the front door was locked. Now you know; and as we're already late for supper, perhaps you'll call off that fool dog and let us go home.”

“Want to go, do ye?” asked their captor with a leer.

“Yes, we do,” replied Chub, shortly.

“Live right round here, I suppose?”

“You can suppose anything you want to,” broke in Roy, hotly. “But we won't tell you where we live. It's none of your business and if you don't let us out of here this minute we'll make trouble for you.”

“Course you will,” said the farmer with a chuckle. “Go to town, likely, and swear out a warrant for me, eh? How'd you know I was alone here? How'd you know my wife was away?”

“We don't know anything about your wife!”

“Some one told you, eh?”

“I tell you we never heard of you before—”

“And don't want to again,” murmured Chub.

“But you didn't know about Carlo, did ye? I bought Carlo after you was here last month. He's a good dog and—”

“After we were here last month?” repeated Chub. “Great Scott, we've never seen your old farm before in our lives. We

got here an hour ago in our boat—”

“Travel in your private yacht, do ye? Left it down at the gate, I suppose?” The farmer chuckled enjoyably.

“She’s tied up in the cove about a half mile below here,” said Chub, angrily. “If you don’t believe it, you can come along and see her for yourself.”

“Dare say, dare say. What you got in your pockets?”

“Nothing that belongs to you!”

“I haven’t seen anything worth stealing,” added Roy wrathfully.

“You haven’t, eh?” snarled the man. “Took it all last time, eh? Looking for more silverware, I guess. Wan’t satisfied with what you had. Should have been, eh? Made a mistake, didn’t ye? Made a mistake coming back to the same place, eh? Thought Jim Ewing was fool enough to be caught twice at the same game, eh? Huh!” he paused and looked at them triumphantly. “More fools you, then. And you look sharp enough, too. Wouldn’t have thought you’d have been such fools.”

“Oh, what’s the matter with you,” growled Chub, exasperatedly.

“Well, you march along up-stairs now, and you’ll see. Go along, and don’t make any trouble or—” he patted the shot-gun—“this thing might go off. That’d be a clear case of justifiable homicide, eh?”

“If you’ll just put that down a minute,” said Chub, yearningly, “I’ll—I’ll—”

“No, you don’t; I’m a peaceable citizen, I am. Don’t say it wouldn’t be some satisfaction to wallop you, but I’ll leave it to the law. Go on up, now.”

“Look here,” said Roy, choking his anger, “what do you intend to do with us?”

“Want to know, do you? You walk up-stairs, or—” he brought the ancient shot-gun to the position of “charge.” Chub and Roy cast anxious glances at each other. Then, with a shrug, Chub turned, crossed the room, and mounted the staircase, followed by Roy and Mr. Ewing.

“Turn to the left at the top,” called the latter. “You’ll be real comfortable while I’m gone, and you won’t find anything to tempt you to steal. That’s it. Sit down, boys, and make yourselves to home. I won’t be gone more’n an hour if I can help it. Don’t be lonesome.” He closed the door and turned the key in the lock, and they heard him go off down-stairs chuckling.

“I’d like to—to—!” But words failed him, and Roy dropped on the old-fashioned bed and stared savagely about the little room.

“So would I,” said Chub, grimly, thrusting his hands in his pockets and walking across to the single narrow window through which the late sunlight slanted. When he turned again to Roy, there was a smile on his face. “Isn’t this the greatest pickle, Roy? He thinks we’re a couple of hardened criminals; thinks we have been here before.” He laughed softly. “I’ve never been in jail yet. I wonder how it feels.”

“I don’t see where the fun comes in,” answered Roy. “We may have a dickens of a time convincing folks that we didn’t

come here to steal his things. Where do you suppose Dick got to?”

“Blest if I know. Maybe he saw the old chap coming across from the barn and hid himself. Maybe he managed to get out the back door while the old fellow was round front. If he did —”

“He’s coming back,” muttered Roy. “And he’s bringing that beast of a dog.”

“You stay here and watch, Carlo,” said the farmer outside the door. “Don’t let ’em out, sir!”

“Mr. Ewing!” called Roy.

“Well? I hear ye.”

“Won’t you believe what we tell you? That we had no intention of robbing your house.”

“Don’t you waste your breath on me, young man. Keep them yarns for the police. I won’t keep you waiting longer’n I can help. You’d better not try to get out; it wouldn’t be good for you; Carlo’s got a sort of a mean disposition, he has.”

“So have you,” cried Chub. “You’ve got the upperhand now, but just you wait till I get out of here! I’ll make you wish you had a grain or two of common-sense; hear?”

“I hear ye,” muttered the farmer, “I hear ye. I guess what you fellers need is a few years in jail, and, by gum, you’re going to get it! Watch ’em, Carlo!”

They heard him go stumping down-stairs and out of the house at the back. Roy went to the window and after much grunting, managed to open the lower sash. Chub joined him.

“We can’t get out here, that’s certain,” he said. “It’s thirty feet to the ground if it’s an inch. Look at the old fool!”

Mr. Ewing was in plain sight in front of the barn. He had run a rickety side-bar buggy out of the carriage shed, and now he entered the barn again.

“He’s going to town for a constable,” mused Roy. “I wonder how far it is.”

“He said he wouldn’t be more than an hour.”

“Then we’ve got an hour to find a way out of here.” Roy turned and looked frowningly about the room. It was some twelve by fifteen feet in size, with one door into the hall, and one window. The walls were kalsomined a streaky white. The furnishings consisted of a bed and a mattress, a yellow bureau, a chair, and a wash-stand with bowl and pitcher and a square of rag carpet.

“If we only had some bedclothes,” muttered Roy.

“Or a ladder,” added Chub with a grin. “I guess we’re here to stay unless—”

“What?”

“Unless Dick turns up. I don’t believe he’s gone off very far, do you?” Roy’s reply was interrupted by the clatter of wheels and they went back to the window in time to see Mr. Ewing rattle by in the buggy. He looked up and grinned malevolently at the faces in the window.

Roy waved down to him airily. “Good-by, Pop!” he called.

The farmer cut the horse savagely with the whip and was out of sight around the corner of the house.

“I don’t suppose it does any good to sass him,” said Chub, “but it gives me a lot of satisfaction.” He went over and kicked the door and was rewarded with a deep growl from Carlo. “Dear little doggie is still at his post,” he said. He bent and put his mouth to the key-hole. “Carlo,” he called softly, “dear little dogums! I’d like to wring your blooming neck, do you hear? You do hear? Well, think about it, will you?” He walked back to the window, whistling cheerfully. Roy, seated on the edge of the bed, scowled.

“Don’t be an ass,” he said, grumpily.

“Why not? What’s the use of making a tragedy out of it? Let us dance, sing, and be merry! ‘We’re here because we’re here, because we’re here, because we’re here!’” Chub sang the words to the tune of Auld Lang Syne.

Roy smiled faintly.

“Let us play we’re Monte Cristos,” said Chub. “What was it he did when he was shut up in the Castle of Thingamabob? Dug his way through the wall, didn’t he? Well, let’s do the same!” Chub drew out his pocket-knife and began to hack at the plaster.

“If you do that,” observed Roy, “they’ll give us ten days in jail for destroying property, or vandalism, or disturbing the peace, or something.”

“That’s so! I don’t see but they’ve got us anyway,” said Chub. “We might as well be hung for a lamb as a—no, for a sheep as a lamb, as the old saying goes. What’s that?” He stopped and listened. Then he ran to the window and looked cautiously out. Below, at the edge of the lane, stood Dick, his hands in his pockets, grinning up at the window.

“Hello, Chub!” he called. “Come on out!”

“Mother won’t let me,” answered Chub, with a grin. “Where were you Dickums, when the storm broke?”

“In the preserves.”

“In the what?”

“Preserve closet under the stairs. I heard everything nicely. I thought I’d die!”

“Did, did you?” asked Roy, sarcastically. “You always did have a crazy sense of humor. What are you going to do?”

“Me? Go back to the boat and have supper, of course,” replied Dick, with a wicked grin. “It’s a fine night, isn’t it? See the new moon?”

“Don’t be a ninny,” said Roy, impatiently. “Do something! He may be back any moment.”

“Oh, no, he’s good for an hour; he said so. What’ll I do—shoot the dog or burn the house down?”

“Find a ladder, you blathering idiot,” Chub laughed. “There ought to be one at the barn.”

“There is. I looked.”

“Well, why didn’t you bring it?”

“It’s too short.”

There was silence after this for a moment. Then,

“How much too short?” asked Roy.

“About ten feet, I guess.”

“You guess! Well, go get it and let’s find out!”

“Instantly, your Majesty!” Dick went off toward the barn unhurriedly, whistling softly.

“Isn’t he exasperating?” asked Roy.

“We’ll square up with him when we get down,” answered Chub with a grim smile of anticipation. In two or three minutes Dick was back, dragging the ladder after him. He placed it against the house under the window and they viewed the result. It lacked at least ten feet of reaching the sill.

“That’s no good,” said Chub. “Isn’t there a longer one anywhere? Have you looked?”

“Yes, Exalted One.”

“I say, don’t be so funny! Do you think we want to be arrested for burglary and have to spend the night in jail? Can’t you think of anything?”

“Certainly.”

“Well, what is it? Now, don’t you crack any more funny jokes or we’ll make you sorry when we get down.”

Dick looked up speculatively.

“Maybe you have some such idea in your head already?” he asked. “I believe you have. Now before I go on with this heroic rescue you’ve got to agree, both of you, to let me laugh as much as I like. Do you agree?”

“Yes.”

“Honest Injun?”

“Honest Injun, Dickums. Go ahead, like a good fellow, and get us out of here.”

“All right. I’ve got a piece of rope here; see?” He took it from under his coat and held it up. “I’ll tie this to the top of the ladder and throw it up to you. Then you haul the ladder up and make the rope fast to something in the room. That’ll leave the ladder only about ten feet from the ground. You can drop that distance easily.”

“Good old Dickums! You’re the right sort.”



CHAPTER X

A NEW ACQUAINTANCE

It was a beautiful evening. In the west the sunset glow still hung above the hills. Eastward the full moon's great, golden disk was poised against the darkening blue of the summer sky. It was very still and quiet, and the only sounds that came to them were the soft *pat-pat* of their shoes on the dusty road. When half the distance to the house-boat had been covered they slowed down to a walk, panting and puffing.

“What—are we going—to do—when we get—there?” asked Dick.

“Have some supper,” said Chub, decisively.

“But we can't stay where we are. When he finds that we've skipped out, he will be as mad as a hornet and will come down here looking for us.”

“Pshaw, I don't think he believed a word we said about being in a boat,” said Chub. “Besides, he's just as likely to look up the river as down.”

“And just as likely to look down as up,” replied Roy. “I guess Dick's right we'd better move on.”

“All right, then, we will; just as soon as we've had something to eat,” agreed Chub.

“If we wait for that our supper is likely to consist of bread and water,” answered Roy, dryly. “What we want to do is to get across to the other side of the river. I never thought I'd be

glad to get to New Jersey, but the time has come.”

“That isn’t Jersey over there, it’s New York,” said Chub.

“Anyway, it’s a heap better than the calaboose,” laughed Dick. “Was that wheels I heard?”

They stopped and listened, but the only sound that reached them was the distant barking of a dog.

“Carlo!” said Chub.

“Get out! It’s the wrong direction. Come on and let’s get back. I had no idea we’d gone as far as we have.”

“Nor I,” said Dick. “And what’s more I don’t believe we have!”

“What do you mean?” asked Chub, anxiously.

“I mean that we’ve gone by the boat.” They stopped and looked about them in the twilight. Chub thrust his cap back and rubbed his forehead reflectively.

“I guess you’re right,” he said. “All I remember is that we came through a strip of woods, and it’s woods all along on this side. We’d better strike through them here and see if we can see the boat.”

Much subdued they followed him between the trees and bushes. After a minute or two of slow progress they came to a narrow field.

“I never saw this before,” growled Roy.

“There wasn’t any field here an hour ago,” agreed Dick.

“I’d just like to know,” muttered Chub, “how it got here. Someone’s been taking liberties with the landscape.”

“It strikes me,” remarked Roy, “that we’re just lost.”

“Well come on. The river’s down here somewhere. Once we get to that all we’ve got to do is to follow it till we find the *Jolly*—find the *Slow Poke*,” said Dick, encouragingly.

“And which way shall we walk, upstream or down?” Chub inquired. Dick looked a trifle crestfallen for an instant. Then,

“We can decide that when we get there,” he said. “Anyhow, don’t let’s spend the night here. I’m as hungry as a bear.”

“Hungry!” muttered Chub, bitterly. “So am I! Well, come along.”

They crossed the field, a particularly moist and “squashy” one, and entered more woods. By this time, although it was still light enough in the open, it was difficult to see much in the forest, and they stumbled over stumps and wandered into blackberry thickets every few steps.

“A chap needs a suit of chain armor for this sort of thing,” said Roy.

““This is the forest primeval,”” murmured Chub, picking himself out of a bush. “It’s evil, anyhow.”

“Here it is,” cried Dick, who had found fewer pitfalls and had taken the lead. “Here it is!”

“The boat?” asked Roy, eagerly.

“No, the river.”

“Oh!” they joined him and found themselves on the shore of a little cove, but it was shallower than the one they had left the boat in and was quite empty of craft. Chub sat down on a rock and sighed.

“How beautiful is Nature!” he murmured.

“I’ll swap my interest in it for a cup of coffee and a slice of bread,” answered Dick, morosely. “I’m going to see if I can find the boat.”

“Don’t go,” begged Chub. “Sit here beside me on this downy couch and let us view the prospect o’er.”

“I’ll wager we’re too far down the river,” said Roy, inattentively. “Let’s go that way. From that point there we ought to be able to see the boat.”

“Lead on,” cried Chub. “We place ourselves in your hands.”

They skirted the cove and reached the point, but although from there they could see several hundred yards up the shore, there was no sight of either another cove or the *Slow Poke*.

“I guess we’re too far upstream, after all,” said Roy. “Let’s look the other way.”

“I’m thankful the river doesn’t run east and west as well,” said Chub. “’Tis a merry life we lead.”

Back they went to the cove and around that to another point. But below there the shore wound in and out confusedly, and, even had the *Slow Poke* lain fifty yards away from them, it was now so dark that it is doubtful if they could have discerned her.

“Let us lie down here quietly and die,” suggested Chub.

“Oh, don’t fool,” said Roy. “Come on.”

“Wait a minute, fellows!” this from Dick. “Come to think of it, when we got out onto the road this afternoon there was a sign on the fence, don’t you remember?”

“Sure!” cried Chub. “‘Noble’s Chill and Fever Compound;’ we spoke of it! That’s easy; all we’ve got to do is to get back to the road and find the sign.”

“For all we know there may be one every fifty feet,” said Roy, pessimistically. “However, we’ll try it.”

Getting back to the road was no simple matter, though. The woods were pitch dark now, and the field beyond was not much lighter, while to make matters worse they crossed the latter where it was little better than a swamp, and at every step their shoes went *squash, squash* in the yielding turf. But they were soon across it and in the gloom of the farther woods.

“Courage, mon braves,” said Chub. “It is soon over.”

But Chub was wrong, for they stumbled on and on, through bushes and briars, and still no road appeared out of the darkness.

“This is funny,” panted Dick, pausing to disentangle himself from the affectionate embrace of a vine. “We ought to have reached the road long ago.”

“It is the enchanted forest,” replied Chub. “Have you never read of the enchanted forest?”

“We’ve been keeping too far to the right,” said Roy, thoughtfully. “Let’s try it off this way.”

“By all means!” Chub bumped into a tree, drew back to murmur politely, “I beg your pardon, madam,” and followed.

“If I ever find that road,” said Dick, savagely, “you can be sure I’m going to stay on it!”

“I don’t believe there is a road,” said Chub.

“I’m going to find one if I have to walk all night,” said Roy.

“That’s what you think,” replied Chub, sadly. “But you’re in the enchanted forest, I tell you. We’re Little *Nemos*, that’s what we are!”

But the next moment the darkness gave place to twilight and they stumbled down a little bank to the dusty road. With one accord they threw themselves down on the grass.

“Here’s where I stay until morning,” sighed Dick.

“Isn’t that a sign over there?” Roy asked.

“Maybe,” muttered Chub, “but I’ve got so I don’t believe in signs.” Roy, however, had crossed the road and was trying to decipher the words on the panel nailed to the fence. Finally he lighted a match and,

“‘Noble’s Chill and Fever Compound,’” he read, “‘safe and certain. Ask your druggist.’”

“‘Ask your druggist,’” sneered Dick. “I’d like to have the chance to ask a druggist! I wouldn’t ask for that, though; I’d ask for a chocolate, or an egg-and-milk.”

“I suppose those things are stuck all along the road,” said Roy, throwing himself down again on the bank. “We know that that one isn’t the one we saw before.”

“Maybe if we sit here much longer,” said Chub, “we’ll be glad to know of a good remedy for chills and fever. I’m going on.”

“Where?” asked Roy.

“Anywhere! What matters it? If we walk long enough we’ll come to a village. And once in a village if I don’t get my hands

on a sandwich and a cup of coffee it's a wonder!"

"Well," sighed Dick, "which way shall we go?"

"South," answered Chub. "I saw a sort of a village a mile or so before we stopped this afternoon. Come on, fellows; never say die!"

"Maybe we will come across a house pretty soon," said Roy. "If we do let's ask for something to eat and a bed in the barn."

"I don't think they have beds in the barns around here," replied Chub, flippantly. "However, whatever we do let us *not*—remark the emphasis, please—let us NOT ask for milk!"

They trudged southward along the winding road. At intervals they came to advertisements of "Noble's Chill and Fever Compound" nailed to fence-rails and trees. For a while Dick religiously bowed and saluted each one, but at last his anger wore itself out and he only growled when he saw one. They had been walking for perhaps a quarter of an hour when a turn in the road disclosed what, at first sight, appeared to be a light in the window of a house, but their murmurs of satisfaction were quickly ended, for, as they approached they saw that the light was the tail lamp of an automobile standing by the side of the road.

"Wait!" whispered Dick, seizing Roy by the arm. "Maybe it's old Ewing and the constable."

"And where would they get an automobile?" asked Roy.

"They might; you can't tell. Better let me go ahead and have a look first." But the others laughed him to scorn. Just then a second light came into sight, and, as they were now close to the car, they saw that some one had been leaning with it over

the engine.

“She’s broken down,” said Chub. As they drew near, the man with the lantern held it up until its rays shone on them, when, as though he had hoped for better things, he turned indifferently away and began to pull things from under the rear seat. It was a large car, seating seven, and was painted gray with trimming of some darker color.

“Having trouble?” asked Chub, sympathetically.

“No, I’m just spending the night here from choice,” was the answer.

“Well, it’s a pretty spot,” laughed Chub. “Anything we can do for you?” The man turned and regarded Chub, disgustedly.

“Yes, get out!”

“Of course!” said Chub. “That’s easy. I asked you a civil question, though. Good night.”

“Hold on!” called the other. “I didn’t mean to be haughty. But I’ve been stuck here since six o’clock and I don’t know yet what the trouble is. That’s enough to make a man rather peevish, isn’t it?” He laughed grudgingly. He was about twenty-one or -two years old, with a good-looking, if at present not over clean, face, and a nice voice.

“I suppose so,” answered Chub. “You’ve had your supper though, haven’t you?”

“Yes, I’ve had that.”

“Well, we haven’t. And we’ve been chasing around the country for an hour and a half on foot. And we’re tired and hungry. I imagine we’re entitled to a little peevishness too,

eh?”

“That’s so,” said the other. “Where are you going?”

“No one knows,” said Chub. “We’re just walking along this road in the hope that some day we’ll come to a place where we can get something to eat. What do you think the chances are?”

“Well, you’d do better if you went the other way. You won’t find a hotel or a store nearer than five miles in this direction.”

Dick groaned.

“I wish this old thing would go,” continued the automobilist. “Then I’d help you out. I suppose you don’t know anything about these things?” His glance ranged over the three faces.

“Well I don’t know that kind,” answered Chub, “but I’ve had a little experience with a four-cylinder Adams. May be, though, if we start and go over her again together we’ll find the trouble. Getting your spark all right, are you?”

“Yes, the trouble is somewhere in the engine, I guess.”

Chub took off his coat and hung it on a fence post.

For a while Dick and Roy looked on, following the others around the car in the glow of the lantern. Then Dick asked permission to get in and sit down and he and Roy sank onto the cushions of the rear seats and stretched their tired legs luxuriously. The minutes came and went. They listened drowsily to the talk of Chub and the owner of the machine, to the clink of tools, the turning of the crank. The full moon worked itself out of a cloud bank and cast a faint radiance over the scene. A breeze came rustling across a corn-field, and Roy reached down sleepily and pulled a robe over him. By that time Dick was frankly slumbering. A half-hour passed since their

arrival. Suddenly, there was a grunt of satisfaction from the automobilist, an amused laugh from Chub and a jarring that awoke the boys in the tonneau. The engine was going.

“I don’t believe I’d ever have found that without you,” the owner was saying gaily as he slammed the tool-chest shut. “Pile in now, and I’ll give you a lift.”

“Is it all right?” asked Roy, drowsily.

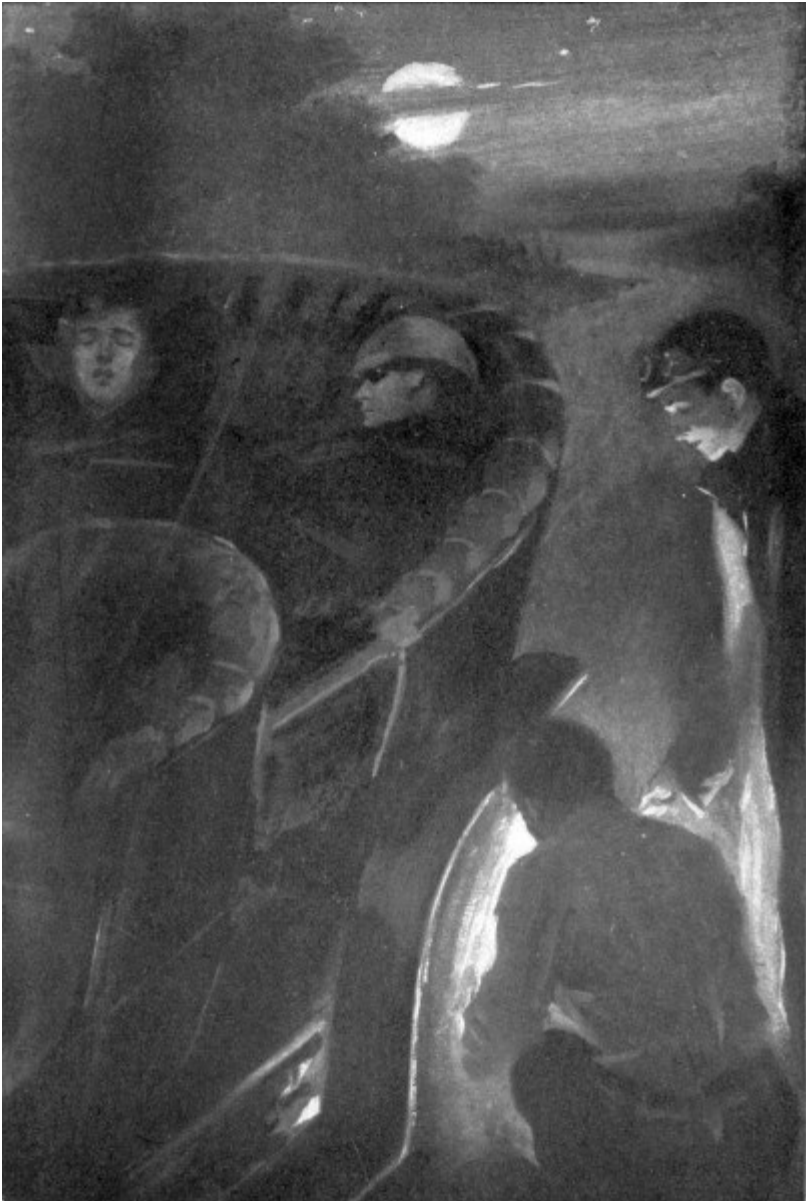
“Yes, Siree; your friend here is a regular genius.”

“Yes, that’s my middle name,” answered Chub as he climbed into the front seat. “Wake up, Dick, we’re going to supper!”

“I am awake. Where are we going to get it?”

“By jove!” muttered their new acquaintance. “I wonder, myself.” He was silent a moment, but when the car was rushing along smoothly into the flood of white light thrown by the powerful lamps, he turned his head. “Look here, you fellows. My name’s Whiting, Joe Whiting, and I live about seven miles down the road. All my folks are away for the summer and I’m going myself to-morrow, and so things aren’t in very good shape for guests. But if you chaps don’t mind bunking around on mattresses and couches I’ll be glad to put you up for the night. Any way, I can give you plenty to eat. What do you say?”

“If you weren’t steering,” answered Chub, “I’d fall on your neck! We accept your kind invitation, Mr. Whiting. We are too far gone to have any sense of decency left; we accept anything and everything you want to offer.”



Dick and Roy slumbering

“All right,” laughed Whiting, jovially. “That’s good. Do you fellows mind going a bit fast?”

“Not a bit,” answered Roy and Dick in a breath. The big car shot forward and the wind rushed by them. The road was fairly

straight and level and quite deserted, and the car tossed the miles behind in a way that made the boys stare.

“Going all right now!” bawled Whiting in Chub’s ear.

“None too fast for me—Whoa!”

“What’s the matter?”

“Cap’s gone. It doesn’t matter, though.”

“Lost your cap? I’ll stop and you can—”

“Don’t do it,” begged Chub. “I couldn’t find it in a week—besides I’d rather lose a dozen caps than have this stop!”

On they went into the white radiance. Trees and fences and poles rushed toward them from the glare ahead and disappeared into the blackness behind. The road was following the railroad now, and for an exciting minute or two they raced a train and gained on it, and would have left it behind, perhaps, had the road not swerved to the left and taken them out of sight. There was a defiant shriek from the engine, a brief glimpse of the lighted car windows through the trees and they were once more alone, coasting down a long hill with only the whirr of the fan to be heard. A few minutes later the car swept from the public road through a stone-pillared gateway and circled up to a big house in which a single light gleamed through the transom above the front door.

“Doesn’t look very gay, does it?” inquired their host. “I don’t doubt the servant has gone to bed. We’ll run around and leave the machine, if you don’t mind.”

They got out when the car had trundled itself into the garage and stretched their cramped limbs.

“I don’t believe,” said Dick, “that I changed my position once all the way. I had a sort of a notion that if I moved we’d go flying off the road into the next county. That was a dandy ride, Mr. Whiting.”

“Glad you liked it. Come on now and let’s eat. I had dinner at six, but can dally with a little supper. I’m afraid, though,” he added as he locked the doors, “I can’t give you fellows anything hot except coffee.”

“Hot or cold, it’s all the same to us,” said Roy.

Mr. Whiting unlocked the front door and admitted them to a wide hall and from there conducted them into a big library and flooded it with light at the touch of a button.

“Make yourselves at home now. If you want to wash come on up-stairs. You needn’t be afraid of making a noise, the place is empty except for Williams and he’s at the back of the house and wouldn’t hear a sound if he wasn’t.”

They trooped up after him to the bath-room and washed the dust from hands and faces. Chub, smoothing his hair with the silver-backed brushes which their host provided, encountered in the glass the gaze of Whiting fixed on him speculatively.

“Say, what’s your name?” asked Whiting.

“My name’s Eaton,” answered Chub. “And my companions are Mr. Porter and Mr. Somes. I beg your pardon, I’m sure; we ought to have introduced ourselves before.”

“Oh, that’s all right; I only asked because it seems to me I’ve seen you before somewhere.”

“It’s possible, I live in Pittsburg.”

“You didn’t have to tell,” said Dick, reproachfully.

“I’ve never been there,” said Whiting, “but all the same— Well, never mind. Let’s go down and see what we can find.”

They found a good deal. Together they raided the pantry and refrigerator and bore their booty into the dining-room and spread it helter-skelter on the big mahogany table. Then they made coffee, about two quarts of it, and if it wasn’t perfectly clear it at least tasted very, very good. It was after nine o’clock when they sat down to supper and it was well toward ten when they got up. It takes some time to satisfy such hungers as Chub and Roy and Dick had. But, of course, they didn’t spend quite all the time eating, for Whiting’s curiosity had to be satisfied and so it was incumbent to narrate the adventure in search of milk. Whiting thought that a fine joke and wished he had been along.

“I tell you what I’ll do, fellows,” he said. “In the morning I’ll take you back in the car, if you don’t mind starting rather early, and you won’t have much difficulty finding your boat in broad daylight. I hope no one has stolen anything out of it, though.”

Back in the library the boys stretched themselves out comfortably in the big leather chairs, and Whiting turned to Chub with;

“Say, Eaton, do you play ball?”

“Yes, some.”

“Only some, eh? I thought that maybe I’d seen you on the ball field, but—”

“He’s a fibber,” said Dick. “He was captain of his freshman

team this year and played on the 'varsity in the big game."

"Jupiter!" cried Whiting. "I remember now! You're the chap they put in for Pritchett at the end of the game; you stole home and won the game! That was all right, Eaton!" Whiting beamed across at him. "Thunder, I'm glad I picked you fellows up! I'm a junior next year. You must come and see me. Are you in college, too?"

"Yes," answered Roy. "I'm in the same class with Chub, and Dick enters in the fall."

"That's fine! It was good luck that I came across you to-night. If I hadn't I'd been stuck back there in the road yet!"

After that there was plenty to talk about, you may believe, and it was well toward midnight when they climbed the stairs and distributed themselves around the empty bedrooms.

"I suppose I might find sheets and blankets and things," said Whiting, apologetically, "but the mater has them put away somewhere and I wouldn't know where to look for them. But if a couple of you chaps will only take my bed I'll be perfectly comfortable in another room."

"So will we," said Chub. "Don't you bother. A good hair mattress like this is all a fellow needs, anyway; and it's too warm for covers if we had them. We'll be all right, thank you. But you'll have to wake us up in the morning. I feel as though I could sleep for a week!"

"That's all right; you'll be called early enough. I told Williams to have breakfast at seven. I've got over a hundred miles to do in the car to-morrow and want to get started early. Good-night, fellows. I do hope you'll be comfortable."

“If I felt any better,” murmured Chub, sprawled out on a big wide bed which he was to have all to himself, “I’d certainly yell. Good-night, Whiting. May you be forever blest!”

They slept finely, were up at half past six, had shower-baths, and were seated around the table at a little after seven. Williams tried hard not to show the astonishment he felt at finding the family circle so suddenly and inexplicably enlarged, but didn’t altogether succeed. At eight they were in the car again, retracing their path of the night before, Chub attired in a plaid cap which his host insisted on his accepting. It was a wonderful golden morning with the bluest of blue skies overhead and an innocent-looking pile of fluffy white clouds in the west, which Whiting declared meant a thunder-storm later on. But no one was troubled about that. The big gray car was on its best behavior, and in less than half an hour they were back in the vicinity of the *Slow Poke*. After some hesitation, they decided on a spot to be set down and bade their new friend good-by.

“Mind you look me up in the fall,” he reiterated. “I want to introduce you to some of the fellows I know; you’ll like them. Good-by and good luck. Hope you find your boat.”

He was off again in a cloud of dust and the three turned and plunged into the woods. Their judgment was not in error, for after a minute or so they came out on the shore of the cove. Twenty yards away lay the *Slow Poke*.

“Thank goodness!” said Roy, devoutly. “I thought—”

But he didn’t tell what he thought. Instead, he stopped suddenly in his tracks, and Chub and Dick stopped with him.

Sitting on the rail of the *Slow Poke*, his gun across his knees,

was Farmer Ewing.



CHAPTER XI

MR. EWING IS OUTWITTED

“Well, what do you think of that?” gasped Chub.

The boys stared at Mr. Ewing in vexation, and Mr. Ewing regarded the boys with grim placidity.

“Just as though he hadn’t made trouble enough for us,” muttered Dick.

“Well,” said Roy, starting on determinedly, “I’m not going to put up with any more of his nonsense.”

“That’s all right,” cautioned Chub, “but remember, chum, that he has a gun there.”

They walked along the bank until they were opposite the boat. Mr. Ewing watched them silently, his gaze resting with interest on Dick. Evidently he couldn’t account for Dick. Chub made the first overtures.

“Salutations,” he called.

“Mornin’,” responded the farmer. A silence followed.

“Want to see us, did you?” asked Chub, cheerfully.

“Ye-es,” drawled the farmer, “I wanted to have a few words with ye.”

“We are deeply honored, sir. Tell the gentleman how deeply honored we are, Roy.” But Roy only growled. The farmer sniffed.

“What are you going to do?” he asked.

“We’re coming aboard,” replied Chub, making ready to leap the yard of water that intervened between shore and boat.

“You just stay where you are,” said the farmer, patting his gun stock significantly.

“But that’s our boat!” cried Roy, wrathfully.

“Maybe, maybe; chances are you stole it, though,” replied Mr. Ewing, calmly.

“Well, you’re the most suspicious man I ever did see,” declared Chub, disgustedly. “Suppose we insist on going aboard; what’s going to happen?”

“I might have to put a load of buckshot in your legs,” answered the farmer, showing his yellow fangs in a grim smile. “This boat is confiscated.”

“You don’t say? What for?”

“Pendin’ the arrival of the constable. You can talk to him when he gets here; I guess he’ll answer all the questions you want to ask him.” The farmer chuckled. Roy appeared to be in real danger of exploding with anger.

“Leave this to me,” whispered Chub. Then, “and about how long do you think we’ll have to wait for the constable?” he inquired of Mr. Ewing. The farmer cast an eye toward the sun.

“About half an hour, I guess,” he replied. “He promised to be over about nine.”

“As early as that, eh?” murmured Chub, reflectively. “I hate to put him to so much trouble. I do hope you and he didn’t lose much time last night looking for us. We were so sorry we

couldn't stay until you returned, but we had an engagement we just had to keep."

"Don't you bother about me," growled the farmer. "Think you're pretty smart, I guess, don't ye? Maybe you did fool me last night, but I sort o' guess I've got ye this time, eh?"

"It does look like it," admitted Chub, reluctantly. "But then you're too smart for us, anyway, I suppose."

"Huh," grunted the farmer, suspiciously.

"We might as well sit down and take it easy while we wait," said Chub to the others. "Me for a nice spot in the shade."

He moved down the shore a little way and Roy and Dick followed. When they sat down under the shade of the trees they were out of hearing of the farmer.



CHAPTER XII

THE TABLES TURNED

“**A**nybody got anything to suggest?” Chub asked softly.

“If we rushed him all at once, the three of us,” said Dick, “we could get aboard all right. You know very well he wouldn’t dare shoot at us.”

But Chub shook his head.

“He’s such an old sour-face, he’s likely to do anything. What do you say, Roy?”

“I’ll risk it if the rest of you will,” he said, angrily. “I’d like to throw him into the water.”

“A bath wouldn’t do him any harm,” said Chub, “unless he caught cold from it. But I’ve got a better scheme, I think. We can’t afford to let the constable find us here. If he does it’ll take a week to convince him that we aren’t robbers. Now, listen. I’ll go back through the woods as though I was going to the road. You fellows stay here and if he asks where I’ve gone tell him I’ve gone to look for the constable. When I get out of sight I’ll get some of my things off and sneak down to the river again on the other side of the point. Then I’ll swim back quietly and get aboard on the other side. He won’t be able to see me and you fellows mustn’t look at me because he might catch on.”

“But what are you going to do when you get aboard?” asked Roy dubiously. Chub’s brown eyes twinkled merrily.

“You leave that to me,” he said. “Come to think of it, you fellows had better go back to the boat in about a couple of minutes and when you see me coming get him talking; see? Make all the pow-wow you can, so he won’t hear me. If he should hear me and go around the other side to see what’s up, you fellows jump on board in a hurry. Got that?”

“Yes,” answered Roy, “but you—you be careful, Chub.”

“It’ll be a long swim, won’t it?” asked Dick, anxiously.

“I won’t have to swim at all,” said Chub. “I’ll just float down with the current. I’m off.” He got up and started aimlessly into the woods in the direction of the road. They watched him go. So did the farmer.

“Hey, where’s he going?” he called.

“Says he’s going to look for your friend, the constable,” answered Dick, carelessly.

“Ain’t no use in you running away,” said Mr. Ewing. “We’ll get ye.”

“Well, you don’t see us running away, do you?” asked Roy, haughtily. “We haven’t done anything to run away for.”

“Don’t you suppose we might fix those ropes so’s we can let go in a hurry?” asked Dick, softly.

“We can try it,” responded Roy, with a glance toward the river beyond the point. “Wait a minute longer. Then we’ll go down there. Maybe we can loosen the knots a bit.” He looked anxiously at his watch. It showed the hour to be ten minutes to nine. “I hope that constable doesn’t take it into his head to appear for a few minutes yet.”

“So do I. Shall we go now?”

“Yes, come along.”

They got up and sauntered back to where the *Slow Poke* lay, Mr. Ewing eying them suspiciously. The boat was moored fore and aft to two trees growing near the bank. When they reached the first one Roy stopped and started to undo the knot, while Dick kept on.

“Say, there’re chairs up there on the deck,” said Dick, pleasantly. “Why don’t you get one? You must be tired sitting on that railing.”

“I’m pretty tolerable easy, thanks,” answered the farmer. “Here, you there! What you doing to that rope?”

“Me?” asked Roy, innocently. “Just fixing it.”

“Well, leave it alone, do you hear?” The old shot-gun was pointed in Roy’s direction and Roy thought it wise to obey, especially as he had practically accomplished his purpose. Meanwhile Dick had seized the occasion to give attention to the second rope, but the farmer spied him before he could loosen the knot.

“Come away from there or I’ll let ye have this!” he shouted, angrily. Dick came away and he and Roy sat down on the edge of the bank in the sun, trying to look perfectly at ease. A swift glance upstream showed them a dark object in the water floating slowly down with the current. The object was Chub’s head. They didn’t dare look again until Chub was almost abreast of the boat. Then,

“That was a pretty easy place to get out of you put us in,” said Roy. The farmer blinked his eyes and motioned at Dick

with his chin.

“You’d been there yet if it hadn’t been for him,” he said. “If I hadn’t been alone there I guess it wouldn’t have happened.”

“You had Fido,” said Dick.

“He means Carlo,” explained Roy, amiably. “He’s a pretty smart dog, isn’t he?”

“Guess you thought so,” chuckled the farmer. (Roy and Dick were straining their ears for evidences of Chub’s arrival at the other side of the boat.)

“Yes, he’s a nice dog,” said Roy, reflectively. “Of course he isn’t much to look at, but, then, mongrels never are, I suppose.”

“He ain’t a mongrel,” said the farmer, indignantly. “He’s a pure-blooded Saint Bernard, he is.” (Still there was no sound!)

“You don’t say?” asked Dick. “Funny how folks will talk to you when they want to sell a dog, isn’t it? It just seems as though they didn’t have any moral sense, doesn’t it?” (There was a sound now, just the faintest sound in the world! Roy and Dick both plunged desperately into conversation.)

“Dogs are funny things, anyway—” began Dick.

“I used to know a dog that looked just like Carlo,” Roy declared with enthusiasm. “He was the knowingest thing—”

“Wasn’t he?” asked Dick, loudly and eagerly.

“Why, that dog knew more than any farmer I ever met!” almost shouted Roy. “Just to show you how knowing he was, Mr. Ewing—!”

Then Roy stopped with a grin on his face and he and Dick looked past the farmer until that worthy's curiosity got the better of him and he turned likewise, turned to look into the twin muzzles of Chub's shot-gun, which the owner, damp and cheerful in his scant attire, held a yard from the farmer's head.

Mr. Ewing's jaw dropped comically.

"Wh-wh-what—" he stammered.

"Kindly lean your gun against the railing, Mr. Ewing," said Chub, softly. "Thank you. Now get down and jump ashore, please."

"I—I'll have you fellers put in prison for this!" growled the farmer. But he was far more subdued than they'd ever seen him, and he swung his long legs over the railing and strode to the gangway at the rear. "What you going to do with my gun?" he demanded.

"Never you mind about your gun," said Chub. "You git!"

Mr. Ewing "got."

"Throw off those ropes, fellows," said Chub, "and bring them aboard." He picked up the farmer's gun, unloaded it, and tossed it onto the bank. "Nothing but birdshot, after all," he scoffed as he glanced at the shells.

Mr. Ewing only grunted as he picked up his gun. Then,

"You're a pretty cute lot, you are, but you wait until the next time, by gum!"

"There won't be any next time, by gum," laughed Chub.

Dick and Roy, keeping watchful glances on the farmer, brought the ropes aboard.

“Start her up,” said Chub to Dick. Then he handed his shotgun to Roy. “See that he doesn’t try any tricks,” he said. “I’ll go up and take the wheel. I want to get out of here before the constable comes.”

The farmer stood a little way off observing them sourly. The propeller began to churn and the *Slow Poke* waddled off into deep water. Chub threw the wheel hard over and the boat swung its nose around until it pointed down-stream. Then he called for full speed and the *Slow Poke* made off in a hurry.

“My love to Carlo!” cried Chub from the wheel-house.

“Tell him I hope he chokes!” added Roy vindictively.

At that moment a man in a faded blue coat with brass buttons came out of the woods and hurried toward the farmer. Hasty explanations followed on the part of the latter.

Chub put his lips to the speaking-tube.

“Got her full speed, Dick?” he called.

“Yes,” was the answer.

“All right. Our friend, the constable, has arrived. Keep her going.” The *Slow Poke* was now far out of the cove and making good time down the river. Roy waved a polite farewell to the two figures on shore; the whistle croaked, and the next minute the wooded point had shut them from view. Roy hurried up to Chub.

“What are you going down the river for?” he asked.

“Because they may send out warrants for us,” answered Chub. “I want them to think we’re going this way. After a while we’ll turn around, go over toward the other shore and

come back. I've got to get rid of these wet clothes."

When he came back, once more in conventional attire, he headed the boat across to the opposite shore, turned her and crept upstream again. Roy brought his field-glasses up and they searched the shore of the cove as they went by. But there was no one in sight.

"I wonder if he's had enough?" pondered Roy.

"I'll bet he hasn't. I'll bet if we came back here fifty years from now we'd find him sitting on the fence outside his gate with that old popgun in his lap, waiting for us. You don't know the—the indomitable will of our dear friend, Job Ewing."

"Jim," corrected Roy.

"Pardon me; I meant to say James. No, Jim won't forget us in a hurry, and I think it will be wiser to keep on this side of the river for a while. That's Westchester County over there and this is Rockland. I don't know much about such things, I'm pleased to say, but it seems to me that if that old farmer gets out a warrant for us we'll be better off in some other county."

"What are you going to do about your coat and things, though?" Roy asked.

"Get 'em this evening," answered Chub, "when the shades of night have fallen over hill and vale. Let's put in around that point there and stay until then, shall we? I don't believe they can see us from the other shore."

Dick joined them and they talked it over and finally agreed to Chub's plan. The *Slow Poke* was steered around the point and anchored—since a shallow beach made it inadvisable to stretch lines ashore—near a little village. The railroad ran

along within a few yards and a tiny station was in sight. But the point of land cut them off from sight of Farmer Ewing's neighborhood and they believed that they could spend the day there safely. They went ashore and made a few purchases and learned that the nearest ferry was four miles up the river.

“That would mean a good five miles upstream and four miles back if they tried to get us that way,” said Chub. “And I don't believe they'd go to that trouble. Besides, it's safe that they think we're still going down the river.”

“Just the same,” said Dick, “one of us had better keep a lookout all the time so that if they did try to get us we could skip out.”

“Right you are, Dickums. Yours is the wisdom of the owl and the cunning of the serpent.”

They spent a quiet day. They would have liked to go ashore and tramp, but didn't dare leave the boat lest the relentless Mr. Ewing should descend upon it in their absence. So, instead, they read and wrote letters on the upper deck under the awning, which was stretched for the first time. To be sure, they had been away from home only two days, but, as Roy pointed out, more had happened to write about during those two days than was likely to happen in the next two weeks, and they might as well make the most of it. The quiet lasted until about four o'clock when Whiting's thunder-storm, which had been growling menacingly for an hour or more, descended upon them in full fury. There was a busy time getting the awning down again, and then, somewhat damp, they retreated to the forward cabin and watched the rain lash the river and listened to the roaring of the storm. It was all over in half an hour, leaving the air cool and refreshing. They had a good supper

and afterward, at about eight, pulled up anchor and headed the *Slow Poke* diagonally down the river until it was opposite the place where Chub had undressed and left his coat. There Chub jumped into the tender and rowed ashore. The others watched anxiously while the *Slow Poke* sauntered along with the current but in five minutes Chub was back again, his clothes in a bundle in the bottom of the tender.

“Didn’t see a soul,” he answered in response to the questions of the others. “Start her up, Dick, and we’ll go back.”

It wasn’t so easy to sleep that night, for the trains went rushing by on an average of every half hour, shrieking and clattering. But they managed to doze off at intervals until well toward morning when, having become inured to the racket, they slept soundly until the alarm-clock in Chub’s bedroom went off.

“I move you,” said Chub at breakfast, “that we get out of this vicinity as soon as we can. I’ve had enough excitement to last me for a month. I’m for the silent reaches and the simple life!”



CHAPTER XIII

CHUB TRIES A NEW BAIT

I could write in detail of the next three days, but the narrative would only bore you, for nothing of special interest happened. In brief, then, they made an early start the morning after the escape from Mr. Ewing and the arm of the law, and were soon rounding the bend in the river opposite Peekskill. By one o'clock they were in sight of West Point and so kept on until they found a mooring at the steamboat pier. There they ate dinner and afterward spent two hours "doing" the Military Academy. Dick declared that if they didn't see another thing, that alone was worth the whole trip, and the rest agreed with him. At twilight, they sidled the *Slow Poke* across to shore almost under the frowning face of Storm King. There was deep water there, and when the mooring ropes were made fast they could step from the deck of the house-boat right onto the bank. The map showed dozens of streams and several small ponds, and it was decided that they would remain there for a while and try the fishing. They slept on board that night, but the next afternoon they rigged the little shelter tent which they had brought between the trees at a little distance from shore, and made camp. Dick and Roy fashioned a fireplace of stones and when the weather was fair the meals were prepared over a wood fire. Chub declared that he preferred the flavor of wood smoke to kerosine. For two days they tramped around the neighboring country and fished to their hearts' content, finding several good trout pools. It was on the second day that Chub caught his "two-pounder." To be sure, Dick and Roy declared

that it didn't weigh over a pound and a quarter, but Chub retorted that that was only their jealousy and that if there was a scales on board he would soon prove his estimate correct. But there wasn't a scales to be found and so Chub's claim was never disproved. He held the trout out at arm's-length while Roy photographed it, and when the picture developed the fish looked like a salmon rather than a trout.

"You might as well call it a ten-pounder as a two," said Dick. "Anyone would believe you. Why, that fish is half as big as you—in the picture!"

Chub viewed him sorrowfully and shook his head.

"That," he replied, "would not be the truth, Dickums. When you know me better you'll find that not even a fish can tempt me from the path of honesty. Perhaps, however, there wouldn't be any harm in calling it a three-pounder; what do you think?"

Roy and Dick had good luck, too, although their trout were smaller than Chub's "two-pounder," and during their stay at Camp Storm King, as they called it, they had all the fresh fish they could eat.

The day after Chub's famous catch he informed the others that he was going back to the scene of his victory for another try.

"We'll all go," said Roy, pleasantly, with a wink at Dick. "It must be a dandy place."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," replied Chub, shortly. "That pool is my discovery."

"Pshaw," said Roy, "if I found a good place like that I'd want you to try it."

“Me, too,” said Dick. Chub viewed them scornfully.

“Of course you would,” he replied with deep sarcasm.

“Well, I would,” insisted Roy. “I’d be generous. Now—”

“I guess you’re like the Irishman,” said Chub. “His name was Pat.”

“It always is in a story,” murmured Dick.

“One day his friend Mike met him and said: ‘Pat, they tell me you’re a Socialist.’ ‘I am,’ says Pat. ‘Well, now, tell me, Pat, what is a Socialist?’ ‘A Socialist,’ says Pat, ‘is a feller that divides his property equally. ’Tis like this, do you see: if I had two million dollars I’d give you one million and I’d keep one million myself.’ ‘’Tis a grand idea,’ says Mike. ‘And if you had two farms would you give me one, Pat?’ ‘Sure would I,’ says Pat. ‘’Tis an elegant thing, this Socialism,’ says Mike. ‘But, tell me, Pat, if you had two pigs would you give me one?’ ‘Go ’long, now!’ says Pat. ‘You know I’ve got two pigs!’”

“It’s a funny story,” said Roy, mournfully, “but I miss the application, Chub.”

“You do, eh? Well, it just shows how easy it is to be generous with something you haven’t got.” Whereupon Chub picked up his rod and stepped ashore.

“You won’t get a bite!” called Dick.

Haughty silence from Chub as he walked away.

“You won’t bring home a thing!” This shot told.

“If I don’t bring home something as big as I did yesterday,” announced Chub, grandly “I’ll—I’ll wash up the dishes!”

“That’s a go,” cried Dick. “Bad luck to you!”

They watched him disappear between the trees. Then Roy turned to Dick with a grin. “Let’s follow him,” he said.

An instant later, carrying their rods, they were on Chub’s trail. They went quickly and quietly, and soon had their quarry in sight. Chub was ambling along very leisurely, whistling as he went. Presently they were out of the woods and on a narrow road that was scarcely more than a path. It wound along the bottom of the mountain for a half a mile or so, running very straight and rendering it necessary for the pursuers to keep in among the trees lest Chub should glance back. But it was apparent that he had no suspicion. The road ran over or through several small streams which came gurgling down the hill and at each of them Roy and Dick expected to see Chub leave the road. But he kept on and presently Dick gave signs of discouragement.

“Thunder,” he said, “I don’t believe he’s ever going to stop. This isn’t much fun, Roy. Let’s quit. I’m all scratched up with these branches.”

“Stop nothing!” answered Roy. “He can’t be going much further. Anyway, the road curves pretty soon and then we can take it easy.”

Presently the road did curve, Chub was out of sight, and they left the underbrush with sighs of relief.

“Have you any idea where this pool of his is?” asked Dick.

“Not the slightest. He and I started out together but he left me about three o’clock and went down toward the river. We were fishing that stream that comes down near the fork of the roads, you know; where we were the first day. That’s about

half a mile further, but I don't see why Chub has to go that far unless he can't find his old pool any other way. Here's the turn. Careful, or he may see us."

It was an abrupt curve and they went very slowly and softly until they could see the stretch of road ahead. It was quite deserted!

"Shucks!" said Roy. "He's got away from us, after all. Come on!"

They broke into a trot and hurried along, looking sharply to left and to right as they ran. A moment or two later there was a rustling in the woods near the turn of the road and Chub came cautiously out, a broad smile on his face. Remaining in concealment, he watched his pursuers until another turn of the road hid them. Then he cut a branch from a small tree, sharpened one end of it, slit the other, and stuck it in the middle of the road. Searching his pockets he, at length, brought forth a crumpled piece of paper. Smoothing it out, he traced a single word on it and stuck it in the cleft of the stick. Then, chuckling aloud, he crossed the road and disappeared into the woods on the lower side.

Some two hours later Roy and Dick came trudging back. They had five trout between them, but they were all small ones. They were very hungry and somewhat tired, and Roy almost walked into the stick in the road before he saw the piece of paper. When he had read it he laughed and handed it to Dick.

"Stung!" read Dick. He grinned, crumpled it up, and tossed it aside, and they went on for a moment without a word. Then,

"You have to get up pretty early to get ahead of Chub," said

Roy, admiringly.

“Get up early!” quoth Dick. “You have to stay up all night!”

They trudged on home to the camp and dinner.

Meanwhile Chub was having hard luck. Fully a mile away, where a stream rushed down a hill and paused for a while in a broad black pool lined with rocks and alders, he had been fishing diligently for over an hour with no success. He had tried almost every one of his brand-new assortment of flies, but, to use his own expression, he hadn't even got a bid. It was getting along toward dinner-time, as his hunger emphatically informed him, and he recollected his agreement with regret. It wasn't that he so much disliked to wash the dishes for once—although as a matter of principle he always schemed to avoid that task—but he hated to have Roy and Dick crow over him. And after the way in which he had fooled them that morning, he had no doubt but that they would crow long and loud!

He sat down on a convenient flat-topped stone and spread his fly-book open beside him. It was a sunny day, but the pool was well shadowed and perhaps, after all, a real brilliant fly wouldn't be out of the way. So he selected a handsome arrangement of vermilion and yellow and gray—a most gaudy little fly it was—and substituted it for the more somber one on his line. Then he cast again to the farther side of the pool. For a while there was no reply to his appeal, and then the fly disappeared and a moment later a gleaming trout was flapping about under the bushes. It wasn't such a bad little trout; Chub guessed three quarters of a pound as its weight; and more hopefully now, he flicked the pool here and there. But nothing else happened. At last, discouraged, he reeled in his line and looked at his watch. The time was a quarter past twelve. Even

if he started back to the boat now, he would arrive very late for dinner. Besides, he couldn't face Roy and Dick with only that insignificant trophy to show. If only he had brought a luncheon with him! His eyes fell again on the trout and his face lighted. Dropping his fly-book into his pocket and picking up rod and fish, he turned his back on the pool and followed the stream as best he could, winding in and out of the thickets and clambering over the rocks that strewed the little vale.

Presently he was out of the thicket and before him lay a small clearing in which waist-high bushes and trailing briars ran riot. The brook spread itself out into a shallow stream and meandered off toward the river, its course marked by small willows, alders, and rushes. Chub found a clear spot in the shade of a viburnum and built a fire of dry grass and twigs, adding dead branches as the flames grew. Fuel wasn't very easy to find, but by prospecting around he eventually had a good-sized blaze. Then, warm and panting, he sat down out of the range of the heat and prepared his trout. By the time it was ready the fire had subsided to a bed of glowing coals. Wrapping the fish in leaves he laid it on the embers and watched it carefully, turning it over and over and raking the hot coals about it. After fifteen minutes of cooking he took it off and laid it on a stone which he had meanwhile washed in the brook. Then, with a couple of sharpened sticks he scraped away the ashes and coals, and began his luncheon. Trout without any other seasoning than wood smoke isn't awfully appetizing, as Chub speedily discovered, and he would have given a whole lot for a pinch or two of salt. But it partly satisfied his hunger, and after he had taken a drink of cold water from the brook he felt good for another two or three hours' fishing. He was determined not to go home until he had

something to show. He stretched himself out in the shade for a while and rested. Then, picking up his rod once more, he returned to the stream and sought a likely spot.

His search led him across the clearing and into a dense woods beyond. Here the stream narrowed again and deepened, and he put another fly on and tried his luck, wandering along from place to place. Twice, inquiring fish nibbled at his fly, and once he hooked a small trout only to lose it from the hook in landing. Then a full hour passed without any results. It was almost three o'clock. The woods were very warm and very still, only the ripple and splash of the brook breaking the mid-afternoon silence. Even the birds were hushed. But the mosquitoes, at least, were active, and Chub, hot and discouraged, brushed them away and sighed for a breeze. Finally he sat down on the ground and for the twentieth time viewed the contents of his fly-book in perplexity. It seemed as though it contained every sort of fly that the heart of trout could desire.

“Finicky things,” muttered Chub. “I’d just like to know what they do want.” He picked out a pretty brown and gray fly tentatively. “That ought to please any one. Maybe, though, they don’t like the taste of them. I suppose, when you come to think of it, steel and feathers and silk thread aren’t very appetizing—except to look at. If I was a trout I’d much rather have a good worm or a nice, juicy grasshopper.”

He paused and stared thoughtfully at the flies. Then,

“Plagued if I don’t try it!” he murmured.

He got up and retraced his steps to the clearing. Ordinarily it’s the easiest thing in the world to catch a grasshopper. All you have to do is to stand still and the silly things will jump

onto you; especially if you happen to have on something white. But to-day Chub found the grasshopper the most illusive of game, almost as illusive as trout! With cap in hand, he crouched and jumped and ran and waited, missing his prey time after time, and getting hotter and hotter and madder and madder, until the perspiration streamed down his face and he was mentally calling the grasshoppers all the mean names he could think of. But perseverance is bound to win in the long run—and Chub had plenty of long runs! And so, finally, he was trudging back, tired but triumphant, with two hoppers firmly clasped in his hand. But it seemed as though he was having more than his share of trouble to-day, for although he had left rod and fly-book not more than fifty or sixty yards from the edge of the clearing, he couldn't find them for a long while, and when he did he was so tuckered out that he had to lie on his back for ten minutes before he could command sufficient energy to go on with his experiment.



But Mister Trout didn't want to come

He sacrificed the most bedraggled of his flies, plucking off feathers and silk, and then placed one of the grasshoppers on the hook. Looking for a likely spot, he found it a few yards further down the stream where the uprooted trunk of a big tree lay across the brook and made a sort of dam. The bushes grew close to the bank and it was necessary to make a short cast. The first attempt wasn't a success, and he had to wade into the pool and disentangle his leader from a stump. Then he crawled out and tried again, assuring himself that he had already scared every denizen of the pool into conniption fits and that, of course, he wouldn't get a bite. But the grasshopper had no sooner lit on the surface than there was a sudden flash and the line spun out.

“Huh!” gasped Chub, his thumb on the reel. “That pleased

you, didn't it? Come on, now."

But Mister Trout didn't want to come on. Instead, he had hidden himself amongst the submerged roots of the trees. Chub wound in a foot or two of line very gingerly, trying to coax the trout into deep water, and the ruse succeeded. With a rush the fish darted from concealment and sped upstream. But Chub brought him up with a turn that made the line sing. Then he began to reel in. The trout fought valiantly and made a good deal of trouble considering his size, and there were one or two anxious moments for Chub. But in the end the victory was his, and back among the stones lay the speckled beauty. It was a good ten inches long and Chub beamed with delight. Now he could go home!

When he had secured his prize on a forked branch he released the other grasshopper from the pocket of his fly-book.

"You've had a narrow escape," he said, as the hopper flounced bewildered away, "and considering the chase you led me I ought to feed you to the fishes, too. But I won't. Go on home, and don't bat your silly brains out against the rocks like that."

At five o'clock Roy and Dick, who were beginning to get anxious about Chub, beheld that young gentleman approaching camp. He had his rod in hand, but no fish were in sight.

"Thunder!" said Dick. "I'll wager he's mad!"

"Had any dinner?" shouted Roy.

"Sure."

"Where'd you get it?"

"Caught it and cooked it, of course. Say, he was a dandy! He

was as long—”

“Never mind about that,” laughed Roy. “You wash the dishes just the same. You were to bring the fish home, you know.”

“Well, but I had to have something to eat, didn’t I?” asked Chub, with a grin.

“That wasn’t in the bargain,” answered Dick. “You’re dishwasher to-night.” Chub stepped aboard, reached under his coat, and laid his trout on the railing.

“Is that so, Dickums?” he asked quickly. The others stared a moment. Then,

“Great Scott!” murmured Dick.

“You win,” sighed Roy.



CHAPTER XIV

THE CREW ENTERS SOCIETY

“What day of the month is this?” demanded Roy.

“Fourteenth,” hazarded Chub.

“Fifteenth,” answered Dick, doubtfully.

“We need a calendar,” said Roy, looking vaguely about the cabin. “But whether it’s the fourteenth or fifteenth, fellows, we ought to write to Harry. She’s going home the twentieth and we promised to be there in three weeks. That would be the twenty-first.”

“That’s so,” said Chub. “We’ve only got seven more days. You write, Roy, like a good chap.”

“What shall I say?”

“Just tell her we’ll be along the twenty-first. Of course, we don’t have to start right off after we get there. I think it would be fun to stay there a while, don’t you?”

“Yes.” Roy left the window-seat on which he had been stretched and went over to the table to write. “Let me take your fountain-pen, Dick, will you? Mine’s dry.”

“You can take it if you can find it,” answered Dick, looking up from his book. “I haven’t seen it since I loaned it to Chub yesterday.”

“Dickums, I gave it back to you,” responded Chub, gravely. “I remember the circumstances perfectly; the whole thing

comes back to me as though it were but yesterday.”

“It *was* but yesterday,” said Dick. “Look in your pocket.”

“Merely as a matter of form,” murmured Chub. “Why, here it is! How strange! Some one must have put it there. Catch, Roy.”

Roy caught, opened the pen, and then gazed disgustedly from his fingers to Dick.

“I should think you’d have a decent pen, Dick. This is the limit!”

“Never look a gift pen in the nib,” laughed Chub. “It is a pretty bad one, though, and that’s a fact. Let’s serve notice on Dick that unless he buys a good one we won’t borrow it any more.”

It was the second day after Chub’s success with the grasshopper bait, and the second day of rain. Yesterday, it had merely showered at intervals, and the three had half a day of good fishing, but since about dawn it had been pouring torrents and they had been forced to remain indoors save when, at about eleven, they had gone in bathing. That had been good fun; there is a certain excitement about bathing in a heavy downpour of rain that is missing under other conditions. Chub had pretended to be disgruntled. “What’s the use of bathing,” he had asked, “when you’re sopping wet before you get into the water?” But he had enjoyed it as much as any of them.

The *Slow Poke* stood the deluge well, all things considered. The rain managed to get under the door of the after cabin until they spread towels along the sill, and there was a small leak in the bedroom. But Chub declared that he didn’t mind as long as it wasn’t over the bed.

“I think,” remarked Dick a few minutes later, laying down his book with a yawn and glancing disapprovingly out of the rain-streaked windows, “that we’ve had enough of this place. Let’s go on. What do you say, Roy?”

“Ask the captain,” said Roy, sealing his note to Harry.

“Sounds like mutiny to me,” said Chub.

“For goodness’ sake, Dick, let’s mutiny and stop his talking about it!”

“Yes, why don’t you?” asked Chub, eagerly. “I’ve been looking forward all along for a mutiny. I wish to put some one in irons and confine him in the lazaret.”

“Lazaret nothing!” protested Dick. “The lazaret is where they put sick folks.”

“Dickums,” responded Chub, superiorly, “without wishing to hurt your feelings I’d like to say that you show a lamentable ignorance regarding things—er—nautical. Let me prescribe for you a short course of Clark Russell, W. H. G. Kingston, and Marryat.”

“I’ve read as many of Marryat’s as you have,” replied Dick, in injured tones. “And I know that a lazaret is a hospital.”

“On some ships maybe, Dickums,” answered Chub, amiably, “but not on the *Slow Poke*. And speaking of that, fellows, we haven’t changed her name yet. I thought we were going to get some paint and fix it.”

“Well, you’re captain,” answered Roy.

“If I am not in error,” responded Chub, with dignity, “it is the able seaman that does the painting, and not the captain.”

“The original question,” said Dick, “was, do we go on or do we stay here?”

“We go on,” answered Chub. “If it stops raining before five o’clock we’ll go on to-day. I, too, would visit new scenes. Besides, we must get somewhere where we can post that note to Harry. Also, I shall buy a newspaper and find out what the date is. Why, for all we know, to-day may be yesterday or to-morrow. Think of eating yesterday’s supper to-day!”

“I don’t want to kick,” said Dick, “but I think it would be jolly nice to stop somewhere and get a good meal. It’s all right for you fellows, because you don’t have to cook everything we have, but I’m getting tired of eating my own cooking.”

Chub bounded out of his chair and pointed dramatically at Dick. “Mutiny!” he cried. “Mutiny at last! Put him in irons, Roy; put him in irons! Happy I am that I’ve lived to see this day!”

“Who’ll cook supper?” asked Roy.

“Oh, we’ll let him go before it’s time to cook supper. Get the irons, Roy.”

“Where are they?”

Chub struck his forehead in despair, and sank back into his seat. “Lost! lost! all is lost! We forgot to bring any irons!”

“We might keel-haul him or hang him from the yardstick,” suggested Roy, hopefully.

“You mean yardarm, of course,” said Dick. “But there isn’t any, and I don’t believe we’ve got a keel that deserves the name. So you’ll have to think of something else. Meanwhile, I’m going to get this chap out of trouble.” And he took up his

book again.

“If he only showed the least bit of remorse,” sighed Chub, observing him sadly, “I might be merciful. But this—this shameless effrontery pains me. I tell you what, Roy, we’ll sentence him to make an omelet for supper.”

“We haven’t any eggs,” said Dick, without looking up from his book. Chub cast his eyes to heaven and groaned tragically.

“No eggs! no irons! Ye gods! haven’t we any of the necessities of life on this ship? What have we got, Dick?”

“Beans, bacon, potatoes, bread, condensed milk, coffee, tea, butter, canned peas and tomatoes, stewed apricots—”

Chub groaned.

“No more, I beg of you! I’m going to look at the map, fellows, and if there’s a place we can reach by seven o’clock where we can buy a good meal, we’ll go there, rain or no rain! What my soul demands is a course dinner, with clams, soup, fish, roast, game, salad—” The rest was lost, for he had disappeared up the iron stairway to the wheel-house. Dick laid down his book again.

“I think I could stand a few of those things myself,” he said wistfully.

“So could I,” said Roy. “You’ve done mighty well, old chap, with what you’ve had to cook, but there’s nothing like an occasional change. It would be jolly if we could find a hotel, wouldn’t it? One of those swell summer resort places where they have ten courses and four kinds of dessert. What about it, Chub?”

“All aboard for The Overlook,” answered Chub gayly as he

came down the steps. "It's only seven miles up on the other shore. Shall we start now?"

"What is it, a hotel?" asked Dick.

"Yes, a big one, too. I've heard of it often. It's where the swells go in summer."

"That's the place for me, then," replied Roy. "I don't think it's raining as hard as it was. Let's go out and have a look."

Not only had the rain somewhat abated, but there were signs of clearing. Twenty minutes later the *Slow Poke* was on her way again.

That evening the captain and crew of the *Slow Poke* "re-entered society," as Chub put it. They made a landing before six, finding a convenient place a few hundred yards from a big hotel which stood on a bluff almost overhanging the river, and at seven were seated at a table in the great dining-room, fairly reveling in the feast. [They had dressed in their best clothes](#), and made a very presentable appearance.

"This," observed Chub, as he spread a yard-square napkin over his knees and looked at the menu, "is about what the doctor ordered. Shall we dally with a little of the caviar, Roy, or descend at once upon the cherrystone clams. Let us bear in mind that we have all the evening to do justice to this meal, and not be hasty. The French, Dickums, draw a fine distinction between a *gourmand* and a *gourmet*. The former is merely a glutton, while the latter is a connoisseur, an epicure. For me, a few of the clams, a little of the consommé—with radishes and cucumbers, some of the bluefish, a wee portion of the boiled fowl, a slice of beef, some potatoes, cauliflower, beets, and—yes, macaroni *au gratin*, a taste of the raspberry sherbet, a bit

of the salad—”

“Oh, let up, for goodness’ sake!” begged Roy. “You make me feel as though I had already had a big dinner. Let’s cut the clams out and get down to business; I’m hungry. I want soup and lots of it. Pass the bread, Dick.”

“You talk like a *gourmand*,” said Chub sorrowfully. “I beg of you not to spoil your appetite with bread. Just cast your eye over the list of things to come, Roy, and hesitate.”

“Don’t you worry,” answered Roy, his mouth full of bread and butter, “I won’t let much get by me!”

An hour later, they were sipping their after-dinner coffee and dallying with cheese and crackers. Then Chub settled a little lower in his chair with a sigh of blissful satisfaction, and gazed benevolently about him.



[They had dressed in their best clothes](#)

“I feel better,” he murmured, “much better.”

Dick took a long and careful breath.

“I’m not sure,” he said cautiously, “that I feel actually better, but I’m sure I feel *different*. And I’d rather die of indigestion than starvation any day!” Roy looked speculatively at the dining-room door.

“If you think we can walk that far,” he suggested, “let’s get out of here.”

On the broad piazza they ran into a group of college friends of Roy and Chub’s, and the rest of the evening was hilarious enough. By ten o’clock, at which time they went back to the *Slow Poke*, they had enlarged their circle of acquaintances until

it included most of the young folks at the hotel. The next morning they had breakfast aboard, but didn't linger long over it, for all sorts of delightful things had been arranged. In the first place, there was tennis on the smooth clay courts, Roy and Chub engaging in doubles with a pair of ambitious friends who rather prided themselves on their prowess with racket and ball. After four sets, Roy and Chub had induced a certain amount of modesty in their opponents, having won three out of the four. Dick, meanwhile, went down in defeat before a curly-haired sub-freshman. They had luncheon at the hotel and went sailing afterward in some one's sloop. (It was at no time apparent whose boat it was, for out of the sixteen fellows who had crowded aboard, only one hesitated to give orders, and that one only because he became seasick as soon as the yacht left her moorings.) There was more tennis after the cruise was completed, in which Dick found a foe he could triumph over. Then they went back to the neglected *Slow Poke* and "brushed up" for dinner.

"This social life is truly exciting," observed Chub, strolling into the forward cabin with a whisk broom in his hand. "Has anyone a nice red tie to lend me?"

No one had, it seemed. Dick ventured the opinion that a red tie was not a proper adjunct to a dinner costume, and that precipitated a discussion that lasted until they were ready to climb the hill to the hotel, Chub asserting that with a blue serge suit nothing was more chaste and recherché than a nice bright red scarf.

"And, anyway, you wild Westerner," he shouted from across the passage, "it's not for the likes of you to be setting up as an authority on masculine attire. If you had your way you'd go to

dinner in chaps and a sombrero!” When they had reached the table, Chub glanced over the menu with a disappointed expression, and shook his head. “That’s the trouble with these hotels,” he said. “There’s no variety. This bill’s just about the same as last night’s. The only difference is that they’ve called the soups by different names and substituted flounder—which they call sole—for bluefish.”

“The ice-cream’s different,” said Dick cheerfully. But Chub refused to be placated.

“It has another name,” he said darkly, “but you wait until you try it. It will taste the same as last night’s!”

But he recovered his equanimity as the meal progressed. He heroically denied himself a second helping of cream pie, recalling the fact that there was to be a hop that evening. “It’s hard enough for me to hop anyway,” he said, “and if I ate any more pie, I wouldn’t be able to move out of my chair.” But thanks to his self-denial Chub was able to do his full duty on the ball-room floor, and was ably assisted by Roy. Dick, however, preferred to sit on the piazza and swap yarns with the curly-haired sub-freshman, and it was not until he had been forcibly assisted through a window onto the dancing floor, that he consented to uphold the honor of the *Slow Poke*, as Chub eloquently put it.

The next day, the second of their stay, they gave a luncheon on board the house-boat. Dick cooked the viands and they were served under the awning on the upper deck. The menu was neither varied nor extensive, but each of the invited guests vowed that they had never tasted anything better. And, of course, it was lots of fun. Even when Dick spilled the chops all up and down the steps and had to wipe them off before he

could serve them no one grumbled. In fact you'd have thought that the party preferred their chops that way! After luncheon the *Slow Poke* was persuaded to sidle out into the stream, and for an hour she waddled up or down the river. Every one of the guests insisted on signing articles with Captain Chub at once, and it required all of the latter's tact and diplomacy to ward them off.

"I wish you fellows could come along," he said, "but you see how it is. We've got to go on up to Ferry Hill and get Doctor Emery and his daughter, so there won't be much room."

Whereupon one of the more enthusiastic fellows declared that he'd ask nothing better than to sleep on deck, and the other seven echoed him. It required a deal of argument to persuade them of the impracticability of the plan. There was another jolly evening at the big hotel, and then the three bade good-by to their old friends and new, for the *Slow Poke* was to go on her way again in the morning. But when morning came, they found that they were not to leave unattended, for half a dozen of the fellows had gathered on the landing to see them off and wish them good luck.

"See you in September," they shouted as the *Slow Poke* ambled away. "Don't get arrested for exceeding the speed limit."

"Stop when you come back, fellows! Don't forget!"

"I'm going to practise serving, Somes! I'll beat you this Fall!" (This from the curly-haired sub-freshman.)

Chub tooted the whistle frenziedly, there was much waving of caps, and the landing fell away astern.

The *Slow Poke* made good time that day. They stopped above Poughkeepsie for dinner and in the afternoon went on up against a stiff tide as far as Kingston. It was a day of alternate sun and cloud and the scenery on both sides of the broad stream merited all the attention they gave it. For the most part, when not busy with navigation, they sat under the awning and were beautifully lazy. Just before sunset, they tied up to the bank and prepared supper. Their three days of hotel living had quite restored their appetite for the plainer fare which Dick provided, and they went at their meals with keen appreciation. They went early to bed, for it was the evening of the eighteenth and they were due at Ferry Hill on the twenty-first, and there remained a full forty miles to be covered. There was an early start the next morning, and that day and the next the *Slow Poke* attended strictly to business, and climbed the river slowly but surely. The only incident of moment occurred on the twentieth when, having stopped for dinner at a little village and moored to the side of a ferry slip, the sign on a neighboring building caught Roy's eye.

"Paint, Varnish, Wall Paper," announced the sign. He pointed it out to the others, and after dinner they delayed the voyage for the better part of an hour while the name on the bow of the boat was changed from *Jolly Roger* to *Slow Poke*. Dick did the new lettering, and if it wasn't exactly perfect it, at least, answered its purpose. In the course of the afternoon they were forced to stop and take on gasolene, and Dick improved the opportunity to lay in a new store of cylinder oil. For the rest of that day, whenever he disappeared they had only to peek in at the door of the engine-room to find him spattering oil lovingly and enthusiastically over the engine and adjacent territory.

“It isn’t that I mind the expense so much,” muttered Chub, “but I hate to think what would happen if any one carelessly dropped a match in this part of the boat. She’s so saturated with that smelly oil that she’d simply go up in a burst of flame.”

“No engine will run smoothly without plenty of oil,” grumbled Dick.

“I don’t expect it to, Dickums, but there’s such a thing as being overkind. Some morning you’ll wake up and find that poor engine floating lifelessly on a sea of cylinder oil. You’re simply drowning it!”

The morning of the twenty-first found them still some twenty miles below Ferry Hill and the *Slow Poke* was put at her best pace in the hope of reaching her destination by luncheon-time. And she responded nobly to the demand, nosing her way up to the boat-house landing at Ferry Hill shortly before one o’clock.



CHAPTER XV

HARRY GOES TO SEA

“**B**ack to the old home,” murmured Chub, as he leaned over the railing of the upper deck and let his gaze travel over the scene before him. Beside the landing at the right was the boat-house; to the left, the little stretch of white beach; before him, the winding path leading upward through a thick grove of rustling trees. Afar up on the hill, the tower of School Hall showed above the tree-tops. Roy, on the float, took a final hitch in the bow line, straightened himself, and looked about.

“Things haven’t changed much, have they?” he asked.

“Can’t expect them to, in less than a year,” answered Chub.

“There’s Hammond over there,” muttered Roy, shading his eyes and looking across the glittering river.

“Well, that’s just where we left it,” laughed Chub. “And Harry’s Island is in the same place, too, strange as it may seem. And the river still flows to the south, and—”

“Oh, yes,” said Roy. “But I don’t think much of the welcome they’ve provided, do you?”

“I do not,” answered Chub, with emphasis. “I expected at least a brass band and a collation.”

“Bother the brass band,” said Dick, appearing from the engine-room wiping his oil-stained hands on a piece of waste. “But a collation has a cheerful sound.”

“I thought surely that Harry would be here,” said Roy, with

a trace of disappointment. “I wonder if she’s back.” He looked up the path.

“Maybe she didn’t get that letter,” suggested Dick. “If she didn’t she wouldn’t know when to look for us. And here we have invited ourselves to luncheon!”

“Let me see,” inquired Chub, “we posted that letter at the hotel, didn’t we?”

“Of course,” answered Dick. “Roy wrote it that afternoon; don’t you remember?”

“I remember his writing it,” said Chub, “but I never saw it afterward. Did you mail it at the office, Roy?”

“Yes—er—I guess so. I put it in my pocket when we went to dinner.”

“Ten to one, you didn’t mail it!” exclaimed Dick.

“Suppose you look in your pocket,” Chub suggested. Roy walked into the forward cabin with a frown on his face. Chub and Dick grinned across at each other. In a moment Roy returned with the letter in his hand and looking very sheepish.

“It was in the pocket of my blue serge,” he announced. The others looked disgusted.

“You’re a nice one!” exclaimed Chub. “Here we are with nothing on board for luncheon and no one to invite us to the Cottage.”

“I’m awfully sorry,” muttered Roy. “I don’t know how I came to forget it.”

“Well, there’s bacon and potatoes, isn’t there?” he added with an attempt at cheerfulness.

“Bacon and potatoes!” growled Chub. “I’m sick of bacon and potatoes!”

“And I’m sick of cooking ’em!” added Dick. “I thought we were going to get a good luncheon at the Cottage.”

“Well, why not go up and call on the Doctor and Mrs. Emery?” asked Chub. “They’ll be certain to ask us to lunch.”

“It looks too cheeky,” said Roy.

“Think of your minding that!” murmured Chub. Then, “I know!” he exclaimed. “We’ll blow the whistle and maybe some one will come!”

“Good idea!” Dick cried. He darted into the wheel-house and in a moment the whistle was screeching loudly. “That ought to fetch some one,” said he.

Toot-toot-! Toot-toot-toot! said the whistle. Dick kept up the racket for a full minute, and then they awaited results. Several more minutes passed.

“What time is it?” asked Dick. Chub looked at his watch.

“Almost a quarter past one,” he replied. “And they have luncheon at one.”

Dick groaned.

“Listen!” exclaimed Roy. From up the hill came a faint shrill cry.

“It’s Harry!” Chub exclaimed. He scrambled down to the landing just as a white-clad figure came into sight up the path.

“Ship ahoy!” she called, gleefully, using her hands as a megaphone, and there was an answering shout of joy in chorus

from the boat. The next moment they were all shaking hands on the landing, laughing and talking together in a babel of sound.

“I thought you weren’t coming!” cried Harry. “You promised to write and you never did it!”

Harriet Emery, or Harry, as she preferred to be called, was the daughter of Doctor Emery, the Principal of Ferry Hill School. She was sixteen years of age, or would be very shortly, and a charming girl. She had pronouncedly red hair of a very pretty shade, a pair of sparkling blue eyes, a somewhat pert, little, uptilted nose, and a complexion which, in spite of the coat of tan which was beginning to overspread it was very attractive.

“Well, you certainly have grown!” exclaimed Chub, backing off that he might get the full effect of the graceful figure in its white dress. “Skirts down and hair up,” he added with a shake of his head. “Harry, you must come to Class Day next year. Will you?”

“Do you really think I’ve grown?” she asked, eagerly.

“Grown!” echoed Roy. “You look a whole foot taller!”

“That’s because she wears her hair that way,” said Dick.

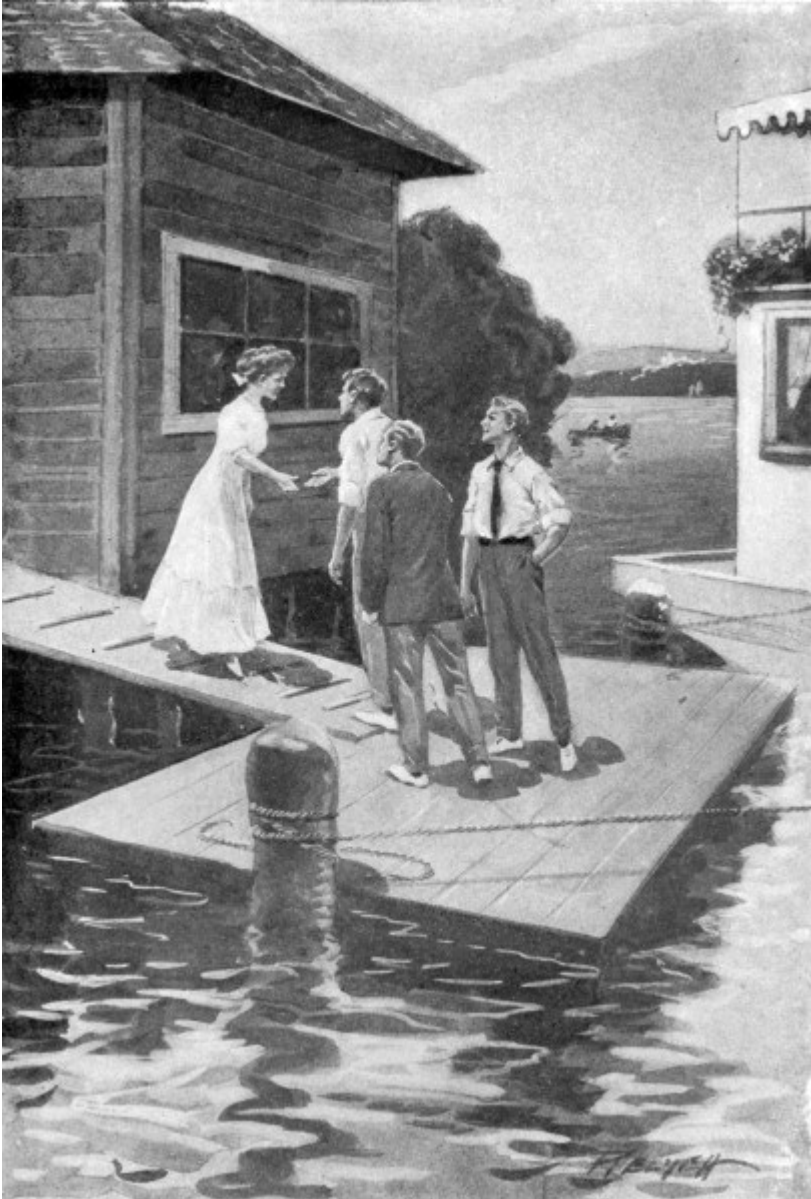
“Dick Some, it is not!” Harry turned upon him indignantly.

“Dick Some, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!” mimicked Chub. “Don’t you mind him, Harry. He never did have any manners in spite of my careful training. We were beginning to think you weren’t here, Harry.”

“I didn’t know when you were coming, silly! Why didn’t you write? I’ve been awfully anxious.”

“Write? Oh, but we *did* write,” said Chub. “Didn’t you get Roy’s letter?”

“Of course I didn’t,” replied Harry, suspiciously, glancing around her at the preternaturally sober countenances. “I don’t believe you wrote.”



The next moment they were all shaking hands

“How passing strange!” murmured Chub. “Roy, hand the lady her letter. She appears to doubt my word.”

Roy laughed, and fished the missive from his pocket.

“You didn’t send it!” Harry exclaimed. Chub shook his head.

“No, we feared it might alarm you. We thought it better to bring it along with us. You will see that we agreed to be here the twenty-first. It is now the twenty-first. And here we are, right on time. Punctuality is one of our principal virtues. Tell her some of the others, Dick.”

“The fact is,” owned Roy, “that I forgot to mail it, Harry. I’m awfully sorry, really.”

“Well, it doesn’t matter now that you’re here, does it?” asked Harry, beamingly. “And doesn’t the *Jolly Roger* look beautiful?”

“She is no longer the *Jolly Roger*,” corrected Chub. “We have changed the name to *Slow Poke*. After you’ve been on her awhile you’ll know why. But she does pretty well. I take very good care of her. Of course, if I had a capable, intelligent crew, I might do much better, but—”

“Chub, you’re just as silly as ever!” said Harry, severely. “I should think that going to college would make you more sensible.”

“It will take more than a year to affect him that way,” said Dick.

“Oh, I’m so glad to see you all!” exclaimed Harry, beaming from one to another of the trio. “But we must hurry back

because luncheon is on the table and I told mama I'd bring you right up."

The boys gazed at each other and smiled covertly. Chub shook his head regretfully.

"It's very nice of you, Miss Emery, and we appreciate your thoughtfulness, but the fact is that Dick had just announced dinner when you appeared. So I think we had better decline your invitation."

"Now that's perfectly horrid!" cried Harry in disappointment. "*Please* come, Chub!"

Chub hesitated, frowning tensely. Dick and Roy grinned. At length—

"Very well, if you put it that way," acceded Chub. "I never could refuse a lady. We will go, even against our inclinations. Dick, clear the viands from the board."

Dick and Roy burst into laughter, while Harry looked perplexedly from them to Chub's grave countenance.

"There aren't any viands," blurted Dick. "We haven't anything but bacon and potatoes."

"Oh!" said Harry. "Chub Eaton, you're a dreadful fibber! It would just serve you right if I—if I recalled my invitation."

"Jehoshaphat!" shrieked Chub, leaping up the path. "I won't give you a chance! I'll tell your mother you'll be right up." They heard him scrambling up through the grove ahead of them. But when they reached the gate in the hedge which divided the school grounds from the woods Chub was awaiting them. "We will all go in together," he announced with dignity. "It will look much better."

So they went across to the doctor's residence, mounted the steps, and found themselves in the little parlor shaking hands with Doctor and Mrs. Emery and the latter's sister, who was to remain at the Cottage during the absence of Harry and her father.

Chub and Roy and Dick had been quite intimate with the doctor and his wife during their school years, and the latter were unmistakably glad to see them again. Luncheon was ready and they all trooped into the dining-room. Of course, there was much to tell and the doctor asked a good many questions of Chub and Roy regarding their college experience. Afterward the conversation worked around to the cruise, and Chub recounted their adventures up to date, winning more than one hearty laugh from his audience. Mrs. Emery wanted them to bring their luggage ashore and occupy beds in one of the dormitories during their stay at Ferry Hill, but they declined the invitation, electing to stand by their ship. It was agreed that the *Slow Poke* was to remain at Ferry Hill two days. Then the Doctor and Harry were to go aboard, and the cruise was to continue up the river. There was only one dissenting voice, and that was Dick's.

"Seems to me," he said, "we ought to turn around and go down stream a while. The *Slow Poke*'s been tussling with the current ever since we started. We ought to give her a rest and let her float with the tide for a while."

"Oh, shucks," Chub objected, "put some more oil on the engine, Dickums. What's the good of going over the same ground—I mean the same water—twice? Let's discover new worlds."

So the majority had its way, as it usually does, and the *Slow*

Poke was slated for a fortnight's trip up the river and back again.

After dinner every one went down to the landing and inspected the house-boat, Roy murmuring excuses for the untidiness of the rooms. Mrs. Emery, however, declared that everything looked very neat, and that she rather wished she were going, too. Whereupon Chub gallantly offered to sleep on deck.

“What a dear little room!” Harry exclaimed when her room on the boat was shown her. “It's perfectly lovely!” Her father's room adjoined it and he, too, was delighted. The three boys “bunked” together in the rear room.

Roy hurried in to summon Dick to his duties as engineer, as the ladies wanted to go for a sail. The *Slow Poke* meandered up the river for a couple of miles and the guests sat on the upper deck and said all sorts of nice things about her and her crew. Harry was allowed to take the wheel for a while, under Chub's tutelage, and was highly pleased.

The boys remained at the school two days, during which time they went to all their old haunts, played a good deal of tennis, and had a thoroughly enjoyable time of it. They spent an afternoon on Harry's Island, which lay in the river just above the school, and talked over the fun they had had the summer before while camping out there. The island had been a birthday present to Harry from her father, and she was very proud of it.

“When I get through college,” she declared, “I'm going to build a house here and live in it all my days. Won't that be jolly?”

“Pshaw,” said Dick, “you’ll get married and maybe live a thousand miles from here.”

“I shan’t,” answered Harry, seriously. “I’ve decided not to be married, ever. I told Aunt Harriet so the other day and she said I was very sensible.”

They visited Harry’s menagerie in the barn and renewed acquaintances with Methuselah, the parrot, several Angora cats and kittens, squirrels, guinea-pigs, rabbits, white mice and pigeons. [Snip, Harry’s fox-terrier had long since welcomed them.] Methuselah looked not a whit different from what he did when they had last seen him, and, although it is doubtful if he remembered even Dick, he acted quite cordially and nipped Roy’s finger in quite an intimate manner.

“Do you think,” asked Harry, anxiously, “that Snip would be in the way on the boat?”

“Of course not,” answered Chub. “We’re going to take him along, aren’t we, Snip?” And Snip wagged his stump of a tail in enthusiastic affirmation.

They were to leave in the morning, and Harry spent most of that afternoon in the kitchen making pies and doughnuts, Mrs. Emery assisting. Chub, being missed from the tennis court, was discovered sitting on the kitchen doorsteps sampling the baking.

“How many has he had, Mrs. Emery?” Roy demanded.

“Only one or two, haven’t I, Mrs. Emery?” cried Chub.

“Well, not very many,” responded that lady smilingly.

“Chub Eaton, you’ve had four to my certain knowledge!” exclaimed Harry, who, with a blue-checked apron tied under

her chin and very flushed cheeks, was superintending the frying of a new batch of doughnuts.

“Then you’ve had quite enough,” said Roy firmly. “And it’s back to tennis court for you, Chub.”

However, they postponed the carrying out of the verdict long enough to do some sampling themselves. “They’re perfect,” was Dick’s verdict, “but I miss the almond flavor, Harry.” Whereupon Harry grew very much redder and it was discovered that her mother had never learned of her experiment in adding almond extract to the doughnut recipe the summer before. So Chub told about it and Harry declared that he was too mean for words and shouldn’t have another bite of anything.

The next morning after breakfast the luggage was taken aboard, the doctor’s being largely composed of books and papers, and at ten o’clock all hands were at the landing, Snip being so excited that he was obliged to bark every instant. Doctor Emery pretended that the voyage was to last for months at least and was very solicitous as to the state of the larder. Mrs. Emery, her sister, and John, the gardener and general factotum, were on hand to witness the departure and to wave good-by as the *Slow Poke* nosed her way free of the landing and started off on the second stage of her voyage.

“Good-by, mama!” called Harry from the upper deck, waving a wisp of a handkerchief frantically.

“Good-by!” called Mrs. Emery. “Don’t fall overboard!”

“I won’t,” promised Harry, earnestly.

And then caps and handkerchiefs waved busily until the *Slow Poke* passed around the end of Harry’s Island and the

landing disappeared from view.

“And now,” cried Harry, ecstatically, “we’re really at sea!”



CHAPTER XVI

UNDER THE AWNING

Three idyllic days followed during which the *Slow Poke*, her white paint freshly gleaming in the sunlight, bobbed and courtesied her way up the long reaches of the river. It was wonderful weather for July, pleasantly cool in the mornings and evenings and languorously hot in the middle of the day. Chub still remained nominally master of the ship, but to all intents and purposes the management of affairs had passed into the small, sun-browned hands of Miss Harriet Emery. It was Harry who ordered the lines cast off as soon as breakfast was finished in the morning and who refused to allow them to remain at anchor for more than the barest two hours at dinner-time. Chub predicted sunstrokes for the whole party, but Harry was without mercy. She was on a cruise and her idea of cruising was to keep going. On the second evening she even insisted that they should leave a very comfortable berth and put in two hours of sailing by moonlight. It proved a very pleasant experience, and every one enjoyed it until it became necessary to find a place to spend the night. Then, as the shore was in deep shadow, they had their own troubles with jutting rocks and submerged tree-trunks.

Doctor Emery spent most of his time on the upper deck, reading in the numerous books he had brought; writing on square sheets of paper, and, sometimes, sitting idly in his chair and watching the shore slip by. But he always had a ready smile for whoever happened by, and, on the whole, was quite the cheeriest and most contented of any. The upper deck was a

mighty comfortable place in the middle of the day when, moored or anchored by the river bank, they ate dinner and indulged afterward in what they called a “siesta.” The table was set up there, and, while it was somewhat of a trouble to bring the things up the stairs, it made a fine dining-room. The striped awning fluttered in the breeze, the geraniums were masses of scarlet bloom and the gaily-hued rugs added their quota of color. There were wicker chairs for all, although Dick preferred to lie stretched out on the deck with a cushion under his head. Sometimes during siesta the Doctor fell frankly asleep and snored gently, and the others talked in whispers for fear of awaking him. But Harry was impatient of idleness, and as soon as the two hours were up she insisted on weighing anchor.

Snip would scamper ashore whenever they touched the bank and he had the most wonderfully exciting times of his life. He explored every foot of the ground, pursued real and imaginary scents, and treed mythical bears. Those three days were jolly ones, even if nothing really happened. There was so much to talk about, so many things to relate, that the conversation never languished for a minute. Harry learned to steer after a fashion, learned to tell time by the ship’s clock in the wheel-house, and helped Dick prepare the meals. She made the beds, too, and went religiously around the rooms with a dustcloth every morning in a vain endeavor to find dust.

But on the fourth day Harry’s mania for progress palled. It was a gray morning, foggy and damp. Oddly enough it was the Doctor who first voiced a desire for change.

“I wonder,” he remarked, looking at the unbroken margin of forest which stretched along the shore, “if there is any fishing

to be found about here?”

“I think we could catch something from the tender, sir,” replied Roy.

“I was thinking of trout,” murmured the Doctor. Chub went into the wheel-house and consulted his map.

“There’s a good-sized stream about a mile up,” he announced. “Let’s go and try it.”

“Oh, let’s!” cried Harry. “I never caught a trout.”

“You should have seen the one I caught,” said Chub. “It was a regular whopper. It was as long—”

Roy and Dick groaned.

“I’ve got a picture of it somewhere. I’ll find it.”

“Never mind it now,” said Roy gently. “Try to think of something else, Chub. You see, sir,” addressing the Doctor, “he’s a little bit—er—daffy on the subject of that fish. As a matter of fact, it weighed about ten ounces and—”

“Ten ounces!” howled Chub. “It weighed two pounds! Why, it was the biggest trout you ever saw! I thought first it was a salmon.”

“Suppose we see if we can find another,” said the Doctor with a smile. “I haven’t fished for trout in years. Could I borrow a line from some one?”

“Yes, sir: I’ve lots of them,” said Chub. “And an extra pole. And Dick has a pole Harry can use. Let’s take luncheon with us and make a day of it.”

They did. The stream, which evaded them for the better part

of an hour, held plenty of small trout and the Doctor was as excited as a boy over his first catch. Harry didn't make a good fisherman, for she was too impatient. But they had a good time, even when it drizzled for awhile, and ate their luncheon at noon huddled together in the lee of a big boulder. They returned to the boat in the middle of the afternoon with seventeen small trout. The sun came out soon afterward and made a glorious ending to the day. They fried the fish for supper and the Doctor, who pretended to have personally caught all the largest of the trout, declared that he had never tasted anything finer.

“We might try again some day,” he said tentatively.

The result was that the next morning they chugged four miles further up the river, crossed to the west bank and made a mooring in a particularly attractive little cove. The stream which they had come to fish in flowed into the cove under a wooden bridge, and a few hundred yards below was a small settlement consisting of a village store and a half-dozen houses. Between the road and the river was a small stretch of meadow on one side and a grove of trees on the other.

“What an ideal place!” exclaimed Harry, as she stepped ashore.

Strange to say, however, they appeared to have alighted in a locality quite bare of streams and lakes and nothing on the map looked enticing nearer than a good-sized lake half a day's journey upstream and several miles back from the river. They held a council and decided to try their luck there, the Doctor declaring with enthusiasm that a lake like that ought to have plenty of black bass in it. Chub and Dick had never fished for bass, and that was enough incentive for them. The *Slow Poke*

was put at her best pace and they reached their destination that afternoon. After supper the Doctor regaled them with stories of bass fishing that made their hearts beat high in anticipation of the morrow's sport.

They were up early to secure a full morning's fishing. Everyone went, Snip showing more true enthusiasm than any other member of the expedition. The lake proved a long way off, the road was very hot and very dusty, and after the first mile Harry was trailing along in the rear, with Chub gallantly bearing her company. They were all tired out when they reached the lake and the sight which greeted them there was far from cheering. The lake was large enough, but for fully half a mile around where they stood it was so shallow that rushes grew for hundreds of feet out into the water. The Doctor shook his head dubiously.

“It doesn't look much like a bass lake,” he muttered, “but we'll walk along around that point and see what's there.”

They walked around that point and two more before they found a semblance of deep water. There was nothing in sight in the way of a boat or raft, and at last they tried a few casts from a bank and in the course of half an hour caught five small fish which the Doctor said were crappies. Whatever they were they were not worth carrying home. The only catch of any importance was made by Snip. He found a turtle on the bank and worried it until it closed on his paw. His yelps brought prompt assistance from Chub who pried the turtle's jaws apart and threw it into the lake. Snip stood in the mud and barked for fully five minutes at the place where the turtle had disappeared. At noon they reeled in their lines, packed their poles and went back to the boat, reaching it just before two o'clock, too warm

and tired and disgusted to be hungry. They had a cold luncheon instead of a dinner, and Harry made some iced tea for which they sacrificed the last piece of ice on board. After luncheon Chub strode to the wheel-house and seized his chart with an air of determination.

“I don’t like this place,” he said. “Let’s get out of here as soon as we can.”

That evening they tied up to a little deserted wharf a few miles below Albany, and in the morning chugged on to the capital. They spent that day ashore, shopping and sightseeing, and had dinner at a hotel. They bought gasolene and ice and fresh meat and fruit and vegetables and what Chub called “real milk.” They spent a very hot night there, anchored in the river, and in the morning went on northward until noon.

“I don’t think much of the river up here,” said Dick.

“Well, it isn’t anything to boast of,” Chub replied. “If every one else is willing I say let’s turn and go back.”

Everyone was quite willing and so after dinner was over the boat was headed down-stream. The next day found them moored at the foot of a sloping pasture which ran back and up to a thick forest. The pasture looked as though it might contain berries, and Harry mentioned the fact. Chub pointed out that whether there were berries there or not there were certainly cows. But Harry declared that she wasn’t afraid of any number of cows and so, leaving the Doctor to keep house, they took pails and buckets and set forth. Harry had guessed right and they had no difficulty in filling their pails with blackberries. There were a few blueberries, too, and Roy had a brilliant idea.

“Harry!” he called, “would you like to distinguish yourself?

I've enough blueberries here for a nice big pie. What do you say?"

"She says yes!" cried Chub.

"I haven't said anything," Harry demurred.

"But you're going to, aren't you?" he asked anxiously.

"Do you really want a pie?"

"Want it! My soul craves a blueberry pie, Harry!"

"All right; but if I'm to make it in time for dinner we must go back at once. I do hope it will be a success. I never tried baking in a tin oven," she added loftily.

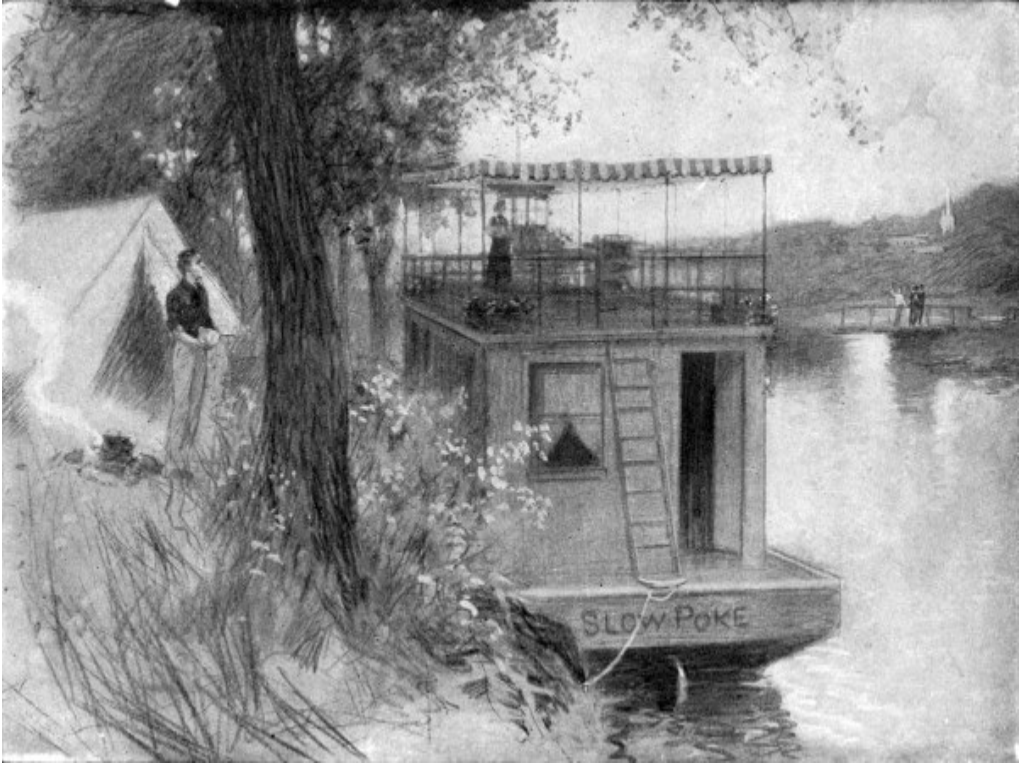
"That's all right," said Dick. "After you've tried it once you'll use no other. Isn't it lucky dinner is our midday meal!"

So they had blueberry pie that day, a good big fat one it was, too. After a short siesta they walked over to the pasture which afforded a fairly good place for kicking and catching, and the boys found the foot-ball which Chub had brought along and had a good hour of fun with it. Snip, too, enjoyed it, chasing the pigskin like a veteran and trying to bite holes in it when he had run it down.

Harry's pie was such a success that there was a loud and insistent demand for more. So she tried one of blackberries and, while it wasn't quite as good as the blueberry, it didn't go begging.

Two days of rain tried their patience, for the upper deck was quite uninhabitable, and staying indoors became dull work after the first few hours. The evenings weren't so bad, for Harry took things in hand then. They had dancing to music

supplied by the talking-machine, they played games and told stories, the Doctor proving a veritable mine of romance. The *Slow Poke* made a few miles each day, but most of the time it remained huddled against a bank as much as possible out of the way of the storm.



[Before noon camp was made at the edge of the grove](#)

The next day the storm passed over, but the weather remained gloomy and chill. The *Slow Poke* put thirty miles behind her between breakfast and supper and life became more cheerful. Just before sunset the clouds broke and a vivid red glow in the northwest promised a fair day on the morrow. That evening the Doctor began to talk of trout again, and Chub brought his map down to the table in the forward cabin and they searched it for likely fishing places. The result was that in the morning they chugged four miles down stream, crossed

over to the west shore, and found a mooring in a charming little sandy cove. The sky was blue again, the river like a great mirror, and the sun shone hot and comforting. The *Slow Poke* lay nestled right up to the bank and a few yards away the stream which they had come to fish in flowed into the cove under an old rickety wooden bridge. Between the road and the water was a grove of trees and a little clearing in which the grass grew knee-deep. Some four hundred yards down-stream huddled a small settlement consisting of a store and a half-dozen white and drab houses under a group of giant elms.

“What a lovely place for a camp,” mused Harry, as the boat was made fast.

“Great!” Chub agreed. “Let’s pitch the tent, fellows, and live ashore for a day or two. Doctor Emery and Harry can stay aboard at night and guard the boat.”

The proposition was received with enthusiasm, and [before noon camp was made at the edge of the grove](#) and Dick was cooking dinner over an open fire. They ate the last of the doughnuts at that meal and Chub was inconsolable until Harry promised to make some more as soon as she could secure the necessary ingredients and a kettle big enough in which to fry them.

“Maybe we can get things at the store down there,” said Chub. “I’ll go and see presently.”



CHAPTER XVII

MRS. URIAH PEEL

The Doctor, Roy, and Dick went up the stream in search of trout, Snip accompanying them, but Chub and Harry elected to stay behind and go shopping. And after the others had taken their departure with poles and tackle they set off for the store. The road ambled across the old wooden bridge, climbed a little hill between high thickets of sumac, and dipped again toward the settlement. From the slope, as they trudged along, they had a view of a wide expanse of farms and orchards with here and there a snug farm-house nestling under its grove of trees. The village, if it really deserved the name, consisted by actual count of seven dwelling-houses and the store. The road they were on continued along the river, while a second road turned from it at right angle in front of the store and wound inland. It was a sleepy little hamlet and the only persons in sight as they reached the corner were an old man half asleep on the tiny porch of a neighboring house and an elderly woman pottering about the garden of another. There was a watering-trough at the edge of the street and three big elms threw a grateful shade over the place.

The store was a one-story affair and at some time in its history had been painted white. At the back a small ell with a side door was evidently the residence of the storekeeper. A brick path led to it between a bed of sweet-william and a row of tall lilac bushes, to which still clung the brown and withered flower spikes. The elms bathed the red brick sidewalk, broken and uneven, and the front of the store in cool green shadow.

Above the narrow doorway, was an ancient sign which proclaimed that “Uriah Peel” dealt in “General Merchandise.” On each side of the door was a shallow bay-window fitted with shelves on which was displayed as heterogeneous a collection of articles as ever came together: pickles, cough syrup, carpet tacks, a jar of stick candy, flatirons, horse liniment, toys, a few paper-covered books, a box of files, women’s shoes, a manicure set in a purple plush case, straw hats, an assortment of ribbons, tin stew-pans and dippers, and a host of other things.



[She tied together the strings of a quaint little black bonnet](#)

“We won’t find anything here that we want,” muttered Chub at the door.

As the door swung open there was a distant tinkling of a bell. The store was empty when they entered, empty and dim

and cool after the sunny road; but in response to the summons of the bell a little woman appeared at the back, entering apparently from the ell. She was one of the tiniest women they had ever seen, and as she hurried toward them [she tied together the strings of a quaint little black bonnet.](#)

“How do you do,” said Harry. “We want to buy an iron kettle if you have one.”

“An iron kettle,” mused the little woman, taking her chin in her hand and looking anxiously about her. “Did you want a very large one?”

She seemed to be about fifty years of age, with a thin comely face and a pleasant voice. Her expression, however, was so troubled and excited that Chub wondered, and Harry hurriedly assured her that just a medium-sized one would do and that if she didn’t have it it didn’t really matter one bit.

“I have some kettles somewhere,” answered the little woman in a flurry, “only I don’t just remember—”

Then she darted behind one of the counters and disappeared from sight while a rattling sound told of frantic search. Harry turned bewilderedly to Chub, and the latter grinned and tapped his forehead eloquently.

“I thought so!” The storekeeper was beaming triumphantly at them across the counter and holding out a very dusty and somewhat rusty iron kettle. It was just what they wanted, Harry declared.

“How much is it, please?”

The little woman turned it bottom up and squinted closely, at last holding it out for their inspection.

“Can you see any figures there?” she asked. “I left my spectacles in the kitchen.”

“Looks like \$7.00,” replied Chub dubiously.

“Oh, then it’s seventy cents,” was the reply. “Uriah always made a cent mark like an ought. Was there anything else, Miss?”

“Well,” said Harry, hesitatingly, “we did want some lard and flour, but—”

“How much lard?”

“Have you a small pail of it?”

“No’m, I haven’t; but I can give you any amount you want. Three or four pounds, Miss?”

“About five, I guess. And have you flour?”

“Yes, indeed.”

And she had sugar, too, and the purchasers began to entertain a new respect for the dingy little store.

“I suppose you don’t live around here,” asked the storekeeper as she bustled excitedly about.

“No, we’re on a boat,” replied Chub.

“I want to know!” was the response. “There was a man in here only last week who came in a boat. He bought a good deal, too, but there was some things he wanted I didn’t have. Would you mind just looking out and seeing if there’s a buggy outside?”

Chub obeyed and reported no buggy in sight. The woman looked anxiously at an old clock and sighed.

“I don’t quite know whether I’m on my head or my heels,” she said with a little apologetic laugh. “I’m just upset to-day.”

They murmured inarticulate sympathy.

“I got a telegraph message from my brother-in-law down to Myersville this morning saying that my sister is real sick and asking me to come down there. And so I’m going to take the four o’clock train.” She glanced again at the clock which said a few minutes before three. “Millie never was very strong and I’m real worried about her. Seems as though he wouldn’t have sent a telegraph message if things wasn’t pretty bad, don’t it? I packed my bag right up and wrote a letter to my niece over in Byers to come and look after the store while I’m gone, but I haven’t seen sight of her yet. I thought she’d be along on that two-twenty train and I sent the Hooper boy down to the station to meet her, and he ain’t back yet. And if he don’t come pretty soon he won’t be in time to take me to the station. Though I don’t know as I’d ought to leave the store until Jennie comes.”

“Is your husband away?” ventured Chub sympathetically.

“He died a year ago last April.”

“Oh!” murmured Chub. “I’m very sorry. I didn’t know—”

“Course you didn’t. I ain’t never had the sign changed yet. Don’t know as I ever will. If business don’t pick up pretty soon I guess I’ll have to close up. Uriah used to do pretty well here when he was alive, but there’s a new store opened down to Washington Hills and folks mostly goes there to buy their things. Is that the buggy?”

“No,” Chub reported. “It hasn’t come yet.”

She looked again at the clock and heaved an audible sigh of

relief.

“Well, everything’s all ready when it does come,” she said. “I suppose you young folks travel a good deal on the trains, but I never have, and I’m always pretty nigh scared to death at the thought of it. There’s always so many accidents in the papers.”

“Have you far to go?” asked Harry. The purchases were all ready and paid for by this time, but neither Harry nor Chub seemed in any hurry to depart.

“‘Bout seventy miles it is. I have to take the train to Jones Point and then the ferry across to Peekskill. I guess I’ll find a carriage waiting for me at the other side. Yes, it’s a good deal of a journey. When Millie was first married it did seem like she was just going right out of the world. But she’s been to see me plenty of times since and I’ve been down to Myersville twice. Millie was visiting me only a little while ago; must be two weeks since she left. Maybe the trip was too much for her. She ain’t as strong as she used to be, and there’s a lot of work about a farm. I guess James is a real good husband to her, but he don’t seem to realize what a sight of work she has to do. Men are like that—mostly. I do wonder why that trifling boy don’t come back?”

She hurried to the front door, opened it, and looked anxiously out.

“Well, I suppose he’ll get back when he’s good and ready. I do hope Jennie can come. If she doesn’t I’ll just have to shut up the store. ’Twon’t make much difference, though, I guess; what’s sold here in two days wouldn’t pay Jennie’s fare across. But I got everything ready if she should come. I marked things plain so’s she can tell how much to ask. I spent about three hours doing it, too.”

She looked proudly about the store and Chub and Harry, their gazes following hers, saw that almost everything in sight had been labeled in some way with the price. Usually small paper bags had been laid upon the article and the figures printed on the bag.

“It must have been a lot of trouble,” murmured Harry.

“So it was, but Jennie hasn’t got enough sense to look after the place if things aren’t marked right out plain. There he is, ain’t he?”

A buggy containing a small, freckled-faced boy drew slowly up at the edge of the sidewalk in front of the store. Mrs. Peel’s face fell.

“Jennie didn’t come!” she exclaimed. “Whatever shall I do? I ought to be starting for the station this very instant. I suppose she’s coming on the next train, but I can’t wait for her. I do think she might have come when I told her, after all the things I’ve done for that girl! But that’s the way of human nature, I suppose! Bennie Hooper, didn’t you see anything of her?”

“No’m,” answered the boy.

“You sure she didn’t get off and you didn’t see her?”

“Didn’t nobody get off,” answered Benny resentfully.

“Well—” Mrs. Peel’s eyes wavered back and forth from the clock to the buggy. “I suppose I’ll just have to shut up the store and leave the key with Martha Hooper. Mrs. Benson was coming in for some onions, but I suppose she’ll have to wait.”

“When does the next train come?” asked Harry solicitously.

“About six. She’s bound to come on that, but—”

“Then you let us watch the store until she comes,” cried Harry. “We’ll be very careful, Mrs. Peel. That is, if you think you’d care to trust us?”

Mrs. Peel’s face had lighted at once.

“You—you wouldn’t mind?” she faltered anxiously. “Jennie’s bound to come on the six o’clock train and I’ll have Bennie wait over there and bring her back. She ought to be here by half-past six. It’s a good deal to ask, especially as you’re strangers to me.”

“We’ll be glad to,” answered Harry promptly. “Won’t we, Chub?” Chub agreed readily.

“Well, I don’t know how to thank you,” fluttered Mrs. Peel. “I just don’t, and that’s a fact. But I’m going to take you at your word. All you’ll have to do is to stay here until she comes and tell her everything’s marked with the price, and that I’ll be back just as soon as I can and will write to-morrow and tell her how Millie is. Now I’ll get my things. You turn that buggy around, Bennie; you know I don’t like to be in it when it’s turned.”

Mrs. Peel shot a rapid look at the clock and hurried away to the little door leading to the living-rooms. When she came back Chub took the old black leather bag from her and put it in the buggy. By this time the little woman’s excitement was intense.

“Tell Jennie the house door is locked on the inside and that she’s to be careful to look out for sparks when she goes to bed because the insurance has run out and I haven’t had time to renew it again. And if Mrs. Benson comes for the onions you see that she pays for ’em, because she owes me two dollars and

eighteen cents already. I didn't leave any money in the till because I had to have it to buy my ticket, but I guess she'll have the right change. I'm very much obliged to you, young lady, and you, sir. And I hope you'll be here when I get back. Benny, you've got your reins crossed; I do wish you'd be a little careful when you know how nervous I am about horses. Did I get my spectacles? Yes, here they are. Go ahead, Bennie, and drive careful. Good-by, Miss! Good-by, sir! Tell Jennie I'll write to-morrow surely. If you like candy there's some in the jars on the shelf back of the counter on the left. Help yourself, Miss. Good-by! Bennie, I guess you'll have to hurry a little."

"Got most forty minutes," growled Bennie.

"Well, I like to be in plenty of time."

"It don't take but fifteen minutes," said Bennie. "Get ap, Cæsar!"

The buggy wobbled around the corner, Mrs. Peel waving an excited black-mittened hand to the two on the sidewalk, and disappeared. Chub and Harry looked at each other and laughed.

"Isn't she a dear!" gasped Harry.

"Funniest ever. Let's go in and look around the shop."



CHAPTER XVIII

KEEPING STORE

It was a queer little store. There was a window on each side of the front door, a window which peeped out onto the tiny side yard and the brick walk, and the sweet-williams, and a window directly opposite which, had the shutters been open, would have given a view of the houses across the road and the river beyond. At the back of the store was a door which led into a good-sized yard extending along the backs of the store and the living house. There were a few bedraggled shrubs here and a row of hollyhocks nodded along a stretch of the high board fence which inclosed the space. A door in the fence, securely padlocked, led onto the road. For the most part the back yard was given over to barrels and packing cases, but in one corner a tiny shed housed two green tanks labeled respectively “Gasolene” and “Kerosine.”

From the store to the dwelling-house the way led up a step and through a door near the back of the store. This door was open and Chub and Harry allowed themselves a glimpse of a narrow and dim hallway with a door at the far end. But this was not their territory and they didn't intrude. Besides, there was plenty to see in the shop part.

There was a wooden counter along each side on which rested here and there funny old-fashioned show-cases with mirrors at their backs. One case held pocket-knives sitting enticingly on their little green boxes, fish-hooks, lead sinkers, a solitary pair of pruning-shears, a horn-handled carving-knife

and fork, scissors, thimbles, and knitting-needles. Another case showed ribbons, lace, edgings, and similar goods. Back of the counters there were narrow aisles, and beyond the aisles were shelves. On these were dry goods, groceries, patent medicines, cheap straw hats and woolen caps, overalls and jumpers, tinware, woodenware, and crockery. Down the center of the store, between the two counters, leaving an aisle on either side, stood barrels and boxes, tubs and pails, plowshares and bags of fertilizer, rakes and hoes and shovels and brooms, bristling from otherwise empty barrels, and potatoes and onions. There were jars of striped pink and white candy on the shelves and in the window, a few toys—paper kites, marbles, and tops scattered around in various places and—oh, heaps of other things besides.

“Talk about your department stores!” exclaimed Chub. “Isn’t this palatial!”

“She said we might have some candy,” said Harry, standing on tiptoe and looking dubiously into one of the jars, “but I don’t believe it is very nice, do you?”

“I do not!” replied Chub decisively. “But, I think I’ll buy a pair of these beautiful brown overalls for Dick. He’s got oil and grease on every pair of trousers he has with him. He’d look perfectly swell in them, wouldn’t he?” And Chub held up the garments in question. They looked at least six feet long and correspondingly broad, and Harry giggled as she mentally pictured Dick in them.

“Chub, you must fold them up nicely again,” she commanded, “and put them back just where you found them.”

“Don’t you worry,” Chub responded. “I’m the neat little storekeeper, I am.” He continued his investigations, peering

into boxes and barrels and having a thoroughly enjoyable time. “Harry, here’s some real old-style brown sugar like grandmother used to have; remember it? It’s great! Have some?”

Harry had some, nibbling it out of the little tin scoop.

“But we must pay for it, Chub,” she said anxiously.

“Oh, we’ll take this instead of the candy,” Chub replied. “And look here, here’s some dried apricots. My, but I’m glad I came!”

“Chub, you mustn’t take things!” cried Harry.

“What, just a few old apricots?”

“No, not unless you pay for them.”

“How much?” asked Chub with a grin. Harry examined the end of the box.

“Well, they’re fifteen cents a pound. How many did you take?”

“Six.”

“Then I should think you ought to pay about a cent.”

“Very well.” Chub fished in his pocket and found the required sum. “What do I do with it?”

“Put it in the till. And we’ll keep a record of everything that’s sold.” Harry found a paper bag and a pencil and wrote:

“Six Dried Apricots \$.01”

“There now, that’s very businesslike, isn’t it?” she asked. “We’ll put down everything we sell.”

“I think it won’t be much trouble,” Chub answered as he pulled open the little till drawer under the counter and dropped his penny in. “We may be the only ones to buy anything. I wonder if she has any prunes.”

He went on with his investigation and Harry wandered back to the front of the store. When Chub joined her a few minutes later she was seated in one of the two old arm-chairs which stood by the open door deeply immersed in a book.

“What you got?” asked Chub, looking over her shoulder. “My! ‘Little Goldie’s Vow!’ Where’d you get it? Is it good?”

“Fine! I found it in the window. There are some more there. It’s awfully exciting.”

“I dare say,” replied Chub, “but I don’t believe I ought to let you read such things, Harry. That’s just trash.”

“You haven’t read it,” answered Harry rebelliously.

“I don’t need to; the title’s enough. You know your mother wouldn’t want you to read such things.”

“Well,” sighed Harry. “But please mayn’t I just finish this chapter, Chub? It’s all about a beautiful girl named Jessica and —”

“Thought her name was Little Goldie,” sniffed Chub.

“Oh, that’s just a nickname that the hero gave her on account of her wonderful golden tresses. And there’s another girl in it named Alice; she’s the villain—no, villainess—and a perfectly fascinating man with beautiful gray eyes and—”

“What’s his name? Tom?”

“Of course not!” exclaimed Harry contemptuously. “His

name is Reginald Forrest. At least, that's what he calls himself, but of course he's an earl or a lord or something in disguise."

"How do you know?" asked Chub.

"Oh, they always are."

"Huh! Seems to me you know a good deal about novels, young lady!"

Harry looked a trifle embarrassed.

"Well, sometimes—at school—the girls would bring them to read at recess," she explained, "and I borrowed one once—"

"Once?" demanded Chub sternly.

"Once or twice," laughed Harry.

"I'm afraid you have a very bad taste for literature," said Chub severely. "And I don't believe I ought to let you go on. I'll have another look for the prunes." But his search was unsuccessful and presently he was back at the doorway. Harry was still deeply absorbed, and so for awhile Chub studied the landscape. But there wasn't much to see until, after awhile, a woman in a brown calico dress turned the corner and came toward him.

"Look out, Harry!" he whispered. "Here's a customer!"

The woman, who had a very unattractive aspect, glanced at Chub curiously and walked past him into the store.

"Where's Mrs. Peel?" she demanded of Harry.

"She's gone away to visit her sister, who is ill at—at somewhere down the river. She's left us in charge of the store until her niece comes. Can I do anything for you?"

“Humph!” said the woman. “She always was crazy. Well, I want two quarts of onions, but I guess I can get them myself, young lady.”

“Oh, Chub will serve you,” said Harry, sweetly. “Chub, please measure two quarts of onions for this lady.”

“Yes, ma’am,” replied Chub. He got a paper sack and found the wooden measure. “Two quarts, madam?”

“That’s what I said,” replied the woman, sourly. “And I don’t want all the little runts there are, either. Mr. Benson said last week that he never seen meaner-lookin’ onions than what I got here.”

“Oh, I think these will suit you,” said Chub, filling the measure. “Let me see now.” Chub studied the figures on the paper bag which lay on top of the basket. “Two quarts will be sixty cents, madam.”

“Sixty cents!” almost shrieked the woman. “You must be crazy. I never paid more than five cents a quart in all my born days!”

Chub looked inquiringly at Harry.

“What is the price on them, Chub?” she asked.

“It says thirty cents, and two quarts at thirty cents—”

“Thirty cents a peck, you stupid!” said the woman.

“It doesn’t say so,” Chub demurred doubtfully.

“It doesn’t say whether they’re thirty cents a pint or thirty cents a bushel,” answered the customer, acidly, “but onions are always sold by the peck.”

“Well, maybe you’re right,” said Chub. “So if you’ll take a peck we’ll call it thirty cents—”

“I don’t want a peck. Who ever heard of any one buying a whole peck of onions at once?”

“But you just said that they are always sold by the peck, and if that’s so—”

“I meant they were always *priced* by the peck, and if you had the sense of a goose you’d know something about it!”

“I think she must be right, Chub,” observed Harry. “Thirty cents sounds an awful lot for onions.”

“Well, all right,” answered Chub, cheerfully. “Thirty cents a peck it is, Mrs. Bronson.”

“My name’s Benson,” replied the woman, tartly. “I hope for Mrs. Peel’s sake that her niece will come soon.” She held out her hand for the onions. “These go down to my account.”

“Sorry,” returned Chub, “but Mrs. Peel told us explicitly to sell only for cash.”

“But I tell you I have my things charged!” said the customer, warmly.

“I don’t doubt it, madam, but as Mrs. Peel would prefer to have the money, I’ll have to do it.”

“Well, I never heard of anything so idiotic! You give me those onions, or I’ll send Mr. Benson over here to talk to you, you young jackanapes.”

“I shall be very glad to hear Mr. Benson if he talks interestingly,” replied Chub, sweetly. “But if he wants the onions he will have to bring eight cents with him.”

Mrs. Benson looked wrathfully from Chub to the bag of onions and wrathfully from the bag of onions to Harry.

“You ain’t going to let me have them?” she demanded.

“I shall be glad to, if you’ll pay cash,” replied Chub. “But Mrs. Peel, I am sure—”

“She’ll rue the day she left you young ninnies in charge here,” interrupted Mrs. Benson, as she flung herself out of the store. “I was never so insulted in all my born days! You wait until Mr. Benson hears of this! You just wait!”

“Phew!” breathed Chub, as he set the bag of onions down. “She has a horrid disposition, hasn’t she?”

“Maybe,” said Harry, uneasily, “we ought to have let her have them. We wouldn’t want Mrs. Peel to lose a customer, would we?”

“The loss of that sort of a customer wouldn’t hurt much,” returned Chub. “Too bad we couldn’t make a sale, though. That cash drawer looks mighty empty. Hello! there goes an automobile. Did you see it?”

“Yes. Do you—do you suppose she’ll send her husband over?”

“Can’t say,” answered Chub, carelessly.

“But he might be angry and make trouble.”

“Let him try it,” said Chub, grimly. “I’ll take care of him if he tries to make a fuss.”

At that moment a form appeared at the door.

“Maybe it’s Mr. Benson,” muttered Chub, as he strolled to

meet him.

The newcomer was a little wisp of a man, with a nervous smile and a diffident manner and a thin, high-pitched voice.

“Good afternoon,” said Chub, affably.

“Good afternoon, sir, good afternoon,” squeaked Mr. Benson. “Nice weather for the time of year.”

“Some of the best,” answered Chub, cheerfully. “Can I do anything for you, sir?”

“Er—if you please. My wife sent me over for—for two quarts of onions. She—she was over awhile back and didn’t have the money with her.” He placed eight cents on the counter and smiled ingratiatingly, rubbing his hands nervously together.

“Right here,” said Chub, handing him the bag. “Eight cents; quite correct, thank you. Nothing else to-day?”

“N-nothing else, thank you. Good afternoon.”

“Good afternoon, Mr. Benson.”

When he had gone, Chub sank into a chair and burst out laughing.

“He leads a merry life, Harry,” he gasped. “Wouldn’t I just love to be Mrs. Benson’s husband!”

“It’s too bad to laugh at him,” replied Harry, suppressing her own smiles. “He looked like a very nice old man.”

“Yes, but I wouldn’t be in his boots for a fortune. Let’s put the money away. That’s sale number two. At this rate we’ll make Mrs. Peel rich before Jennie comes.”

Harry deposited the coins in the till and made another entry on her record:

2 quarts of onions .08

Then she went back to her book, and Chub took the chair at the other side of the open door and watched her a while. Presently, "I say, Harry," he asked, "what's the price of that book?"

"Ten cents," she answered, glancing at the cover.

"Are you going to read it through?"

"I—I don't know. Do you think I oughtn't to, Chub?"

"Suit yourself," answered Chub, with a shrug of his shoulders. "I was just wondering whether you could afford to read it."

"Afford to?" asked Harry. "What do you mean?"

"Well, it's a ten-cent book, isn't it?"

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Do you think I ought to pay for it?"

"Why not? You're getting the use of it, aren't you? It's just the same as though you took it away with you."

"Why, no, because I'll put it back in the window and Mrs. Peel can sell it again."

"Yes, but if you took it you'd throw it away after you were through with it. It isn't any good to you after you've read it, you see. How much have you read so far?"

"Pretty nearly a third."

"Well, we will call it three cents' worth if you stop now."

“But—but I haven’t any money with me, Chub!”

“That’s all right. I’ll lend it to you.”

“Well, couldn’t you—couldn’t you lend me ten cents just as well?”

“No.” Chub shook his head. “I couldn’t trust you for so much. If you read any more you’ll have to go and get the money before Jennie comes.”

“Chub, I think you’re just horrid!” cried Harry, vexedly.

Chub only grinned. Harry looked hesitatingly at the book for a moment, and then closed it regretfully and placed it back in the window. Chub counted out three coppers and dropped them into her hand, and she placed them in the till. Then she made another entry on the paper bag as follows:

One third of “Little Goldie’s Vow” .03

After that they drew their chairs to the doorway and sat and looked out across the quiet, shaded street.

There wasn’t much of interest to look at—a cat washing its face on the side porch of the little white house opposite, a sparkle of blue where the river was visible between the branches of a tree and the corner of a house on the other street, a couple of pigeons parading about in the road. Twice an old man went by trundling a wheelbarrow, and twice automobiles flashed along northward on the river road.

“Wonder what time it is,” murmured Chub after a while, as he drew his watch out. “Hello, almost six! I wonder if one of us hadn’t better go back to the boat and tell the rest what’s happened to us. Maybe they’ll be worried.”

“I’ll go,” said Harry. “And I’ll tell them we can’t be back until half-past six, so that they will keep supper for us.”

“All right,” answered Chub, “if you don’t mind. I’ll keep store. When did she say that train was due?”

“About six, I think. She said Jennie would surely be here by half-past.”

“Well, only three-quarters of an hour more, then. Run along and tell them. And you don’t have to come back, Harry, unless you want to.”

“Oh, but I do! I won’t be more than ten minutes, Chub.”

“Take your time,” answered Chub, magnanimously. “I sha’n’t be overworked, I guess.” He settled down comfortably in his chair and watched Harry disappear around the corner. “My, but this is an exciting town!” he muttered. “I wish that cat would fall off the porch, or something else would happen.” But nothing did, and presently Harry was back again, and the clock at the back of the store struck six in wheezy tones. The sun was getting low, and long shafts of amber light swept down the road that wound up the hill toward the west. A train whistled in the distance.

“That’s Jennie,” said Chub. “Bennie will be along pretty soon now; Cæsar and Bennie and Jennie. I’m getting awfully hungry. Do you remember any of the messages Mrs. Peel left for Jennie?”

Harry did, and to prove it she enumerated them. Chub applauded her memory.

“All I remember,” he said, “was something about sparks.”

It was almost twenty minutes later when the white horse and

the dilapidated buggy rattled around the corner and pulled up for a moment in front of the watering-trough. In the buggy sat Bennie and no one else. He grinned joyously.

“She didn’t come,” he announced. “Get ap!”

“Hold on!” cried Chub, hurrying to the curb. “Are you sure she wasn’t on the train?”

“Course I am.”

“Didn’t she send any—any message or anything?”

“No, not that I know of.”

“When is the next train?”

“’Bout ’leven o’clock, I guess. Get ap.”

“Well, now what are we going to do?” demanded Chub, as the white horse ambled away again. Harry shook her head.

“I’d like to tell Jennie what I think of her,” said Chub aggrievedly. “Nice way for her to act. We can’t sit here until eleven o’clock and wait for her. We’ll just have to shut up shop.”

“But how will she get into the house?” asked Harry.

“I don’t know.” Chub frowned thoughtfully at the crumbling bricks.

“I suppose we might leave the key across the street and pin a note on the door telling her to go there and get it. I guess that’s all we can do, eh?”

Harry agreed that it was. So they saw to the fastenings of the window, took their iron kettle into which were packed their other purchases, wrote a line on a paper bag, and locked the

door behind them. Then Harry supplied a pin, and Chub posted the note, which read:

JENNIE: The key to the store is at the white house right across the street.

At the white house they had some difficulty in explaining their errand to an elderly woman who was very deaf and very suspicious, but finally they accomplished it and went off, leaving the key in her hands.

“There’s a chance that Jennie won’t be able to make that old woman understand what she wants,” growled Chub. “Jennie may have to sleep on the sidewalk to-night. Well, we’ve done what we could.”

“And then maybe she won’t come at all,” said Harry, hopefully.

“What good will that do?” Chub asked.

“Why, then we can keep store again to-morrow. Wouldn’t you just love to?”

“H’m,” said Chub, doubtfully.



CHAPTER XIX

A MIDNIGHT ALARM

When they reached camp and the *Slow Poke*, Dick and Roy were busy about the fire, while Dr. Emery, in a pair of old gray knicker-bockers and a blue flannel shirt, was cleaning fish on a stone at the edge of the water.

“Look here at this one, Chub!” called the doctor, proudly, as he held one of his trophies up by its tail.

Chub examined it with interest and had to acknowledge that it was pretty nearly as big as his own famous fish.

“You didn’t get so very many, though, did you?” he asked.

“No,” answered the doctor, “we didn’t. I don’t believe it’s a very good stream any longer. About fished out, I think. There’s a large summer boarding-house up there, about a mile in, and then we came across a good-sized camp of Gypsies. They’re fond of fishing and pretty skilful, too. But Roy says the map shows another stream to the north that we might try. That is, if we cared to stay here another day.”

“Oh, I think we’d better stay a day or two longer,” Chub replied. “It’s such a dandy camping-site, doctor, don’t you think?”

The doctor decapitated a trout deftly and replied with enthusiasm that he did. Chub smiled as he watched him and remembered when even to have stood in such close proximity with the doctor would have filled him with vast uneasiness.

The doctor had been a good deal in the sun to-day, and the end of his nose was scarlet, while other little patches of the same shade were spread above his eyes and on his cheeks.

“You’ll be needing some cold cream to-night, sir,” Chub said. “You’re burned.”

The doctor felt of his nose gingerly. “It—it’s quite tender to the touch,” he said wonderingly. “I had no idea the sun was so hot. There, that’s the last one. All ready, Dick. Will you bring the pan over here, or shall I—”

“I’ll get it, sir,” said Chub.

Twenty minutes later they were seated around the table—just a yard-square piece of white oil-cloth spread over the grass between the river bank and the tent. It wasn’t the most even table in the world, and Dick unfortunately set the coffee-pot down on a place where it managed to topple over when no one was watching it. That necessitated a new brew. But they were all hungry and happy, as one generally is out of doors under the trees and the sky, and the fiasco was only a matter for laughter.

“See that hump, Dick?” asked Chub, gravely.

There was much to talk about. Dr. Emery and Roy and Dick had their fishing adventures to narrate, and Harry and Chub must tell about Mrs. Peel and the store, and Bennie, and Mrs. Benson and her awe-inspiring husband. Dick was especially eloquent on the subject of the Gypsies whose camp they had passed in returning from the fishing-site.

“There were dozens of them, Chub, and they had the dandiest wagons you ever saw. Painted up like circus wagons, they were. And there were about ten horses there. We saw the

queen, too, Harry. She was sitting in the door of her tent, the biggest one of all, it was, and braiding sweet-grass; making baskets, I guess; there were a lot of them hanging around camp.”

“I thought the queens never did any work,” Chub objected.

“I don’t know. I never saw but one band of Gypsies before; we don’t have ’em out West much.”

“There was one young fellow,” said Roy, “that wasn’t any darker than I am. Dick insists that he is a white person and was stolen when a child.”

“Well, he might have been,” said Dick. “You read about such things.”

“In books,” added Chub—“books like ‘Little Goldie’s Vow,’ you know.”

“What’s that?” asked Roy.

Chub darted a glance at Harry’s disturbed countenance and shook his head.

“Nothing that you should know about, Roy. It’s a novel. When you’re a few years older—”

But Roy threatened him with the contents of his tin cup, and Chub ceased. After supper was over and the things cleaned up they went back to the boat and climbed to the upper deck. The breeze, which had mitigated the heat during the day, had died down, and it was cooler here than on shore. It was dark by the time they settled down, and Dick brought up a half-dozen Japanese lanterns and strung them along the awning rods. When the candles were lighted they threw quite a radiance over the scene.

“It’s just like a party,” said Harry. “Let’s play games!”

“Anything but ‘going to Jerusalem,’” said Chub, drowsily, from where he was stretched out in his chair. “I don’t feel that I am able to walk that far to-night.”

“We’ll play ‘fish, flesh, or fowl,’” said Harry, “and I’m ‘it.’”

“You always are ‘it,’” said Chub gallantly.

“Papa, you draw your chair over that way more,” said Harry, ignoring Chub’s compliment. “We must sit in a circle. Come, Chub.”

“I’ll try,” Chub murmured. “It sounds a bit difficult, though, sitting in a circle. How’s this, Harry?”

“Oh, Chub, don’t be so silly,” Harry laughed. “Put your feet down and behave. Now I’ll begin. The first one that doesn’t answer correctly must take my place.” The deck was soon ringing with laughter, for, of course, some funny things happened. As when Harry, suddenly poising in front of Chub, exclaimed:

“Fowl! One, two, three—”

“*What?*” exclaimed Chub, with a jump.

“Four, five, six—”

“Er—er—”

“Seven, eight, nine—”

“Bullfrog!”

“You’re ‘it!’” cried Harry. “A bullfrog isn’t a fowl.”

Chub strove to temporize.

“Did you say fowl? Are you sure?”

“Go ahead, Chub, she caught you,” said Roy “Be game!”

“That isn’t fair,” grumbled Chub. “Of course a bullfrog isn’t exactly a fowl, but everybody knows that frog legs taste just exactly like chicken, and so—”

“Get up, get up, you lazy duffer!” cried Dick.

Chub got up and fixed Dick with a malevolent scowl. Then he walked over to him and remarked conversationally:

“Fish! One, two, three, four, seven, ten!”

“Here! You didn’t count right!” objected Dick.

“Here, now!” said Chub, contemptuously. “That’s right, try to get out of it!”

But Dick got up and immediately caught the doctor, who gazed blankly at him while he counted the fateful ten. Harry clapped her hands delightedly.

“Papa’s ‘it’!” she cried. “Now we’ll have some fun!”

The doctor got up and surveyed the four laughing faces anxiously.

“Let me see, now; what is it I say?” They explained it to him, and he made for Harry.

“I’m a fish!” he cried. “One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve thirteen, fourteen—”

He might have been counting yet had not they stopped him, for Harry had gone off into a gale of laughter and was quite incapable of words.

“You mustn’t say ‘I’m a fish,’” she explained finally. “You

just say ‘fish.’ And you must only count to ten, papa.”

“Oh! Then I’ll try again,” answered the doctor, cheerfully. He fixed Harry with a stern look and said:

“Fish! One, two—”

“Flounder!” cried Harry.

“Three, four, five, six—”

“But I said it!” Harry cried. “You mustn’t count any more.”

“Oh, then what must I do now?”

“You must try again until you catch some one. Try Dick.”

So the doctor tried Dick with no better result, and then Roy and finally Chub.

“You mustn’t say ‘fish’ every time,” Harry explained. “If you do, we know what to expect. Try ‘fowl’ or ‘flesh.’” But the doctor shook his head.

“I guess I’d better stick to fish,” he replied. “I can remember that. Besides, I’m fond of fish.”

Finally Chub took pity on him and allowed himself to be caught, and the doctor sank gratefully into his chair, sighing with relief and mopping his face with his handkerchief. They tried other games after that and kept up the fun until the clock in the wheel-house warned them that it was past bedtime. The doctor and Harry slept on the boat, but the boys sought the tent on shore. The moon came up while they were getting ready for bed, and with it came a fresh breeze out of the southwest, which, according to Chub, “just filled the bill.” At all events, it made the tent a much more comfortable sleeping-place, and it wasn’t very long before they were all slumbering.

If Chub was first asleep, he was likewise the first of the three to awake. He sat bolt upright, staring through the gray door of the tent. The sky had clouded over, and the moonlight no longer made the night radiant. Chub wondered what had awakened him, and even as he wondered the answer came to him in a shrill, frightened cry from the house-boat:

“Papa! Chub! Help!”

It was Harry’s voice, and Chub was out of the tent in an instant, with a whoop of reassurance. The world was gray-black, and objects were only dimly discernible. But he knew the way to the boat well enough, and went hurrying, stumbling over the grass and through the little bushes. As he went, a light sprang into view somewhere aboard, Snip barked loudly, and at the same moment he collided with a figure on the bank.

“Who’s that?” called Chub. “What’s the matter?”



[The figure disappeared noiselessly into the night](#)

There was no response, and [the figure disappeared noiselessly into the night](#). Then a white-clad figure appeared at the edge of the boat, and the doctor's voice said:

“Dick! Chub! Are you there?”

“Yes, sir,” answered Chub, scrambling aboard. “What’s up?”

“Harry had a fright,” replied the doctor, calmly. “I fancy she was only dreaming, but she says she awoke and saw some one at her window on the other side of the boat. But I heard no one until you came.”

“I did,” answered Chub, looking regretfully back. “I ran into some one just before you called. I asked who it was, and got no answer.”

By that time Dick and Roy, who had hastily put on some clothes, though still half asleep, had joined them, questioning excitedly.

“Let’s get something on and have a look around,” suggested Roy when the doctor had told his story again. So they hurried back to the tent and drew on coats and trousers, while the doctor returned to Harry again.

When they returned to the boat, Harry had joined the doctor in the forward cabin. She had slipped on a blue kimono and was seated on the window-seat, with her feet tucked under her, still rather pale of face, but trying to smile.

“I don’t know what waked me up,” she said. “But suddenly I was sitting up in bed and looking at the little window. At first I didn’t see anything, and then a man’s head and shoulders appeared. I could see him against the gray sky; just for a minute, for I let out an awful screech, and the man disappeared just like that!” And Harry snapped her small fingers. “Papa says I dreamed it, but I didn’t, really; I was wide awake!”

The doctor shot a warning glance at the boys, and Chub, who had opened his mouth, shut it again quickly.

“Well, dreams seem very real sometimes,” said the doctor, soothingly. “And even if there was any one there, I guess he was just looking around. I don’t believe he stole anything.”

“We’ll soon see,” said Chub, as he moved toward the door. “Anyhow, don’t you worry about it now, Harry. He’s gone by this time. I shouldn’t be surprised if he was as scared as you were when you screamed! Whew! it brought me up in bed like a shock of electricity!”

Harry laughed nervously.

“I—I think I’ll sleep in here with you, papa,” she said. The doctor smiled and looked at his watch.

“Well, I think we won’t have to do much more sleeping,” said the doctor. “It’s after four o’clock. You lie down, Harry, and try to go to sleep again. The boys and I will look around a little and see if we can see any hoof-marks from your nightmare.”

“You won’t go far?” asked Harry, anxiously.

“No, no, I won’t leave the boat,” he answered.

“I’m awfully sorry I woke everybody up,” said Harry, apologetically. “I suppose it was terribly silly of me, but I was so—so startled—”

“Shucks,” said Roy, “we don’t mind. It’s rather a lark.”

“Yes,” said Chub, “it’s what is known as rising with the lark.”

Harry laughed quite naturally at that, and they left her to go over the boat and see if the early morning marauder had taken anything off with him. They found signs of his presence as

soon as they reached the after cabin, for burnt matches were scattered about the floor, and three cans of peaches had been moved from the galley to Dick's bed.

“Evidently meant to take these with him and got scared off,” said Dick.

“Maybe he meant to take bed and all,” Chub suggested. “Let's look in the engine-room and see if he's left the engine.”

They poked around for a while longer with their lanterns, but found no further evidences. By that time the sky was brightening in the east, and Roy suggested that, instead of going back to bed, they have an early breakfast and go fishing before it got hot. Even the doctor agreed enthusiastically to the proposition, and, still discussing and conjecturing, they returned to the tent. They had breakfast at a quarter to six. Harry was not on hand. She had fallen asleep again, and they didn't disturb her. Roy volunteered to stay behind and keep her company, and at half-past six the others set out merrily to try the new stream. Roy cleaned up the breakfast things, keeping Harry's repast warm at the back of the fire. Then adding fresh fuel, he climbed to the upper deck of the boat and made himself comfortable with a magazine. Harry appeared at half-past seven, looking none the worse for her interrupted slumbers.

“Well, any more nightmares?” asked Roy, cheerfully. Harry shook her head smilingly.

“No, but I don't think it was a nightmare, Roy,” she answered. She seemed, however, less certain about it than before. Perhaps she wanted to believe in the dream theory as much as any one. Roy served breakfast to her and stood by attentively with a dish-towel over his arm, suggesting

respectfully, [“A little more of the hegg, ma’am?”](#) or “Another cup of coffee, ma’am?” Then, when Harry had finished, they washed the rest of the dishes very merrily and tidied up the camp and the boat. Harry wanted very much to walk over to the store and find out whether Jennie had arrived, but, as it had been agreed that the boat was not to be left unguarded, Roy couldn’t accompany her, and she preferred not to go alone. Roy was all for returning to his chair on deck and his magazine, but Harry wouldn’t allow it. The flower-boxes, she declared, were greatly in need of water; and so Roy worked hard for a time with a pail and a dipper, Harry superintending his labors. When the last dipperful had been distributed, Roy set down the pail with a sigh of relief and looked ingratiatingly at Harry. But the spirit of unrest still possessed that young lady, and after a moment of thought her brow cleared, and she cried:

“Now we’ll make some doughnuts!”

“Will we?” asked Roy, without enthusiasm.

“Yes; Chub and I got everything yesterday. It’ll be lots of fun, and the others will be so surprised when they come home and find doughnuts for dinner. Chub is so fond of them!”

“Yes, and that’s what makes it seem kind of mean of me to help,” said Roy, earnestly. “He’d love to be here, you know. Suppose we wait until he can help?”

“Oh, he won’t mind,” answered Harry lightly. “He’d much rather eat them than make them.”



[“A little more of the hegg, ma’am?”](#)

“So would I,” thought Roy. But he didn’t say so. Instead, he followed Harry down to the galley with a sigh which this time didn’t suggest relief. For the next two hours there were great doings. Harry, with numerous towels pinned about her in lieu

of an apron, and Roy, with his coat off and his sleeves tucked above his elbows, measured and mixed and beat; at least, Harry did; Roy stood by and did what he was told, but the tasks which fell to him were menial in the extreme. In spite of the limitations of space and utensils, the frying was a big success, and, as Roy was allowed to help himself to the sizzling, hot doughnuts as soon as they were sugared, he regained some degree of happiness.

“There!” exclaimed Harry, when the last batch was being powdered with sugar from an improvised shaker which Roy had fashioned from a baking-powder tin by punching holes in the lid. “That makes eight dozen and three. And then you ate—how many, Roy?”

“Five,” answered Roy, promptly and unblushingly.

“Roy Porter! You won’t have any appetite for dinner!”

“Don’t worry,” Roy laughed. “As long as you’re around I guess I’ll manage to work up an appetite. I suppose we’d better dust the river next or trim the trees.”

“You’re just too lazy for anything,” laughed Harry. “For goodness’ sake go and sit down.”

“Not for worlds!” he said indignantly. “I can’t bear to be idle. I shall fish from the tender. Want to come along?”

Harry did, so they scrambled into the little boat with a few worms and a couple of lines, and rowed a little way into the stream.

“We mustn’t go very far away,” said Harry, “in case—”

“Your nightmare came back,” teased Roy.

“Do you think it was that?” she asked anxiously.

“Don’t you?” he answered evasively.

“I don’t know. Maybe. But it didn’t seem like a dream.”

“Lots of dreams don’t. Hand me the bait-can, please.”

They fished for nearly an hour without having even a nibble, and then rowed disgustedly back to the boat. Shortly before noon the rest of the party returned almost empty-handed. The doctor had landed three small trout, Chub two, and Dick none.

“The stream’s too small,” said the doctor. “To-morrow—” he hesitated—“if we’re still here, we’ll try the first stream and go higher up.”

“Did you see our friends the Gypsies?” asked Roy.

“All over the shop,” answered Chub. “We met two fishing and passed a couple more about ten minutes ago. They had two gunny-sacks on their backs, and I’ll bet they’d been stealing things. Get busy with dinner, Dick; I’m almost dead, I’m so hungry. This early breakfast business won’t do.”

When the meal was ready, Chub let out a howl of delight.

“Doughnuts!” he shouted. “Hooray! Where’d you get ’em?”

“Made them, of course,” replied Roy, loftily. “Harry assisted me. She’s real handy about the kitchen. I don’t know what I’d have done without her.”

“Huh!” said Chub. “She could have done without you, Roy. You ate more than she made.”

“Roy did beautifully,” Harry said. “I couldn’t have got along without him.”

Roy bowed impressively, and Chub grunted in derision. But the latter had to acknowledge that the doughnuts couldn't have been better even without Roy's interference.

Dinner over, Harry declared that they must go to the store and make certain that Jennie had arrived.

"We'll all go," said Dick. "I want to see your old store."

The doctor elected to stay at home and do some work, and they left him on the upper deck, immersed in his books, with a fountain pen clasped tightly between his teeth, and his pad of paper on his knee.

"I think," laughed Roy, "that any one could come along and steal everything out of the boat without the doctor knowing anything about it."

"Sure they could," Chub agreed. "But no one will come around when they see him there."

When they came in sight of the store, Harry gave out a cry of distress.

"There's nobody there!" she exclaimed. "It's all closed up! She never came."

"Well," murmured Chub, sorrowfully, "I never did have much faith in Jennie."

"I guess we might as well go back, then," said Dick.

"Nothing of the sort!" returned Harry, determinedly. "We'll get the key and open the store. Mrs. Peel left us in charge, and it's our duty to do it. Why, just think of all the money we may have missed already to-day! It's a perfect shame, Chub."

"I know; thousands of dollars, likely." Chub shook his head

gloomily. “Maybe we’ll have to go into bankruptcy. You run over and get the key, Harry.” But Harry shook her head in distress.

“Oh, I couldn’t, Chub. I never could make her hear me. You go.”

“Well,” answered Chub, “I’ll do my best, but my voice isn’t very strong to-day.” He crossed the road toward the little cottage.



CHAPTER XX

“GASOLINE AND SUPPLIES”

Chub mounted the porch and tapped with the iron knocker, while the rest waited and watched on the other side of the empty street. After a while he tapped again, and after a longer while the door opened and the same old lady peered out, her spectacles astride the tip of her nose. Harry and Roy and Dick heard the conversation begin, saw the old lady lean forward and place a hand behind one ear, and saw Chub nerve himself for a new effort. After that they heard every word beautifully.

“I called for the key of the store,” said Chub, loudly.

“Nothing to-day,” replied the old lady, starting to close the door. Chub deftly introduced one knee between the door and the frame.

“You don’t understand! [I want the key of the store!](#)” He pointed across the street. “Mrs. Peel’s store!”

The old lady shaded her eyes and peered across at the waiting group.

“Feels sore, does he? Which one is it? How’d he do it?”

“He didn’t! I mean—Look here, ma’am, I want the key we left here last night! The key! *Key!*”

“Key?” asked the old lady mildly.

“Yes’m.” They could almost hear Chub’s sigh of relief. “We’re going to open the store. Mrs. Peel’s niece didn’t come.”

“You want the key?”

“Yes’m, please.”

“Are you the gentleman who left it here?”

“Yes’m.”

“What say?”

“*Yes, ma’am!*”

“Well, don’t yell so. I’m a little deaf, but I don’t have to be yelled at, young man.”

“No’m.”

“Eh? What say?”

“*It’s a nice day!*” bawled Chub, desperately.

“Yes, yes, I’m a-going for it. Ain’t any sense being so impatient. Sit down and wait a minute. I don’t remember just where I put it.”

Chub retired to the railing and wiped his brow, while the old lady carefully closed and locked the door. Across the street the others were struggling with their laughter.

“Did you make her hear?” asked Dick, softly. Chub made a gesture of despair and felt of his throat gingerly. Presently the door opened again and the old lady held out the key.

“When’s she coming back?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” replied Chub. “I haven’t heard.”

“Third? Not till then? You going to keep store for her?”

“Just for to-day, I guess,” answered Chub, wearily.

“Eh? I can’t hear you. You don’t talk plain. She ain’t sold out, has she?”

“*No, ma’am, she hasn’t!*” shouted Chub. Then he plunged across the porch and made his escape. The old lady remained at her front door, watching and muttering, long after they had opened the store and disappeared inside.



[“I want the key of the store”](#)

“Here’s a couple of letters,” said Dick, as Chub raised the window-curtains. They were lying on the floor just over the threshold, and he picked them up and examined them. “One for Miss Jennie Frost and one for Mrs. Amanda Peel. Strange I

didn't get anything."

He handed them to Harry, and she looked them over critically.

"This one's from Mrs. Peel to her niece," she said. "And the other—Chub, where did you say Jennie lived?"

"Byers, or something like that. Why?"

"Because this other letter is postmarked Byers. It just means, I suppose, that Jennie can't come."

"Probably."

"I wish we could open the other letter, the one from Mrs. Peel, and see when she's coming back."

"Yes, but of course we can't," said Roy. "Besides, what does it matter?"

"Well, it seems too bad to have the store shut up, doesn't it? I'm sure Mrs. Peel needs money badly. I'll put these letters in the cash drawer."

"Come and look at the pocket-knives, Roy," called Dick. "I'm going to have one. There's a *dandy* here for seventy-five cents. Look."

"Oh, do buy one, Dick," called Harry. "We ought all to buy something and help her out. I've got fifty cents, and I'm going to see what I want."

Eventually Harry proudly added the following items to her record of sales:

One Pocket-knife	.75
One "	.75

One pair Canvas Shoes	.60
One yard Blue Ribbon	.08
One package of Raisins	.15
½ pound Crackers	.08
¼ ” Cheese	.10

Harry frowned and figured for a while and then announced exultantly that they had already sold two dollars and thirty-three cents' worth of goods. "Isn't that fine?" she asked.

"The old lady hasn't sold that much before in a week," said Chub. "Who wants some crackers and cheese? Or some raisins? The cheese is fine, but the crackers are a little bit stale."

They perched themselves on the counter and partook of Chub's hospitality, Dick suggested craftily that if they all ate as much as they could now it wouldn't be necessary to prepare so much supper when they went back to camp.

"And there's something in that, too," Dick continued, "for our stores are getting pretty low. We'll have to have some fresh meat about to-morrow, and some eggs, and—let me see; what else was it I thought of? I know; kerosene. And the ice-chest has been empty for nearly a week."

"Oh, we don't need ice," said Chub.

"We do in this sort of weather if we're going to keep meat fresh. And I'd like mighty well to see a little fresh milk and not have to use that canned stuff. And we're about out of that, too."

"We can get condensed milk here," said Roy. "I saw some over there on the shelf."

“Oh, let’s!” said Harry.

“I tell you what,” Chub said. “To-night we’ll look over the boat and make a list of what we need. Then if we can get any of the things here we’ll do it. What do you say?”

“Good scheme,” replied Roy. “It’ll put some money in Mrs. Peel’s pocket.”

They were still discussing it when there was the sound of a wagon stopping in front of the store. The arrivals proved to be a farmer and his wife, and for the next quarter of an hour all hands were busy. The farmer wanted axle-grease, horse liniment, five-pounds of red ocher, five gallons of kerosene, a bag of flour, and ten pounds of sugar. While the boys were hunting these things up, Harry was following the farmer’s wife all around the store, from one show-case to another, explaining the absence of Mrs. Peel and exhibiting the goods.

“Well, now, I call it right down kind of you young folks to keep store for her,” declared the woman. “I hope her sister ain’t very sick, but she didn’t look real strong when she was here awhile back. How much is that wide yellow ribbon?”

“Fifteen cents a yard,” replied Harry promptly, having thoroughly investigated the contents of the ribbon-case and the prices earlier in the afternoon.

“My, ain’t that a lot? Still, I always was partial to yellow; it seems so sort of cheerful, don’t it? You can cut me a yard and a quarter, I guess. And I want a dozen sheets of writing-paper, the kind that’s ruled, you know, and a package of envelopes to fit.”

When the customers departed, Harry reckoned up the sales and announced gleefully that four dollars and twelve cents had

been added to the treasury.

“I haven’t had so much fun since I had the measles,” said Chub. “Did you observe the artistic way in which I did up that bundle?”

“And did you see me handle the sugar-scoop?” asked Dick. “I believe I was cut out for a storekeeper, fellows.”

“We’ll have to order some more kerosene soon,” remarked Roy. “I pumped the tank almost dry filling the old farmer’s can for him. Where do we buy our kerosene?”

“Standard Oil Company,” answered Chub, promptly. “I’ll drop a note to Mr. Rockefeller this evening. I wonder what she keeps gasolene for?”

“Maybe for automobiles,” suggested Harry.

“I don’t believe an automobile ever stopped in this village,” Chub replied.

“Plenty of them go by, though,” Dick said. “I’ve seen four this afternoon. I think this is the main road along here, isn’t it?”

“What we ought to do,” announced Chub, “is to let them know that we keep it. We ought to put a sign out. Wait a minute.”

He went out into the back yard and rummaged around until he found a board some four feet long by ten inches wide. He brought it in and pulled a marking-pot and brush from under the counter.

“Now then,” he said as he dipped the brush and began to print, “here goes for the automobile trade!” Five minutes later

the sign was done and they were nailing it to the corner of the store, where it was visible for a hundred yards up the road. Chub had lettered it as follows:

HEADQUARTERS FOR AUTOMOBILISTS
GASOLENE AND SUPPLIES

But Chub wasn't yet satisfied. On the back of a piece of cardboard he printed "Midsummer Sale!" This he placed in one of the windows, saying, "I'm pretty certain that Mrs. Peel is asking a heap less than her husband did. You see, there's a store some place near here that's getting her trade away from her, and it's safe to say she's marked things pretty low."

"How about your automobile supplies?" asked Roy. "What do you mean?"

"I didn't say 'automobile supplies,'" answered Chub. "I said 'gasolene and supplies'. We've got all sorts of supplies, haven't we? 'Supplies' means crackers and cheese and such things just as much as it does carburetors, doesn't it?"

"I suppose so, but it sounds sort of misleading."

"Well, if you come right down to it, we've got plenty of things automobilists use. We've got grease and wrenches and files and pliers—and water—"

"That's right," agreed Dick. "We don't claim to have a full line of supplies. We're short on goggles, pink veils, spark-plugs, and extra tires."

"Wouldn't it be lovely," asked Harry, "if a big automobile should stop and buy a whole lot of things?"

"Yes, say about fifty gallons of gasolene, a dozen files, half a dozen wrenches, and a pail of water!" laughed Chub.

“Well, they might buy something,” replied Harry, cheerfully. “And if any one should ask for a pink veil I’d show them the mosquito netting.”

“Harry, you’ve missed your vocation,” Roy laughed. “You should have been a shopkeeper. Hello, what’s that?”

There was a loud grinding of brakes outside, and a big red touring-car which had coasted noiselessly down the hill came to a sudden stop at the corner almost under the new sign. Before they could reach the door a man in a yellow duster, evidently a chauffeur, hurried in.

“I want some gasolene,” he announced brusquely. “Where do you keep it?”

“In the back yard,” replied Chub, promptly. “Come on. How much do you want?”

“Five gallons will do. Is it any good?”

“Best made,” answered Chub. “We get it direct. Come on.”

The chauffeur followed him with a growl.

“Bet it’s low-test stuff,” he muttered.

Roy went out with them, while Harry and Dick sauntered out on the sidewalk, where they could see the car and its occupants. There were two ladies and a gentleman in the back of the car, and a second gentleman was seated in front. They all wore dust-coats, and from the appearance of the car it was evident that they were touring. One of the ladies glanced around and caught sight of Harry and said something to the gentleman beside her. He, too, turned, and in a moment they were all looking. Harry colored and drew back around the corner. Dick, however, held his ground.

“Got anything to eat in there?” asked the man in front.

“Yes,” Dick answered. “Crackers, cheese, canned things, raisins, dried apricots—”

There was a burst of laughter from the car.

“Let’s get out and see what we can find,” said one of the ladies. In a moment the store was invaded. They bought crackers, cheese, canned peaches, potted ham, and sardines, and did it so merrily that Harry and Dick had to laugh with them. The party bore their purchases back to the car, Dick assisting, and immediately began their luncheon or, as one of the ladies laughingly called it, “afternoon tea.”

“But we haven’t paid for it” she said suddenly. “How much do we owe you?”

“Let me see,” said Dick, “there was a pound of crackers—”

“Never mind,” said one of the men, taking a bill from his purse. “Here’s five dollars. I guess that will pay for the gasolene and everything. You keep the rest.”

“It won’t come to anything like that,” Dick protested. “The crackers are—”

“We don’t want to hear how much they are,” laughed the second lady. “They might not taste so well, and when you haven’t had a mouthful to eat since eleven o’clock—”

“Never mind about counting it up,” said the man to Dick, genially. “That five dollar bill will cover it all.”

“Thank you,” replied Dick, gravely.

The chauffeur appeared with the gasolene poured it into the tank, and tossed the can to Dick.

“Poorest stuff I ever saw,” he muttered savagely as he climbed to his seat. “All right, sir?”

“Go ahead,” replied the gentleman beside him. The car sprang forward and in a moment had disappeared in a cloud of dust. Dick went back to the store.

“Did they pay you?” asked Harry, eagerly.

“I should say they did.” Dick exhibited the five-dollar bill. “He said this would pay for the gasoline and the other stuff, and I was to keep the change. I kept it.”

“But the chauffeur paid for the gasoline!” cried Roy. “Call them back!”

“You go out and call,” said Dick, dryly. “They’re a mile away by this time. If they want their money, they’ll come back for it. Meanwhile it goes to Mrs. Peel.” He deposited the five-dollar note in the till. Harry clapped her hands ecstatically.

“Six dollars more!” she cried. “You must all help me put it down. How much were the sardines, Dick?”

Half an hour later a small boy appeared and bought a bottle of peppermint and two sticks of candy, and that completed the day’s sales. At six o’clock they closed the store. Chub locked the door into the living-rooms and put the key on a nearby shelf.

“There’s no use having that open,” he said, “since Jennie isn’t coming.”

On the sidewalk they paused irresolutely.

“You take it over to her,” said Chub to Dick, holding forth the key. But Dick shrank away from it.

“Not me!” he cried. “I never could make her hear!”

“Look here,” said Roy, “why not keep the key ourselves? It isn’t likely that Mrs. Peel will be back before to-morrow. We can come over early in the morning and open up again.”

“Of course,” Harry agreed. “And we’ll leave a note on the door in case she should come.”

So the note was written and pinned up, and they started back to the boat.

“Do you think,” asked Harry, uneasily, when they were climbing the hill, “that it’s quite safe to leave all that money in the store over night? There’s over twenty dollars.”

Chub waved the key under her nose.

“But some one might break in,” she insisted.

“Shucks! Don’t you worry, Harry; I’ll wager there hasn’t been a robbery around here since the place was started.”

“You don’t know, Chub. Does he?” she appealed to the others. “If that money should be stolen, you’ll have to make it good.”

“Me?” asked Chub. “Certainly. I’ll make it good. That’s one of the easy things I do. I hereby place myself under a thirteen-dollar bond.”



CHAPTER XXI

THE BURGLARY

“Kerosene, potatoes, condensed milk, cheese, and bacon,” said Dick, writing the items on a slip of paper.

Chub groaned.

“More bacon?” he asked dismally.

“Well, we’ve got to have some sort of meat,” answered Dick, “and we can’t get fresh meat here. All those things we can get at the store to-morrow. But we’ll have to reach a real town pretty soon. We ought to have meat and fresh vegetables and fruit.”

“Look here,” said Roy, “there are plenty of farms around here. Why not see if we can’t get some vegetables and fruit at one of them to-morrow? And some milk too?”

“Good idea,” said Chub. “I delegate you and Dick to buy those things.”

“I don’t mind,” said Dick. “There’s a farm, a big old farm a little way beyond the village; you can see it from the road. And seems to me it’s almost time for corn, isn’t it?”

“Sure,” said Roy. “And don’t we need more eggs?”

“Yes,” answered Dick. “I forgot eggs. And, I say, maybe they will sell us a couple of nice young chickens. We’ll start right after breakfast. Want to come along, Harry?”

But Harry shook her head. “Chub and I have to look after

the store,” she replied importantly.

“That’s so, I’d forgotten the store. Well, you take this list along, Chub, and bring those things back with you at noon. I’ll put down the quantities we need. Who’s got any money?”

“Money!” exclaimed Chub. “Where’s that large sum we intrusted to you a week ago?”

“Large sum!” responded Dick indignantly. “It was two dollars! How long do you think two dollars is going to last? I’m down to my last cent, and I don’t suppose I can get a check cashed around here.”

“Scarcely,” said Chub. “I’ve some money, though. Here’s two dollars to spend on vegetables, and I’ll pay for what we get at the store. Are you keeping the account straight, Roy?”

“I guess so, I put down whatever any one tells me to. It’s hot down here. Let’s get back on deck.”

The doctor was sitting in one of the willow chairs, his gaze on the opposite shore of the river, where a few faint lights twinkled through the darkness. Chub lighted the lamp in the wheel-house, and Harry stopped behind her father and rumbled his hair playfully.

“Asleep, papa?” she asked.

“Asleep? By no means, my dear. The fact is, I was—” he paused and laughed amusedly—“I was occupied in rather a funny way. I was making up a riddle.”

“A riddle!” said Harry. “That’s nice. What is it, papa?”

“Well, see if you can guess it, any of you.”

“That means me,” said Chub, perching himself on the rail

and hugging a stanchion. “If there’s one thing I pride myself on, it’s elucidating riddles. Elucidator’s my middle name.”

“Well, tell me what it is that

‘Flies through the air without wings,
Swims through the sea without fins,
Has nails but no toes,
Sheets but no clothes,
On each of its fingers wears rings.’”

“Why, it’s poetry!” declared Harry.

“Well, I don’t claim much for the rhymes,” answered the doctor, modestly. “Got it, Chub?”

“Er—well, you see, sir, being in rhyme makes it more difficult.”

The others jeered.

“Of course I don’t mean that I can’t guess it, only that it requires more effort. Now let me see: ‘Flies through the air without wings;’ that’s a balloon. ‘Swims through the sea without fins;’ that’s—that’s an eel. Er—what was the rest, doctor?”

“‘Has nails but no toes,
Sheets but no clothes,
On each of its fingers wears rings.’”

replied the doctor.

Chub was silent a moment. Then, “I—I think it’s an ichthyosaurus,” he said.

“You’ll have to guess again,” laughed the doctor. “How about you, Dick?”

“I give it up,” answered Dick.

“So do I,” said Roy and Harry in unison.

“And you, Chub?”

“Well, of course I could get it in time, but as the others are impatient, I won’t stand in their way, sir.”

“Very kind of you, sir,” said the doctor. “It’s a ship.”

Every one said “Oh!”—every one save Chub.

“I should have guessed that next,” he remarked easily.

“Oh, what a fib, Chub!” said Harry. “You’d never have guessed it, and you know it.”

“I don’t quite see what you mean about ‘nails and no toes,’” said Dick.

“Don’t you? Why, a ship’s put together with nails, Dick.”

“Sure,” murmured Dick, while the rest laughed. “And—and how about the rest of it, sir?”

“A sheet is a rope that hoists a sail, as you doubtless know,” explained the doctor. “As for the fingers and rings, why, the masts are the fingers, and the rings are the wooden rings that the sails are attached to. There you are, sir.”

“To think of you making that up yourself!” sighed Harry. “You did make it up yourself, papa?”

“Yes, it’s quite home-made,” was the reply. “Suppose the rest of you try it.”

“I couldn’t make mine rhyme,” said Harry. “I never could make things rhyme.”

“I will make up the first one,” said Chub. “Are you all ready?” They told him they were, and Chub cleared his throat portentously.

“Well—er—why am I like a young pig with a pink nose?”

“There’s so many reasons,” said Dick, “but, to keep you in good humor, I speak for all when I say we give it up.”

“Because I’m always Eaton: see? *Eaton—eating!*”

“What’s the pink nose got to do with it?” asked Roy.

“Oh, I just put that in to make it harder.”

“That’s a rank conundrum!” jeered Dick.

“There speaks envy,” returned Chub, sadly. “Let’s hear you give a better one.”

“All right. Why did the animals go into the ark?”

“Because there was Noah else!” shouted Harry. “That’s an old one, Dick, and you didn’t make it up at all.”

“Didn’t say I did. Chub challenged me to give a better one, and I did it.”

“Here’s one,” said Roy. “I think it’s original, but I won’t vouch for it. When is a wagon not a wagon?”

“When it’s a cart?” asked the doctor.

“No, sir.”

“When it’s awheel,” cried Harry, eagerly.

“N-no, but that isn’t so bad. Give it up?”

“Yes.”

“When it turns into a road.”

“That’s lovely!” said Harry. “I must remember that. ‘When is a wagon not a wagon? When it’s a road;’ no, no, ‘when it turns *into* a road.’ I know one, but it’s not original.”

“Out with it,” said Chub. “The answer’s on the tip of my tongue.”

“Well, then, what’s the best age for a small house?”

“Cott-age,” answered Dick, to Harry’s disappointment.

“You knew it,” she objected. “You ought to have let Chub try.”

“Pshaw! he’d never have guessed it. He hasn’t guessed one yet.”

“Just wanted to give the rest of you a show,” replied Chub, amiably. “Don’t you know any more, doctor?”

“Let me see,” said the doctor. “I used to know some. Here’s one; perhaps you all know it, however.”

“Do I know it, papa?” asked Harry.

“If you do you mustn’t tell. Now then: What throat trouble did George Washington have when he chopped down the cherry-tree?”

Nobody knew, and the doctor had to dispel their ignorance.

“Why, a hacking cough, to be sure. And what remedy did his father give him?”

“A licking,” said Chub. “Hand me the prize, please.”

“Oh, no; this was a remedy for throat trouble. He gave him cherry *bawl-some*.”

“That’s great,” laughed Chub.

The conundrums continued until Dick asked one that broke up the meeting. That was: “How long will it take to get Chub up in the morning if we don’t go to bed right away?”

“That’s the easiest yet,” said Roy. “The answer’s half an hour.”

“Wait, please!” cried Harry. “I’ve just thought of a lovely one. You know this, papa, and so you mustn’t guess. What’s the difference between a spiritualist and a sailor?”

“I’ve heard that,” said Dick. “It’s something about ghosts, isn’t it?”

“Yes, but you mustn’t tell,” warned Harry. “Do you know it, Chub?”

“What, that? Huh, that was the first conundrum I ever made up! I got a prize for that!”

“Then what’s the answer, smarty?”

“Why—er—one goes to sea in the day and the other goes to see in the dark. Come on, fellows.”

“That’s not right, Chub! Do you all give it up? Well, the answer is, one sees to ghosts and the other goes to sea.”

“Wasn’t that what I said?” demanded Chub from the steps. “Hasn’t she simply taken the words from my mouth, Dick?”

“No, she hasn’t,” laughed Dick.

“Anyhow,” said Chub aggrievedly, “it isn’t as nice as one I

know about a chestnut.”

“Huh, I guess that’s what it is—about a chestnut!”

“Listen, Dickums!” Chub pulled Dick after him down the steps and held him against the side of the boat. “I’ll tell you, Dickums, and no one else. You’ve been a good friend to me. Don’t squirm so! Give me your full attention. Now: What’s the difference between a good chestnut and a bad chestnut?

Answer: A worm. Cute, isn’t it? Laugh, Dickums, laugh, or I’ll drop you overboard!”



The next morning after breakfast Roy and Dick set out in search of vegetables and eggs, milk and chickens, the doctor trudged off with his fishing-rod, and Chub and Harry went to the store. When they arrived, the curtains in the windows were still down, and the note still hung on the door.

“She didn’t get back last night, I guess,” said Chub, as he unlocked the door and threw it wide open.



[The till was empty](#)

“I do wonder when she will come,” murmured Harry. “Of course we can’t stay here much longer. Papa said at breakfast that he thought we ought to try a new fishing-place.”

“My, but he loves to fish, doesn’t he?” laughed Chub, as he

raised the curtains and let the sunlight in. “Any mail this morning?”

“Not a bit,” answered Harry. “Let’s take that list, Chub, and get the things together we’re to take back to the boat.”

“All right. I wonder what I did with it. If I’ve gone and lost it—no, here it is. Kerosene—hello!”

“What?” cried Harry.

Chub pointed to the counter half-way down the store. One glance was sufficient for Harry. With a cry of alarm, she darted to the money-drawer and pulled it open.

“Oh, Chub!” she wailed despairingly.

The till was empty.



CHAPTER XXII

CLUES

The money was gone from the drawer; boxes, tins, and packages had been pulled from the shelves, examined, and either tossed helter-skelter back or left upon the counters, and on every side lay evidence of the burglar's depredations.

"I said we oughtn't to leave the money here," wailed Harry.

Chub didn't reply. He had seated himself on a box and was frowning dejectedly about him.

"Who do you suppose did it?" asked Harry.

"I don't know *who* did it, but I know how it was *done*," answered Chub. He pointed to the door into the back yard. The panel nearest the lock had been splintered in, and the marauder had evidently thrust his hand through and turned the key from the inside.

"What shall we say when Mrs. Peel comes?" asked Harry, miserably.

"Tell her the store's been broken into and burglarized," answered Chub, stolidly. "I'll make up the money they stole, but I don't think I ought to pay for the goods taken. And I imagine, from the looks of things, that the robbers took more than twelve dollars' worth of stuff with them."

"That's the worst of it," mourned Harry. "We can make up the money between us, for you know very well, Chub, we aren't going to let you pay it all, but we can't pay for the

groceries and things.”

“We haven’t even any way of finding out how much they are worth,” replied Chub. “I suppose I’d better report the robbery to some one. I wonder where the nearest police station is.”

He got up and walked to the back door, Harry following him, and examined it.

“Looks as though some one had just kicked his foot through it, doesn’t it?” he asked. “And here he goes—hello, there must have been two of them! You can see the footprints, Harry. They just climbed the fence here, walked across to the door, and smashed it in so that one of them could put his hand through and turn the key. And here’s a match.” He picked it up, examined it, and dropped it into his pocket. “They lighted a candle or something—”

“There’s a candle over there beside the barrel,” said Harry. Chub picked it up.

“If it was a new one when they lighted it,” he said, “they must have been in here a good long time. I don’t believe a candle burns down that much in less than twenty minutes or half an hour. I wonder—”

He broke off and walked to one of the shelves. A new box of tallow candles had been dragged from its place, and one candle was missing from the top layer. Between the counter and the door he picked up four more matches and added them to the one in his pocket.

“I don’t suppose,” he said thoughtfully, “that they’ve got any police around here who could catch these fellows in a hundred years. So I guess it doesn’t make much difference

whether we report the robbery to-day or next week.”

“Oh, but we ought to tell some one right away, Chub,” exclaimed Harry.

“Well, I’m going to look around first, anyway. We ought to get some idea of what’s been taken. I’m glad I locked the door into the living-rooms. Here’s the key just where I put it.”

He started around the store, looking into displaced boxes and cans and returning them to their places. Presently Harry got a piece of paper and began to put down a list of the things which they believed had been taken.

“There were more sides of bacon than this,” said Chub.

“There were seven,” said Harry. “I noticed yesterday. They’ve stolen four.”

“Put it down,” said Chub. “And they’ve made a big hole here in the canned things. Looks to me as though they’d taken about two dozen cans. You can see where they took peaches and green-gage plums. Let’s see; put down six of each, Harry, and about a dozen more assorted—tomatoes, beans, and other truck. And sardines, I guess; I don’t know how many; say three or four. That’s all they took here, I think.”

He worked around the store, examining, tidying, and replacing, Harry following anxiously with her paper and pencil. When they had finished they breathed easier. It seemed that the robbers had confined themselves entirely to bacon and canned goods, although, as Chub allowed, they might have helped themselves to other things in small quantities for all they knew. But at most the value of the things taken would foot up well under ten dollars.

“Don’t see why they didn’t take more,” mused Chub. “They had all the time they wanted, apparently.”

“Maybe they had to carry the things a long way,” Harry suggested. Chub shot a questioning glance at her.

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“Why, they might live a long way off,” Harry explained. “I don’t believe it was any one who lives here, do you?”

“No, I don’t. It might have been a couple of tramps. The railroad isn’t more than a quarter of a mile from here, and they may have been walking along the track and got hungry and came over to see what they could find. Only, how’d they know there was no one at home here?”

“That’s so,” murmured Harry. “It looks as though it must have been some one who knew that Mrs. Peel was away, doesn’t it?”

“Yes,” answered Chub, thoughtfully. “Well, whoever they were, they cleaned up the cash-drawer.” He walked over to it and stared into it, hands in pocket. “There ought to have been a lock on it, though I don’t suppose that would have kept them out.” He turned away, and as he did so something white on the floor under the counter caught his eye. Picking it up, he bore it to the light. It proved to be a crumpled wad of papers. Chub smoothed them out, revealing Harry’s memoranda of sales, the letter to Jennie, and the letter to Mrs. Peel. Both envelopes had been torn open.

“Guess they thought there might be money in them,” said Chub. Then—“Look here, Harry,” he said, “I’m going to read this one to Jennie and see if Mrs. Peel says when she’s coming back. Under the circumstances I think it’s allowable, don’t

you?”

“Yes,” answered Harry. “I do. Because she ought to know what’s happened, and if she isn’t coming to-day or to-morrow we must write to her.”

So Chub opened the letter and read it aloud:

“DEAR JENNIE:—I found Millie was very much better when I got here, and there wasn’t any real need of my coming, except James was worried and upset and afraid she was going to be real sick. The doctor was here about half an hour ago and says she is doing nicely. It was just a touch of heat, but James thought it was a fever. She was doing a heavy washing, and the weather was terribly hot, and she just gave out like a flash. I tell James he must have a woman to come in Mondays and help Millie, and he agrees. Unless something unlooked-for happens, I will be home day after to-morrow afternoon, and if you have your bag packed you can go right home the minute I get there, if you want to. Your aunt Millie sends her love, and so does James.”

“Your aff. aunt,
“AMANDA PEEL.”

“When was it written?” asked Harry.

“Day before yesterday,” Chub answered. “That means that she will be back to-day. Well, all the better. I’ve had about all the storekeeping I want.”

“So have I,” said Harry, dolefully. “And it was such good

fun until this morning, wasn't it?"

"It wasn't bad. You stay here, and I'll see if I can find out where the nearest station is. You aren't afraid, are you?"

"N—no," answered Harry, "I'll stay near the door."

She had no chance to be lonesome, for ten minutes after Chub left, almost the entire population of the village had appeared on the scene, eager for details of the robbery, anxious to see the broken door, and highly curious about Harry. Meanwhile Chub, seated behind Cæsar and beside Bennie Hooper, was being taken to Washington Hills and the sheriff. Chub found the sheriff in the middle of a horse trade in front of the livery-stable. When, however, he had stated his errand the horse trade was adjourned, and the sheriff followed Chub and Bennie back to the scene of the robbery in his side-bar buggy.

The sheriff was a young, alert man, and Chub had to own that he seemed quite intelligent. But he didn't offer them much hope.

"I reckon," he said, after he had looked over the premises and heard all the particulars they could give him, "that whoever done this job has got away before this. Tramps, likely as not. It looks like their sort of work; bungly, you see; took no pains to hide their tracks. They was hungry and couldn't find any place that looked more promising. Probably had a gunny-sack and filled it, and then went back to the railroad. The old lady was lucky they didn't take more."

"But doesn't it seem funny," asked Chub, "that they should know the place was empty?"

"Well, you left a note on the door, didn't you? Maybe they prowled around, found that, didn't see any lights, and

concluded they'd take a chance. Probably they tried the windows and couldn't open 'em without breaking the glass, and then went around back. Well, I'll see what can be done. But I guess it's a hopeless job. Like as not they're ten miles or even twenty miles away by now. Maybe they caught a freight. But I'll telegraph up and down the road. You leave it to me, sir. Tell Mrs. Peel I'll let her know if anything comes up."

He climbed into his buggy and was off again. They watched him go and then locked the store and went back to the boat. It was almost noon, and Dick and Roy had just returned after a fruitful journey to the neighboring farm.

"We got eggs and chickens and corn and beets and peas and a whole half-gallon of milk!" called Dick, jubilantly. "And some little round squashes that you fry in bread-crumbs."

"Didn't you bring the things from the store?" asked Roy.

"No," Chub answered.

"Why not?"

"Well, I guess we sort of forgot them. Some one broke into the store last night and stole the money and a lot of groceries."

Presently, when Roy and Dick had heard all there was to hear, Chub decoyed Roy to the tent, out of hearing of Harry.

"I say, Roy," he began, "do you remember the other night when we found those cans of peaches on the bed?"

"Sure," answered Roy.

"Remember we found a lot of matches on the floor?"

"Yes."

“Remember what sort they were?”

“What sort? No, just matches, weren’t they?”

“Parlor matches?”

“Um—no, they were what we used to call ‘all-day matches,’ the kind that come in cards and have to be broken off.”

“Exactly, sulphur matches,” agreed Chub. “Well, look at these.” He drew five burnt matches from his pocket and held them out.

“Yes, I see,” said Roy. “Look like the same kind, don’t they? You think, then, that the fellow that Harry saw at her window is the same fellow that robbed the store?”

“I think he was one of them,” answered Chub, decidedly. “Besides, he tried to steal canned fruit from us, and they took about two dozen cans of it last night.”

“That’s so. Who do you think did it?”

“I don’t know, but—I’ve been wondering—I say, how far do you think it is to where those Gipsies are?”

“About two miles, I should say. Now, that’s it, Chub! I’ll wager they did it!”

“Well, that’s what I think,” said Chub. “Now, look here. After dinner you and Dick had better go back to the store with Harry and be there when Mrs. Peel comes. I’ll give you a check to replace the stolen money. She won’t lose that, anyway.”

“Oh, we’ll all contribute to that,” said Roy. “I don’t know that we’re bound to replace it, though. We didn’t steal it.”

“No, but I’d feel better if we did. You fellows needn’t help, though; I’ve got enough to pay for it all.”

“Nonsense; we’ll go thirds on it. But what are you going to do?”

“Go fishing,” answered Chub, with a grin.

“Fishing?”

“Yes, up near where the Gipsies are camped.”

“Pshaw, you can’t find anything, Chub!”

“I don’t suppose I can,” replied Chub, musingly, “but—well, it won’t do any harm to have a look around.”

“Let me go with you,” said Roy, eagerly. But Chub shook his head.

“No, I’ll go alone. I want to look around the camp a bit, and they won’t think much of it if I stumble in there alone.”

“Don’t think they’ll act badly, do you?” asked Roy, uneasily.

“No; why should they? They won’t know what I’m up to. Maybe they won’t see me. We’d better not let Harry know anything about it, though, because she still thinks she may have dreamed that chap at her window. If she knows it really was a man, she’ll be scared to death all the rest of the time we’re here.”

“I don’t see what we want to stay here for, anyhow,” said Roy, disgustedly. “The fishing’s absolutely no good.”

“Well, I think we’ll move on to-morrow. It would have saved us money if we’d gone before. There’s the doctor

coming back. I'll tell him about it now, so Harry won't know."

"Too bad, too bad!" said the doctor, when Chub had told his story. "But I wouldn't let it worry me much. As for the money, why, we can fix that up easily enough among ourselves. I don't believe I'd run any risks, Chub, by poking my head into that Gipsy camp. They're an evil-looking lot. I came by there this morning again after I'd caught these." He looked down ruefully at the string of five small trout which he carried.

"I don't think there's any danger, sir," answered Chub. "Don't worry; I'll be back long before supper-time."

But Chub was mistaken there.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN THE GIPSY CAMP

After luncheon Dr. Emery remained in charge of the boat, Harry and Roy and Dick returned to the store, and Chub wandered nonchalantly away with his fishing-pole. Harry declared that he was as mean as he could be to desert them now, just when Mrs. Peel was coming back, but Chub was quite heartless and went off whistling. At the parting of the roads he waved them good-by, but Harry refused to notice him. With a resentful toss of her head she walked straight on, her little tip-tilted nose held high in air.

Chub smiled as he turned and took up his journey. It was the hottest sort of a hot day, and the road wound on without a speck of shade for the better part of a mile. He crossed the railroad and after a while found himself at the summit of a hill, with the river valley stretching along beneath him north and south for as far as the eye could reach. There was a small group of sumac-bushes beside the road here, and he threw himself down in the scanty shade it afforded and rested for a few minutes. Then he climbed a stone wall, crossed an upland meadow, and so came to a stream. It was rather a good-sized affair and very noisy, for it was hurrying down-hill over a bed of boulders. Pools were few and far between here, but he followed the stream up as it wound around the side of the hill, and eventually found a place where a big lichen-covered rock backed the water up into a shallow basin. The place didn't look as though it held many trout, but he selected a fly and made his cast. At the end of ten minutes or so he had landed a miserable

little fish, not much more than a fingerling, which under ordinary circumstances he would have disdained to keep. But it was already approaching mid-afternoon, and he couldn't afford to be particular. Two more youngsters were added to his string during the next quarter of an hour, and then Chub decided that he had enough for his purpose, for he only wanted to convince the Gipsies that he was a bona fide trout-fisher and not an emissary of the sheriff's office. Stringing his catch on a willow twig, he disjoined his rod and slipped it back into its case, dropped his fly-book into his pocket, and took up his journey again.

He kept on around the side of the hill and presently was back on the road, which had begun to dip into a narrow valley which divided it from the higher range of hills to the westward. He proceeded slowly and cautiously now, for he didn't know how near the Gipsy encampment might be, and he wanted to look it over before he decided on a course of action. He met no one on the road save a farmer jogging along half asleep on top of a load of hay. Presently a speck of grayish white caught his eye. Surmising it to be one of the Gipsy tents, he left the road and plunged into the woods to the right. It was very still and warm. Once he thought he heard voices in the direction of the tent, and presently, as he went softly through the trees and undergrowth, the gurgling of a stream reached him. He kept on until he had found it, and then followed along the bank, feeling pretty certain that it would lead him to the encampment. Nor was he mistaken, for fifty yards farther on the tents came into view between the trees. He dropped to his hands and knees and worked cautiously forward until the undergrowth stopped. There, lying behind a bush, he reconnoitered.

The spot which the Gipsies had selected for their camp was

an ideal one. On one side lay the road, on the other the brook. It is probable that the band had camped there each summer for a number of years and that their occupancy of the spot had denuded it of underbrush. At all events, it was quite clear of bushes and was just such a place as one would have picked out for a picnic. The trees were scattered, but gave plenty of shade; there was a fine turf underfoot; the road was at their front door and water at their back.

There were two big, gaily painted vans and five tents, the latter scattered about apparently at haphazard. One tent, a circular one and the largest of the lot, was set in the center of the grove, and this Chub guessed to be the queen's apartment. Here and there clothes hung drying or airing from the branches, some bales of hay were piled beside one of the wagons, there was a pungent odor of smoke from a smoldering fire. Chub counted eight horses tethered about where they could crop the grass. Outside one of the tents hung a string of baskets, and in the air, mingling with the odor of the wood-smoke, was a faint perfume of sweet-grass. Each tent appeared to have its own fireplace and commissary. Kettles and pans littered the ground about the piles of ashes, and here and there dried branches were heaped for fuel. It was all rather interesting, and for a moment Chub quite forgot his errand.

There were three men, perhaps twice as many women, and several children, the children ranging in age all the way from that of the baby, who kicked and crowed in his mother's arms, to that of the lad of apparently twelve, who was lazily breaking up fire-wood with an ax at the far side of the camp. The men were frankly idle, sitting with pipes in mouth outside one of the tents.

The women, all save the one with the baby, were busy. One was mixing something for supper in a flat tin pan, others were weaving baskets, and another was sewing. Chub had always imagined Gipsies to be rather picturesque folks, with earrings and brightly hued costumes. But there was little of the picturesque about these. The women wore calico dresses of blue or brown, the men were clad in things that would have disgraced a tramp, and the children came into, apparently, whatever was left. Chub, looking them over, decided that the doctor was quite right; they certainly were an evil-looking lot, and he wondered what their course would be if they suddenly discovered him lying here behind the bush. They looked as though they would hesitate at nothing. And just when he had reached that decision, one of the men broke into laughter, the others joined him, and the women smiled in sympathy, the swarthy faces falling into soft lines and the dark eyes glinting merrily. Perhaps, Chub reflected, they were human, after all. This, under the circumstances in which he found himself, was an encouraging thought.

He had come there with the idea that possibly he might catch sight of something which would prove that the burglary had been performed by one of their number. He had scarcely expected to find them seated in a circle dividing the spoils, but it had not seemed impossible that he might discover a telltale can of peaches or a side of bacon. But now, search as he did, not one speck of incriminating evidence could he see. The only course remaining, then, was to retrace his steps through the woods and approach the camp openly by the road. Perhaps, if he made believe that he had lost his way and asked them to set him right, he might get an opportunity to look around the camp and possibly see inside one or two of the tents. He might even

buy a basket or two. But, on the point of creeping away, a new plan occurred to him, a plan which engaged his ardor because of its sheer recklessness.

The nearest tent was about thirty feet from where he lay, its back toward him. No sounds came from it, but he couldn't be sure that it was unoccupied, for all of that. Yet, somehow, he believed that it was. It seemed fair to assume that the three men in sight were the only ones left in camp; that the others were away, peddling, dickering for horses, fishing. Surely no one would remain in a stuffy tent a hot day like this, he thought. By creeping a few yards to the left he would have the tent between him and the Gipsies, unless some of the children, who were fairly quiet under the effects of the heat, should take it into their heads to roam his way. But that was a risk he could afford to take, he decided. Once at the back of the tent, he could easily raise the canvas and look in. It might be that he would discover nothing for his pains, but, on the other hand, he might find a good deal.

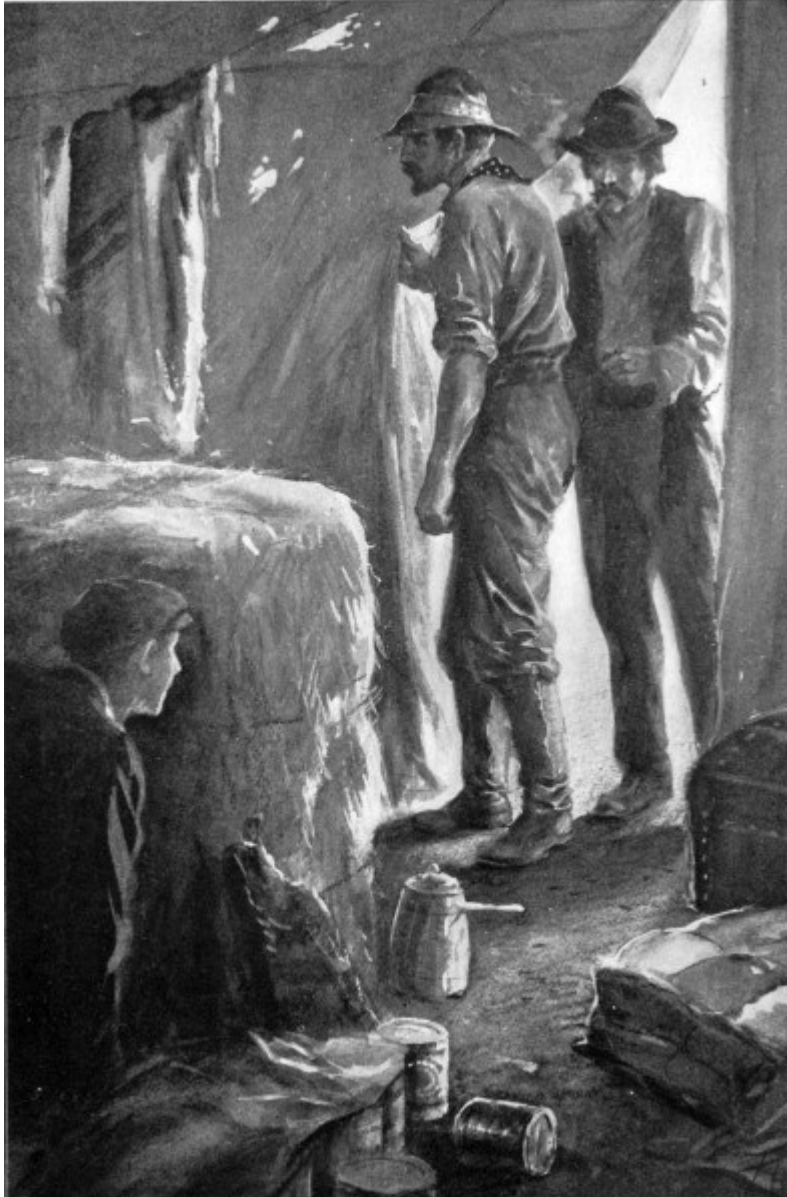
Leaving his rod and the fish under the bush and mentally locating it so that he could recover them later on, he crept back and made a detour of a dozen yards toward the road. When he again reached the edge of the clearing, the tent was in front of him and the Gipsies out of sight. Pausing a moment to rest, for creeping on hands and knees is breath-taking work, he slid stealthily from cover and crept toward the tent. He didn't pause to listen, for the sooner he was behind the tent the sooner he would be well hidden. But when he crouched against the soiled canvas he paused and harkened intently, his heart pounding against his ribs like a hammer. Only the murmuring of voices reached him, however, and he breathed easier.

Putting his head down, he peered under the edge of the canvas, and his heart gave a throb of triumph, for there, not a foot from his nose, were a dozen or more of the stolen cans!

They were piled on the ground at the back of the tent, the corner of a yellow horse-blanket half covering them. Chub squirmed until his head and shoulders were inside the tent, and reached forward. Beyond the cans were two of the strips of bacon, wedged in between them and a bale of hay. Not a sound came from the tent. Noiselessly Chub drew the rest of his body inside and peered around the corner of the bale. The tent was empty. Three beds composed of narrow straw-filled ticks were in sight, a small old-fashioned trunk, cooking utensils, some clothes swinging from the ridge-pole, a couple of empty boxes on top of one of which lay a pack of dirty playing-cards and a pile of harness. Chub smiled his satisfaction and then pondered his next step. If the stolen groceries were here it was plausible to suppose that the money was here, too. Of course it might be in the thief's pocket, but Chub didn't believe that Gipsies were in the habit of carrying much money around with them. If only he knew where to look!

The flap of the tent was open, and through the opening he could see the woman with the baby, and two of the children rolling about on the grass. If, he thought, he could only close the flap! Then he saw a way of accomplishing that result. By keeping close to the side of the tent on the right he would be out of sight of the Gipsies and could creep around and loosen the flap. So he dodged back behind the bale of hay to the farther wall of the tent, and crept along it until he could reach the flap. It fell into place, cutting off the shaft of hot sunlight that had flooded the front of the tent. As it fell, he dropped to the ground and peeked out under the bottom to see if it had

been noticed. But, save that one of the men had got to his feet and was standing yawning and stretching, the inhabitants of the camp were much as he had seen them last. He waited and watched until the yawning man had stretched himself out in the shade and pillowed his face in his arms.



Two men entered the tent

Then he began his search. As rapidly and as quietly as he could he began at one corner of the tent and worked around to it again, lifting blankets, boxes, beds, cooking-utensils, and whatever else he found. He searched the ticking of the mattresses for slits through which the money might have been thrust, and he tipped the bale of hay up and looked under it. But when he had completed the circuit of the tent he was forced to acknowledge defeat, for not a penny of money had he found. It was hot and stifling since he had closed the flap, and the perspiration was pouring from his face, when he finally paused nonplussed and sought about in vain for some hiding-place he had overlooked. At that moment footsteps sounded close beside the tent, shadows passed across the sloping canvas, and Chub's heart jumped into his mouth. With a bound he reached the bale of hay and tumbled himself behind it just as the flap was lifted and two men entered the tent.



CHAPTER XXIV

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE APPEARS

When Roy and Dick and Harry reached the store they found, to their satisfaction, that the village inhabitants had gazed their fill and gone. Roy and Dick amused themselves for a while in discovering clues and evolving theories, but that amusement finally palled, and they joined Harry at the front of the store and awaited the advent of Mrs. Peel. With the doors open front and back it was fairly cool, although outside the sun was baking hot. Two hours wore themselves away to the slow ticking of the old clock, and Dick became restless.

“My!” he exclaimed, “I wish the old lady would come if she’s coming!”

“So do I,” said Roy, heartily. “And I wish I could get a drink of cold water somewhere.”

“Why not use the watering-trough?” asked Dick. “Come on. I’m thirsty, too. Have some, Harry?”

But Harry declined, and the boys went out and held their mouths to the little iron pipe. And while they were drinking a two-seated carriage turned the corner and drew up in front of the store. On the back seat were Mrs. Peel and a tall man who, in spite of the heat, wore a long black frock-coat buttoned tightly about his lank form.

“That’s Mrs. Peel!” whispered Roy. “Come on!”

Mrs. Peel climbed nimbly out of the carriage and entered the store, while her companion remained to haggle with the driver over the amount to be paid for the drive from the station. Roy and Dick entered close behind Mrs. Peel.

“How do you do?” asked Harry, in a small voice.

“Why, bless me, my dear,” exclaimed Mrs. Peel, “I didn’t think to find you here!” She looked about the store. “Where’s Jennie?”

“She didn’t come,” answered Harry, gaining courage, “and so we’ve been keeping store for you. And we sold over twelve dollars’ worth of things—”

“I want to know!” said Mrs. Peel, beamingly.

“Yes’m, but last night some one broke into the store and stole the money and a lot of things!”

The little woman paled and glanced apprehensively about her.

“Burglars!” she whispered. “But who—”

“I guess we don’t have to look very far for ’em,” said a voice at the doorway. Roy and Dick started and looked up. It was the man in the black frock-coat.

“Thunder!” muttered Roy, softly. “*It’s Jim Ewing!*”

“This is my brother-in-law, Mr. Ewing,” faltered Mrs. Peel. “This young lady is the one I was telling you about, James, and these gentlemen—they are friends of yours, my dear?”

“Yes,” answered Harry, “we’re all together with my father and Chub—you saw him the other day—on a house-boat.”

Roy and Dick were gazing fascinatedly at the farmer, and Mr. Ewing was staring malevolently back at them.

“James, there’s been thieves here,” said Mrs. Peel, “and they stole—how much did they take, Miss?”

“They took all the money in the drawer,” said Harry, “and we reckoned up that they’d taken about nine dollars’ worth of bacon and canned goods. They broke in the back door—”

“Up to your old tricks again, are ye?” asked Mr. Ewing, harshly. “Ain’t content with robbing farms, eh? Have to take the bread out of the mouths of the widows and orphans, too, do ye?”

“Why, James!” ejaculated Mrs. Peel, bewilderedly. “You don’t understand! These aren’t the thieves! These gentlemen are—”

“Don’t need to tell me anything about ’em,” grunted the farmer. “We’ve met before, ain’t we?”

“We have,” replied Roy, dryly.

“Didn’t think you’d dare deny it,” was the triumphant response. “Well, I guess we’ve met once too frequent for your good, you young rascals! I guess—”

“Why, what do you mean, James?” cried Mrs. Peel, nervously.

“Mean? Mean that these folks is a parcel of thieves, that’s what I mean, Amanda! Travel around country, they do, in some sort of a floatin’ robbers’ den. They broke into my house early in the spring and stole more’n thirty dollars worth of silverware. And then here a while ago, when Millie was up visiting you, they come around again, and I found ’em at their

tricks and pretty nigh got 'em. But this time I'll wager they'll get what they deserve. You go out, Amanda, and send some one for the constable."

But Mrs. Peel was beyond running errands. She subsided into a chair and fanned herself with her bonnet, looking dazed and frightened.

"You said they was friends of yours," she whispered weakly to Harry.

"They are," replied Harry, stoutly and indignantly, "and this gentleman is quite mistaken. The store was robbed last night, while we were all asleep on the boat or in the tent."

"Of course, of course," chuckled the farmer. "You didn't know anything about it, young lady; I don't say *you* did. But I guess these fellers here can pretty nigh put their hands on the things if they want to. Where's the other chap?" he demanded of Roy.

"He's—he's fishing," answered Roy.

"Fishin', eh? Carried a bag along with him, didn't he? To bring the fish home in, eh? Yes, he's fishin', I'll be bound—fishin' in hen-coops, likely! Got a room where we can lock 'em in, Amanda, till the constable comes?"

"Why, James, I—I—don't know what to think! I'm sure these young gentlemen wouldn't do such a thing! And—and even if there is a few things missing," she continued, nervously, "I—I wouldn't want to make any trouble, James."

"You don't need to," he replied, grimly. "I'll make the trouble. Now you get up and march into the house, right through that side door there." This to Roy and Dick.

“Look here, Mr. Ewing,” said Roy, calmly, “you’ve made a fool of yourself once before, and it’s time to quit. We weren’t robbing your house that other time, and we don’t know any more about this affair than we’ve told you. And if you think we’re going to let you lock us up in a stuffy old room just so you can make a goose of yourself, you’re mightily mistaken. Come on, Harry, and leave this crazy man to himself.”

“No, you don’t!” cried the farmer. “You stay where you are! I’m going to have the law on you, I say! Don’t you defy the law now! Don’t you do it! If you do it’ll go hard with you, I tell you that! I’ve warned ye!”

“James,” gasped Mrs. Peel, “don’t be violent! Just—just let’s hear what they have to say. You tell me, my dear, all about it.”

“Then he mustn’t call Roy and Dick thieves,” answered Harry, angrily. “He’s a horrid old man, whoever he is.”

“Tell Mrs. Peel all about it, Harry,” said Roy, in a bored tone. “See if you can make her understand.”

“Well,” said Harry, pausing a moment to collect her thoughts, “it was like this.” And she told the story of the burglary from the time of Mrs. Peel’s departure to the station to her return. Mr. Ewing sniffed and snorted at intervals, and Dick looked several times as though he was having hard work to refrain from pitching into him, but Mrs. Peel listened attentively to every word, and when the narrative was finished turned in triumph to her brother-in-law.

“There, James,” she said. “I told you you were mistaken. And these young gentlemen have put the money back in the drawer—which I’m sure they aren’t beholden to do—and it’s

there now.”



[“You stay where you are!”](#)

“A check!” scoffed the farmer. “I reckon I wouldn’t count too much on any piece of paper they give you.” But it was to be seen, nevertheless, that Mr. Ewing was somewhat shaken in mind, for it would have been very difficult for any one to have disbelieved Harry’s story.

“Oh, if that’s all that’s troubling you,” said Roy, “we’ll give you the cash instead.”

“And how about the other things you stole?”

“We didn’t steal them. And I guess you’ll have to look for them yourself,” said Roy, wearily.

“And how about my silverware?”

“Oh, bother your silverware!” exploded Dick. “I don’t believe you ever owned any! Anyhow, I’m sick of hearing about it. Come on, Roy, let’s mosey along.”

But the farmer strode to the door, closed it, turned the key in the lock, and dropped the key into his pocket.

“[You’ll stay where you are](#) a bit longer,” he snarled. “I ain’t decided yet what to do with you.” Then, before either Roy or Dick remembered the back door, he had headed them off in that direction as well, and, with both keys in his pocket, was master of the situation.



CHAPTER XXV

MR. EWING IS SUSPICIOUS

Dick looked eagerly at Roy, but Roy shook his head. So far they had done nothing to merit punishment, but if they set on the farmer he would have good cause for complaint against them. Besides, as Roy realized, it was doubtful if they could overcome Mr. Ewing in a tussle. Roy perched himself on the counter again and shrugged his shoulders.

“You’re making a fool of yourself,” he said, “just as I begged you not to do.” The farmer paid no heed to him.

“You get your things off, Amanda,” he said, “and look around and see just what’s gone. I reckon if these fellers own up to nine dollars’ worth you’ll find a heap more than that missing!”

“You’re a horrid, ugly, suspicious old man!” cried Harry, hotly. “And just as soon as I get back to the boat I’m going to tell my father on you!”

Mr. Ewing regarded her thoughtfully.

“Father’s with you, is he?”

“Yes, he is!”

“Guess you and your father wasn’t with these fellers a while back, was you? When they stopped and paid me a visit?”

“No, but we know all about it. The boys only stopped at your place to buy some milk, and your dog got after them and drove them into the house.”

“Well, I ain’t saying you’ve got anything to do with this,” said the farmer, quite kindly. “And if you want to run along home I ain’t got no objections, Miss.”

“I sha’n’t go until you let Roy and Dick go,” replied Harry, spiritedly. “You haven’t any right to keep us here.”

“I ain’t keeping you, Miss. I offered to let you out. You run along, Amanda, and do as I tell you to. The sooner we find out what’s missing, the better.”

“Well,” said Mrs. Peel, arising with a sigh, “I don’t know what to say, James. It don’t seem to me as you’re doing right.”

“Don’t you worry about me, Amanda. I’ll stand good for my actions.”

With another sigh and a troubled, doubtful look about her, the little woman went toward the door into the living-rooms.

“You’ll find the key on the third shelf at the right,” said Harry. “We locked the door yesterday.”

“Might as well have a look around in there, too,” advised Mr. Ewing. “Maybe they’ve been collectin’ silverware again.”

Dick groaned loudly, and the farmer cast a baleful look at him as Mrs. Peel disappeared. Harry joined the boys, and they discussed the situation in whispers, while Mr. Ewing stood guard near the front door.

“What’s the good of being huffy?” asked Roy. “It’s nothing but a lark, anyway.”

“But look at the time,” said Dick. “Six o’clock already, and I’m as hungry as a bear. And the doctor will wonder what’s become of us.”

“That’s so. I say, Harry, you’d better run along to the boat and bring the doctor and Chub with you. There’s no use in missing our supper just to please this old galoot.”

“Well, I will,” answered Harry. “I guess when papa comes he will have something to say to this man!” She shot a vindictive look at the unperturbed Mr. Ewing. “If you’ll kindly unlock the door,” she announced, haughtily, “I’ll go.”

“Very well,” said the farmer, “but you fellers just stay where you be; understand?”

“Yes, we understand,” replied Roy. “We won’t try to rush you. Don’t you suppose we could get out of here if we wanted to try?”

“Maybe; maybe not,” answered Mr. Ewing, as he unlocked the door. “Anyhow, you’d better not try it.”

“Good-by,” called Harry. “I’ll bring papa right back.”

“Oh, take your time,” replied Roy, with a wave of his hand. “We’re quite comfortable. Besides, we have the inestimable pleasure of Mr. Ewing’s society.”

The door closed again, and the farmer returned the key grimly to his pocket. After a few minutes Mrs. Peel returned.

“Not a thing’s gone from the house, James,” she announced.

“Are you certain sure?” asked Mr. Ewing.

“Of course I am,” she replied, tartly.

“Well, now you take a look around the store.”

Mrs. Peel proceeded to do so. When she came to the money-drawer she found the check which Harry had placed there. She

brought it to Mr. Ewing, and the latter looked it all over carefully.

“It looks perfectly good, don’t it, James?” she asked, anxiously.

“Yes, it *looks* all right,” he acknowledged, grudgingly, “but it’s the best-lookin’ checks that’s the worthlessesst. Horace Collins, over to Highwood, took a check like this from a stranger once, and it wa’n’t a bit of good. Came back to him marked right across the face of it, ‘No funds.’ You can’t ever tell by *lookin’* at a check what it’s *worth*, Amanda.”

Roy and Dick sat on the edge of the counter and swung their heels and grinned.

Mrs. Peel continued her investigation, and when she was through she did some figuring, dipping the little stump of a pencil at frequent intervals into the corner of her mouth. Finally:

“It’s just as they said, James,” she announced. “I can’t see as anything’s missing except the canned things and the bacon. And that foots up to just eight dollars and forty cents.”

“Glad to hear it,” said Mr. Ewing, in tones which belied his assertion. “It might have been a heap worse.” He turned to the boys. “If Amanda’s willing to take that money in cash instead of paper and let you off, I ain’t got anything more to say. If I was her I’d have ye all put in jail, but women-folks are soft-hearted and easy-goin’, and it’s for her to say.”

“Of course,” said Mrs. Peel, hurriedly, “this check may be all right. I don’t get many of them, you see, and don’t pretend to be able to tell the good ones from the bad. But James says it’s risky, and so if you gentlemen wouldn’t mind just giving

me the money instead—”

“We’d do it in a minute for you, ma’am,” Roy answered, “but this gentleman here has got on my nerves. So I guess that, seeing we aren’t liable for that money anyway, it’ll have to be the check or nothing.”

“Didn’t you agree—” began the farmer, angrily.

“There, there, James,” Mrs. Peel soothed. “There ain’t any cause to pursue the subject. They’re right, I guess; they ain’t bound to pay back what the burglars took, and I don’t know as I ought to take the money from them.” She laid the check on the edge of the counter and observed it dubiously.

“That’s all right, ma’am,” said Dick. “We want you to have it. We’ve made it up between us. It wasn’t our fault that the store was broken into, but still we were left in charge, after a fashion, and we’d feel better about it if you let us pay.”

Farmer Ewing laughed sarcastically.

“Gettin’ out of it pretty cheap at that, I guess,” he sneered. “If it was my store—”

“Oh, see here, now, if it was your store you’d have had no customers!” broke out Roy.

Further hostilities were interrupted by a knock at the door. Mr. Ewing turned the key and looked out. Then the door swung open, and the doctor and Harry appeared.

“Well,” said the doctor, gravely and quietly, “what’s going on here, pray?”

“Is he your father?” asked the farmer of Harry. She nodded.

“Then I’ll explain to him,” said Mr. Ewing. He started in

and had reached the robbery of his farm in June, when his silverware had been taken, when the doctor smiled and held up his hand.

“One moment, sir,” said the doctor. “I happen to know exactly where all three of these young gentlemen were during the first three weeks of June, and it is quite impossible that they could have had anything to do with taking your silver. As for the time they visited your farm and were found by you in your house, their explanation is quite truthful. I’ve known them all for periods of from three to five years, sir, and I assure you that you can believe what they tell you. As for attempting to connect them with the recent burglary here, why, that is quite absurd. I think, Mr. Ewing, that you have allowed your imagination to run away with you.”

“Sounds mighty fine,” growled Mr. Ewing, “but how do I know who you are?”

“My name is Emery, sir, and I’m principal of the Ferry Hill School at Ferry Hill, which, as you probably know, is only a short distance down the river from here. These boys have all been my pupils, and this young lady is my daughter. Now, boys, I guess we’d better get back to supper.”

Dick and Roy followed the doctor to the door, Mr. Ewing offering no objection. At that moment there was the sound of an automobile horn, and a big gray car swept down the road and stopped with a jarring of brakes in front of the store. In the front seat sat Chub and Joe Whiting; in the back of the car were the sheriff and three chaps of about Whiting’s age.

“Hello, there!” cried Chub, cheerily. “Mrs. Peel in? Tell her we’ve got pretty nearly all her stuff, and what we couldn’t find we’ve brought the money for!”



CHAPTER XXVI

CHUB'S ADVENTURE

It was after eight o'clock, and they were back at camp, eating a much-delayed supper and listening to the story of Chub's adventures.

"I just had time to get behind that bale of hay with the horse-blanket over it when they came into the tent. I thought sure they'd seen me! I made myself as small as possible and felt around for the bottom of the canvas, thinking every minute they'd reach down and pull me out."

"Oh, but you were scared!" laughed Roy.

"I was," acknowledged Chub. "You'd have been scared, too."

"Then what happened?" asked Harry, eagerly.

"Now, if Dickums will cut a few more slices of bread I'll proceed with the narrative. I'm as hungry as a bear!"

"Well," Chub proceeded, as he buttered another slice of bread and helped himself to the stewed apricots, "I got my feet through under the bottom of the tent and squirmed out until I just had my head inside. I wasn't going to leave that there, but just then the two Gipsies began shouting and quarreling with each other, and I was pretty certain that they didn't know I was around. So I stayed still a moment and listened. I couldn't understand more than one word in three, for they used the funniest language I ever heard, but I didn't have any trouble

making out that one chap wanted money and the other didn't want to give it to him. I thought every minute they were going to fight, but they didn't; just romped around and called each other things in Gipsy language—and sometimes in English—and raised all sorts of a rumpus. I thought you could have heard them a quarter of a mile away, and I wondered why the other folks didn't come over to see what was up. But I suppose they're used to it. Presently I got my head outside, too, but in such a position that I could see in under the canvas and hear everything.

“Pretty soon they calmed down, and I heard one of them saying something about a dollar, and the other fellow saying ‘Two dollars! Two dollars!’ over and over. And finally one of them hove in sight, and I ducked quick. I heard him fussing around back of the bale of hay, and thought he was getting some of the canned things for supper. I lifted the canvas a little way and saw that he wasn't looking toward me at all. He was leaning over the bale and pulling a piece of brown paper out between the layers of hay. When he had it out he opened it, and I felt like kicking myself. For there were bills and silver and coppers wrapped up in it, and I knew it was the money I'd been looking for. But I kept still and watched. He took a two-dollar bill out of the bunch, did the rest up, and put it back where it had been before, shoving his hand 'way into the hay. Then he went off, and I heard them squabbling again, only they weren't so peevish now.

“Then, thinks I, it's my time. So I squirmed back until I had my head and shoulders in the tent again. By stretching I could reach the bale, and in the shake of a lamb's tail I had that little bundle of money in my pocket. Then I thought it would be a good scheme to have a look at the chaps so I could tell them

again. That's where I made my mistake, for, just as I got my head around the corner, one of the fellows got up off the box he'd been sitting on and looked my way. I saw him all right, and the other fellow too, but he saw me, which wasn't down on the program. I saw his eyes get big and his hand shoot out toward me, pointing, and I heard him break into song, but I didn't wait any longer. I sneaked. I got tangled up in backing out, and lost some time that way, but I got out before they reached me, and was up and running like the dickens for the woods.

“Well, you never heard such a row as there was! I hadn't got half-way to cover when the whole place was in an uproar and everybody in that camp was coming after me. The fellows in the tent came, too; one through the back and the other by way of the door. It was a merry chase, fellows! I made for the deep woods and then circled around toward the road, thinking I could outrun any of them if I had a good track. But I was off my reckoning. I reached the road all right and had a few yards' start, when the chap who had seen me broke out of the woods and came after me like a house afire. And he can run, that Gipsy! If we had him at college we'd win the sprints easily! I put on every ounce of steam I had, but he kept gaining on me, and I saw that it was no use. Then I made a dive for the woods again, thinking I might manage to give him the slip. But instead of that I gave myself the slip. I tumbled over a root or something, and before I could get my feet again he had me.”

“Oh, Chub!” gasped Harry. “Did he hurt you?”

“Cut his head off,” said Dick. “Look for yourself, Harry.”

“No, he didn't hurt me, that is, not to mean it. He pretty nearly broke my back when he landed on me, but that was

unintentional, I suppose. By the time I'd got up, about six more of the Indians were on the scene, all talking and jabbering away like mad. No one seemed to know what the trouble was, and the chap who had me couldn't get them to keep still long enough to let him tell them. I never heard such a lot of noise in my life. Sounded like a meeting of the Football Rules Committee. Well, they held on to me and shouted and yelled, and I got my breath back and tried to put on a front.

“‘What do you mean by chasing me like this?’ said I. ‘Let me go immediately’—or words to that effect. ‘What you do in my tent?’ asks the pasty-faced gentleman who had caught me. ‘What tent?’ says I, looking as innocent as anything. Then they all broke out again, and pointed, and began to lug me back to their old camp. I went unwillingly, but I went; that is, I went part way. Because, just as we were getting back to it, along comes a cloud of dust with an automobile in it. So I began to yell like anything: ‘*Help! Murder! Fire! Thieves!*’ And, being a human sort of an automobile, it stopped quick to see what was up. When the dust had blown away I looked up to find Joe Whiting grinning down at me in surprise.

“‘Well, what the dickens are you doing here, Eaton?’ he asked.

“‘Having my fortune told,’ said I. ‘And I don’t like the way it’s turning out.’

“‘Well, Whiting had three friends with him—they were touring, it seemed—and it wasn’t more than half a minute until I was in the car with them. The Gipsies didn’t want to let me go. They said I’d been caught stealing; they can talk good enough English when they want to; and they were going to have me arrested. But the fellows said I was a particular friend

of theirs, and they couldn't spare me. Whiting sort of wanted to get out and break up the camp, but I told him I knew something that would be more fun than that. So we went on, and I told him all about everything; how I'd found the stolen things and the money, and all we had to do was to get the sheriff and go back there and get them. Whiting said they weren't in any particular hurry, and they'd run over to Washington Hills and bring the sheriff back. So we did it. Found the sheriff washing up for supper, got him into the car, and hustled him back. The rest was easy. He just showed those Gipsies his badge and the handle of his revolver, and they said, 'Welcome to our city.' We hunted through the whole place and got everything except a few cans of vegetables and two strips of bacon. Then the sheriff threatened to arrest every one if they didn't pay up for what was missing and move out of the township before to-morrow night. And they agreed to everything. We threw the booty into the automobile, said good night, and kited for the store."

"Well, you had a busy and eventful afternoon," said the doctor, when Chub had ended. "It was a lucky thing that your friends came just as they did. I'm afraid you'd have fared badly otherwise."

"I don't believe they'd have hurt me, sir," answered Chub. "You see, they didn't know I'd taken the money; they didn't find that out until the sheriff told them. And I don't believe they'd have thought of it. I think they'd have let me go after a while."

"It did me good," laughed Dick, "to see the expression on old Jim Ewing's face when you lugged the stuff into the store. He was a picture."

“The old ruffian!” growled Roy.

“Well, he saw the error of his way,” said Chub, cheerfully. “And he came as near apologizing as it was possible for him to, I suppose.”

“Said he’d made a mistake; we could have told him that before,” muttered Roy. “I hope he—” Roy glanced at the doctor and gulped. “I hope he loses his train.” The others laughed.

“Well, Mrs. Peel apologized for him, anyway,” said Dick. “She’s a nice old lady. She was so excited she didn’t know what was happening, especially when Whiting bought the dozen cans of tomatoes. What did he want with those, Chub?”

Chub chuckled.

“I asked him, and he said they were fine to set up on the fence-posts and shoot at with revolvers. Said every time you hit one the blood came. He’s a good chap, fellows. We must look him up when we get back to college.”

“We sure must!” said Roy, vehemently. “Come on and let’s get these things washed up. It’s ’most time for bed.”

“I wonder,” remarked the doctor, as he pushed Snip off his lap and arose—“I wonder if you boys know what the date is.”

“Yes, sir, the fifth,” replied Chub, promptly.

“Sixth, isn’t it?” asked Roy, doubtfully.

“Seventh,” said Dick, as though he really knew.

“The seventh it is,” replied the doctor, “the seventh of August. Does that suggest anything to any one?” He looked around the circle smilingly. But every one looked utterly

blank, every one save Harry; she looked uneasy, as though she would have liked to change the subject of conversation.

“Somebody’s birthday?” asked Roy, vaguely.

“Labor Day!” exclaimed Dick, and was promptly hooted.

“No, it’s nothing particular on the Gregorian calendar,” said the doctor, “but it’s an important day on my calendar, I might say *our* calendar.” And he laid his arm over Harry’s shoulders and pulled her to him.

“Well, it isn’t Harry’s birthday,” said Chub, “because she —”

“And it isn’t the doctor’s,” Dick interrupted, “because that comes in February. We—we observed it last time.” And Dick smiled doubtfully at the doctor.

“You did indeed,” replied the latter, dryly, to the accompaniment of Harry’s laughter.

“What did you do?” asked Chub, gleefully.

“They serenaded me,” said the doctor, with one of his slow smiles. “The music was really nice, but, as it happened at half-past six in the morning, I was obliged to interrupt it. In fact, I was obliged to interview some half-dozen of the leaders at the office. And our friend Dick, here, was one of them.”

“Oh, we didn’t mind, sir,” replied Dick, cheerfully. “You see,” he explained, turning to Chub with a reminiscent grin, “we got up early, about twenty of us, and went to the cottage. There were about eight of us who could play things, and we had two violins, three banjos, a concertina, and—and—”

“A clarionet!” prompted Harry, her eyes dancing.

“Yes, and we made pretty good music. We played ‘Boola’ and ‘Dixie’ and something else. They weren’t especially appropriate, of course, but we had to play what we all knew, or what most of us knew. We were just in the middle of the third number on the program, with everything going finely and the clarinet skipping every third or fourth note, when up went a window and out popped the doctor’s head. ‘What does this mean?’ he asked, very sternly. Then we all cheered and made noises on the fiddles and things, and yelled, ‘Happy birthday, Doctor!’ And the doctor told us to go back to the dormitory instantly. And we went.”

“And then you went to the office after breakfast, eh?” asked Roy.

“Oh, yes,” replied Dick, carelessly, “but the doctor didn’t really mean half he said!”

Dr. Emery’s laughter mingled with that of the others.

“But you haven’t guessed my riddle yet,” he reminded them.

“I give it up, sir,” said Chub. “The seventh of August doesn’t mean a thing to me.”

“Well, we wish it didn’t to us, don’t we, Harry?” Harry nodded sorrowfully. “It’s the end of our two weeks’ cruise on the *Slow Poke*,” said the doctor. “It’s the day we were due home.”

“O—oh!” exclaimed the boys in chorus.

“Can’t you stay a little longer, sir?” asked Chub, eagerly. But the doctor shook his head with decision before Harry could get out the words on her tongue.

“No, I’m afraid not, Chub. I’ve an engagement at home the

day after to-morrow and some things to look up first. I ought to have been back to-day, I suppose, but I think one day won't matter. Do you think you can get us back to-morrow?"

"Easy, sir, if you really must go," answered Chub. But Dick shook his head dubiously.

"Why not?" challenged Roy.

"Well, you see, the engine hasn't been working very well of late, and I shouldn't be a bit surprised if it just stopped entirely to-morrow."

"Get out! You haven't had it going for days!" said Roy. "How do you know?"

"Feel it," answered Dick, gravely. "I—I have a premonition."

"And how long do you think it will be before the engine gets to working again?" asked the doctor, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Probably about a week, sir," replied Dick, slyly.

"A very intelligent engine," said the doctor, with a smile. "You have a talk with it to-night, Dick, and explain to it that I am obliged to be at home to-morrow. Maybe it will decide to go on with us. You might say, that if I can't get home on the *Slow Poke* I'll have to ferry across and take the train."

"In that case," said Dick, regretfully, "it—it might postpone its breakdown until later. But I feel sure that it won't last longer than it takes to reach Ferry Hill."

"Goody!" cried Harry. "Then you can stay and pay us a visit, can't they, papa?"

"They're going to," he answered. "They're going to stay

with us at least a week, aren't you, boys?"

The boys looked at each other questioningly. Finally:

"I'd like to," said Chub, "if the others—"

"We'd all like to," said Roy. "And we will if you're sure you don't mind, doctor."

"Mind! Of course I won't mind! Why, Mrs. Emery wouldn't forgive me if I let you go back without a real visit."

"If they don't come," said Harry, "I won't speak to them again ever!"

"Oh, we're coming," said Chub. "We'll sleep aboard the boat, doctor, so that Mrs. Emery won't have to bother about us much."

"Just as you like about that, boys, but you'll take your meals at the cottage; that's understood. How much longer is your cruise going to last, Chub?"

Chub looked doubtfully at the others.

"Well," he replied, finally, "this is the seventh, and if we stay at the school a week that will bring it to about the middle, won't it? Then if we went back to New York slowly we could make the trip last to about the twentieth. And, as far as I'm concerned, I think I'd be ready to quit by that time."

"That's long enough," said Dick.

Roy agreed with him. "We'll have been gone over six weeks by that time," he said. "And there's no use prolonging a good time till you begin to get tired of it."

"And there's no use staying up all night," said Dick, with a

yawn. “I wager you’ll dream the Gipsies have got you to-night, Chub.”

“If I do,” answered Chub, “you’ll hear me!”



CHAPTER XXVII

GIFTS AND FAREWELLS

The next morning camp was broken and the *Slow Poke* was made ready for the cruise to Ferry Hill. Chub and Harry left Dick to fiddle with his beloved engine and Roy to help him, and paid a farewell visit to Mrs. Peel. They found the little woman busily and contentedly engaged about the store, armed with a feather duster. Chub's gasoline sign still challenged the passing traffic from the corner of the building.

"I'm just going to let it stay right there," said Mrs. Peel, when Chub offered to get it down for her. "When you can buy gasoline for twelve or fourteen cents by the barrel and sell it for twenty cents a gallon, I think it pays real well. And you'd be surprised the number of automobiles go by here! I've been keeping track of them this morning, and there's been three already. Didn't any of them want any gasoline, I guess; leastways, they didn't stop; but maybe the next one will; you never can tell. I took the sign out of the window, though," she added, apologetically. "It didn't seem just the thing, although it was certainly printed just lovely. I was wondering if you'd mind doing me another one instead. I was making up my mind to ask you, in case you came back again, just when you crossed the street."

"I'll be glad to," said Chub. "What shall I print?"

"Well,"—Mrs. Peel folded her arms and pursed her lips—"I've heard folks say that down to Washington Hills it's hard to get waited on at that store, and that half the time they

get short weight. I guess that's how that fellow down there can sell as cheap as he does. I thought you might just put on the sign, 'Prompt attention, honest prices, full measure.' What do you think?"

"That's lovely," said Harry, "and it's all true, too!"

"Well," said Mrs. Peel, beaming at the compliment, "I always have held that it pays to treat folks fair and square, leastway in the long run. That fellow down to Washington Hills is doin' pretty well now, but I wouldn't be surprised if he got into trouble before many years are gone. Folks don't mind being cheated for awhile, but they get tired of it in the end. There was a man came here last Fall with a lot of signs he wanted me to buy; cards, they were, that you put in the window and around the store. Awfully pretty, too; looked like pictures, most. But I didn't take to them. Mostly they was signs like 'Our Prices can't be Beat' and 'As good as Any, Better'n Many' and 'Our Prices are the Lowest in Town.' Well, course that last was true enough, because this is the only store here, but most of them was sort of prevaricating. I told the man so. I said if he had any real honest signs to fetch 'em out and I'd look at 'em. But, if you'll believe it, he didn't have one! My husband used to say that you could cheat a man once, and maybe twice, but you couldn't cheat him the third time because he wouldn't give you a chance. And I guess that's about the way it is. I'll get a nice big piece of cardboard, sir, and the marking pot."

Chub took particular pains with that sign, ruling his lines and spacing his letters with a pencil before he set to work with the brush and the lampblack. And when it was finished it certainly looked fine.

“There,” said Chub, holding it out, “that isn’t so bad, is it? I’ve seen signs right in the windows of our stores at home that didn’t beat that much. That capital F looks sort of wobbly, but you wouldn’t notice it, I think.”

“It’s perfectly splendid!” said Harry, admiringly. And Mrs. Peel, who had watched the lettering with an almost breathless interest, fluttered off, in quite a tremor of excited pleasure, to find her spectacles.

“Looks just like it was printed on a printing-machine,” she exclaimed, when her glasses had been adjusted and she was alternately trying the effects of looking through them and over them. “I’m very much obliged, sir. I—I think I’ll put it in the window and see how it looks from outside.”

So, with Chub assisting, she tacked it to the back of one of the window shelves, and cleared the one below so that the inscription should not be missed. Then she hurried out to the sidewalk and viewed it with her head perked about like a bird’s. Chub and Harry joined her and observed the effect with satisfaction, and Chub, to Mrs. Peel’s delight, discovered that it could be read from the corner of the street if you found just the right spot to stand.

They made a few modest purchases for the boat’s larder and then bade Mrs. Peel good-by.

“Well,” she said, “I do hope you’ll come again. You’ve been most kind and obliging, all of you. I do hope you won’t hold it against me, the way James acted. He’s a real nice man, ’cept when he gets his tantrums, and then he’s that set and—and pig-headed there isn’t any use trying to argue with him.”

“I think that’s so,” murmured Chub.

“Indeed, we didn’t mind him at all, did we, Chub?” assured Harry.

“No’m, not a bit,” Chub replied. “I—I hope he got his train all right last night?”

“He must have, I guess. If he hadn’t he’d been back again likely. He was real ashamed of the way he’d acted and the things he’d said, but wild horses couldn’t get him to own up to it, Miss. Some men are like that. You have to know them, Miss. My husband used to say that there was two ways to judge a man. One way was to watch him in public, and the other way was to see him at home. I’ve seen James at home. Well, must you really be going?”

“Yes,” answered Chub, “they’ll be waiting for us at the boat, I’m afraid. Good-by.”

“Good-by, sir. Good-by, Miss. I do hope you’ll come up this way again, and—and—” The little woman broke off vaguely and swept her gaze quickly about the store. Then, “Just you wait a bit, please, Miss,” she exclaimed. She trotted back to the ribbon-case, casting a backward glance at Harry’s face, and fumbled agitatedly about there for a moment. Then she came back with a roll of light-blue ribbon which she put in Harry’s hand.

“To tie up your hair, my dear,” she whispered, patting the hand that held the gift.

“Oh, but really, Mrs. Peel—”

“Now don’t you say anything, Miss! It’s just a little remembrance from an old woman you’ve been kind to. ’Tain’t worth a row of pins.” And while Harry was thanking her she turned to Chub.

“Ain’t there any little thing you’d like to take along, sir?” she asked, eagerly. “I do wish you’d select something. I suppose there isn’t much here you’d care for, but—”

“Indeed there is, Mrs. Peel,” Chub assured her heartily, “but I’m not going to take anything. I thank you just the same.”

Mrs. Peel’s eyes were ranging the store again, and Chub nudged Harry and moved toward the door.

“Just a minute, sir!” And Mrs. Peel hurried away to one of the farther shelves, returning in a moment, looking highly pleased with herself. “There,” she said, “just you take that, sir. It’s a real pretty bit of china, ain’t it? Course that sentiment don’t mean anything. Unless,” she added, half shyly, “you want it should, sir.”

The gift was a pale pink mustache-cup, decorated with green leaves and purple flowers, and bearing the inscription in funny gilt lettering, “Friendship’s Token.” Chub glanced at Harry, whose eyes were dancing merrily and yet looked a trifle misty, and then at Mrs. Peel. Apparently, however, that lady was quite unaware of the irony of presenting Chub with a mustache-cup, and Chub restrained a smile and thanked her quite gravely and earnestly. When they reached the corner with their gifts and purchases, they turned and looked back. The little woman was in the doorway, smiling and waving her feather duster. [They waved back to her and went on.](#) Harry was silent until they were taking the hill. Then:

“I don’t care,” she said, half aggressive and half apologetic. “I think it was perfectly sweet of her, Chub!”

“Of course it was,” answered Chub, emphatically.

“And—and it shows,” continued Harry, earnestly, “that the

world is just full of nice people, and you can't always tell who they are at—at first.”

“The world is so full of a number of things,
I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings,”

murmured Chub, adding, with a glance at Harry's ardent face,
“Anyhow, 'most any one could be nice to you without half trying.”



[They waved back to her and went on](#)

“Why?” asked Harry, opening her blue eyes very wide. Chub’s gaze wandered off to the scenery.

“Oh, just—just because,” he answered, vaguely.

Shortly before ten the *Slow Poke* was on her way again, dropping down the river with, for the *Slow Poke*, almost marvelous speed.

“At this rate,” sighed Harry to Chub, “we shall be home long before supper-time.”

“Well, for my part,” answered Chub, turning the spokes of the wheel idly back and forth, “I’m about ready to eat some one else’s cooking. But don’t whisper it to Dick.”

“This will be our last—I mean *my* last dinner on board,” said Harry, regretfully. “Don’t you think we might find a real pretty place to stop, Chub?”

“To be sure, we can; and we’ll make a farewell banquet of it and eat everything nice we’ve got! You take the wheel a minute, and I’ll give orders to my worthless crew.”

They made quite a ceremony of that dinner. Dick, imbued with the spirit of the occasion, made a jelly omelet as a *pièce de résistance*, and piled every good thing that the larder contained on the table up under the striped awning. They had stopped the headlong career of the *Slow Poke* where a murmuring grove of trees came down and leaned over the water as though to watch their green finery mirrored back to them from the calm surface. They had snubbed the boat’s bow close to shore, so that half the upper deck was in the cool shadow, and at that end they had placed the table. Harry and Snip had jumped ashore and brought back sprays of leaves for the adornment of the festal board and Roy had ruthlessly snipped a dozen big red blooms from the geraniums in the boxes. Dinner was late, but no one minded, not even the

doctor, for Ferry Hill was less than fifteen miles away, and three hours more would bring them there.



[The doctor was called on for a speech](#)

[The doctor was called on for a speech](#) when the dessert was brought on, and responded eloquently, finally toasting his hosts

in a brimming glass of “vin de Cold Spring.” Chub responded, “on behalf of himself and his crew, who, being a motley lot hailing from many countries, were unable to speak the English.” The crew groaned loudly at this, but later forgave the remark and responded generously with applause. Snip ate his repast from a dish at Harry’s side and had a little of everything, as was only proper when you consider the occasion. Harry decreed that no one was to hurry the least little bit, and no one did. And so it was two o’clock before the engine began its work once more, and almost five when the *Slow Poke* sidled up to the Ferry Hill landing, and Snip, with a bark of sheer delight, leaped the intervening two yards of water and capered around the float.

I might tell, at the cost of many details and much space, of the week that followed, but the story is really finished at this moment. It was a jolly week, the jolliest sort of a week, and every one, even Dr. and Mrs. Emery, enjoyed it thoroughly. And every one, Dr. and Mrs. Emery not the least, regretted the arrival of the day of departure. Good-bys were said, promises of future meetings made, and, with the doctor and Mrs. Emery and Harry waving from the landing, and Snip barking farewell, the *Slow Poke* moved away on the final stage of her journey. The boys watched the group on the wharf until a point of land hid it from view.

“Nice folks those,” said Dick, quietly.

“Yes, they are!” murmured Roy.

“Right, oh!” said Chub.

The voyage back to New York was taken in easy stages, for, now that the end was in sight, no one was really anxious to reach it. They stopped when they liked, and started when it

pleased them, and had a pleasant, lazy time of it. No incident of moment occurred worth setting down here, unless, possibly, it is a very tiny incident that happened on the second evening of the homeward voyage. Chub was getting ready for bed, and Roy and Dick were standing at his door talking to him, their own disrobement complete. Suddenly Dick pushed his way into the little room and picked up something which was lying face down on the bed beside Chub's discarded garments.

"Hello!" said Dick. "Where'd you get the photograph, Chub?"

"Here! You put that down!" exclaimed Chub, making a dash for it. But Dick was too quick for him and tossed it to Roy.

"Have a look!" he called, as Chub grappled him.

Roy had a look, and:

"It's Harry!" he exclaimed, in surprise.

"Well, what of it?" asked Chub, defiantly.

"Oh, nothing," murmured Roy.

"Oh, nothing," echoed Dick, softly, and, joining arms, they marched twice around the deck in the moonlight, whistling Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" badly out of tune, and grinning like a couple of Jack-o'-lanterns when they passed the window. Chub, frowning and muttering, stowed the photograph at the bottom of his suit-case.

THE END

Transcriber's Notes:

Punctuation and spelling inaccuracies were silently corrected.

Archaic and variable spelling has been preserved.

Variations in hyphenation and compound words have been preserved.

[The end of *Captain Chub* by Ralph Henry Barbour]