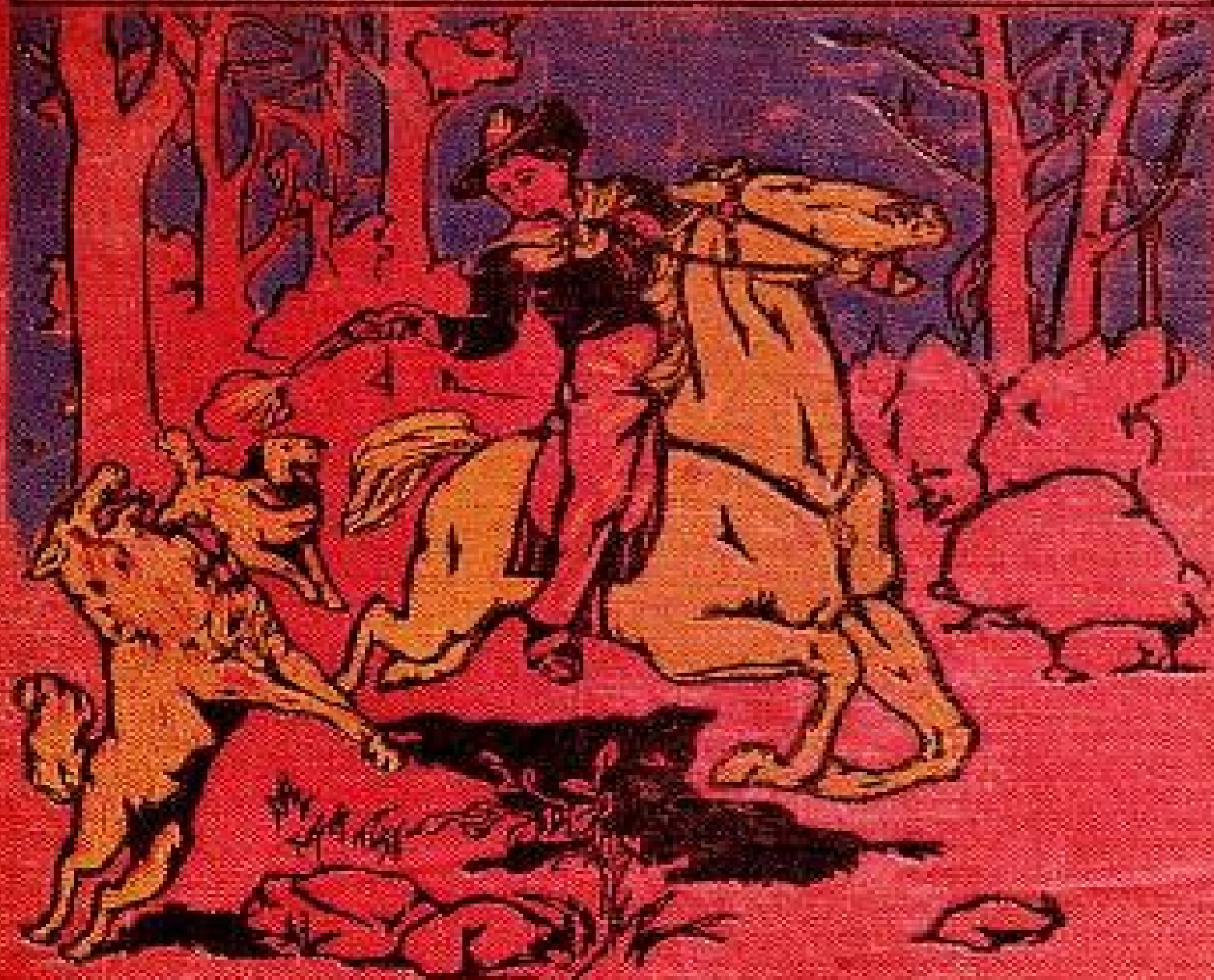


FRONTIER BOYS IN THE SIERRAS



CAPT. WYN ROOSEVELT

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THE FRONTIER BOYS

IN THE

SIERRAS

OR

THE LOST MINE

BY

CAPT. WYN ROOSEVELT

Illustrated by
S. SCHNEIDER

NEW YORK

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By the same Author

FRONTIER BOYS ON THE OVERLAND
TRAIL

FRONTIER BOYS IN COLORADO

FRONTIER BOYS IN THE ROCKIES

FRONTIER BOYS IN THE GRAND CANYON

FRONTIER BOYS IN MEXICO

FRONTIER BOYS ON THE COAST

FRONTIER BOYS IN HAWAII

FRONTIER BOYS IN THE SIERRAS

FRONTIER BOYS IN THE SADDLE

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“the mexican had got almost within striking distance.”—P. 179.

“THE MEXICAN HAD GOT ALMOST WITHIN STRIKING DISTANCE.”—P. [179](#).

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The Frontier Boys in the Sierras

CHAPTER I

IN THE CHANNEL

“By Jove, Jim!” exclaimed Jo Darlington, “but this sea is something fierce! For one I will be mighty glad when we get clear of the Hawaiian channels and out into the open.”

“It is lively going,” yelled Jim, above the roar of the wind, as he and his brother Jo were standing together on the bridge of their ship, “but I guess the *Sea Eagle* will weather it, if we don’t run into another vessel in the dark. How about it, Captain?”

The captain, who was the rather bent figure of an old man, was clothed in a heavy woolen jacket, buttoned across his chest. He stopped and regarded Jim fixedly in the semi-light on the bridge.

“What’s that, Skipper?” he roared hoarsely, “weather this? Why, this ain’t no sea, and the *Sea Eagle* is a staunch boat. Why, lad, you must be joking.”

“I was,” replied Jim, laughing. “I just want to reassure brother Jo,—that was all.”

“Somebody ought to go and cheer up Tom and Jeems Howell,” remarked Jo, in order to give himself some sea standing in the eyes of Captain Kerns. “They are as sick as puppies down in the cabin.”

“Don’t blame ’em much,” cried Jim, “this motion would upset a shark’s liver.”

If you have read “The Frontier Boys in Hawaii,” you will be well acquainted with these conversationalists on the good sea-going yacht, the *Sea Eagle*, but if not, you will have to be introduced, “Mr. Reader, this is Skipper James Darlington.”

“Happy to make your acquaintance, hope you are a good sailor?”

“Mr. Reader, allow me to present Captain Kerns.”

Captain Kerns merely grunts, and, kind Mr. Reader, you must overlook his lack of formality, because the captain is an old salt and his manners are a little briny.

In way of further explanation, I may say that the Frontier Boys are just returning from a trip to Hawaii in which they have explored the wonderful crater of Haleapala on the Island of Maui, and their ship the *Sea Eagle*, whose capture is another story, is pointing her prow eastward through the rough channel that separates Hawaii and Maui.

They are en route to the coast of California, and as soon as they land they have planned to make an exploring expedition into the wilds of The Sierra Nevadas, in search of a lost mine, rumors of which have come to their ears. Besides the three Frontier Boys and their comrade Juarez, there is their friend Jeems Howell, a shepherd and philosopher, from a small island off the coast of California; Captain Kerns, a retired ship's master who was persuaded to come along merely to supervise; Jim, the oldest of the three brothers, being the acting commander, though generally referred to as skipper. And besides these, there is old Pete, an ancient mariner, the engineer, and a sturdy boy below who does a good deal of the stoking.

Besides these *dramatis personæ*, there is a general chorus of Mermen and Mermaids, sharks, porpoises, sea serpents *et al.*; as Jo Darlington would say, it was the sharks that *et all*. But this is no reflection upon the appetites of the boys, which was invariably good, if we may except Tom Darlington and Jeems Howell just at the present moment.

Now, on with the voyage: as the principals have been introduced and are ready, they can come to close grips with the ocean and all its dangers, so that the referee, being the writer, has made his exit through the ropes, allowing a free field and no favor. It is a tough beginning as far as sea way goes. The hour is close upon midnight in mid-channel, and that is no dream even on so staunch a little craft as the *Sea Eagle*.

"That time she lapped the starboard boat into the water," yelled Jim. "Hold steady now, lads."

Then up rose the ship on the other roll to larboard; over, over, over she went; would she never stop? Then with a straining of all her timbers, that had all the effort of severe muscular tension, she did stop, then back she rolled on the other

tack which was equally as sharp, the brass balls on top of her masts pointing from star to star, describing, it seemed, almost a semi-circle.

To make it more interesting the *Sea Eagle* would then dip under a huge wave and the water would swish and roll aft along the main deck. The wind whistled and hummed through the taut ropes, and altogether it was a lively night, even if the sturdy old captain did discount its terrors. Occasionally Jim and Jo would slide across the bridge and bring up against the side; but as a rule they kept their sea legs in good shape.

“Hold on, Juarez,” cried Jim, as he saw a dark form emerge from the companionway, “here comes a big wave.”

But with the roar of the sea and the wind Juarez did not hear the warning, and had just started across the deck when under went the *Sea Eagle*, and a tremendous wave swept aft, submerging the bulwarks. It caught Juarez off his feet and swirled him toward the side. He would not have lived a minute in those rearing, plunging seas.

As he was swept over, he caught frantically at an iron stanchion and barely gripped it, and before he could make an effort to help himself he was submerged in the water, the sea tugging at him as though it were an hungry animal. Hardy as Juarez was, he could not help but feel a thrill of terror; it seemed as if the waves desperately clutched at him.

Jim was filled with horror when he saw Juarez apparently carried overboard. He shook off the captain’s grip; the latter thought that Jim was going to spring over after his friend, which act he knew would result in two lives being thrown away. So he leaped to the main deck. Then he saw Juarez struggling to get aboard before the next wave came. He sprang to his help and with a powerful pull yanked him in.

They braced themselves against the attack of a second wave that swept the deck and then they were “high and dry” on the bridge, drenched to the skin, but entirely safe, and none the worse for their impromptu bath.

“That was a close call, Juarez,” said Jo sympathetically.

“Another call like that and I won’t be tu hum,” replied Juarez with a grin.

“Next time take a look for’ard, lad,” said the captain, who had joined the group in the shelter of the deck house; “we could never have picked you up on a dark night like this.” Then he went back to his station on the bridge. The hardy old sailor would never have dreamed of making much ado about any accident no matter how serious. If the party came through alive, that was sufficient to show that it was not very bad. The Frontier Boys, too, had absorbed a good deal of that philosophy in the course of many dangers which they had so fortunately outlived.

When daylight came, the *Sea Eagle* had battered her way through the rough channel, its waters tortured by rapid currents and terrific cross seas, and was now pitching along the windward coast of the big Island of Hawaii, with its twin volcanic summits nearly fourteen thousand feet in height. It was not smooth going yet by any means, but better than during the night.

“Get up, Tom, and look at the scenery.” It was Jim’s cheerful voice, addressed to Tom, who lay pale and rather wan in his bunk.

“I’ve got no use for scenery,” growled Tom, “unless I can get close enough to it to put my foot on it. I want something solid.”

“How would a beefsteak do, Tom?” It was Jo, who was looking over Jim’s shoulder. At the mention of food, Tom seemed endowed with sudden energy and reached down, and grabbing up a shoe, hurled it at the two in the doorway. They ducked and the missile barely grazed the beard of the old captain, who was coming aft, and then it went overboard.

“By Thundas!” he exclaimed, opening his eyes wide with surprise, “who kicked that?”

“Tom threw it, sir,” said Jim with a burst of laughter he could not control, at sight of the captain’s astonished visage, “but he meant it for us, because we were guying him.”

“I’ll forgive him on account of his intentions,” grinned the captain. “I only wish he had swatted you.”

Tom was much relieved to hear this expression of opinion on the part of the captain, of whom he stood in considerable awe. From fright to relief was such a revulsion of feeling that Tom forgot to be sea-sick, and he began to mend from

that moment, so that he was able to be present for duty when breakfast was served.

“I thought you were sick abed,” remarked Jim, opening his eyes with surprise.

“I was,” replied Tom, “until I threw up that shoe, now I feel fine and fit to eat a square meal.”

CHAPTER II

FAREWELL TO HAWAII

Jeems Howell was the only one of the hardy Frontier group who was unable to be present at breakfast that fine morning.

“How are you feeling, Jeems,” inquired Jo, looking in upon the sufferer a little later. “Don’t you think that you could eat a little something if you were propped up with pillows?”

“No, no, lad,” said Jeems sadly. “I feel that I ain’t long for this world.”

“I don’t know what you call it then,” remarked the incorrigible Jo, “you are six feet four and that seems to me to be pretty long for this world or any other.”

Jeems laughed so heartily at this that he too began forthwith to recuperate. Then he got out on the land side of the deck and, though the sun was of a sufficient warmth to satisfy the most exacting, he kept a heavy shawl wrapped around his shoulders.

“Durned old woman,” growled the captain when he caught sight of the figure seated between the cabin and the rail. “He ought to be for’ard scrubbing deck.”

However, Skipper Jim was more lenient, and only laughed at the captain’s severity, for he knew that the old fellow’s bark was much worse than his bite. In fact, no work was being done aboard ship that morning, for all hands were given a chance for a long last look at Hawaii. Never again were they to behold a more beautiful scene than the panorama that traveled steadily along with the *Sea Eagle* that morning.

The soft radiance flooded the deeply azure sea, and the tropic island of vivid and varied green. The four boys stood leaning lazily on the ship’s rail, gazing in silence at the view that was passing before them. Their sombreros shaded their eyes, but the glare from the water shone upon their faces of healthy bronze, and they did not seem to mind it in the least. The old captain sat upon the bridge in

his old armchair, with his old comrade, the tortoise-shell cat, dozing and blinking at his feet, a true picture of furry felicity.

So the crew of the *Sea Eagle* passed in review this coast of Hawaii, with black precipices, that rose in a continuous line of palisades from out the sea, with no white beach shelving down. The great green surges, with the force of the Pacific behind them, rolled against the perpendicular walls, the dark surfaces of which were veined at frequent intervals by the silvery lines of the waterfalls, or graced by the vines which fell in straight lines, or were looped in varied shapes.

Beyond these cliffs there rose the splendid slopes, with here and there groves of royal palms and slender cocoa trees, fit temples for the gods of ancient Hawaii who were supposed to dwell in streams and groves and mountains. Still higher up the mountain side grew the forests of creamy koa, inlaid among the dark-leaved kukui.

At times the skirts of the clouds, heavy with moisture, dragged along the lower slopes, and a soft gloom would diffuse itself over the landscape. Then the sun would roll the mists aside for the moment, and the light would fall upon tropical vales, hills and mountain slopes, with all the vividness of the early spring and yet with the full, rich splendor of summer.

No wonder the Frontier Boys were silent as they gazed upon this scene of varied and unusual beauty, so different from the wild and barren grandeur of the mountain ranges in their own country, and the arid deserts they had traveled over.

"I'd hate to fall overboard here," exclaimed Tom, "it looks all-fired deep."

"The captain says that along these island coasts," remarked Juarez, "is some of the deepest seas in the world."

"Say, Jeems," cried Juarez to the invalid, "wade out here and see how deep it is."

"If you really want to know I'll tell you," responded Jeems, the philosopher. "Off this coast it's between five and seven thousand feet."

"Whew!" whistled Jim, "over a mile, how is that for down?"

"It makes me shiver to think of it," exclaimed Tom.

“Hello, boys!” cried Jeems, “there is a big fire over on the other side of the Island.”

“I should say!” commented Jim earnestly. “Look at that smoke rolling up.”

“It must be a forest fire,” put in Jo. “Reminds me of our Colorado experiences.”

“I tell you what, boys, let’s make a landing and take a look at it,” cried Juarez. “There’s a fine harbor ahead of us!”

Old Captain Kerns was taking a deep interest in the conversation, as was evident, as he looked down from the quarter deck at the boys.

“What’s that you lads were saying, about a big fire somewheres?” he inquired. “I hope it hain’t aboard ship.”

“No, no, Captain,” replied Jim reassuringly, “we meant that big smoke over on the other side of the island. Juarez wants to make a landing, so as we can see it to better advantage. We don’t want to miss any excitement.”

“You lads are always so eager,” replied the captain. “Why don’t you wait until you get back here sometime?”

“It will be burned out long before we get back,” said Jo.

“Well,” said the captain slowly, “that smoke has been there for nigh onto a thousand years, and is liable to be there for some time yet. That’s the volcano of Kilauea.”

How the captain roared then; for an instant the boys were dumfounded, then they gave themselves up to hilarious mirth.

“That’s certainly one on us boys,” cried Jim. “We can’t tell a volcano when we see it. We ought to have stayed on the old farm and dug potatoes.”

After the ship had turned northward from the coast of Hawaii the boys set to work about their usual tasks aboard ship. Jim took the wheel; Juarez went below to work with the engineer, with whom he was quite chummy; Jeems and Jo scrubbed decks, while Tom was busy in the galley preparing the dinner. All the boys were pretty fair cooks, but Tom’s cooking probably had more style to it, though he was not quite a French chef.

The old captain had turned into his cabin on the quarter deck to take a good nap in his bunk, while the cat, whom he named Ulysses, both on account of his wisdom and because he had been a great traveler, was curled up in the chair beside him. So the day went quickly and cheerfully by,—the first day at sea.

In the late afternoon all hands were on deck to take their last look at Hawaii, that was fast becoming a mythical island on the enchanted border of the horizon. The bulk of the Island of Hawaii was encompassed with an atmosphere of wonderful blue, rising from out the dusk, which shrouded the distant sea, and its two great volcanic cones, that rose to the glow of the sunset, were touched with a delicate pink.

“We have had a fine time down there in Hawaii, boys,” said Jim, “but I’m glad we are headed for home.”

“I suppose you will try to locate that lost mine in the Sierras?” said Tom, “that Jeems spoke about the other day.”

“If there is anything lost we are the ones to locate it,” said Jo. “There is no doubt about that.”

“We must get Jeems to tell us more about it,” said Jim. “Perhaps we can get him to tune up this evening after supper.”

“Time to put up the lights, Captain?” inquired Juarez.

“Yes, Juarez,” replied Jim. “You may attend to it.”

“I don’t see what’s the use,” remarked Tom. “We won’t probably see a ship until we get near the coast of California.”

“Don’t make any difference,” replied Jim. “That’s the law of the sea and you can’t ever tell what you will run against.”

Juarez did not wait to hear the discussion, but went after the red and the green lanterns. He placed the red on the starboard side for’ard in a wooden bracket well up, and the green was placed on the port side, or the left, and they shone through the bronze dusk that obscured the rolling sea, like separate jewels, the emerald and the ruby.

It was a happy group that gathered around the supper table in the cabin that

evening, for the boys were homeward bound. The windows of the skylight were wide open, because it was a typical tropical night—warm and balmy—and the great lamp that swung over the table with its brass reflector served to make it warmer still.

“Tell us something more about that lost mine you were telling about the other day, Jeems,” piped up Tom.

“Don’t tell Tom first,” warned Jim, “because if you do, he will have all the shares sold before we arrive.” There was a general laugh at this because Tom was strictly business when it came to money.

“Wait till we get on deck, then I’ll spout,” said Jeems.



CHAPTER III

JEEMS' STORY

So the clan shortly after supper gathered at the after hatch on the main deck to hear what Jeems had to tell them in regard to this stray, lost, or stolen mine in the depths of the Sierra Nevadas. The captain was seated in his old chair upon the quarter deck, and, in the gloaming, puffing thoughtfully at his weathered old pipe, meditating, like as not, on the days of long ago, when he was as full of life as that bunch now talking and laughing on the main deck.

“This is a fine old night,” declared Jo, as he stretched himself comfortably out on the canvas cover of the hatch.

“I never saw so many stars before,” declared Tom, “must be a million in sight.”

“Not so, son,” remarked Jeems. “There is not more than three thousand visible to the naked eye.”

“Go on with you,” said Tom, conclusively, “you needn’t tell me that. It’s as much of a yarn as your story of the lost mine.”

“Don’t mind him, Jeems,” said Jim. “Let’s hear your tale of woe about this mine that somebody lost.”

“Well,” remarked Jeems, “if you children will be quiet and don’t interrupt, I’ll begin. First make yourselves comfortable.”

This the boys proceeded to do; Jim and Juarez stretched their long legs out on the deck, with their backs against the hatch, while Tom started to make himself content and at ease by using Jo’s stomach for a pillow. This, however, did not agree with Jo’s idea of comfort, or perhaps it was his stomach that it did not agree with. However that may be, there was a cat fight on the hatch, Jo and Tom grappling with each other and struggling over and over. Jim was about to jump in and separate them, when he saw that they were likely to roll off the hatch on to the deck, and then he would not have interfered for anything.

The two combatants were so interested that they did not see or care. Then they poised on the edge and, as the ship gave a roll, over they went, just missing Jeems' shepherd dog, who was peacefully lying, nose over paws, upon the deck. This unexpected avalanche sent him howling for'ard for safety.

Then still clutching each other they rolled into the scuppers, Tom striving to get a strangle hold on brother Jo, and the latter chugging Tom in the side with his free fist. At this juncture Jim took a hand, not in the interest of peace, but because he wanted to hear the shepherd's yarn. So he yanked them apart, none too gently.

"Ain't you ashamed of yourselves?" exclaimed Jim severely, "mussing up my clean deck and scaring Jeems' dog into a fit."

"I'm no sofa pillow," panted Jo. "Tom will find that out."

"I'll put you children on either side of the hatch if you don't behave," advised Jim, "and make you sit there."

"Like to see you try it," replied Tom belligerently.

"Send 'em to bed without any supper," put in Juarez jocosely.

"I'd give 'em a taste of the rope's end."

It was the old captain's voice rumbling down from the quarter deck. He, too, had been aroused by the sound of the scuffle. Tom glanced up at him with an apprehensive eye, for he stood in considerable awe of the old sailor, and quieted right down.

"They will be good boys now, Captain," grinned Jim. "Their feelings were temporarily upset."

"It seemed to be an upset of some kind," replied the captain with a grim smile, and went back to his chair.

Peace being restored, Jeems began his narrative in the slow, drawling manner characteristic of his mode of speech. He was leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, and his gray eyes—large and open—seemed to be looking dreamily over the dusky sea, that was rolling languidly through the warm darkness of the night.

“It was a some different sort of night than this when I first heard tell of the mine, which maybe you boys think you will find some trace of, being young and hopeful and full of action.”

“Now, Jeems, don’t get personal,” warned Jim. “We aren’t as young as we act.”

“I know it, Skipper,” admitted Jeems; “but as I was going to tell you, this night I was speaking of, it had started in to snow something fierce. I was young then myself, and had been prospectin’ all day and had come home to my little cabin that was under the shelter of a huge ledge in the mid-Sierras.

“I can tell you, lads, I was mighty glad to be out of the storm that night, and I pitied any poor prospector who might be caught out in it. My cabin was smaller than the one I had on the Island off the coast, where you first discovered me, but it was comfortable and warm, and well sheltered from the wind.

“I had built a big stone fireplace in one corner of the cabin, and had big sticks of pine piled up to the roof and a lot just outside of the door. You know how pitch pine will burn.”

“Needn’t tell us,” cried the audience in chorus.

“Besides wood, I had enough grub to stand a siege, as I was always forehanded.”

“Must have been durn lonesome,” commented Jo. “Grub and firewood ain’t everything.”

“That sort of business would just suit me,” put in Juarez.

“Well, I wasn’t entirely alone,” said the shepherd.

“Wife with you?” cut in Tom, who could be over-smart at times. Jim noticed that the shepherd winced at the careless question, and he put a grip on Tom’s knee that meant that the said Tom had better keep his mouth shut.

“A man don’t take his wife into such a wilderness as that,” said Jim.

“Go on, Jeems, and there won’t be any more personal interruptions.”

“Well, Skipper, as I was agoin’ to say, I had with me a big hound, one that had followed me on my trips ever since he was a puppy. A prospector had given him to me when I was sluicing for gold on Rainbow Creek. He was a smooth, black-

skinned dog, with stubby ears, and a jaw on him like a prize fighter. He was equal to anything in a fight short of a grizzly, and I valued his company considerable, I can tell you."

"I should like to have seen a scrap between him and Captain Graves' Santa Anna." (This was on the back trail when the Frontier Boys were in Colorado), said Juarez.

"Get Jo and Tom to mixing it," laughed Jim, "and you'll have some idea of what it would be like."

At this point the boys were surprised to see Jeems become angry at Juarez's innocent interruption. It was the first time that the boys had ever seen Jeems Howell anything but good-natured, no matter what happened, or what prank was played on him. But, as Jo remarked later, "Human nature is a mighty uncertain business, and everybody has got a cranky spot in 'em if you just happen to strike it at the explosive time." Which is a mighty true observation, which you can prove to your own satisfaction any day in the week. The writer being example No. 1, and you, indulgent reader, example No. 2.

Jim and Juarez, by their combined and genial efforts, pulled Jeems out of the sulks and on to his own sunny level once more. Then he took up his narrative again.

"Well, boys, it don't seem that I have got any right to criticize that black hound's temper, considering my own."

"Anybody is apt to get riled once in a lifetime, Jeems," said Jim, "even Tom here has been known to act up occasionally." Tom joined in the laugh because he had a notoriously quick temper, and complete serenity was restored.

"That hound would never make friends with anyone except me," continued Jeems, "and I could always depend on his watchfulness to warn me of the approach of any marauder. It was a wild country, and with bad Indians and worse white men you always had to be on your guard. Still on this night I tell ye of, the storm was so wild and fierce that I did not believe anyone would be abroad who had any sort of a place to stay in.

"Before turning in, I stepped outside to see how things were going. The hound followed close on my heels. I closed the door tight and stood in the darkness

with my old gray hat pulled down close around my head. I could scarcely see. The snow was swirling from the ledge above my cabin, and was blown out in great sheets into the night.

“Then the hound began to growl kind of low, and his hair was bristling, but he did not show any sudden desire to take a jump down the mountain side, as he would under ordinary circumstances, and I didn’t urge him because I thought he showed mighty good sense.”



CHAPTER IV

THE LOST MINE

“‘Anybody down thar?’ I yelled, but my voice was blown down my throat, and you couldn’t have heard it six feet away, as the wind was doing all the talking that night. So I stepped back into my cabin, followed by the dog, who kept growling to himself like a man with a grouch.

“No sooner was I inside than I let the heavy bar down across the door, and, when it fell into place, I drew a full breath, for I felt nervous at the action of the dog, and it was terrible lonesome, just as bad as being adrift on a raft in this ocean.”

“I’d take the land every time,” cut in Tom. “It’s what’s under you makes you so scarey on the ocean.”

“I don’t know but that the constant motion of the sea makes it kind of company for a man,” remarked Jim.

“Don’t tell me that,” said the shepherd with a quizzical look in his eyes, “from my recent experience that same motion will separate you from what is nearest to you. Anyhow, after I had put on a big log of pine on the coals in the fireplace, and the flame began to blaze up, I felt more cheerful, for it seemed to make my cabin alive with a hearty glow.

“After I had toasted my blankets thoroughly, I wrapped them around me, and laid down near the fire, with my rifle near me. The big hound was just back a bit, between me and the door, and I felt quite secure and perfectly comfortable. I was tired, too, for I had been working hard all day, and I soon dropped off into a sound sleep.

“I do not know how long I had slept, when I sat up suddenly throwing the blankets off from me and grabbing my rifle. The fire had died down and there was that chill in the air that cramps a man’s blood. The cabin was full of shadows, except the dying glow on the stone hearth. The dog had risen and was growling towards the door. Then I heard the blow of a stick, I suppose it was,

against the door.

“I tell you, it made me feel scared, coming in the dead of night, in such a lonesome, utterly desolate place. I was kind of superstitious in those days, too, and I was afraid of what was outside there, because it didn’t seem possible for anything human to have reached my isolated cabin on such a night. Again came the blow upon the door; then I crossed to the window and very cautiously looked out.

“It had evidently heard me or divined that I was at the window, for I saw pressed against the pane and almost touching my face, it seemed, the dark visage of a man with wild, black eyes. The dog saw him too, but as he did not seem to be inspired with his usual ferocity, I decided to take a chance and let him in. I would not have kept the Old Boy himself out on a night like that.

“So with my weapon ready, I unbarred the door, and the man stumbled in. I saw that he was not an American, but belonged to some dark race, probably a Spaniard. When I got a good look at his face, I saw that my unbidden guest was no other than Rodrigo Sandez, who was fabled all through that region to have found the entrance to the famous Lost Mine, whose wealth had been coupled with legends for many years.

“It seems that this mine had been known to the earliest Spanish explorers, many of whom went back to Spain fabulously rich. Then, for many years, all trace had been lost of it, and numerous miners and prospectors laughed incredulously at any mention of it. Then came Rodrigo Sandez with his friend, who likewise was Spanish, or as I think Spanish-Mexican, and rediscovered the Lost Mine, probably through some information long hidden, that had come to them in Mexico, through some unknown sources.

“The man was half frozen from exposure to the elements, and when he was thawed out physically, it did the same for his powers of speech. I eagerly hoped that he would have something to say that would give me a clue to the whereabouts of that mine, not that I expected he would make me his heir, but I was anxious to make a stake in those days, for one reason, if not for another, so I had hopes.

“In the three weeks that he stayed in my cabin before the storm broke, not a hint could I get out of him, though he would talk volubly about other matters, telling

me of his travels in Mexico and South America. All the time he was with me I kept wondering what had become of his partner, but when I had it on the tip of my tongue to ask him, something in his manner of looking at me held me back.

“Physically he was not impressive, this man, being short and stocky. His complexion was very dark, and his hair was short and bristly. But there was a peculiar power in his eyes at times, and when he was disturbed about anything, instead of becoming sharp and brilliant they took on a kind of glaze, that gave you a creepy feeling when he looked at you.

“I might say right here that though Sandez and his partner had been trailed many times in the effort to find where this mine was located, they were always lost track of. Either they dropped out of sight as though the earth had swallowed them, or something happened to the party that was following them.

“When Sandez left my cabin to go on his way south, the weather having cleared, I decided to take up his back trail in hope of finding some trace of his partner, and thus getting a possible clue to the location of the mine. So I started out one clear, cold day, with my dog for guide and company.

“I knew the general direction that the two partners traveled, for their trail was not lost until they had gone some twenty miles northwest of my cabin. I made fast time over the frozen snow on my skis, until by noon I had covered nigh onto fifteen miles. The dog was trotting along ahead of me when suddenly he disappeared into a deep gulch.

“In a second or two he set up a howl long-drawn-out and I knew then that he had found the quarry. I discovered the body of the man under some thick bushes at the bottom of the gulch. He had not been frozen to death either, for there was a slit in his back, where the knife had been driven.

“No wonder that I had found it hard to ask the Señor Sandez what had become of his partner. Here was the answer. It was evident that this deed of treachery had been the end of a bitter quarrel, perhaps over the division of the wealth or some other matter of dispute. I always felt that there was more back of it than appeared on the surface. I found nothing to establish the identity of the dead man, neither his name nor his place of residence.

“I did find, however, in an inner pocket the picture of a rather pretty Spanish woman, and on the back of it was drawn a diagram showing a certain part of the

mountain. I instantly jumped to the conclusion that it was the clue to the Lost Mine. I spent several months thereafter trying to locate the place. I got most of the way by the map and then I came to a mark that fooled me completely, and I lost the trail.”

“What did you do with that diagram, Jeems?” asked Jim intently.

“I kept it back of a rock in the chimney of my cabin, and it’s there yet for all I know.”

“Unless the mountain rats have chewed it up,” remarked Tom gloomily.

“I suppose you can find that cabin of yours, can’t you?” inquired Juarez.

“It’s a good many years, but I reckon I could,” Jeems replied.

“Well, I reckon you will have the chance,” said Jim, “just as soon as we land.”

“That yarn of yours was not only interesting, Jeems, but it has some practical value,” remarked Jo.

“Ahoy there, Skipper,” boomed out the old captain’s voice from the quarter deck. “It’s about time the man at the wheel was relieved.” Jim sprang to his feet, and gave his head a hard thump with his fist to wake himself up.

“Right, Captain,” he replied, “I’ve been sitting here listening to a yarn and forgetting my work. Jo, to the wheel. I’ll stand watch.”

Then he leaped up the steep steps leading to the quarter deck, closely followed by Jo, who took Pete’s place at the wheel, while that worthy went below; and the captain turned into his cabin on the quarter deck without more ado. If anyone besides Jim had been so forgetful, there would have been a vast amount of growling on his part, but Jim was a favorite.

CHAPTER V

WORKING THE SHIP

It was now ten o'clock, and the ship steadily held her way over the plunging seas, and the wind came from out the vague spaces of the night, not chill, but bracing. How Jim loved it! Sometimes he felt when he was pacing the deck at night on watch, that he liked the ocean even better than the mountains.

As he strode back and forth he thought and pondered over Jeems' story. Suppose they should find this rich pocket mine of gold in the Sierras, what would they do with the money? Jim was not grasping and the mere idea of getting rich did not appeal to him. "A fool can make money," he had sometimes said, "but it takes a wise man to spend it." Then he brought his fist down hard upon the rail.

"I've got it, Jo," he cried, "if we find that mine, we will take a trip around the world and see if we can't discover something new. We've got the ship already."

"What do we need of more money?" asked Jo. "Let's head her around now and strike out for the Philippines. We have got some of that treasure left that we discovered in Mexico."

"I wonder what Pap would say," replied Jim, lowering his voice, "if he found that he had been shanghied in any such fashion. I suspicion that there would be a mutiny aboard this craft."

"I forgot about him," admitted Jo.

"Another thing, you don't realize how much money it takes to keep a yacht going, even if we are under sail part of the time. This boat has got to be overhauled when we get to port. Drydocked for one thing, liable to cost \$500; then the engines will have to be overhauled. Next coal and provisions——"

"I reckon we had better discover that mine," agreed Jo.

"That's where you show your good sense," concluded Jim.

So as the schooner yacht went northward following her unseen path through the darkness, the boys' minds were busy with their plans for the future. For one, I envy them their buoyant freedom, their hearty comradeship, and their chance for new and varying adventure. Yet they had earned much of the good fortune that had come to them by their pluck in danger and their cheerful endurance of hardship.

At two o'clock Tom was called on deck to take the wheel, and Jeems Howell to stand watch. Not a very strong maritime team, to be sure, but with the calm mild weather it was safe enough, and the captain was near at hand if any trouble should arise suddenly from out the darkness of the sea.

"Do you suppose you two land lubbers can manage, without running us aground?" inquired Jim.

"Aye, aye, sir!" replied Jeems cheerfully.

"I'm just as liable to run this thing in a circle," replied Tom, "and we will butt into Hawaii before we know it."

As a matter of fact, the boys were all pretty fair sort of sailors by this time, in a kind of make-shift practical way. They had received good instruction from old Pete, and capable supervision from the old captain, and it gave them confidence to have him back of them in case anything unusual should come up.

Juarez, who was really a mechanical genius, went below in the engine-room to relieve the engineer. He spent his happiest hours in a pair of greasy jumpers working over the engine, feeding it with oil, polishing it until it shone, and giving it constant attention. The taciturn engineer had taken quite a fancy to Juarez, who was himself as silent as an Indian. He had taught Juarez a great deal about his intricate trade, and the pupil had been quick to profit, always watching and observing, and saying little.

It seemed to Juarez that he was at the center of things when he was watching over the throbbing, steady, ceaseless movement of the engine; and shut off from the outside world, his thoughts seemed to time with the steady, powerful harmony of the mechanism, with its living spirit of steam within the polished framework. Many a boy who reads these lines will envy Juarez Hoskins, assistant engineer of the *Sea Eagle*, and will understand his feelings perhaps even better than the writer.

Nor did Juarez mind the heat, as with the jumper fastened over his brown naked shoulders, and bare head, he went busily about the engine-room whistling softly to himself. Old Pete passed near on his way into the hold, and in a short time up came the boy stoker, black as a gnome and cheerful as a darkey, for he was Irish, which I take to be a Hibernian remark.

Thus with the exception of Pete the Frontier Boys were in charge of their ship and running it all right too. There was no question that this practise cruise to Hawaii was a fine thing for them, and after it was over they would be well qualified to take the *Sea Eagle* wherever their fancy might dictate, or where necessity might require.

The next morning broke bright and balmy and the boys settled down to regular sea routine: scrubbing decks, steering, polishing the brasswork, and last, but not least, cooking. Some things were now present on the bill of fare which were absent when they sailed from the coast. For instance, there were bananas, some yellow and ripe, others a bright green which would ripen on the voyage.

There was also half a bushel of mangoes, a most delicious fruit of juicy yellow meat, and a tart flavor hidden among its sweetness. There was also a small barrel of poi, the staple Hawaiian article of diet, of which the boys had grown very fond during their short sojourn in Hawaii. It was a thick bluish paste, and most nutritious.

Poi was made from a native root called taro, of mottled bluish-white meat. This was pounded up with water to a thick consistency and according to the native custom eaten from bowls into which the two forefingers were dipped, whirled around and then transferred quickly and gracefully to the mouth. It was an interesting spectacle to see Tom, for instance, seated on a hatch, his bare legs crossed before him, and a bowl of poi between them. Then Tom would throw his head back and pop his two fingers into his mouth with much and evident enjoyment.

Now poi is very fattening and the boys used to tease Jeems Howell about his getting a corporation, as he was naturally as thin as a slab. "You would look funny waddling around the deck, Jeems," said Jim, "and the fat shaking on your tummy when you laughed."

"Could use me for ballast then, Skipper," he would remark, "but I ain't worrying

any. When I see myself fat I'll believe it and not before."

One day the dead calm of sea monotony was broken by a breeze of excitement. It was morning and Tom was at the wheel, while on the bridge was Juarez keeping a sharp lookout, as was his custom, although there was not much to expect in the way of interest. As far as sighting a sail, that was most unlikely, for this part of the ocean through which they were traveling was nothing but a blue desert, as far as other ships were concerned.

"What's that coming now?" cried Juarez. "I can't make it out."

"Where?" asked Tom eagerly.

"Low down on the northeast quarter," said Juarez.

"I see what you mean," remarked Tom, but he too was puzzled.

"I'll get the glass," suggested Juarez.

This done, he took a good long pull at it, his legs well braced against the roll of the ship, and making a very nautical figure indeed. Then he made out the enemy clearly; three big black hulls they were, and then from the bow of one a column of steam—or was it water?—went slanting into the air. Juarez's frame stiffened with interest and excitement.

"Whales!" he cried.

"What's that, lad?" It was the captain, who was supposedly asleep in his cabin, which was the deck house, but he responded quickly to the magic word, "Whales."

"Gimme the glass," he ordered, his hand outstretched. The boys watched him with interested attention. "Three of 'em," he cried. "Gosh! I wish I was younger."

By this time the whole Frontier gang was present on the quarter deck looking at the dark spots on the blue ocean that now had become visible to the naked eye. To say that they were interested was to put it very mildly. There was a strange interest to these marine monsters.

"Let's get one of those fellows," cried Juarez. "We have a couple of harpoons."

“Get ready, boys,” cried Jim. “It’s a go.”

“What!” roared the captain. “You boys can’t spear a whale even if you did get nigh him. He would spank you to kingdom come with his tail. You stay right here where I can keep an eye on you. The idea of you tackling a whale. Why, it’s plumb ridiculous. Just a passel of kittens when it comes to whaling.” Then he stopped to blow, entirely exhausted.



CHAPTER VI

DANGEROUS WORK

However foolhardy the proposition, the boys were determined, and then they were in the majority, so they overruled the captain. A chance like that was not to be permitted to slip. They had hunted bears, mountain lions, Indians, outlaws, ducks and much other game, but never had whales come within range before, and at least they were going to try to make their preliminary acquaintance.

“Well, boys, as I ain’t responsible to your parents, yer might jest as well end yer lives by the flap of a whale’s tail as go on to be hung, because that, in my opinion, will come to you sooner or later, being so reckless.” But down in his heart the old fellow was pleased with their enterprise and pluck.

“Better come along and take care of us, Captain,” urged Jim, “so these fellows won’t bite us.”

“All the fishing I’ll ever do now will be for minnows over the rail,” replied the captain. “My whaling days are over.”

“The only whaling I know about,” remarked Jo, “was what I used to get in school.”

“You would get some more of the same kind now,” remarked Jim briefly, “if I could spare the time.”

“Now, you have to spare the rod,” replied the irrepressible and irresponsible Jo. He ducked quickly as Jim hit at him, but there was no time for further discipline or discussion, so Jo escaped the merited punishment that was due him.

The boat was lowered, and the harpoon with its apparently endless coil of rope, was made ready. All this was done under the careful instruction of Captain Kerns, who knew the business of whaling thoroughly, and was determined that the venturesome boys should not be entirely helpless through ignorance. As for the harpoon, that was the property originally of the former owner of the *Sea*

Eagle, Captain Bill Broom, of interesting memory. What pleasure he would have felt to see the Frontier Boys start out on their perilous expedition, sure that the whales would wreak vengeance upon the daring boys who had finally given him such a bitter defeat!

Everything was now ready, and the selected crew was prepared to pull away from the ship. They were delaying only for a few last words and instructions. Nor was the crew of the boat made up exactly as the reader might imagine, for Tom was left aboard and Jeems Howell was taken in his place.

There were two reasons for this. In the first place, Jeems, though lanky and thin, was really very strong and could do better work at the oars than Tom; the other reason had to do with an incident that happened in the attack the boys had made on a sand cone in the crater of Haleakala, the said cone being defended by a number of savages.

Tom had at that time failed to protect Jim when he was attacking the savages, due to nervousness, and Jeems had to come to the rescue. I do not know whether he appreciated the distinction of being chosen on this particular occasion or not, but he had to accept the honor thus thrust upon him.

“Good-bye, Tom,” cried Jim; “I’ll leave you my blessing, if the whale takes a chaw out of us.”

“I’d rather you would leave me something valuable like your gold watch,” replied the mercenary Tom.

“I’ll make you my sole heir, Tommy,” cried Jo. “I’ve got some debts back home that you can have.” Then the boat pulled away from the ship.

“Don’t forget, lads,” roared the captain in farewell, “that whales ain’t fools because they are big. Look out for ’em.”

“Aye, aye, sir,” came back the answer clear and strong.

“Good luck,” yelled the captain, and the boys waved their hands in reply.

But no sooner had they pulled away than he got the other boat ready to launch in case it should be needed and a couple of life preservers were gotten ready, with a line attached, for no one knew better than the old sailor the dangerous undertaking on which the boys had launched.

Meanwhile they were making good time over the slow, lazy swell towards the whales that could be seen floating easily along two miles distant. Jo was pulling the stroke oars, and Jeems was pulling the other pair directly behind him. Jo was a fair oarsman and Jeems was capable of keeping up with him.

They discovered that there was an excitement and interest in rowing on the ocean that was not present in the same form of exercise on a lake or river, for there was a vitality, breadth and power about the sea that was lacking in the others. I tell you, they felt rather small and puny as they pulled the boat steadily over the swells that played gently with their craft, as though the old ocean was in a lazy playful mood, just like a tiger when it rolls sinuously upon its back fondling some object.

Jim was in the bow of the boat, ready to use the harpoon when the time should come. Once or twice he stood up in the bow and plunged it down into the blue bosom of a rounded wave with all his force, the water slashing white from the track of the tearing weapon.

“Better save your strength,” warned Juarez, who was at the steering oar.

“Just getting warmed up, lad,” said Jim.

“Think you can fetch him, Jim?” inquired Jo anxiously.

“Sure,” replied his older brother confidently. “I reckon a whale is no tougher than a grizzly, and we’ve got them.”

“Not with a harpoon,” remarked Jeems Howell. “You won’t be more than able to tickle the leviathan with that weapon.”

But Jim scoffed at his prophecy, for there was this about James that helped him in a crisis like the present, that he had perfect confidence in himself which had been fortified by several narrow escapes. But here was an occasion where his good luck in danger was apt to be thoroughly tried out.

“Whales are something like elephants, it seems to me,” said Jeems Howell. “They are big, dangerous and very intelligent.”

“The elephant beats the whale when it comes to ears,” remarked Juarez.

“But makes it up with his tail,” laughed Jeems.

“Now, boys,” warned Jim, “be careful; no more talking. We will soon be within range.”

A strained, intense silence settled over the boat. All was expectation and suppressed excitement. I do not suppose that the gentle reader can realize the feeling of the boys at this moment, as he has probably never stalked a whale in the open ocean, but perhaps he can imagine something of what they felt.

One thing favored the young whale hunters, and that was the fact that the whales were taking things very softly and slowly, their big bodies barely moving through the water. They seemed to be enjoying the calm of the clear morning, and were taking an ocean stroll as it were.

The bull, some sixty feet in length, was in the lead; at some little distance to the east was the cow and a young whale near her side. It was a wonderful sight to see the big black fellow forging slowly in advance, his head a long, square promontory rising from the water, and his body a half-submerged island.

But what power and strength was there in that great body and what temerity it was for the boys to tackle him; they should have been glad to let him go on his way unmolested, if he would do the same for them. But the boys had no such thought. Under the silent direction of Jim’s hand the boat made a circle and swept around back of the great mammal coming up on the far side. As the chase came near its end the pulses of the boys quickened. There was a wonderful excitement in closing in with this king of all the oceans.

Jim crouched in the bow, the harpoon clutched in his right hand. Now the boat was within fifty feet of the whale, who was evidently not yet aware of their near proximity, as he could not see anything approaching along the side. It was indeed a thrilling moment. Jim rose to his full height in the bow, with the harpoon poised above his shoulder, a powerful and athletic figure.

The boat was now alongside the monster, and then with all his strength of body, arm and shoulder, he plunged the harpoon down deep into the great black body, following the instructions of the captain as near as he could; he was but an amateur, after all, and he missed a vital spot.

“Back up, boys!” he yelled.

Down dug the poised oars into the water, and the boat tried frantically to get out

of the deadly circumference of the wounded whale's wrath. Instead of sounding down, as he would have done if vitally wounded, he thrashed and pounded the ocean into foam. There was no escape for the boat apparently.

With an exclamation of horror, Captain Kerns turned his ship's prow straight for the scene of the disaster, for he saw what had happened. It was enough to startle even a man so hardened to sights of danger as the captain. As for Tom, when he saw the beginning of the accident, he pressed his hand close against his eyes to shut out what promised to be terrible destruction for his two brothers, and his two tried comrades.

Pete was at the wheel, his old weathered face pale and intent upon the scene not so distant. He had grown fond of the boys and could scarcely bear to look upon their overwhelming danger.



CHAPTER VII

WHAT THEY SAW

When the whale was in his first flurry of pain, he sent the boat high into the air with one stroke of his mighty tail, and like loose articles the boys were scattered out of it into the boiling vortex of water. This was the sight that had called forth the alarm on board the *Sea Eagle*, and made the captain spring to quick action.

No time was to be lost, for the boys were as helpless as straws in the maelstrom. One thing was fortunate, they were all pretty fair swimmers, but that would not help them if the whale should, in his fury, chance to see them. But here, their very insignificance saved them from his first rush. The mother and her young had taken the alarm and were forging away to the southward.

The boys were now but several dark spots in the swirling waters. Jo had the closest call, for one of the flukes of the whale's tail swept a huge wave over him, and he thought he was going to be carried to the bottom of the ocean. Jim at the very first had called out a warning, "Boys, keep away from the boat." It was a lucky thing that he did so. For as soon as the whale caught sight of it he made a furious surge for it, and, opening his great jaws, he caught it squarely across the middle.

There was a crunching sound, only more intense, as when a dog crushes a bone. As Jo said afterward, "It wasn't more than a toothpick for him." Meanwhile the boys were swimming in the opposite direction as fast as their arms and feet could propel them. The whale now became aware of a new enemy bearing down upon him.

Only this was even larger than he was, though of the same color. It was making a chug-chug sound as it came towards him. In the dim brain of the whale was an idea struggling for birth. Was this a strange sea monster that was going to contest with him the supremacy of the seas, or was it some of his antediluvian ancestors come back to earth, I mean to sea, again?

There the reasoning of the whale stopped. A sudden blind fury came over him and he charged for the *Sea Eagle*. Two rifle shots rang out from the deck of the ship, and one tore deep into the black carcass. Then the monster threw his flukes into the air and down he sounded towards the depths of the sea.

In a moment the yacht was alongside the exhausted swimmers, and they were hauled aboard. Jeems Howell was about done for, and had to be worked over for some time; Jo also had shipped considerable salt water, but Jim and Juarez were in tolerable condition considering the experience they had been through.

“I hope you lads are satisfied now,” grumbled the captain.

“He chewed our boat to kindling wood,” said Jim, looking ruefully to where the fragments strewed the sea.

“He would have done the same by you, if we hadn’t come along,” remarked the captain. “Served you right, too.”

“I hate not getting him, that’s what worries me,” said Jim.

“How did you feel when he tilted you and the boat up in the air?” inquired Tom curiously.

“Can’t say,” replied Jim. “It was so sudden, and I didn’t take any notes.”

“I felt like I was going to be another Jonah,” remarked Jo feebly.

“He’s the Jonah,” remarked the captain, pointing a contemptuous thumb at Jeems, who had just gotten to his feet.

“How can I ever thank you, Captain?” asked Jeems Howell, who had a sly streak of humor at times. “You saved my life at the risk of your own. It was a noble deed, and one long——”

“Oh, g’wan with you,” cried the captain. “I don’t want none of your banquet speeches.”

To escape the infliction, he retreated to the quarter deck, where he stood ready to repel any thankful survivors who might creep upon him. Tom was busy asking questions about the whole unfortunate business, for he had a very inquisitive mind, had Tom. Jeems, however, was the only one among the gallant survivors inclined to humor him. Jim was looking longingly over the expanse of ocean, not

thinking of his dripping clothes, but as though he had lost something, as indeed he had. He was minus one large whaleboat and one small boat. It was not the boat, however, that he was looking for, and no one but Jim would have taken a continued interest in his whaleship but would have given him up for lost.

“jim stood prepared to aim.”—P.61. Frontier Boys in Sierras.

“JIM STOOD PREPARED TO AIM.”—P. [61](#).

“There he blows!” he cried suddenly. “Let’s try for him again.”

“No more of that,” roared the captain. “Not while I’m alive on this boat.” Jim smiled. He had not really intended to go after him in the boat because he realized how foolhardy such a performance would be, but he had another scheme in mind, and he prepared to carry it out.

“Come on, boys, let’s give him a shot from the cannon,” he cried.

“That’s the idea!” exclaimed Juarez. “We will bring the ship up close enough to get a good aim.”

“I’d like to get even with him for the kick he gave me,” cried Jo viciously.

“Well, you boys are the beatingest,” remarked the captain.

But he made no objection to this plan, and took the wheel himself, so as to maneuver the *Sea Eagle* to within good striking distance of the big mammal. Meanwhile, the boys lost no time in getting the small cannon ready for the fray. All was excitement and energy. Here was a target worth shooting at. The whale seemed to be resting after his recent exertions, and was rolling easily on the surface of the ocean.

Tom stripped the jacket of canvas from the shining gun of brass, Juarez and Jo got the ammunition from the hold, and soon had the charge ready to fire. Jim stood prepared to aim. The boys waited impatiently for the right moment to come, when the yacht would be as close to the quarry as it would be wise to venture. Steadily the little ship bore down toward the whale, keeping half quartered to it.

It seemed that he must take alarm and the boys held their breath in fear lest the monster should take fright and make a sudden disappearance into the depths. The harpoon still sticking high up on his side gave a line to aim by. Then Jim

depressed the muzzle of the cannon until it was point blank at the long black target now shelving up from the blue surface of the ocean. Just as the whale awakened to his danger, Jim pulled the lanyard and fired. There was a roar, a white gush of smoke, and the shell tore into the vitals of the great whale.

Then there was action to which the disturbance when the whale was harpooned was a mere flurry. He thrashed the ocean into foam and the blood from his wound dyed the waters crimson. At last he rose bodily in the air and fell back upon the surface of the ocean with a mighty whack that could have been heard for miles. The waters retreated from his fall in great waves that made the little steamer rock.

There was great jubilation on the deck of the *Sea Eagle* when Jim made that shot, which was not so remarkable either, when one considers the size of the target and the nearness of the object aimed at. But the captain was decidedly enthusiastic over Jim's success, and clapped him heartily on the back with manifest approval.

"You ought to be in the navy, lad," he cried. "You are a born American gunner. Old Paul Jones ought to have had you."

"That wasn't a hard shot, Captain," remarked Jim. "It was your navigating that really deserves the credit."

"Too bad we have to leave him," said the captain. "That fellow would be good for a lot of oil."

"I should like a closer look at him," urged Jim. "I believe I'll lower the other boat and board him."

"I reckon he can't do you any harm now, Skipper," said the captain, "and I suppose a whale does look cur'us to you. I see by that harpoon that you made a pretty good shot with the iron; just a little nearer to the shoulder and you would have fetched him."

The boat was all ready to lower and in a jiffy they had it in the water. Tom was allowed to go along this time, but Jeems Howell was among the missing, he absolutely and steadfastly refused to go on the excursion.

"Come along, Jeems," urged Jo. "You never saw a dead whale."

“But I have seen a live one, and my curiosity is satisfied,” replied Jeems.

“He won’t bite you, jump in,” said Tom, who was quite brave now.

“How do I know that he is really dead?” replied Jeems. “Like as not he will give a last flop and crush you. The deck for me.”

Realizing that it was useless to urge Jeems the boys pulled away from the *Sea Eagle*, and rowed over to the dead whale.

“My! but he is a monster,” said Juarez. “Let’s board him.”

“All right,” agreed Jim.

So Tom jammed the bow of the boat against the whale’s side, and the three J’s—Jim, Jo and Juarez—made a landing on Whale Island. It made Jo feel a little squeamish standing upon the mass of the dead monster that yielded under his foot. It seemed that his tread must surely cause the whale to make a final effort to get rid of his enemies.

“He must be all of seventy feet,” cried Jim, pacing as far as he could.

“His head is eight or ten feet long,” said Juarez.

“Too bad you can’t take some of him for a souvenir,” said Tom.

“We are mighty glad that he didn’t get any of us for a souvenir,” remarked Jo.

“I’m going to get my harpoon any way,” said Jim. As he wrenched at it, the whale suddenly rose with a gentle heave, and Jo was almost paralyzed with fright, and even Juarez turned somewhat pale. However, it was only an unusually large wave that had raised the whale up and allowed the placid carcass to slide down again.

“Ahoy there, squall coming!” hailed the captain’s voice from the quarter deck of the *Sea Eagle*. “Get aboard quick.”

The boys obeyed, but with obvious reluctance, for the whale had much of interest for them yet. But they saw the squall whitening over the ocean from the northwest quarter, and coming with great rapidity.

“We don’t want to worry the old man any more to-day,” suggested Jim, “so we

will pull for the shore.”



CHAPTER VIII

A RACE

Even then they were none too quick, for as they were swinging the boat to the davits the squall struck the *Sea Eagle*, heeling her well over, and there was a rush and roar of wind and flying spray from the yeasty seas. It was fun while it lasted. The prow of the ship was turned eastward once more, leaving the whale, but not alone.

Already the birds were gathering to their feast, and from all directions cut the dark-finned sharks to get their share. In a short time all was turmoil about the whale, fluttering wings and whirling foamy water. This was too good a target for the boys, so they decided to give the crazy cannibal crew a surprise.

“Let’s give those beggars a farewell salute, Juarez,” cried Jim.

“I’m with you,” he replied.

“What’s the distance?” inquired Jo.

“Quarter of a mile,” hazarded Tom.

“It’s nearer a half,” replied Jim.

“It don’t look it,” put in Jo.

“That’s because objects on the ocean seem nearer than they do on land.”

“Why is that so?” inquired the ever inquisitive Tom.

Jim was clearly stumped by this inquiry, but he did not let on that he was puzzled in the least.

“No time to tell you now. That gun is about ready to fire.”

“You don’t know,” jeered Tom, “that’s just an excuse.”

“Show you later if you can’t study it out for yourself,” remarked Jim nonchalantly.

Juarez now had the cannon loaded and ready to fire. The *Sea Eagle* was moving obliquely away from the storm-center and it was a very difficult shot, but still a possible one on account of the size of the target. The old captain took much interest in the skill of his protégé Jim, whom he considered worthy to be enrolled in the straight-shooting American navy. He stood with his sturdy figure well braced and the glass in hand ready to mark a successful shot.

“Don’t you think you have got that weepin’ raised a leetle too high?” he inquired anxiously of Jim.

“I’m aiming a little over, sir,” replied Jim, “because I think the shell will fall a little in that distance.”

“I guess you know your business better than I do, Skipper,” replied the captain. “I was no shot ’cept with a blunderbuss that would scatter.”

“Make a bull’s-eye, Jim,” urged Juarez.

“You mean a whale’s eye,” put in Jo.

“Humph!” said Jim, “don’t talk that way; you will make me miss.”

“You mean——” Jo got no further, for Jim held up a cautionary hand.

“Ready now,” he cried.

The captain clapped the spy-glass to his eye, there was a roar and the quarter deck shook under their feet, then the captain shook the glass above his head.

“Yer struck into the shark gang, Skipper,” he cried, “I said you would be a recruit for John Paul Jones.”

“Let me have a chance,” said Jo.

“All right,” agreed Jim, “I don’t want to be a hog.”

So Jo took his turn. With due deliberation he aimed the shining little cannon aft toward the distant fray. Then he fired, but the shot sent up a spurt from a wave some distance short.

“We are getting too far away,” said Jim, “to get in an accurate shot.”

“Say, Jim,” put in Tom, “you haven’t told me why things seem closer on the ocean than they do on land.” If pertinacity meant success in life, Tom Darlington would no doubt reach the top of the ladder. Jim was somewhat surprised, and he did not want to admit ignorance, so he sparred for time.

“Now, Thomas,” said James, “I am not paid to do your thinking for you, but if you will sit down and think for ten minutes and if at the end of that time you have not reached a logical conclusion, I will explain the matter to you.”

“Ho! Professor!” railed Tom, pulling out his silver timepiece, which was so heavy that it would be a dangerous weapon if thrown, “if you ain’t ready with your explanation you will lose your place.”

Jim took this warning with perfect nonchalance, but his mind was very active just the same trying to solve this problem, because Tom would never let up on him if he found out that he was bluffing. But why was an object nearer, anyway, in appearance on the ocean than on land? Why? Perhaps it was the difference in atmosphere. No, for in high altitudes things appeared closer on account of the clarity of the air than they did at sea level.

Six minutes passed, still no answer had come to Jim, yet he was perfectly calm and contained as though he were the perfection of wisdom. He folded his arms across his chest and regarded Tom serenely as he sat on the opposite side of the deck on a coil of rope, regarding his big brother skeptically. Eight minutes had passed, and Tom, taking out his watch, recorded the fact with quiet triumph.

“Eight minutes and a quarter,” he declared, “and no land in sight yet.”

“Eight and a half,” he tolled, “nine!” Jim was apparently entirely composed, but his mind had not yet reached a complete explanation. It was, however, on the right track, but the time was short.

“Ten,” cried Tom. “Speak up, Professor.”

“It’s your place first,” he replied.

“Give it up.”

“Now listen carefully,” began Jim in a magisterial manner, “and if there is

anything you don't quite understand, raise your hand."

"Humph!" grunted Tom, "I guess that I can understand anything you can tell me."

"Well, children, it's this way," continued Jim. "When you are upon the land and you look at something in the distance your eyesight is stretched from point to point by intervening objects, while on the ocean your vision instead of being stretched out collapses as it were because there is a monotonous level between your eye and the object. Now I hope you will remember what I have just told you, children. School is dismissed."

Jo seemed to be unduly impressed with the idea that he was a schoolboy again, so he grabbed Tom's hat and made as if he was going to throw it overboard. Tom made a grab for Jo and missed, then there was a great chase around the main deck. Jo was very fleet of foot and gained on his pursuer, until Tom saw that he must resort to stratagem; so no sooner had Jo disappeared around the corner of the quarter deck than Tom doubled back on his own trail, to the cook's galley, that had a door opening on either side, so that one could step into either passageway.

Tom leaped into the galley, and was quick to the other door, that he opened a wee bit; he saw that Jo had just swerved into the passageway and down he came full tilt toward where Tom lay in ambush, swinging the latter's captured hat in his hand. Tom watched him eagerly, then he sprang out from his hiding place directly in front of the flying Jo, who was utterly surprised, but he was under such headway that he could not stop.

Tom met him squarely and down they went in a heap, the lurch of the ship sending Jo's head heavily against an iron stanchion. His body gave a jerk and quiver, then he stretched out unconscious. We all know that skylarking of that kind sometimes produces the worst accidents. Naturally Tom was terribly frightened, for he thought Jo was killed, and he did look it, stretched out, with his eyes closed.

"Jim!" cried Tom, "Jim! come here quick."

There was something in Tom's voice that made Jim appear in a hurry.

"Get the brandy," he said. Tom lost no time in getting the bottle out of a locker in

the main cabin. When he returned he found Juarez and Jeems standing near looking very sober, while the old captain and Jim worked over him.

The Frontier Boys had gone through many dangers unscathed, and it seemed terrible that Jo should be so badly hurt in a moment of play. In fifteen minutes' time, however, Jo was partially himself, but he could not walk and had to be helped to his cabin, and that night he had a high fever, but next day he was quite himself, due mainly to a rugged constitution.

A few days later the weather began to change. The sea became rough and boisterous, with head winds and decidedly colder, but the boys did not complain, in fact they rather liked it, as they were strong and hardy and enjoyed battling with the elements.

"It's the sweaters for us now," said Jo, coming out on deck, to find the nasty gray sea swept by rain squalls, and the deck sodden and the sky sullen.

"I like it," declared Juarez, "the tropics are all right for a few weeks, but I couldn't stand it for long."

"That's because you lads are stormy petrels," remarked Jeems.

"If by that poetic symbol you mean that we are always in trouble," replied Jim, "you certainly have struck it."

Then the boys went below to get their respective sweaters, the colors being chosen according to their individual taste. Tom's was black, which is no insinuation against his character; Jim's was blue; Juarez the same color and Jo's red. As for hats, they still wore their weather-beaten sombreros. They were just the hats for this kind of weather.

The evening came on dark and blustery and with a steady beating rain from the northwest. All about, the seas were humping through the darkness. But the *Sea Eagle* was a staunch boat, well built, and well ballasted, and though she shipped a few seas and the spray flew high over her bridge, she did not roll or plunge unduly.

"Sort of a nasty night, Jim," remarked Jo, as their dark forms emerged on deck from the companionway.

"It's dark and threatening," replied Jim, "and looks fierce, but for real high

rolling give me that first night in the channel between Maui and Hawaii.”

Jo made some remark, but a sudden gust of wind took it out of his mouth and anyone to leeward would have got the benefit of it. The only light forward was a glow that came from the engine-room. Jim and Jo stepped inside out of the storm and found Juarez there as usual, and Tom was seated on a step. He was watching the two men moving around the shining engine, which worked smoothly and unceasingly, and its condition showed how carefully it was tended.

“Gosh! but it is good to get inside here out of the storm,” exclaimed Jim. The engineer nodded pleasantly, as he was a man of few words.



CHAPTER IX

THE ENGINEER

The engineer of the *Sea Eagle* has not received much attention, either in this book or in the one just preceding, but this is not because he, John Berwick, was not worthy of consideration, but because he was apparently a very quiet man, whose conversation was generally confined to monosyllables; likewise his work kept him out of the limelight, as it were.

But word had come via Juarez, who of all the crew was the only one whom the engineer admitted into his confidence to any degree, that John Berwick had really a most interesting career. This was true to a far greater extent than the boys knew. A sailor like old Pete or a mariner like Captain Kerns would see the shores of many countries and land in numerous ports, but learn nothing of the real people, or the nature of the countries.

But with the engineer it had been an entirely different proposition. He came of a good family and had received an excellent education, but from his youth he had been wild and adventurous, and was always traveling, by different ways and in varying occupations, going into the interiors of little-known countries and becoming acquainted with the nature and character of their inhabitants.

As he is a man well worth knowing, I will describe his appearance for the benefit of the reader. As to age, John Berwick might be anywhere from thirty-five to forty years. In height, five feet nine, with rather square shoulders, and neither light nor heavy in build, but with a frame that indicated quickness and great powers of endurance.

He was evidently one of those men who have a certain care to their physical condition, without overdoing it and making physical prowess a hobby. He had found out the value of health, and condition. In his travels in remote lands, if he had gotten sick, there would be no one to bother with him, and he would be left to die, so he reasoned that it was better to be a live man than something more wretched than a sick dog.

“I used to smoke like a chimney, Ezac,” he once said to Juarez. He never called the latter by his full name, it being either “War” or “Ezac,” according to his mood, “but I quit about five years ago. I didn’t make any resolution about it either and would smoke now if I wished to.”

“I suppose you felt miserable for a while after you quit?” said Juarez.

“No, strange to say, I didn’t. In fact, I began to feel fine and fit in a week or two and I found that I could meet any crisis that came up on the level, and did not have to make an effort of the will to step up to it and brace myself to it as I used to. But I’m not preaching. Smoke if you want to, Ezac.”

“I don’t want to,” replied Juarez, “and what’s the use of taking up with something you don’t care for? Just so much extra baggage.” Berwick smiled at this, showing his fine white teeth.

“Well, now, ‘War,’ that’s unusual sense for a kid, I must say. The fact that you don’t want a thing for a boy of your years is no argument. It may be smoking or chewing or something else that will make ’em devilish sick, but a kid will do it just for a show and to make an impression on his friends what a terrible character he is.”

“None of us are like that,” said Juarez. “Perhaps it is because we have seen plenty of real life on the frontier and have had plenty of excitement and adventure without resorting to foolishness.”

“Something in that, Ezac,” nodded Berwick.

This will serve as an introduction to this interesting man, before we listen, with the Frontier Boys, to the story that he has to tell. I may add here that John Berwick had dark hair, thinning in front and brushed straight with the forehead, dark hazel eyes, generally pleasant in expression, but capable of becoming harsh and hard with anger. He wore a rather slight dark moustache above a mouth thin-lipped and wide. The chin was square, and the whole complexion of the face rather dark.

The boys had never gathered before in the engine-room in a body, and as Jeems Howell’s tall figure loomed in the doorway the gathering was complete. It was because the boys had never imposed on him that the engineer was inclined to be gracious, on this occasion. Then, too, there was something about the warm

interior of the engine-room, contrasted with the storm outside, that lent itself to good comradeship and anecdote.

“I suppose that you boys have never traveled a great deal, except in the West, have you?” questioned John Berwick.

“That’s right, Mr. Berwick,” said Jim; “we expect to visit a few other countries, though, before long, if we find this ‘Lost Mine’ we are looking for. You know you can’t travel without money.”

“Not in your own yacht,” replied Berwick.

“I generally walked, or,” seeing a gleam of humor in Jim’s eye, “or worked my passage.”

“We will stick to our yacht,” remarked Jim, “seeing that we have it on our hands.”

“Quite right, too,” replied the engineer.

“You must have had some rather unusual experiences in your travels,” prompted Jo.

“Juarez says that you have been pretty much all over the world.”

“That’s so,” replied the engineer, “but I do not know as I have learned enough to pay me for the exertion.”

“Tell the boys about that time you traveled in Russia,” said Juarez.

“Which time?” questioned Berwick.

“Don’t you know?” asked Juarez, slightly confused, “when you were riding in the railroad carriage?”

“And got rather hungry?”

“Sure, that’s it,” said Juarez, smiling.

“That’s only an anecdote,” replied the engineer. “But I will tell it if you think it will interest.”

Being assured on this point, he began:

“I suppose you boys know what it is to be hungry?”

“I have got a pretty good idea of it after eating one of Tom’s dinners,” remarked Jim. “You see he don’t believe in having anything left over. Thinks it’s wasteful, so he just cooks dabs of things as though we had no more appetites than a group of maiden ladies who were taking afternoon tea.”

There was a general laugh at this, the exaggeration being so manifest that even Tom joined in, still there was some truth in Jim’s jocose remarks, for Tom did have a “close” side to him, which showed even in cooking. It was always evident that Thomas Darlington would become the financier among the Frontier Boys. After the laughter had died down the engineer took up the Russian incident again.

“I venture to say that my hunger on the occasion I am about to speak of was somewhat more real than yours, Skipper. I was traveling first-class from St. Petersburg and heading for the German frontier. Very foolishly I did not provide myself with a hamper of provisions, supposing that I would be able to get food along the way. I never made that particular mistake again.

“I had plenty of money in those days, and was traveling, as I say, first-class. When I got in my compartment at St. Petersburg I supposed at first that I was going to have it all to myself, and I was very well pleased because I could take things easy and sleep undisturbed through the most of what promised to be a very dreary trip.

“It was then about eight o’clock in the morning, and snowing furiously, and I could scarcely see the outlines of the handsome station through the storm of snow. But it was very comfortable in my compartment, which I was pleased to note was of unusual elegance. So I did not mind the delay at first.

“I noticed that the cushions of the seats were of a deep softness and of a rich crimson velvet. There were likewise hangings over the windows, with heavy golden tassels on the same. Then I observed a crest stamped on the embossed leather upon the inside of the door, and it was also repeated in gold upon the back of the seats.

“I must admit that this seemed a good deal of style, but I did not consider it any too much for a representative American citizen traveling abroad. I was a fool in those days, but made up in audacity what I lacked in wit. After a half hour had

passed beyond the schedule time set for the train's starting, I began to get uneasy and was just about to get out of the compartment to help move things along, when I saw a gorgeous sleigh drive up in front of the station.

"There was a splendid ermine robe thrown over the back, and two plumes in front. The horses were fine animals too, driven three abreast after the Russian fashion; over the one in the center was a single arch on which jingled the merry bells. The middle horse was a great black, and his comrades on either side were gray, the very symbols of the snowy landscape.

"From the furs of the sleigh emerged a gigantic Russian, blonde-bearded, and under his fur overcoat was some sort of a military uniform. I watched him with interest as he came toward the train, accompanied by the station-master, and met by the salutes of the soldiers, who are everywhere in Russia.

"He came straight towards the carriage where I was seated in lonely pomp, and I had just time to seat myself in the opposite corner of the compartment when the door was thrown open, and—enter his royal nibs—the Archduke Alexandewitch or something or other. At least this was high nobility of some kind. His bearded face was very red, and his system had evidently been warmed by something besides exercise.

"His eyes were blurred, and, coming from the light into the semi-darkness of the carriage, he did not see me. A guard deposited a hamper within, and he and the station-master bowed profoundly to me likewise, evidently taking me for some exalted personage, possibly the Czar, who, however, was a giant of a man while I was only medium in height. So it must have been someone else."

"You certainly were a cool hand," remarked Jim admiringly. "I never could have done that."

"Nor I, either," was the chorus of the other boys.

"Just my bloomin' cheek, as an English pal of mine used to say," the engineer continued, "and nothing that I'm very proud of now, but it was the only thing that would have pulled me through that fix. No sooner was his Nibs seated in the train than it started.

"It made me rather tired to think that we had been delayed for that big pig of a Russian, though I suppose in the United States a train would have been held for

some big-bellied politician with a pull, so that I need not have felt so aggrieved at this happening in darkest Russia. But I looked at the big Russian in disgust nevertheless. Then he saw me sitting quietly near the window opposite. One moment he was a picture of amazement, and then he let a roar out of him that shook things.

“I did not naturally understand what the Russian was saying, so I just had to let him roar, and made a few gestures for myself. I feared at first that he would have a fit of apoplexy, as he grew redder in the face than ever, but having expressed himself to his full satisfaction, with a final threat he sat down. I supposed that I should be shot or sent into exile at the first stop.”



CHAPTER X

THE RUSSIAN

“The first thing his Royal Highness did was to open the neat-looking wicker hamper and take out a cut-glass bottle encased in silver, the contents of which he poured into a dainty-looking glass. He took a number of drinks, but without asking me to join, which I thought was very impolite of him. Then he settled himself for a nap, first drawing out a huge pistol which he placed near him on the cushions.

“It was, of course, a silly thing for him to do, but then the man was, I thought, more than half drunk. When he first drew, I was afraid that he was going to blow me to pieces then and there, and I was ready for him. But when he laid it down and dropped off into a heavy sleep, I could have laughed.

“I would have taken a nap myself, but his stentorian snores made it impossible. There was nothing to see outside but a dreary scene through the snow that was coming down in fine, white driving particles. At times there would be distant forests of rather stunted pines, but for the most part, only the desolate stretch of plains.

“Once in a while we would come to a stop at a small station, but only for a short time, and then the train with its long line of flat-looking coaches, would rumble out over the barren plain. By-and-by I began to feel very hungry and I realized that there was going to be no stop for meals, as the other passengers, more familiar with the custom of the country, had no doubt provided themselves with hampers of provisions.

“I looked at the Grand Duke or whatever it might be, and he was sleeping as only a big man who is quite intoxicated can sleep. Then my eye wandered to the hamper. Instantly my hunger hardened into resolution. I was not going to starve with that within my reach. I stooped down and picked it up, then opened it on my knee.

“I had never seen anything more dainty, and more elegant, than was the arrangement of that basket. As for the contents, well, I can only recall, I cannot describe. For warming tea there was an arrangement of silver and ebony in one compartment. Likewise a roasted fowl in a delicious sauce, and stuffed with chestnuts. Also bread and caviar, the latter a Russian delicacy of fish-roe or eggs.”

“I wouldn’t like that,” cut in Tom.

“How do you know?” reproved Joe, “you never tried it.”

“Fish eggs!” exclaimed Tom with a grimace.

“You would have turned up your nose at birds’ nests too,” said Jim, “until the Captain told us how fine they were, and not at all like we supposed.”

“Yes,” nodded the engineer, “birds’ nests are all right, I’ve eaten them in China. They are gathered before the birds ever nest in them.”

“But go on with your story, I’m anxious to see how you made out. It was certainly an interesting experience,” urged Jim.

“I should say so,” chorused the boys.

“I’m glad you like it,” remarked the engineer, “and it was an entertaining situation, especially the lunch part of it. Where was I?”

“Caviar,” suggested Tom.

“Oh, yes. Well, on the bill of fare were different cakes, jellies and jams, all beautifully put up. As to the liquors, there were half a dozen different bottles, as I have said of cut glass, in filigree silver holders, with his Nib’s crests on the tops, engraved in silver. It was all beautiful to look upon. One liquor green, oh, such a lovely green, as a French poet says the color of a mermaid’s eyes. Another purple, another the color of honey. But I had sense enough left not to take any of them, else I would have had no senses left, which would have been bad under the circumstances, for I might have wakened up to find myself at the sudden end of a rope, or sitting out on the lonely plains with some bruises and no friends.

“So I contented myself with several nice cups of tea, with a bit of lemon in them,

and the rest of the bill of fare. That roasted fowl was remarkably good, and as for the sauce——! I was on the point of asking his Royal Highness for the recipe, but he was sleeping so soundly that I felt that it was a pity to disturb him. Just then I noticed that the pistol near his hand was about to fall to the floor with the jolting of the car, so I put the hamper reluctantly aside and caught the pistol.

“I stood with it in my hand regarding it with interest. A clumsy weapon indeed, though of beautiful workmanship. I hesitated, holding the weapon carefully.”

“Did you think of shooting him?” inquired Tom tremulously.

John Berwick smiled and shook his head. “No, not that. I was not a nihilist. You see I had plenty to eat, why should I be? Nevertheless, I came to a quick decision. I went to the window opposite, and opened it very carefully, no wider than I had to, and launched it safely out into a snowdrift. Then I closed the window quickly, but stood perfectly still, for I was aware that the giant back of me was stirring, a draught of the fresh air had awakened him. It appeared that my sin had found me out.

“Standing perfectly quiet, I turned my head slowly and saw that the Russian had merely changed his position, and had gone off into another slumber. So I leisurely finished my lunch, enjoying the preserves and other dainties hugely. After this part of the performance was completed, I put everything back into the hamper with the utmost neatness. To tell the honest truth, there was not a great deal left to repack, a part of the chicken, and some bread and caviar, which to the appetite of a Russian would be no more than a lamb chop to a hungry tiger.”

“Gosh!” exclaimed Jim again, “but you surely had your nerve with you.”

“Yes,” acquiesced the engineer, “and a full stomach, which is a good thing to have along with your nerve. I have noticed that some times the two go well together. However, the liquor was untouched, and I hoped that he would take some more and thus again become oblivious to everything else. One thing reassured me, and that was, that I had got rid of his revolver or rather pistol. I was not afraid of his shooting me, but had been afraid of his braining me with the butt end of it.

“It had now grown very dusk in the carriage, and outside the storm was sweeping over the vast plain in white swirls, and still the train lumbered westward. I decided to save the guard the trouble of lighting up, so I attended to

that myself, and pulled the dark hood over the thick glass that was set in the center of the top of the compartment, so that his royal Nibs could have his siesta undisturbed.

“Then I sat myself down in the corner of the carriage, and pulled out my cigarette case, selected one and lighted it.

“‘I trust your Highness will not mind the smoke?’ I remarked in a low tone, as I gave a delicate puff into the air, but I guess that his Royal Highness did, for in a few moments he stirred ponderously, and finally sat up. Then a look of utter amazement came into his face when he saw me seated there in the corner with a cigarette in my fingers. His little puffed eyes opened as wide as they could.

“‘Poof!’ blew out through his bewhiskered mouth, expressing utmost disdain and indignation. Then he totally ignored my presence, and picking up the hamper, he set it before him. The crucial moment had come, and I must confess that I felt a few creeps of apprehension go over me. As for his Royal Highness, his whole attitude was of great hunger about to be satisfied.

“It showed in his popped eyes and the workings of his large, full-lipped mouth. Then he flung back the top of the hamper and leaned forward eagerly. If his first amazement was utter this was too utter. He sat bolt upright for a second, then he dived at the basket again. He poked around in it. He shook it vigorously, but no provisions miraculously appeared. It was appalling, beyond belief. He took out a small mirror and regarded himself very carefully, and then solemnly he nodded. It was none other than himself, his Royal Highness Michael Palanovitch, and this before him was his Honorable Hamper, but like old Mother Hubbard’s cupboard, it was entirely bare. It was too much for my sense of humor and from my corner there came a suppressed snort.

“Instantly his Royal Highness grasped the situation and I thought that he was going to grasp me at the same time. I never saw such rage and I immediately became very sober and entirely innocent. He stormed, he raved, I am afraid he swore, though I could not understand all he said. It was a roar of sound and a frazzle of language. He tore at his hair and raged like a caged lion.

“I saw visions of the knout and exile in Siberia. I protested my innocence, and my profound sorrow at the sad state of his larder. I used both language and pantomime. ‘I am an American, Monsieur,’ I cried, ‘I cannot eat anything

cooked in Russia, it does not agree with me.’ I protested with such vehemence and with such utter innocence that his Highness finally quieted down, partly from sheer exhaustion, possibly from lack of food.” There was a twinkle in the speaker’s eye, and the boys roared. “When he had become quiet, I, with a low bow, went to the hamper and produced the piece of chicken that was left and presented it to him with much humility.

“His amazement knew no bounds at this performance of mine, and his face showed it. Then his mood suddenly changed, and he burst into homeric laughter. It was so extraordinary, that it struck him as humorous. Part of the joke being that I was a foreigner, especially an American, of whom anything might be expected. On the basis of this incident he immediately accepted me into a jovial comradeship. Whenever it struck him he would burst into a roar of laughter. So, behold me, when the train finally did stop at a brilliantly lighted station, wherein was a really palatial dining-room, walking arm in arm with his Royal Highness, Archduke Michael, and receiving the salutes of the soldiery and the plaudits of admiring citizens.”



CHAPTER XI

A CONSPIRACY

There was a moment's silence when the engineer had finished his unusual and most entertaining narrative. It seemed to them so vivid had been his story, that instead of being on a ship in the mid-Pacific in the midst of a blustery rainstorm that they were in far-off Russia, and as the tale ended they could see a picture before their eyes.

There was the long train, covered and crusted with snow, standing alongside the station. In the light of large lamps shining brilliantly upon the snow, was the gigantic Russian in his fur coat, arm-in-arm with the slight, dark American. Their steps were directed towards the long dining-room that shone in singular attraction out of the storm and cold. The many round tables set with glowing whiteness and with gleam of silver. The high-backed chairs of some black wood. At one end of the long dining-room a tea urn of huge proportions shining like silver. So the boys sat for some minutes in complete silence, under the spell of the story; then Tom spoke up:

"I should have thought, Mr. Berwick, that you would have been fired out of the carriage at St. Petersburg when his Nibs arrived."

"It was curious," admitted the engineer. "I have never quite understood it."

"I reckon it was your audacity that helped you out," said Juarez.

"Or, rather helped you in," remarked the incorrigible Jo.

"I have thought of that, as an explanation," said Berwick.

"Or, you may have resembled some High Duke or other," suggested Jim, "and that let you through."

"I'm greatly flattered," said Berwick with a slight smile. "That may have been the solution, but I have partially figured that my success was due to the odd character of my Russian friend. I discovered later that he was a Grand Duke,

well known in a social rather than a political way and famous for his eccentricities. He spent much of his time in Paris and favored foreigners rather than his own countrymen, so I was probably taken for one of his French cronies. I saw him some years later in Paris, but I did not try to revive the acquaintanceship, but then I was not hungry.” Jo was about to open his mouth to make a pun when Jim interfered.

“Don’t you dare to say anything about being hampered or unhampered,” he warned. The engineer laughed heartily. He liked the boys for their boyish qualities, which were very refreshing to him.

“How did you ever get down to this work?” asked Tom bluntly, “after you had been hobnobbing with Dukes and living in Paris?”

“I do not believe you boys will understand me,” he replied musingly, “it would not be in the nature of things that you should. I did not come down to this work, but up to it. After traveling for a great many years over the world, I got to living a very idle and useless life on the continent. But it palled on me after a while. I was in good health, and had money, but I was tired of myself, thoroughly and entirely bored. By the way, I might illustrate this unpleasant condition of things by a high and mighty example. Did you ever hear of Charles IX. of France?” This was a question the boys were anxious to answer, just to show that they knew something besides roughing it, and to prove their intelligence to the engineer, who in a quiet way always put them on their mettle, but to tell the truth they were rather rusty on all branches of learning, but Jo and Tom were both fond of history and had read a good deal of it at odd times. Tom was the first to jump into the ring of knowledge, with the four-ounce gloves of information, but ignorance ducked his first wild swing and was thus saved a knockout.

“Oh, yes,” he replied glibly, “Charles IX. was the son of Henry of Navarre.” The engineer shook his head slightly.

“You are away off, Tom,” declared Jo. “His mother was Catherine de Médici and Henri III. was his brother. Maybe he was the nephew or cousin of Henry of Navarre. I wish I had a history here and I would look it up.”

“Partly right and partly wrong, Jo,” said Berwick. “Catherine de Médici was the mother of Charles IX., whose sister, Margaret of Navarre, married Henry of Navarre. But this is the point I want to make. Charles IX. finally got so tired of

the pomps and ceremonies of the court after a while that he had a forge fixed up in his palace and there he used to make and hammer out horseshoes. That," he concluded with a smile, "is why I took up my work. I was tired of useless idleness. There is a constant live interest in this business of running an engine that I like. Now I must get at it, and good-night to you."

"Good-night, Mr. Berwick," replied the boys, and made their way out of the engine-room on to the storm-swept deck, all except Juarez, who stayed to work with the engineer.

The boys separated to their respective duties. Jeems took the boy's task of stoking, Jim was at the wheel, sending Pete below to the forecastle to take a good sleep. Tom and Jo were detailed to go to their respective cabins and turn in for the night, as the old captain had rather perversely taken it into his head to stand watch on the bridge, though Jim had tried to dissuade him.

"It won't do your rheumatism any good, Captain," warned Jim. "It's mighty wet and cold on the bridge and the wind is rushing fierce."

"Trying to make me out an old man," growled the captain, much aggrieved. "I guess I can stand as much as any of you boys. I've weathered many a storm in my day."

"You are tough as a knot yet, Captain," said Jim soothingly.

So it happened that the captain in his heavy storm coat stood on the bridge, while the rain swished and swirled over the tossing seas, and swept the decks, so that it was much pleasanter in the cabin than abroad, but Jim enjoyed nothing more in sailing than to be at the wheel a night like this, guiding his craft plunging through the heavy waves in the darkness. There was a fascination about it, the obedience of the ship to the helm, the following of the mysterious guidance of the needle, the standing fixed against the rush of wind and rain, the familiar feeling of the spokes of the wheel, like grasping the bridle reins when riding a spirited horse, all this went to make up Jim's liking for this work.

Now being anxious for the welfare of Tom and Jo, let us see if they are safely tucked away in their little cribs. We find that they are not, so mischief must be afoot, and it is. It seems that neither Jo nor Tom were in any mood to go to sleep, and their minds were busy with the story that the engineer had told them. They felt a desire to emulate him. So they lay awake and thought what they might do

to make life interesting on the ocean wave.

Tom thought of surprising the captain and Jim by making weird sounds back of the cabin on the quarter deck and robing himself in a white sheet at the same time. A most excellent plan indeed, both worthies being such timid characters. But Tom gave up the idea of this surprise for fear the tables might be turned on him and then he would get a taste of the rope's end for fair, so he had another thought coming.

The idea that came to Jo in the silent night watches was to give Jeems a benefit while he was busy stoking, but there was one difficulty here that it was almost impossible to get down into the hold without being discovered, so that plan had to be given up. Then an inspiration came to Tom.

He got hastily up, and went to Jo's cabin, which was just forward of his on the main deck. You see there were three cabins on a side; each of the boys had one and the engineer the sixth. Tom did not stop to knock, and slid Jo's cabin door noiselessly back, but the wakeful Jo heard him.

"Who's there?" he demanded in a gruff voice.

"Don't shoot. It's me, Tom," replied a low voice.

"Well, Mr. Tom, what are you doing up so early in the morning?" inquired Jo.

"I've got a scheme," said Tom in the low voice of a conspirator. "Let's surprise old Pete and the boy in the forecastle."

"It's dark as a cave down there," said Jo. "They will be sure to hear us."

"We will wear our moccasins," replied Tom, "and there isn't any bric-a-brac to knock over."

"I tell you what!" cried Jo, exhilarated by a sudden and brilliant idea. "Let's rub matches on our faces, when we go down."

"Same as Jim did when we were in the Hollow Mountain, and he surprised those Hawaiian Priests!" exclaimed Tom. "Gee! but you have got a good head on you, Jo. That's what we will do."

"Here's plenty of matches," said Jo. "We must be careful and not let them get too damp. Another thing, we will have to look out and not let the Captain see us, or

Jim, either, or there will be something brewing.”

“What do you suppose the old gentleman would do to us if he saw us snooping along?” inquired Tom apprehensively, for he stood in much awe of the captain.

“You had better stay in your little crib if you are so alarmed,” remarked Jo.

“I’m ready when you are,” said Tom gruffly.

Then they started moving silently along the deck, though the fierce wind that swept the ship gave them an excellent protection. Still they proceeded very cautiously, keeping close to the galley and the wall of the engine-room. Just then the shepherd’s dog jumped up from the shelter where he was waiting for his master to come up from below.

He barked furiously at first when he saw the two shadowy forms coming towards him, then Jo spoke to him in a low voice, and the dog, recognizing him, lay down in his dry shelter again. But the captain was on the alert. He came to that side of the quarter deck and looked over.



CHAPTER XII

THE GREEN GHOSTS

“I wonder what made that pup break loose like that?” he remarked. “Must have seen something unusual.”

He waited for a short time looking down to the deck below, and the boys, Tom and Jo, directly beneath him, hugged as close to the wall as they could. Then the *Sea Eagle* gave a heavy lurch, and Tom lost his grip, and much terrified, rolled to the bulwarks, in a dark bundle, but fortunately the captain had made up his mind that it was a false alarm and had gone back to the bridge.

Tom lay in the scuppers not daring to move, and imagining that the captain’s baleful eye was glaring down on him from the quarter deck. As Jo would have said if he had dared open his mouth, there would not have been any quarter in spite of the deck, but he was muzzled by circumstances. Another heavy roll heaved the frightened Tom back against Jo, who had a purchase on an iron ring. Jo grabbed him and held on.

“Stay anchored, you idiot,” said Jo in a hoarse whisper. “You will give us away if you aren’t careful.”

“Can’t help it,” growled Tom. “The old ship rolls so.”

“Now is our chance, come,” whispered Jo.

The next dash brought them to a temporary safe anchorage directly underneath the bridge. So far the practical jokers had rather had it put on them, for they had been badly scared and an occasional wave that came over the bow of the *Sea Eagle* threatened the two gallant Frontier Boys with a severe ducking.

“Skylarking is all right,” whispered Jo to his comrade in mischief, “but this sealarking is different.”

“If you were going to be hung you would try to pun,” growled Tom.

By stealthy observation they found that there was no chance for them to reach the hood of the forecastle on the forward deck without being seen by the keen-eyed captain.

“Think up some scheme, Jo,” urged Tom, “to distract the old boy’s attention or he will spot us sure.”

Jo thought a minute, then he discovered what he imagined would be a fine scheme.

“You stay here, Tom,” he whispered, and sped back towards the cabin.

“He need not have told me that,” grumbled Tom. “I wouldn’t be apt to stay anywhere else.”

Meanwhile, Jo had reached his cabin, and he hastily pushed the sliding door open and went in. He was not long in getting what he was after. It was a ship’s bell, with a history to it, that he had picked up in Hawaii—the bell, not the history. Holding the clapper tight so that it would not betray him, Jo made his way quickly to the ladder-like stairs leading to the quarter deck and tied it underneath, in such a way that it was sure to ring.

This promised to be a double-barreled joke, and they would be lucky if the recoil did not kick them over. When it was properly fastened Jo let go of it and sped back to Tom. Scarcely had he reached his fellow conspirator than there came the clear metallic ring of a ship’s bell. Weird and uncanny it sounded through the stormy darkness of the night. The old captain could scarcely believe his ears. Then came that startling vibration again.

“By Thundas, what’s that?” he cried.

“It sounded to me like a ship’s bell,” said Jim. “I’d soon find out, if you would take the wheel, sir.” Growling something, the old fellow made in the direction of the sound, and Jo and Tom scudded for the forecastle, which they reached without being discovered.

Meanwhile, the captain had come to the ladder leading from the quarter deck to the main deck, and the tolling came from the darkness, just beneath his feet. There was a strain of superstition in him, as in all sailors, and he had heard yarns of ghostly bells on haunted ships that tolled for the dead about to be. And it

shook the old fellow's nerve. Just then the shepherd's dog began to howl dismally and this put the seal on matters as far as the captain was concerned.

He could not locate the continued tolling, so he returned to the bridge and reported the fact to Jim, with his own view of the case.

"I don't wonder at it either, Skipper," he said in tremulous tones. "This was once a pirate's ship, and I don't need to tell you anything about its former captain, Bill Broom. There's been many a deed of blood done aboard this ship." Jim felt generally angry, but not at the captain, whom he understood, but he hated to have the ship of which he was fond, given a bad name.

"Take the wheel, sir," said Jim, "and I'll find out in a jiffy what's wrong. If this ship is harboring any ghosts, I'll fumigate them out."

"It's a job for a young man," replied the captain, taking the wheel. "I wish you good luck, Skipper."

No sooner did the captain take the helm than Jim strode across the quarter deck in the direction of the tolling sound. It was weird enough to give almost anyone the creeps. Just imagine for yourself how it would be, with that metallic sound coming out of the stormy darkness. Fortunately for him, Jim was not imaginative, and did not see things unless he was shown. He reached the top of the ladder, and the tolling was just beneath his feet. He started down and then something happened.

Let us return to the two desperate characters, to wit: Tom and Jo, whose malign efforts had started all this trouble. When we left them, they were in the steep ladder-way leading down into the forecabin. They stopped there for a minute, panting both with excitement and from the dash they had made. It was as dark as pitch below them, but they could hear the stentorian snore of Pete and the sturdy Irish lad, who did the most of the stoking.

"Give me some more matches, Jo," whispered Tom.

"Don't you laugh and give us away," warned Jo.

Here they proceeded to rub the sulphur on their faces until their countenances took on a ghostly greenish-white hue. Then they crept down the steps into the dark forecabin.

“Who’s that?” cried Pete, who slept with one eye open after the manner of sailors.

The boys gave a deep groan and then Irish roused up. Pete was already wide awake, and aghast at what he saw, two greenish-white faces in the gloom and with audible groans too. At first he was paralyzed, then Irish broke the spell.

“Howly Saints!” he yelled, “it’s the devil!”

Then he sprang from his bunk yelling at every second, and made for the ladder. Pete wasted no breath in yells. He put it into action. When the boy gave his first yell the old sailor likewise jumped for the ladder; no matter if he did have to pass within a few inches of those ghostly ghosts, the fresh air for him.

It was a case of two minds with but a single thought, for old Pete and the boy met at the ladder and then there was a wild scramble. First Pete would start part way up and Irish would pull him down, then the boy would get up a ways and Pete would yank him deckward and the boy was yelling for help with every breath. It was a regular cat fight and Tom and Jo were weak from suppressed laughter, at the exhibition. It was funny in a way, but those laugh best who laugh last sometimes, as Jo and Tom were likely to find out.

Finally the boy did get out on deck with Pete at his heels, and they ran aft yelling at the tops of their voices.

“Murther!” “Haul in,” according to their different modes of expressions.

“What’s the matter with you wild Indians?” roared the captain from his station at the wheel. “Get below there till you are called.”

It was lucky for them that he was not free to get at them, for the old captain was doubly irritated by their outcry since he had been somewhat nervous himself. Pete and the lad ran aft as though the devil indeed was after them. Jim heard the commotion just as he started down the ladder, and in a jiffy he had collared the runaways.

“Here, shut up!” he yelled, shaking them fiercely. “What’s all this noise about?”

It took a couple of minutes before he could get anything coherent out of them. When he found out what they had to tell he started for the forecabin, grabbing a belaying pin on his way. He was thoroughly aroused, and he knew something

was wrong, but he could not divine what it was.

“What’s the matter with those boobies?” cried the captain when he saw the tall figure in the darkness making for the forecastle.

“Think they have seen ghosts,” yelled Jim, “as near as I can make out, dreaming, I guess.”

“I’d give ’em something to dream about if I could lay hands on them,” said the captain. Jim laughed and strode to the hood of the forecastle.

Now let us see what had become of the two practical jokers. It looked very much as though they were trapped and the joke had turned out more seriously than they expected, as is often the case, and they knew it would go hard with them when they were captured.

“We have got to hide,” cried Jo, “those idiots have roused the whole ship. I didn’t think they would act like that.”

“We will probably be keel-hauled for this,” said Tom. “Where are you going to hide, Jo?”

“Don’t know, but we have got to hide somewhere, and soon, too.”

Jo was more daring than Tom, and he made a dash for the deck with the hope that he would be able to get back to his cabin and be innocently asleep when an investigation should be made, but no sooner did he get out than he saw that all retreat was cut off, for he could dimly see Jim’s form coming along the passageway. He hesitated for a second undecided which way to turn, then he crouched quickly in the direction of the bow. It had come to him like an inspiration. There was a covered cubby hole roofed over, where old chains and such things were kept, in the bow.



CHAPTER XIII

TOM'S BAD LUCK

Jo crawled as far back as he could into his hiding place, bumping his head and bruising his knees on the rusty chains, and in the remotest corner he crouched much like a scared kitten. He had just got safely hidden when Jim reached the hood of the forecastle.

Then Jim descended in search of the ghosts. No sooner had he lighted a lantern than Pete appeared hobbling down the steps into the dim interior with the bell, that Jo had tied to the ladder, in his hand. This the old sailor felt would give the clue to the mystery, and it did.

"Here, Skipper, I found this tied aft." Jim took it and recognized it at a glance.

"Ho! ho!" he cried, "this is some of Jo's work. He and Tom have been up to some devilment. I bet my sombrero that those two rascals were the ghosts you saw." But the old sailor did not want to give up the dubious honor of having seen some live spirits, and so he stuck to his story.

"But these were real ghosts, sir. I seen 'em with my two eyes, and their faces were white and green, like nothing human."

"He's shure roight, sor," declared the boy who had now put in a cautious appearance. "My grandfather has seen ghosts in his time."

Jim laughed and began an examination of the floor, whirling the light from the lantern slowly around until he came to some damp footprints in the middle of the floor.

"These ghosts must have worn moccasins," Jim remarked, "for if I don't mistake that is the sign of 'em, and they got their feet damp. You stay here long enough and you will probably hear them sneeze."

"But how was they complected that way?" questioned old Pete, his face growing very red with the possibility of his being made a fool of by a couple of kids.

“I guess they were bilious, those ghosts,” remarked Jim, “or maybe it was sulphur they rubbed on. They once saw me scare some savages that way down in Hawaii.”

“I call it a durned outrage, on an old man like me, to have a couple of fool kids play a trick like that. I hurt my leg too, Skipper.”

“How was that?” inquired Jim, not without malice aforethought.

“Well, you see, it was this a way, Skipper,” explained old Pete shamefacedly, “I seen this peculiar object or two in the forecastle, and I says to myself, ‘The skipper ought to know about this,’ so I jumps up and starts to report it to you _____”

“I had the same thought, sor,” cut in the boy.

“Yes, and he got in my way going up the ladder, and I fell and cut my leg.” He showed the place to Jim, and the latter, though trying hard not to laugh at the old chap’s explanations of his scare, was justly indignant when he saw that he was hurt.

“Those beggars must be hiding here,” he said. “They certainly haven’t got aft. We will soon root ’em out and I’ll give them something to remember this performance by as long as they live.”

Then began a systematic search of the forecastle. Of course they did not find Jo, for, as we know, he was safely hidden on deck, but Tom was in the forecastle, and was bound to be discovered sooner or later in so small a space.

“Look under the bunks on that side, boys,” said Jim, “I’ll take this.”

“Aye, aye, sir-sor,” was the reply.

But after a most careful search, turning over blankets and bedding, no one was found. Jim swung the lantern under the dark ladder, but no one was there. Where could they be? They must be within a few feet of them and yet they could not see them.

“It’s odd about them,” remarked Jim, coming to a halt in the middle of the floor. “They seem to have vanished.”

“I reckon it was ghosts, after all,” said old Pete.

The only pieces of furniture in the place were a small trunk belonging to the boy, an impossible hiding place for lads the size of Jo or Tom—and Pete’s battered old sea-chest. This latter Pete opened, it was not locked, and saw only a heap of old clothes.

“Not here, Skipper,” he said, shutting down the lid with a snap.

“They must have got up on deck then,” said Jim, puzzled.

So the party adjourned to the deck, Jim carrying the lantern to aid him in the search.

“What did you find?” roared the captain.

“It was Tom and Jo, sir,” yelled Jim, “but we can’t locate them. Have you seen them skulking aft, Captain?”

“Nobody has gone by me,” cried the captain. “They must be for’ard.”

Just then Juarez joined in the search.

“Look in the bow,” he advised, when he found how matters stood.

So paying no attention to the water and spray that came over the bow, they made their way forward, Jim in the lead with the lantern. He swung the light in among the chains, but a deep shadow cast by the lantern hid Jo, who laid low, making himself as small as possible, his head buried close to the deck.

But Juarez’s keen eyes saw a dark object crouching in the furthest corner. He dived past Jim and caught hold of the cowering Jo and in spite of his struggles pulled him to the surface. Jo appeared like a much disheveled criminal when he was dragged out.

“Well,” said Jim, “you are a pretty looking fellow. Where’s your pal?”

“Tom?” questioned Jo grumpily. “He was in the fore-castle when I saw him last.”

“You will have to pay for this night’s rumpus,” warned Jim.

“Near made me break my leg,” growled Pete, “with your foolin’.” In spite of his present predicament Jo could not help laughing heartily at the recollection of old Pete and the boy scrambling like a couple of scared cats up the ladder of the

forecastle.

“You won’t feel so gay when we get through with you,” said Jim. He marched him with a heavy hand to the cabin which he occupied, shoved the angry and resisting Joseph within and shut and locked the door. Then they started out in a final search for Tom, the only one of this desperate gang of night marauders that now remained uncaptured.

“I declare, I don’t know what has become of that boy,” said Jim.

“He couldn’t have fallen overboard?” questioned Juarez. Jim negatived that idea emphatically.

“Tom’s too cautious for that,” he said.

Where was he? The reader knows well enough, being an adept on solving all these mysteries. He was in old Pete’s sea-chest hidden down under the clothes, and Pete, whose eyesight was not as good as it once was, had failed to see any sign of him. Now, when he heard Jim and the rest go on deck, he decided that it was time to get out of his uncomfortable prison, which was much too cramped.

What was his dismay to find that he was indeed a prisoner, for when old Pete had shut down the top of the chest it had fastened shut. Tom began to feel stifled for air, partly imagination on his part, and partly fact. It was true that some air could get in, through where the rope handles went, but not much. Tom struggled till he got his hand in his pocket, hoping to find his knife with which he would cut the rope handles and push the pieces through the holes and thus get enough air to sustain life, but as luck would have it, his knife was not there.

He began to pant now, and gasp and think of all the horrible tales he had ever read of people being buried alive and of similar tragedies, until he was almost hysterical. He yelled for help, but his voice was muffled, and besides there was none to hear. He tried to attract attention by beating with his hands against the top of the chest.

After what seemed an interminable time, the half-fainting Tom heard feet clattering down the steep ladder into the forecastle, and this brought him partially to.

“Jim, get me out,” he cried, and his voice came feebly to the ears of the

searchers.

“I heard Tom,” cried Juarez.

“tom did not try to make his escape.”—P 119.

“TOM DID NOT TRY TO MAKE HIS ESCAPE.”—P. [119](#).

“Sounded like a cat mewling,” remarked the unfeeling Jim. “Listen.” Again they heard it and a faint pounding inside the sea-chest.

“He’s in that chest,” cried Jim, and he tried to open it.

“Locked in,” said Juarez. “Let Pete open it.”

Pete came forward, after fishing a key out of the depths of his pocket.

“Lucky I could find it,” he said. Then he flung the top of the chest back. Tom did not try to make his escape, or put up a fight of any kind, for he was all in, and was only too glad to be captured, for, as he figured, and quite correctly, that even the captain could not put him in a worse place than he had put himself.

“You look more like a ghost than the other one,” said Jim with a grin.

After he was sufficiently revived, he, too, was locked up, and further proceedings were put off until the morrow. In the meantime it was decided to have a little fun with these practical jokers on the next day, so as to teach them the seriousness of life on the ocean wave.

So at ten the next morning a court-martial was held in the dining saloon. As the weather still remained dark and overcast, it was necessary to have the big lamp over the table lit. The judges were the captain, who sat at one end of the table, and Juarez, who was at his left, and Jim, at the right. For once the captain took off his old cap and showed a bald, pink dome, with tufted gray at the side. His face wore a grimness that betokened hanging for the culprits—nothing less. The court was ready.

Then there was a clattering of feet on the stairs, and the prisoners were brought in by the sheriff, who was none other than the tall shepherd. They were tied with ropes, that is, their hands were, and their hang-dog looks were enough to condemn them. They did not dare face the captain, who was regarding them with great severity, but looked askance at Jim, who paid no attention to them, but was

busy making notes on a pad of paper before him on the table.



CHAPTER XIV

THE TRIAL

The sheriff was compelled to leave his prisoners in the hands of the court and hasten on deck to take the wheel, as the ship was short-handed, nearly the whole crew being present on court-martial duty. The prisoners were represented by John Berwick, the engineer, who entered into their defense with much interest and eclat. The specifications were in two charges, it being related:

I. "That Joseph Darlington, a native of New York State, and Thomas Darlington, a native of Missouri," read Jim with sonorous voice. At the word Missouri, John Berwick, the counsel for the defendants, was on his feet in an instant. He said:

"I move this honorable court that specification No. I be quashed, it being therein erroneously stated that my client, Thomas Darlington, comes from Missouri."

"Motion to squash denied," said James severely, not being entirely at home in legal phraseology.

"Then, your Honors, I move to amend, by striking out the word 'Missouri,' and substituting that of New York, this being a manifest attempt to prejudice the case of my client, the prosecution, no doubt, being desirous of proving that this innocent lad was one of the notorious Jesse James gang, that operated in Missouri and the Southwest."

The defendants' attorney stood tapping the table before him with one long finger and gazing earnestly at the court, which seemed to be struggling hard to suppress some deep and hidden emotion.

"The amendment is allowed," gasped Jim, gazing over the heads of the two sullen-looking prisoners. Then the first charge, as amended read:

I. "That Joseph Darlington, a native of New York, and Thomas Darlington, likewise a native of New York, are hereby charged with conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman, in that they did on the night of August eighteenth, 18—,

feloniously steal through the darkness into the apartments (better known as fo'scle) of one, Peter McCloskey, and of one, Aloyisius Durgan (minor), and did with malice aforethought, disturb the peace, quiet and sleep of the said McCloskey and the said Durgan, by representing themselves to be ghosts, with green faces" (here Tom snickered, but one look from the captain at the head of the table sobered him, indeed, it was the captain's presence on this trying occasion that lent dignity and reality to the scene, for he evidently meant business, and his sternness was rounded out by the impressiveness of his polished dome. When quiet settled heavily once more upon the trial, James resumed his reading of the charge), "representing themselves to be ghosts with green faces, to the grave detriment of the peace of mind of the said McCloskey and said Durgan, and furthermore, causing them severe bodily contusions and bruises upon their limbs while attempting to escape from said ghosts, at the time and place before mentioned, thus unfitting them for active service aboard their ship, the *Sea Eagle*, James Darlington, Master." At this last statement Captain Kerns leaned forward over the table, and regarded the two prisoners with great severity, and they felt in their bones that they were going to catch it. They looked appealingly at Juarez, but he appeared entirely oblivious of their presence.

II. "Furthermore, it is charged that the said Joseph Darlington and Thomas Darlington on the night of the 18th of August, 18—, did resist their superior officer—" Here Tom growled something in the ear of his attorney, who immediately rose to his feet and said, "My client objects to the word superior, as not being true and applicable, he says that the aforesaid officer only thinks that he is superior."

"This objection is overruled," said Jim, the judge, his mouth twitching; "by superior is meant commanding officer."

"Certainly, Skipper," rumbled the captain; "you're right. Don't let 'em give you any nonsense, you are in command of this ship."

Nothing more from Tom, and the reading continued. "Therefore, the two defendants are charged with mutiny on the high seas."

"Are you ready to plead to these specifications?" inquired Jim, looking at the prisoners' counsel.

"We are," replied John Berwick.

“What is your plea?”

“Not guilty, your Honors.”

“We will proceed to trial,” said Jim solemnly.

“They deserve the rope’s end for their impudence,” growled the captain.

Old Pete was the first witness and he was much impressed by the dignity of the court, as was evident as he limped in with his hat, or rather cap, in hand. He took the stand, which was an armchair placed facing the court, beyond the end of the table. No sooner had he seated himself than the *Sea Eagle* gave a sudden lurch to the starboard, and he would have gone, chair and all, into the wall if John Berwick had not caught him.

“Beg pardon, your Honors, but this thing ain’t anchored right.”

“What is your name?” inquired Jim.

“Peter McCloskey, sir.”

“Where were you born, Mr. McCloskey?”

“On a farm near Darien, Connecticut,” was the answer.

“What is your present occupation?”

“I am sailor aboard the *Sea Eagle*, sir.”

“And where were you on the night of August 18th?”

“I was asleep in the fo’scle of the *Sea Eagle*, sir.”

“Tell what occurred, if anything.”

This Peter McCloskey did with much enthusiasm and picturesque detail, and then John Berwick, the attorney for the prisoners, started in to cross-examine the witness, who kept himself firmly anchored by means of two large feet outspread at separate angles.

“Now, Peter,” he commenced suavely, “tell the court how much you drank on the eventful night of the 18th of August, when you saw these remarkable apparitions.”

“Well, your Honors,” said Pete, hesitatingly, “you know how it is yourselves. I took a nip before I turned in. Old bones have to be warmed somehow.”

“Exactly,” said the prisoners’ attorney. “Now, McCloskey, tell the court if you were not in a condition to see things on the night in question.”

“No, sir, Mr. Berwick, I was as sober as a judge when I woke up and saw those green things staring at me.”

“Are you sure, Peter, that you didn’t dream all this?” inquired Berwick.

“I didn’t dream this, sir,” replied Peter, showing a bruise on his leg.

This was quite unanswerable, and old Pete was allowed to go with the honors of war, and he was followed on the stand by the Irish lad, who was a willing witness and had many remarkable things to tell about ghosts, their natures and dispositions and their actions on the old sod of Ireland, where green-faced ghosts no doubt abounded. As his story confirmed old Pete’s, things looked dubious for Tom and Jo.

Their attorney, however, made an eloquent plea for the life and liberty of the two prisoners at the bar. He said in part:

“I ask your Honors to deal leniently with these two lads and to recall how much they have had to contend with in their short young lives. They have had only the harshest surroundings. Having come under the baleful influence of Captain Bill Broom, the former owner of this vessel, you cannot rightly blame them for their strong sense of humor.

“I think that a reprimand is due them for their infraction of the ship’s discipline and for resisting their *superior* officer” (a grin from Jim), “but I ask this Honorable Court to remember their tender years and to deal gently with the prisoners. If you do not, I fear that ghosts with green faces will haunt your fevered sleep forever. I leave their fate in your hands.”

Bowing low, the attorney for the prisoners sat down. Then the culprits were sent back to their cabin-cell while the judges took their fate under advisement. There was quite a lengthy discussion. Juarez being influenced by his friend, the engineer, was in favor of having the captain give them a severe call down, and let it go at that. While the captain himself favored the rope’s end and

imprisonment in the lazaret that had not been used since old Broom's day.

It was their resistance to the skipper that added to his severity, for he was a firm believer in discipline. But Jim suggested a more reasonable course that would better favor the ends of justice (which was not the rope's end)—than that which the other two judges recommended. His plan was finally adopted; then the bound prisoners were summoned before the August Court. (That is a pun the writer will have to make for Jo, as he is not in his normal spirits.)

They stood at the end of the table, looking sullen and defiant, and evidently expecting the worst.

"It is the finding of the court that you, Joseph Darlington and Thomas Darlington," read Jim with much emphasis and in a sonorous voice, "are guilty on both charges of the specifications, and by the unanimous judgment of the court, you are sentenced," Jim paused to give due impressiveness to the following words; meanwhile the two boys paled slightly, "sentenced to hard labor, shoveling coal, until Pete and the boy get over their lameness. This sentence to be immediately executed." And it was.

"I'm glad the sentence is going to be executed instead of us," said Jo as he was sent below with his comrade in crime to get busy feeding the insatiable furnace. Altogether the boys were pleased to get off without the rope's end being used on them.

"That was a good sentence, Judge," said John Berwick to Jim after the court had adjourned. "It met the case, for the real damage done was having Pete and the boy laid off on account of their prank."

"That's it," remarked Jim. "Then, too, Jo and Tom are husky and hard workers, and, with them shoveling coal, we ought to get to the coast now in a few days."



CHAPTER XV

“THE MARIA CROTHERS”

As the boys drew near the end of the voyage, they began to be anxious to see the land once more, not that they were tired of the sea, for they had come to regard the *Sea Eagle* as their home, and every plank was familiar to them. Moreover, there was nothing equal to the freedom of life on the ocean wave, but they were anxious to start for the Sierras to attempt the discovery of the Lost Mine, so that perchance they could take a trip around the world.

According to their calculations it was now only a question of a few days before they would make the harbor from which they had sailed a few months before. Jim was on the quarter deck talking over matters with Captain Kerns. It was a very pleasant afternoon, with a clear shining sun, and a sparkling sea, and sufficient breeze to make the air alive. The captain was seated in his scarred but comfortable armchair. That was the only piece of furniture which he had brought with him from his cabin on the coast. He wore his heavy woolen jacket buttoned across his chest because it was cool even in the sun. Jim leaned easily against the rail, dressed in his well-remembered blue flannel shirt, and trousers to match, with the gray sombrero pushed back from his forehead. His bronzed face and keen gray eyes determined him to be a very fair specimen of the American boy when in top-notch condition.

“I hope you will be able to look after the *Sea Eagle*, Captain,” propounded Jim, “while we are in the mountains.”

The captain mused for a while, pursing up his eyes, then he took his short blackened pipe out of his mouth.

“I’ll do it, Skipper,” he said. “I’m fond of this yere boat, and it’s like home to me. Then, too, I like you boys. There’s nothin’ of the fresh, gabby kid about any of you. I’ll do it fer you, Skipper.” And the bargain was sealed with a warm grip between the two friends.

“There’s one thing I ought to speak about though,” said Jim, “and that is in regard to old Bill Broom, the pirate, who had the *Sea Eagle* before we took her. He is a revengeful old beggar and may make you trouble if he gets a chance.”

“I never really met Broom, though I came near it once,” remarked the old captain grimly, “but if he is wise, he won’t come bothering around me or the *Sea Eagle* either.”

“I expect old Pete will stay aboard and the boy,” said Jim, “so you won’t be without some company.”

“I’ve always got ‘Lyssus’ here,” grinned the captain, picking up the big tortoise shell that was purring around his legs. “I don’t want any better company than him.”

“He is a good old fellow,” said Jim, playfully nipping the cat’s ears with his fingers, “and a mighty good sailor, too.” Just then Jim chanced to look up, scanning the expanse of sea ahead, not with the expectation of seeing anything, but just force of habit. Immediately he straightened up and his gray eyes narrowed with interest.

“What is it, Skipper?” questioned the old captain, getting to his feet.

“It looks like smoke,” exclaimed Jim, “about three points on our starboard bow.”

“Maybe it’s a steamer,” said the captain. “We ought to be running across them now once in a while.”

“Possibly it’s a volcano,” suggested Jim.

By this time the captain had got the glass from his cabin, and had it focused on the slender blue-gray column of smoke that was rising close to the southeastern horizon.

“It’s a ship, almost burned out,” exclaimed the captain.

“By jove!” cried Jim. “We will see exactly what it is,” and he gave the order to Pete, who was at the wheel, to change the *Sea Eagle*’s course accordingly.

“I reckon nobody is alive aboard,” remarked the captain. “She looks pretty well burned out.”

No sooner had the ship's course been changed, than every member of the crew was out on deck to see what was up, and all were intensely interested watching the column of smoke that now could be seen rising from a dark hull close to the water, marking one of those oft-repeated tragedies of the sea. Rapidly the gallant little *Sea Eagle* plowed the blue surface of the ocean in a straight course towards the burning ship.

Many were the conjectures as to how the destroyed ship came to be in her present hapless condition. Jo thought that she had probably caught afire and the crew had been compelled to abandon her, but the engineer shook his head at this theory.

"I don't agree with you, Joseph. My idea is that she is a derelict that has been abandoned possibly years ago. Some ship has crossed her trail recently, and to get rid of her as an uncharted menace to ships in regular travel, has set fire to her, but without completing her destruction."

"They are bad things to be lying around loose," said Jim. "If we had been off our course a little, and it had been some hours later, we would have stood a jolly good chance of running plump into this ship, and if we had not gone down, we would have been badly stove up."

"You would have gone down," said the engineer briefly.

"I suppose there are a good many of these derelicts floating around the oceans," remarked Juarez.

"Yes," said the engineer, "and some of them have most interesting histories. There was a curious incident in regard to a barque named the *Norton* that was abandoned in the Atlantic some years ago. The skipper and the crew were rescued by a sailing vessel, and, after a while, they drew near an English port.

"The skipper of the *Norton* was pacing the poop deck from force of habit, when he suddenly stopped as if petrified, and his jaw dropped, for there ahead of him alongside of a wharf was his lost and abandoned ship. The explanation was simple. She had been picked up by a passing steamer and towed into port, for salvage."

The *Sea Eagle* was now within a half mile of the derelict and she could be made out quite plainly. She was a good-sized wooden vessel, a three-sticker, but the

masts had been broken off and the ship had been rendered entirely helpless. She was rolling sluggishly to the motion of the waves, without life or hope.

“She’s the *Maria Crothers*, London,” said the captain from the upper deck, looking through the glass, “and she looks like she has been floating around for several years.”

In a few minutes the *Sea Eagle* was lying to, a short distance from the derelict. It was evident that she had been abandoned a long time. The sides and bottom of the ship were encrusted with barnacles and long green streamers of sea weeds on her sides and bow gave her a most ancient and dilapidated appearance.

In the center of the main deck smoke was slowly rising into the air from the charred timbers.

“She is too water-logged to burn,” said the captain.

“We will try to blow her up, Captain,” cried Jim. “She is a dangerous proposition so near to the coast.”

“It’s a good idea, lad,” agreed the captain.

“Lower the boat, my hearties,” ordered Jim with a grin.

They put two kegs of powder into the boat, and with the material for a couple of long fuses, they started for the derelict, now but a short distance off. None of the boys will ever forget that boarding of the abandoned vessel, not on account of the danger, for there was none, but for the unusualness of the occasion and the picturesqueness of the scene.

The sun was just setting as they rowed towards the *Maria Crothers*, or what was once that gallant vessel, and the crimson glow came over the slow-rolling swell and touched everything with a lurid light, especially the desolate derelict. As they were nearing the hulk, Tom exclaimed:

“Look, there is a shark coming out from a hole under her bow!”

Sure enough, with sinuous motion a long and ugly-looking shark swam slowly a short distance below the surface, taking on a greenish hue, from the color of the water. There was something singularly repellent about him and peculiarly sinister in his every motion.

“If he gets too sassy, we will treat him like we did his friends and brethren near the coast of Maine,” said Jim. “When we were in the canoes. Remember, Jeems?”

“Don’t mention it to me,” warned Jeems. “I’m liable to have a chill.”

It was not difficult to board the derelict, when the boat was brought on the lee side, for the vessel was down well with the water. Jim jumped aboard and the others followed, except old Pete, who was at the oars; he kept the boat close while the barrels of powder were transferred.

The boys found nothing on the old craft of especial interest. They could still see that the cabin had been a handsome one, with dark wood like mahogany and properly gilded, but everything was now mildewed or covered with green slime. There were sea things crawling everywhere.

Jim found his work cut out for him to get the powder planted where it would do the best execution. Darkness came on, and he was busy aft with one keg while Juarez and the engineer were planting the other for’ard. They had got a number of lanterns from the ship to work by, and, from a distance they looked like glow worms on the dark surface of the waters.

It was a most weird and peculiar sight, but after nearly two hours’ work, everything was ready. Only Jim, Juarez and the engineer were left upon the derelict, with old Pete ready at the oars to pull away as soon as the men should jump into the boat after firing the fuses.

“Already for’ard!” yelled Jim.

“Ready,” came Juarez’s reply.

They touched the long fuse and then ran and stepped lightly into the boat. Pete dug the oars into the water and away the boat leapt towards the *Sea Eagle*. She had cleared the derelict about a hundred feet, when with two dull shaking thuds, and a glare of red light at either end, the derelict was blown to destruction, and pieces of broken timber fell all about the boat. Some pieces fell even on the deck of the *Sea Eagle*. In a few minutes the broken hull had sunk below the dark waters of the Pacific. The work had been well done.

Two days later the *Sea Eagle* turned from the windy channel into her own harbor

on the southern coast of California with the flag flying, and as the anchor chain rattled down into the quiet water, there came a salute from the two cannon on the upper deck. Then Jim turned and gripped the hand of his old friend.

“Here you are at home, Captain. Now it’s for the Lost Mine, boys.”

“And good luck to you,” said the old captain heartily. “I and the *Sea Eagle* will be here when you return.”

The boys at parting gave three rousing cheers.



CHAPTER XVI

AN EXCITING CHARGE

It was indeed a beautiful morning, with the sun shining with a clarity that is characteristic only of the higher altitudes. There was quite a procession coming up the steep mountain trail. As yet they could not be made out distinctly, as they were so far down the mountain side. Then they were lost to view in one of the folds of the slope.

“I wonder whom those tenderfeet are?” The voice came from a man who was crouching behind a granite boulder. He had been watching the approaching party intently for some time. “One thing, sartain,” the voice continued, “them fellars will find trouble if they keep traveling in this neck of the woods.”

The speaker was not a prepossessing-looking party. He was of squat figure, very strongly built. His face and neck burned to a brick red. His shirt of a nondescript color was open at the neck, exposing a hairy throat. A rifle was gripped firmly in one powerful paw, and there was a knife and pistol in his belt.

He was an ugly-looking customer, and it was evident that his mission was not a peaceful one. Once more he took a look down the trail. The approaching party was much nearer now and he could count the individuals.

“Five!” he exclaimed. “Looks like they might give the boys trouble. That fellar in front has sartain got a fine horse.”

Already the voices of the five came clearly to his ears, and it would not be long before they would top the ridge, and the scout, for such he was, would be discovered.

“It’s time for me to scat!” he exclaimed.

And he did, taking long swinging strides that soon took him out of sight of the ridge, into a belt of pines. Here the stranger stopped again and watched for the tenderfoot party to put in an appearance. He did not have long to wait, for there

came the strong clear sound of voices, and then he saw a gallant figure on a gray horse ride into full view. This young fellow was dressed in blue, with a flannel shirt of the same color, and a gray sombrero, which was pushed back from his sunburnt forehead.

A perfectly polished rifle was hung across his back, and there was a revolver in the holster at his hip. The young fellow rode his splendid animal with an ease and mastery that showed long experience. Behind the leader rode a shorter lad, but very stockily built, and of extremely dark complexion, with heavy black hair, cut square across.

“That chap must be an Injun,” remarked the watcher in the pines.

But the reader who is more intelligent and better informed, knows otherwise, for he is acquainted with these riders and has been in their company before, and it is not necessary to pass the entire procession in review. The Frontier Boys were all there, and Jeems Howell likewise. The man in the pines was deeply interested in these mounted men, viewing them from his position back of a big pine, in front of which was a screen of brush.

He saw that they were well mounted and armed, nor did they appear entirely like tenderfeet either. There was something in the way they rode and their general air that showed that they could take care of themselves. Once or twice he partially raised his rifle as though about to fire at the leader, but he evidently thought better of it, and contented himself with a mere reconnoissance.

The Frontier Boys were unmindful that they were watched, but they were not careless. Juarez, especially, seemed on the alert, and even suspicious. He kept looking around and once he came to a halt. Swinging off his roan, he began to examine the ground.

“Scent something, comrade?” inquired Jim gravely.

“Something wrong around here,” he said.

“Panther, painter, or mountain lion?” inquired Tom.

“Look out, he will bite you,” volunteered Jo.

Shaking his head, Juarez mounted his horse and took his place in line, and the procession started again, but always the red-faced, red-necked scout kept them in

view for his own purposes. He did not have much trouble to keep up, for the boys did not hurry their horses. They had had a hard pull for several hours that morning, and Jim decided it was best to let them take it easy, as there still was plenty of hard work ahead.

“How soon will we reach your ancient castle, Jeems?” inquired Jim.

“In time for dinner, boss, I reckon,” replied Jeems.

“Dinner be ready for us?” inquired Tom hungrily.

“Well, as I haven’t seen my ancestral walls for nigh on to twenty years,” replied Jeems, “I’m much afeard that the dinner is petrified by this time.”

“We don’t mind that,” laughed Jo. “Haven’t we eaten grub in Mexican restaurants and along the border? Nothing is too tough for us.”

“That’s so,” agreed the chorus.

“This country begins to look very familiar,” soliloquized Jeems. “Here’s a rock I’ve sat on many a time to rest coming home from a hunt, and down there are the three pines struck by lightning, on the Fourth of July, too——”

“Go on with you,” jeered Tom, “don’t give us any tall yarn like that.”

“Halt! there he goes!” cried Juarez, bringing his rifle to his shoulder and aiming it at a fleeting shadow among the pines down the mountain slope. He did not fire, however, and without a minute’s hesitation the boys turned their horses down the steep mountain slope towards the woods where the man had been detected by Juarez’s observant eye.

Away they went full tilt, and to an outsider it seemed certain that some one was sure to get his neck broken. Jo’s horse did stumble, plowing its nose into the gravel, and sending Jo forward about a dozen feet, landing on shoulder and neck. Pretty well shaken up, he was too, but not injured.

Tom came near getting mixed up in the mêlée, for he was just back of Jo, but missed him more by good luck than good management. There was no attempt on the part of any of the boys to stop to pick up Jo or to see how badly hurt he was. They presumed that if injured he would say something about it. So on went the gallant 400, their steeds leaping rocks and fallen trees, crashing through brush

with powerful recklessness.

A haze of dust soon hung above the cavalry charge, which was destined to come to an end when the line of pine trees was reached. But it seemed that Jim's Caliente was not going to halt for the solid pines even, for he charged full speed ahead, with all his fighting blood aroused.

"Ahoy there, Jim!" yelled Tom, "better anchor your yacht."

But James could not head him, pull as hard as he would, and he ducked his head low under a branch which threatened to brain him, scraped between two tall and massive pines, and finally brought his panting horse to a full stop in a dense clump of brush.

But Jeems Howell seemed to be having the most interesting, if not the pleasantest, time of all. He was not a natural centaur anyway. He had tried his best to keep his little rat of a bay from joining in the chase, but without success. With his long legs stuck out in front and his eyes wide open with astonishment, he was pulling with all his might, but with no effect.

It was a comical sight, the long-legged man yelling "Whoa!" "Whoa!" and the little pony scampering at top speed down the steep and sunny slope with the dust flying back at a great rate. Then of a sudden, the pony leaped right from under the long-shanked Jeems and he sat down upon the warm gravel, while the animal went on into the woods. As for the man, he made his escape into a neighboring gulch where he hid himself under a ledge, and was safe enough.

That one movement which he had noted of Juarez's rifle when aimed at him, was sufficient to give him an idea of the mettle of the Frontier Boys. He was determined, however, not to get out of that section until he had seen these travelers properly located, so he waited.

Meanwhile, the boys had got together, in a general council with only one absentee, viz: Jeems Howell, who was seated contentedly, if somewhat dazed, upon the mountain side. Then his absence was noted by the other boys.

"Where is Jeems?" inquired Jo, who had recovered his horse and his equilibrium likewise.

They looked around anxiously. "There's his pony over there," said Juarez,

“having a good time grazing.”

“I suspect we will find Jeems grazing somewhere back here on the mountain,” said Jim. “Jo, you go look for him, if you think you won’t fall off, too.”

With a grunt Jo turned his horse at right angles, and went back up the mountain slope. He soon came upon Jeems seated placidly upon the ground apparently enjoying the view.

“Lost something, Jeems?” he inquired.

“Yes, my pony,” he replied.

“He is grazing down below,” said Jo. “Why don’t you get up?”

“I’m grazing here,” replied Jeems.

“Gazing, I guess,” grinned Jo.

“Is it morning yet?” inquired Jeems.

“It will be night before you get up, if you don’t hustle,” warned Jo. “Better go and get your horse and join the family council.”

“There shall be no vacant chair, I’ll be there,” and Jeems rose by sections.



CHAPTER XVII

A CHASE

“Are you sure you saw that fellow, Juarez?” asked Jo.

“Certainly,” replied the chief.

“Of course he did,” said Jim. “You don’t suppose that Juarez would exclaim at a shadow. I got a glimpse of him myself.”

“What did he look like?” inquired Yankee Tom.

Jim’s face took on a look of settled gravity as he answered:

“He was a tall dark-complected man, with a wart over his right eye, and he had a ring on his middle finger with his wife’s picture engraved on it, and——”

“Oh, shut up,” growled Tom, “you are just kidding.”

“I didn’t see anybody,” put in Jeems Howell mildly. This remark was greeted with a roar of laughter.

“I bet you didn’t,” jeered Tom. “All you could do was to yell ‘Whoa!’”

“But he didn’t whoa!” said Jeems sadly, but truthfully.

“You did,” remarked Jim.

“Somebody had to,” explained Jeems, “so I decided it was up to me.”

“You mean,” said the whimsical Jo, “down to you.”

“I suppose so.”

“He has made his escape anyway,” said Tom.

“So have our pack mules,” cried Juarez, looking back up the mountain.

“Maybe they have just grazed off,” said Jim anxiously.

This was serious business indeed, if their mules should take a notion to take the back trail with their grub and camp equipment. So the boys lost no time in getting back to the ridge and all thought of the stranger that they had tried to interview had left their minds for the present. When they got to the top of the ridge they found their worst fears realized. Juarez was the first to take in the situation, because his little roan was the fastest in a short dash. Juarez had urged his horse obliquely across the slope of the hill.

“They have scooted for home, boys,” he yelled.

Sure enough there were the three beasts a mile down the trail and jogging steadily along with an evident intention in their mulish minds to go home and stay there. Now “home” was a hundred miles away, but that made no difference with their plans.

“We have got to head ’em down this other side,” cried Jim. “It’s no use following them on the trail. They have got the start on us and when they see us coming it will make them hike all the faster.”

“You’re right,” said Juarez.

“There is no use for all this bunch going,” said Jim. “Jo, you and Tom and Jeems stay here. Keep my guns, I’m traveling light.” He handed over his rifle and revolver to his brother and Juarez gave his to Jeems. Then they gave the cinches to their saddles an extra tightening, especially the back cinches, then they swung swiftly into the saddles.

“Durn those mules,” they cried and were off. Keeping their horses well in hand, for it promised to be a long hard race, they galloped along the ridge, keeping slightly below the summit. They were now on the opposite side of the ridge from where the trail was up which they had traveled. As the two headers-off got under way the gravel flew back from their horses’ feet. At first the way was not very hard, but at the end of the first mile they came to a great field of broken rocks.

Here they had to slacken speed and find their way among great rocks, broken, and with many miniature canyons and ravines among them. Once they rode under the shadow of a great slab of quartz, some eighty feet long and twenty feet in thickness; like a long flat bridge it was.

“This is a sure interesting country,” remarked Juarez.

“I wish that we had time to look around a bit,” replied Jim, “but I am afraid that those pesky mules are gaining on us right here.”

“We are almost out of this nest of rocks,” encouraged Juarez.

This was true, but now they had ahead of them a long slope with many fallen trees, but the boys could not stop for such trifles. Away they went, leaping the trunks of trees, twisting this way and that, but never slackening speed. If it was not for their anxiety, it would have been fun for the two of them, as there was enough danger and variety to make it interesting. Jim’s big gray, which he had captured in Mexico and had named Caliente, jumped with great power and with remarkable lightness, considering his size, but Juarez’s roan was as quick as a cat and just as light on its feet.

“See that notch in the ridge,” cried Jim, “about half a mile ahead?”

“Yes,” replied Juarez.

“There’s where we will cross and try to get ahead of those bucks.”

“We will make them hustle back,” cried Juarez, grinding his teeth.

“Sure,” agreed Jim with a grin.

In a short time they had reached the notch and found it to be something more than that, as it was quite a deep cut in the back of the ridge, and continued into a narrow ravine, which was quite heavily wooded, and down which ran a pretty little stream of the clearest crystal.

“We ought to see those mules soon now,” said Juarez.

“There’s the trail,” said Jim, “just a bit of it high up.”

“I see it,” replied Juarez.

“We will cut it soon now,” remarked Jim, “then we will head those Missouri runaways.”

But before they did that, a lively dash was before them, for suddenly they came in full view of the upper trail for a mile or more.

“There are those rascals,” cried Juarez, pointing with an excited hand.

“I see them,” said Jim.

“Brethren,” remarked the mule in the lead, to his long-eared comrades, “here come our masters to head us off. Let us run.” He wig-wagged this piece of news with his long ears and a waggle of his short tail. They understood perfectly and acted in unison. They did not trot, but started at a swift, sharp lope down the trail. It was fortunate for the packs that the boys were old mountaineers and knew how to make them secure else they would have been jostled into the ravine below.

The boys cut loose at full gallop down the ravine, utterly reckless of what might be ahead of them. They tore through the brush, crushing down every obstacle in their way, determined to head those mules or die in the attempt. They were mad through and through, and, for one, I can sympathize with them. They won the race by about twenty feet. Caliente with one last leap was in the trail.

The mules saw that they were intercepted and came to a halt, and looked at Jim and Juarez with quiet unconcern, mingled with a slight surprise at being so rudely interrupted in their little jaunt.

“You blasted, long-eared, rat-tailed beggars, get back where you belong,” yelled Jim; “you hustle.”

“Give me a rock, I’ll help ’em,” cried Juarez.

He reached from the saddle and picked up a number of fragments of broken granite, and Jim did the same. Then they began to pepper those mules with carefully aimed stones, sometimes striking their haunches and sometimes their ears, keeping them at a steady jog trot up the grade.

“Take that, Missouri!” Jim would cry, flipping a stone at the leader.

“Here’s one for you, Pike County!” laughed Juarez, aiming at the second target.

So they kept it up, thus getting even for all the trouble the runaways had made them, which was considerable. After a while they reached the top of the ridge, expecting to find Jo, Tom and Jeems waiting for them. But there was no sign of them anywhere.

“What do you suppose has become of them?” inquired Juarez.

“Maybe that mysterious stranger has stolen them,” suggested Jim.

“Let’s see if we cannot find their tracks,” said Juarez. This was done without difficulty.

“Here’s a track that looks like a gorilla’s,” remarked Jim, inspecting the dust of the trail.

“Must be Jeems’,” grinned Juarez.

“These other tootsie tracks are Tommy’s and Jo’s, I reckon,” said Jim.

“But why did they walk instead of ride?” inquired Juarez.

“They didn’t intend to go far and thought it just as easy to walk,” explained Jim.

Just then there came a faint halloo that caused the boys to look up.

“There’s Jeems, the beanstalk,” cried Jim.

“Where?” asked Juarez.

“See that shadow standing on that rock way over yonder?” inquired Jim.

“Yes.”

“That’s him.”

“What do you suppose that they are doing over there?” asked Juarez.

“We won’t be long in finding out,” replied Jim.

“There’s Jeems’ castle,” said Juarez, after they had ridden a few hundred yards, pointing to a speck high up on the mountain side.

Juarez was right, for Jeems and the other boys soon met them with the news that they had located the cabin where they hoped to find the plan that would give them a clue to the location of the Lost Mine.

“Have a hard chase after the mules, Jim?” inquired Jo as they climbed up a steep slope towards the cabin.

“You ought to have been along,” remarked Jim significantly.

“I hope Juarez don’t let ’em get away this time,” said Tom.

“If you must worry, why don’t you take something probable,” remarked Jim severely. “Like Jeems running off to become a circus rider.”

“You would have thought that he was a circus rider sure enough,” laughed Jo, “if you could have seen him riding down that slope this morning, with his feet stuck straight out in front of him, and yelling whoa to ‘Mosquito.’”

“I thought,” said Jeems sadly, “that if I held my feet that way that they would offer enough resistance to the air to stop or slow up Mosquito,—but they didn’t.”



CHAPTER XVIII

THE DIAGRAM

“What’s the use of being a philosopher and a thinker, Jeems,” inquired Jim, after the roar of laughter had spent itself at his ludicrous remark, “if you can’t invent some way to stop a mite of a pony like Mosquito?”

“There isn’t any use trying to be a philosopher,” said Jeems frankly, “when you are traveling with such a hair-brained gang as you fellows. A philosopher has to have time to think, and things keep happening so fast in your company, that you don’t get time to breathe. If it isn’t the mules running away it is Mosquito, and so it goes.”

“Cheer up, Jeems,” said Jo. “Just wait until we begin to cruise around the world on our yacht, then you will get lots of time to philosophize.”

“Don’t believe it,” replied Jeems skeptically. “If it isn’t pirates it will be sharks, and if it isn’t them it will be octopuses.”

“In your case it is more likely to be the *mal de mer*,” put in Jim with his easy command of French. I believe he had one other phrase that on occasion he could use.

“I suppose that they say *de mer* because they feel like demurring,” said Jo glibly.

“*Sacre bleu*, Jo!” cried Jim, using his other phrase. “Don’t be so smart.”

“Can’t help it,” replied Jo.

“There will be a sudden and mysterious disappearance if you don’t,” said Jim darkly. By this time they had climbed into clear view of Jeems’ cabin.

“Somebody has thrown a rock at your castle and caved the roof in, Jeems,” declared Tom.

“Lucky I wasn’t home,” replied Jeems philosophically.

“It does look like an ancient ruin,” said Jim, as they finally reached the little shelf on which the cabin was built.

The passing years had evidently done their worst, a large boulder had come down from the mountain above and crashed the roof in. The rudely built chimney had been partially destroyed, and rats and squirrels were making themselves at home. Jeems stood looking sadly at his former cabin, for Jeems had a strain of sentiment in him and he had spent three interesting and quite happy years at this spot.

“It’s kind of like Rip Van Winkle returning home after his long absence, isn’t it?” inquired Jo.

“Only I don’t see my faithful dog,” replied the shepherd, waking from his reverie.

“You must have built here for the view, Jeems,” remarked Jim.

“I used to sit out here on the shelf many a summer evening,” said Jeems, “and look off towards the east till it got dark. I suspect that’s what helped to make me kind of dreamy; those years.”

“Shouldn’t wonder,” said Jim.

It was a wonderful view, and it held the boys for a minute, accustomed though they were to unusual scenes. There was a vastness and freedom about it that would be hard to equal. Range after range extended to the eastward, pine-clad, with deep valleys intervening; to the south some great rocky summits, blue, impalpable, mysterious, upon the verge of the horizon. Far below over a granite chasm wheeled an eagle on darkening wings. The wonderfully clear air was full of the murmur of the pines; the tone that sings of the days of primeval mystery. Far down below the boys could see Juarez with the horses and mules.

“Hello, Juarez,” cried Jim. Then in a few seconds came the answering call, clear and distinct.

“It’s wonderful how far you can hear, in this country,” said Jo.

“What are you fellows stopping so long to admire, scenery?” inquired Tom. “You would think that you never saw any before. Why don’t you investigate the ruins and see if you can’t find that plan of the ‘Lost Mine.’”

“Don’t get excited, Tommy,” urged Jim. “Maybe you won’t be elected President of ‘The Lost Mine Co.’ anyway.”

“I’d rather be Treasurer anyhow,” replied the practical Tom.

“You’ll be the janitor of the company,” said Jim severely, “because you have had so much experience shoveling coal on the *Sea Eagle*.”

Tom’s face flushed, and there was an early promise of a mixing up, when Jeems intervened.

“Come, boys, never mind about fixing up your company, I’ll show you where I hid that plan about twenty years ago.”

“It won’t be any good now, after all that interval,” declared the pessimistic Tom.

In spite of Tom’s prophecy the boys went heartily to work to clear away the débris so they could get at the particular stone behind which Jeems had hidden the document.

“What shape was it?” inquired Jim.

“Something like this,” replied Jeems, kicking a stone near his foot.

“Maybe that’s it,” said Tom.

“No, it isn’t. That stone was some narrower than this.” After a half hour’s industrious work they finally uncovered it, and very carefully lifted it out of its place. They leaned eagerly forward while Jim swept his hand around trying to locate it.

“Hold a light so,” he ordered.

“Aye, aye, sir,” replied Jo. Then under the quick flare of a match, Jim eagerly gripped a piece of yellowed cardboard.

“This is her picture, boys!” he cried, with much sentiment.

“Let’s see the other side,” said Tom.

“It’s going to be difficult to make this out,” remarked Jim, after close scrutiny. He sat down upon a rock and began studying it, with the other boys looking over his shoulder.

“That crooked line must mean a creek,” said Jo.

“I think it represents the top of a ridge,” remarked Tom.

“This other work of art below the ridge-creek appears to me to be a pine tree with a cross on one side of it.”

“You are right, Skipper,” said Jeems. “I got as far as that tree, but that was my limit. I could not make any headway beyond that.”

“It looks to me as if that design further down were a pathway with a mill of some kind on one side and a cabin a little further down.”

“Good head, Tommy,” said Jim patronizingly. “But what are those stars near the end of the line?”

“They represent a snow storm, I guess,” said Jo.

“Oh, they do!” said Jim. “I suppose that is a hint it will be winter before we find anything. But what do these numbers below the stars mean? 400 — + 1500 — 30. Is that yards, feet, dollars, or doughnuts?”

“Isn’t that a cross marked before the 1500?” asked Tom the lynx-eyed.

“I guess you are right,” said Jim, “but I don’t see as it helps any.”

“We might as well adjourn,” remarked Jo, “we have got our plan, and we can spend some time studying it out. We have had plenty of exercise for one day and we can take our time to make a good camp.”

“All right,” agreed Jim. “To-morrow it’s all hands to try to locate the Lost Mine.”

It was clear sailing now for a ways, at least so it seemed, but things are rarely what they seem, and there was a certain party of men not many miles distant whose business in that part of the country was to locate the Frontier Boys, but of this they only had a dim suspicion from the sight of the man of whom Juarez had caught a fleeting glimpse.

It did not take the boys long to cover the ground between the cabin and the place where they had left Juarez with the horses and mules. It was a little over half a mile from the shelf where the cabin stood to the group of pines where Juarez

was. The upper half of the slope was covered with tall tufted grass and scattered rocks. The lower part was a long slide of sand.

“I’ll beat you tenderfeet down,” vaunted Jim.

“Let’s get an even start and I’ll show you,” said Jo, who was in truth a fleet runner. “Jeems will give us the send-off, as he is the only one who has his revolver with him.”

So they lined up on the level place in front of the cabin, while Juarez, who felt that there was something in the wind, came out into the open and watched the proceedings with interest. He saw that a race was about to take place and he stood prepared to catch the winner.

“Are you ready?” inquired Jeems in a shrill voice, and the three admitted that they were; then he extended his pistol over his head and fired. There was a sharp report, and away the boys leaped as though they, too, had been shot out of a gun. Down the steep slope they went over the tufted grass and rocks like bounding jack-rabbits. Jim was ten feet in the lead, then Jo, and Tom five feet behind him.

My, but it was fun! I would give a good deal to be in that race. How the boys did jump! Jim with his long legs and stride seemed to have the advantage at first, but when they struck the long sand slide Jo began to pull up on his brother. Even the scout who was watching the race from a distant tree became so interested that he lost his caution for a moment and came into view.

“I bet the little varmint beats the lanky guy,” he said to himself.

It seemed so, for half way down the slide the “little varmint” had crawled up even with Jim. They were going so fast that you could not see them for the haze, and the gravel and sand flew from before their feet like spray and they leaped fifteen to twenty feet at a stride. I tell you it was exciting work. Jo drew ahead and beat Jim about three feet, it was that close, and Tom “came tumbling after.”

“I get the prize,” cried Jo, as soon as he could get his breath.

“It’s a silver water pitcher,” said Juarez, giving him a big tin cup.

“Look out, here comes Jeems on the warpath,” cried Jim.

They looked up and sure enough there he came full tilt, his long hair streaming

in the breeze and his lanky legs reaching out like they were endowed with the wonderful seven-league boots. Here was fun.

“He’s drunk!” cried Juarez.

“He is running away!” yelled Jim.

“Whoa, Mosquito, whoa!” screamed Jo and Tom in unison.

The scout who was roosting in the tree a quarter of a mile below, became so enthused at the sight of the lanky vision striding down the mountainside that he became convulsed with laughter. Just then Jeems, who was half way down the sand slide, accompanied by the wild yells of the boys who were watching him, struck, in one of his flying steps, a partially submerged rock.

The effect was instantaneous and surprising, such was his momentum that he bounced high into the air and sprawled out like a gigantic flying squirrel for thirty feet or more before he came to earth, or rather dove to sand, and was lost in a cloud of dust. The boys rushed to pick up the remains.

“look out, here comes jeems on the warpath.”—P. 165.

“LOOK OUT, HERE COMES JEEMS ON THE WARPATH.”—P. [165](#).



CHAPTER XIX

THE CAMP IN THE VALLEY

The dust settled and they were able to see Jeems in all his outlines. He seemed unhurt and in the possession of all his faculties, for he began to spout poetry to the boys after this wise:

“From morn till noon he fell, from
noon
Till dewy eve then like a falling star
Dropt from the zenith.”

“Hurrah for Lucifer!” cried Jo, who knew something about literature. Jeems bowed.

“What did you think you were, a flying squirrel?” inquired Tom.

“I didn’t think, I just flew,” said Jeems, which was true.

This incident likewise came near getting their enemy who was in hiding, for when he saw Jeems Howell perform his startling evolution in the air, he laughed so hard that he lost his balance and came crashing through the branches to the ground below and he lay there rolling over and over, not in the agony of a broken leg, but with uncontrollable laughter. As he told his pals later, “I never seen the likes of that performance. It was head and heels over any circus that ‘Green Ike’ ever saw back in ole Missouri. (Green Ike so-called, not on account of the color of his skin, but of his eyes.) That fellar must have struck a spring board the way he went through the air.”

After the excitement had quieted down over Jeems Howell’s flight through space, the boys took up the next order of the day, which was “forward march to their camping place for the night.” It was now well along in the afternoon and the shadows were extending far down the slopes and across the valleys.

“We must get to a place where there is good water,” said Juarez, as they started

on their way.

“I wish we could find some grazing for the horses,” mused Jim.

“It’s a long pull into that valley down there,” remarked Jo, “but I guess we can make it.”

“I don’t see why not,” said Tom. “Our horses have had a long rest and ought to make fine time.”

They did succeed in finding an excellent camping place after riding down the mountain slopes for about five miles. They came into quite a broad valley with a beautiful stream of clear tumbling water flowing through the midst of it, and green meadows on either side.

“I bet that’s a fine trout stream,” exclaimed Tom enthusiastically.

“This is one of the best places that we ever had to camp in,” cried Jo. “The only place I can remember that beat it was in Mexico near the trembling mountain where we were all shut in.”

“Here’s the place for a camp,” announced Jim. “This hill is away from the mountain slope far enough so that no enemy can crawl down under the protection of the trees. Then it can be defended, if necessary. For some reason, I would not like to camp out on that level meadow to-night.”

“You don’t expect trouble with Indians, do you?” inquired Tom anxiously.

“No,” replied Jim, “but there are other bad men besides Indians.”

“You are right, Skipper,” said the shepherd, “we are liable to find the worst kind of cutthroats and ruffians in this part of the country.”

“I guess we will be able to stand ’em off,” said Jim, “without calling in the police.”

Then James swung himself off his horse at the foot of the long hill; Tom and Jo rather stiffly, for they were not yet used to active mountaineering after so much sea travel, while Jeems Howell stepped off his little bay pony. Now ensued a scene of much activity making camp. Each one had his work to do and it was done promptly.

Juarez and Jim looked after the horses; rubbed them down, looked carefully after any strain or sore, and it was work that they loved to do. When the horses were sufficiently rested they were watered and fed, and from their splendid condition it was evident that they were well cared for. Caliente, Jim's charger, was in extra fine shape. His coat of mottled iron-gray fairly shone under Jim's brushing. When he had time he polished his hoofs. There was a real affection between the horse and his master. On more than one occasion his strength and fleetness had saved Jim's life. No one else was equal to controlling him.

Jeems' and Tom's work was to look after the mules, take off their packs and feed and water the animals. Jeems seemed to get along with the mules all right, much better than he did with the horses. Perhaps the mules were philosophers. At least they were very wise animals, canny and self-controlled. No mule you notice will overeat even when he has a chance, but with a horse it is different.

Jo's duties were very active ones. He had to move the goods, saddles, etc., into camp, and then get the wood for the fire. By this time one of the other boys would be free to help rig up the tent and another would fetch water. It was a lively, interesting scene and the boys enjoyed it thoroughly.

Within an hour the work was all done, and the horses were grazing, with evident enjoyment of the freedom of roaming around over the wide meadow with its growth of luxuriant grass, this after the hard day's pull. The boys had built a roaring fire of logs fed by long pine cones, for the nights were cold at that altitude.

"This would make a pretty fair sort of a fort," said Juarez, "if we had to defend it."

"Not as good as the one Jim and I had when the Apaches attacked us in New Mexico, when we were separated from Tom and the Captain," remarked Jo wisely.

"That was a natural fort," put in Jim, "but as Juarez says, we could stand off a crowd here, if we had a chance to fix it up a bit."

"It's lucky that it stands clear of the mountain on this side, so that an enemy could not attack us from shelter," remarked Juarez. "It must be nearly three-quarters of a mile to the foot of the mountain on this side of the valley; perhaps further."

“This hill must be all of one hundred and fifty feet high,” said Tom. “I should like to see a crowd of Indians charge it.”

“You wouldn’t,” put in Juarez. “They never do a trick like that, but would hang around until we were starved out.”

“I tell you, lads, it won’t be the Indians who will give us trouble,” remarked Jeems Howell, “but a gang of renegade white men and half-breeds. That’s the crowd that will be on our trail.”

“I have a sort of feeling that there is a lion in our path,” quoth James. “We will never get in the vicinity of the ‘Lost Mine’ without a fight. You mark my words. The sooner it comes the better.”

“I guess we had better get the horses corraled, hadn’t we, Skipper?” inquired Juarez. “It’s beginning to get dark.”

“Right you are,” agreed Jim. “They have had a two-hour graze. We will take them down to water and then bring them into camp. Jo, you stay here and guard the goods.”

“Aye, aye, sir,” said Jo.

It was already growing dusk when the boys started across the level meadow to get the animals. They had no difficulty in picking up the trailing lariats. Only the mules acted rather queer. Their long ears were pitched forward and they were gazing fixedly in the direction of the mountain back of the camp. Then Missouri, the leader, a big buckskin with a brown stripe down his back, suddenly put his ears back and began to squeal loud and viciously.

“What’s the matter with old Missouri?” inquired Jeems anxiously. “You don’t suppose that the grass has given him a pain in his tummy?”

“No,” said Jim, “the old chap scents trouble of some kind.”

“Maybe it’s a mountain lion,” suggested Tom, “that would make him act up.”

“Maybe,” admitted Jim.

Now they had arrived at the stream that was roaring through the meadow. It was no brook either, but a brawling stream about forty feet in width, very clear and wonderfully cold, as it came from the snow-clad summits to the northwest.

There were a good many large boulders that checked its course and made a roaring music in the quiet of the valley. It was a full half mile from the hill where the camp was.

“This would be a fine stream for trout,” remarked Tom. “I wish we were going to stop in this valley long enough to give us a chance for some sport, but I suppose we will get up about four o’clock in the morning and chase over the mountains all day and then make a dry camp where our animals will be stampeded by the Indians.”

“You certainly are a croaker, Tommy,” laughed Jim heartily, for Tom’s pessimistic prophecies never failed to amuse his big brother, “but cheer up, I have about decided to stop here in the valley for a day or two and give the children a good time.”

“It won’t be a bad idea, Skipper,” remarked Juarez, “because it will give the horses a good rest and they have had a long, hard pull of it the past ten days, and will put them in good condition for the rest of the trip; perhaps, too, we can get a deer or two around here.”

“There formerly was and ought now to be deer in this valley or near it,” put in Jeems. “This is just the kind of place for them to come for grazing and pasture.”

“It will help fill out our larder, too,” said Tom.

“You mean our stomachs,” said Jeems whimsically, after his fashion.

“I would like a mess of trout,” remarked Tom. “I’m tired of salt horse.”

“What’s the matter with Missouri?” said Jeems, “he won’t drink.”

“You can’t make him then,” said Jim. “A mule is sure stubborn.”

The rest of the animals appeared willing enough, but it took quite a while, as only one could come down to the stream at a time. The banks, though not high, were cut through the turf and there was only one spot where there was a broken place and a couple of stones where the horses and mules could step down to the stream.

“I guess Jo will begin to wonder what has become of us,” said Jim, as the last horse drank his fill.

When they turned the animals' heads towards the camp it had grown dark, while the great valley was filled with the loneliness and the deep shadows of the night. There was nothing to break the stillness but the tune of the tumbling stream and the monotone of the pine-clad slopes rising blackly on either side of the valley. The light of the campfire upon the hill sent up its distant glow.



CHAPTER XX

A SURPRISE

Let us now return to Jo to keep him company during the absence of his brethren and companion-in-arms. He sat down by the fire on a rock with his legs stretched out before him, for he was rather tired, and his hands clasped back of his head. All about him were the shadows of the trees, but he was perfectly at his ease, though it would have been lonesome enough if he had not known that the rest of the gang was near.

Still it would have been better if he had kept closer watch, for already the Frontier Boys had received warning that they were being trailed, and Jo should have seated himself in the door of the tent so that his back would have been protected, and he would have had the benefit of the fire just the same. He likewise naturally trusted to Jeems' shepherd dog to give him warning. The dog lay near the front of the tent with his nose over his paws and his brown eyes blinking toward the blaze.

It was his presence that saved Jo at this time, nothing else. Shep jumped to his feet with a growl that grated along his back teeth, a growl that meant business and serious business, too.

Let us see what was the cause of Shep's alarm. Just a little after the boys had left the hill to take the horses to water, the figure of a man could be seen coming stealthily out of the shadow of the pines upon the slope.

He maneuvered so that the hill was between him and Skipper Jim's party, then he stood straight up and walked stealthily and carefully, but nevertheless swiftly, towards the camp. The man had made a slight miscalculation, for he supposed that the camp was deserted and that he could take what he wanted and destroy the rest before the boys could return. A crooked smile came over his face as he made his evil plans. He would go through the camp, take what was valuable, throw what he could not use on the campfire and as a last touch he would set fire to the tent.

Then as the tenderfeet came rushing back filled with anger and fear at the sight of the burning tent, he would easily make his escape through the darkness to the protection of the mountains, where these boys would never get him. He would have, too, his booty, which he would hide in a cave he knew of, so that he would not have to divide with his gang. It was a beautiful plan and it appealed to him in several ways.

“Those American pigs,” he said, “they think through their snouts. They do not know enough to guard their camp in this country.”

But as we know, there was something of a surprise in store for this enterprising gentleman. It is evident that he was not the same fellow that Juarez had detected skulking in the woods that morning, for this was a Mexican who was stalking the boys’ camp. He came swiftly through the grass, with a silence born of custom. It was well for him that he did, else Jo would have been on his trail in a minute.

The Greaser, for such he deserves to be called, went cautiously up the slope of the hill, following a small depression which was a watercourse during the rainstorms. When he got within two-thirds of the top, he stopped as though he had been struck, for there was the figure of Jo seated on the rock between him and the fire. For a second his jaw dropped and his eyes opened wide. Then his cunning ferocity came to him.

A tall bush and several trees intervened between him and Jo, utterly unconscious of his danger. Without a sound he crawled along, his poniard gripped between the gleam of his strong white teeth, which gave him a snarling and sinister appearance. His plan was evident. He did not dare to risk a shot, for that would give the alarm and he would have no chance for loot.

Meanwhile, Jo continued entirely unconscious of the treacherous approach of this unseen foe. Jo was not thinking of any danger and his mind was far away on an excursion of its own, dreaming of the far corners of the earth to which they would sail, if by good fortune they found the treasure of the Lost Mine.

But Jo was in an ace of taking a longer journey than any that he was at that moment dreaming of. The Mexican had got almost within striking distance of Jo and had risen to his feet, not seeing the dog, and was just drawing back his arm to throw the fatal knife when Shep gave his growl of warning at the figure he saw in the shadow back of his master.

If Jo had been careless before he made up for it now. His experience stood him in good stead, for instead of rising to his feet to confront the danger as a tenderfoot would have done, he dropped down behind the rock as quickly as a pugilist ducks his opponent's lead. It was all that saved him. "Swish" swept the knife with a flash of steel through the air, where Jo's body had been the second before. Jo's pistol was in the tent on a box, but his hand, as he dropped, touched a stone. The reader perhaps remembers what an accurate shot Jo was with a ball or rock. If his memory goes back far enough he will recall what Jo did to the Apache when he was trying to sneak up on the boys' fort in New Mexico.

As soon as the Mexican saw that he had missed his aim, he started to run. Jo saw his dark form a few feet away and hurled the rock, striking him behind the left shoulder and half knocking him down. Jo, the fleet of foot, was upon him in a couple of bounds, and now a furious struggle ensued between Jo and the Mexican. The Greaser was strong and wiry, also very desperate. Once he had Jo nearly gone, as he threw him to his knees, and put his weight upon his back to crush him down.

With a quick shift Jo got to his feet again, and the struggle was renewed. Jo finally got his man near a rock that stood up a foot and a half above the ground. Exerting all of his lithe strength he shoved him back so that his heels struck the rock. As the man toppled, Jo threw his whole weight against him, and back he went with tremendous force, striking his head against a pine tree.

This laid the Greaser out and Jo, panting heavily, dragged him into the firelight and in a minute more had him tied securely. Then he sat down on a rock, breathing hard, just as the voices of the returning boys could be heard at the foot of the hill as they were bringing in the horses. Jo said nothing, but sat quietly, knowing how surprised the boys would be to see this new addition to the family circle.

"Didn't see any wild Injuns, did you, Jo?" It was Jim's cheery voice.

"Narry Injun," replied Jo. Just then Caliente began to act up, surging around with his ears back and plunging to get away from Jim. Either he saw the Mexican or suspected his presence.

"Whoa, you Tiger!" cried Jim, but he had quite a tussle with him before he got him subdued. Even then Caliente kept snorting at intervals, with his nostrils

dilating. Then the boys came toward the campfire from the shadow of the trees. Meanwhile Jo had thrown a blanket over the inert form of the Mexican, and he looked like an irregular log of wood.

Perhaps this was not a very gallant way to treat one's fallen foe, but you are not apt to feel very kindly towards a man who has just tried to throw a knife into your back. So Jo did not care much if he was sat upon and used for a sofa. This particular log was placed convenient to the fire.

"You look rather rumped and pale, Jo," grinned Jim. "Did a hoot owl scare you while we were gone?"

"I bet Jo was hiding in the tent," jeered Tom, "with his head in the blankets."

Jo looked kind of sheepish and very red in the face. It was evident that he was struggling with some hidden emotion. Jim started to sit down upon the convenient log, and Tom likewise, the latter growling:

"You always try to get the best of everything."

Then they sat down upon the supposed log. To their utter surprise and ultimate horror, the log began to twist and turn.

"Whoopee!" yelled Tom, leaping six feet, it seemed, into the air, "it's a snake!" Jim rose more slowly, but very pale. He was deeply moved, not to say frightened. "Sancte Maria, Sancte Sebastina!" seemed the words issuing from the muffled folds of the blanket. Jim tore it off and there was the Mexican whom Jo had had the round-up with.

"What!" cried Jim; "who is this?" Jeems' head was now looking between the flaps of the tent, into which he had dived headfirst when the log came to life.

"It's one of the gang that has been trailing us," cried Jeems.

Jo was rolling around in paroxysms of laughter.

"Whoopee!" he cried in imitation of brother Tom, "it's a snake," then he went off into another fit.

"You durned idiot," yelled the incensed Tom, "shut up laughing. I guess that fellow is a snake. You might have scared me into breaking a blood vessel."

“I came near scaring you into breaking the record for the high jump,” panted Jo, weak from laughter.

“But where did you capture this specimen, Jo?” asked Jim with a quiet smile. To tell the truth he was somewhat chagrined, for he could not deny even to himself that he had been badly frightened by Jo’s trick.

“Look a here, boys,” cried Jeems, “here is where a knife has gone clean through the corner of this tent.”

“Sure enough,” agreed Jim, examining the cut in the canvas.

“Here’s the weapon,” said Juarez, who was quick to follow up a trail of any kind. He brought the dagger to the firelight, and they looked at it with interest. It had a very keen blade, sharp-pointed and two edged. The handle was richly engraved and of silver.

“How is this, Jo?” inquired Jim. “Tell us the whole story even if it implicates your friend here, the human log.” There was a grim quality in Jim’s voice which made the Mexican roll his eyes viciously.



CHAPTER XXI

THE GREASER

“You are certainly a great chap for collecting knives,” said Jim admiringly to his brother Jo. “Somebody is always giving you one or throwing it at you. Remember that Indian friend of yours who crept up on you that night in Kansas and threw the bowie at you?”

“I’m not likely to forget that souvenir,” grinned Jo. “But this fellow certainly was going to give me the best surprise of all. Was it not so, Señor Manuello Greasero?” and Jo gave the fellow a contemptuous stir with his foot and the Mexican responded with an open-mouthed snarl for all the world like a wild cat when you poke a stick at him.

“It was a dirty, treacherous piece of business,” said Jim, his face growing dark with anger. “I’m going to put this fellow to the question.”

But they made no headway with the prisoner, as he maintained a stubborn silence about himself and his associates. Finally Jim, tired and disgusted, rose to his feet and looked down at the Mexican.

“Give me that dagger, Jo,” he said. Jo handed over the silver-handled weapon, while the Mexican watched Jim with eyes of concentrated hate. He believed his last hour had come.

“Have you got anything to say for yourself?” inquired Jim savagely, as he felt the edge of the knife with his thumb.

“I want to see a priest,” croaked the Mexican in a hoarse voice.

“I can furnish you with a philosopher,” said Jim. “Here, Jeems, can you offer any advice to this cutthroat or consolation either?”

“I haven’t any license to talk to the likes of him,” said Jeems gravely. “He wants a guarantee for the next life and I won’t give it to him. But I can tell him one thing, if he don’t hang now, he will later.”

When the Mexican saw that his life was going to be spared, he may have been surprised, but he showed no sign of gratitude. It was now time for the boys to turn in, but of course the camp was not left without a guard. The night was divided up into watches. Tom was to watch until eleven; then Jeems Howell was to have the watch until one; Jim to three; Juarez to five, and Jo the hour until six.

It was necessary to keep up a moderate fire, for the hours toward midnight were very cold. Tom kept moving around briskly when the others had turned into the tent.

The boys did not lay awake a minute, for they were wholesomely tired and the clear, cold air, touched with the fragrance of the pines, caused them to sleep sound and hard. The light from the fire shone into the tent where the boys were stretched out, wrapped in their blankets. They did not have to sleep with one eye open, because they had confidence that the one on guard would warn them if any danger approached.

Tom, as I have said, was on the alert. He moved around the camp, seeing that the horses were all right and going down the slope of the hill a ways in the darkness if he heard any suspicious sound, with his pistol gripped firmly in his hand and the faithful Shep pattering along at his heels. The dog was a good deal of company for Tom. Then they would return to the fire where the Mexican lay bound, with his hat pulled down over his head, but with his shifty black eyes continually on the alert. If he had any plan, he had no chance to carry it out while Tom was on duty.

At eleven o'clock promptly, Tom stole into the tent, and stepping over Juarez waked up Jeems, who sat up with a tousled head of hair and sadly sleepy, but he took it all like a philosopher, and stooped out of the tent to take his watch on deck. A slight change had come over the weather. A few dark and heavy clouds were drifting high across the valley and there was a steady roar of wind among the pines upon the mountain slopes.

The prisoner noticed the change of guard with interest. "I am thirsty, Señor," he said. The philosopher went and procured for him a drink. "A little closer to the fire now, Señor. I feel cold." The shepherd did as requested.

"Don't ask me to make tea for you now, because I would have to refuse."

The man gave no sign that he understood, and Jeems went back to the horses to

see how they were getting along. It was quite a family party of animals and if one had been gone the others would have missed him sadly.

They were all fastened to rather small trees back of the tent. The mules stood with heads slightly bent and perfectly still. Jeems went up to old Missouri, pulling his long ears affectionately, and his muleship did not seem to mind it in the least. As Jeems often said, they were kindred souls. The ponies stood with drooping heads. Jo's horse had his head resting over the neck of Tom's, for they were quite chums.

But Jim's Caliente seemed restless and not quiet like the others. He had a good-sized pine for his anchorage, and was in the center of the group, while the others were tied in a circle around him. He was shaking his head and stamping his feet, but Jeems could not find that there was anything especially the matter with him.

Just then the shepherd thought he heard something moving, or creeping through the brush below and he went cautiously down to investigate. He had got below the crest of the hill, about fifty feet, when he was sure that he saw something crouching and moving swiftly off through the darkness. He cried halt and was about to fire his revolver at it when the object disappeared as though the earth had swallowed it up. Then, too, Jeems was not a very ready hand with a pistol; few philosophers are; it requires an impulsive temperament to shoot offhand. Jeems made his way back to the camp debating in his mind whether he should wake up the boys and tell them what he had seen. This question was settled for him as soon as he arrived in front of the tent. One glance was enough, he saw that the Mexican prisoner had escaped. He was evidently clean gone.

"He's gone, boys," cried Jeems, sticking his head into the tent.

"Who's gone?" they cried, simultaneously sitting up.

"The Mexican," replied Jeems.

"How long?" cried Jim, getting outside of the tent in a jiffy.

"I haven't been gone over five minutes, maybe eight, though," he added reflectively.

"Good riddance to bad rubbish," was Jim's verdict.

"I'm glad we do not have to have him around anyway," chimed in Jo.

“But how did the beggar get away?” inquired Juarez. “He was tied tight enough, I reckon.”

“Here’s the answer,” said Jim, stooping over and picking up a piece of rope that lay on the edge of the circle of the firelight.

“Why, it has been burned through!” exclaimed Juarez.

“Exactly,” replied Jim.

“How did he get close enough to the fire to do that?” asked Tom.

“I would have thought that he would have burnt himself up,” said Jo.

“It was simple enough,” explained Jim. “A coal rolled close to him and he was able to get the rope that tied his hands against it and burnt through, and the rest was easy.”

“That was a pretty good trick,” said Juarez. “We will have to remember that.”

“I would be afraid of burning myself,” objected Tom.

“That Mexican wouldn’t feel it if you did put a live coal on him,” quoth Juarez. “They don’t mind heat.”

“I bet he gets his gang on our trail,” said Jo. “We will have to look out for trouble from now on.”

“We will be ready for them,” remarked Jim significantly.

“It looks a little bit like a thunderstorm, boys,” said Juarez.

“We had better peg that tent down tighter,” said Jo. “It is going to blow, too, in a short while.”

The boys did not get things ship-shape any too soon. The black clouds were drifting in a gloomy procession over the great valley, then came a flash that showed the expanse of the level meadow in a green-white color and the somber pine-clad slopes, then the wind and rain together.



CHAPTER XXII

HAIL

The storm drifted steadily northward over the valley with its accompanying flashes of lightning, followed by volleys of rain mingled with the shot of hail. As soon as the boys heard the hail on the canvas roof of their tent they hustled out to put blankets on their horses, so as to protect them from the beating hail. They moved them under the protecting branches as much as possible and made them as snug as they could.

“Remember the time we got into a hail storm in Kansas?” questioned Jo, as they walked back through the beating white pellets, that were getting larger every minute.

“That was fun,” laughed Tom. “We pretended that the hail was bullets and the one who was struck on the head was to be dead.”

“You were it,” declared Jo.

“I was not,” said Tom decidedly.

“We will leave it to this storm to decide,” said Jo.

“All right,” agreed Tom.

“Jeems to be the referee,” said Jo.

This was likewise acceptable to Tom. The hail was now coming faster and of good size, about as big as the end of one’s thumb, but the boys did not seem to mind as they slouched along with their sombreros pulled down around their ears, thus affording pretty fair protection. Just then a big bullet of hail struck fairly on top of Tom’s skull and bounced, the others saw, about six inches into the air.

“Hurrah!” yelled Jo, “that proves it. You are it again. Isn’t he judge?” this to Jeems.

“You mean hit again, not ’it. I fear you are English,” replied Jeems.

“Don’t insult me,” said Jo, “I’m plain U. S. Southwest. But isn’t Tom out?”

“Yes,” replied Jeems, “he is.”

“What!” cried Tom in great surprise, “did something strike me.”

“I always thought your head was thick,” replied Jo contemptuously, “now I’m sure of it.”

By this time they had reached the shelter of the tent and stood looking out at the antics of the hail as it danced upon the hard ground and leaped from the surface of the rocks, and spatted into fire until a steam arose into the air. In a short time the ground was covered with several inches of whiteness.

“Did you boys ever hear that old circus joke?” inquired Jeems, looking musingly out at the jumping hail.

“Not recently,” said Jo. “Fire away, Jeems, and relieve your mind.”

“Well, in the circus they have a king rigged up on a throne. Him in a red robe and a tinsel crown. All the varlets come in and bow low before his majesty. Then comes the clown and bows lower than the others.

“‘Hail! Hail!’ he cries.

“‘How dare you hail,’ roars the king, ‘when I’m reigning!’ Then the crowd yells.”

“That isn’t so worse, Jeems,” laughed Jo, and the rest joined in.

“What’s the difference, boys,” questioned Jim, “between rain and a hen?”

“Give it up,” said the chorus.

“The one lays the dust and the other dost lay.”

Then Jim leaped out of the tent to get away from the boys, who would have combined and given him a good licking in token of their appreciation of his brilliant wit. It was his turn to keep watch, anyway, and so he stayed out under a tree, while the boys went peacefully to sleep, with the hail beating on the canvas roof of their tent, confident that with Jim on deck they would be safe enough.

How about the vanished Mexican? He had made his escape as Jim had said. Though stiff from being tightly bound and suffering from the blow he had got from the stone that Jo had thrown at him, he made quick time to the pine-clad slope of the mountain. He seemed to know the way even through the darkness of the forest of pine. After going half a mile he saw the outline of his horse hitched to a sapling.

As soon as he was mounted he turned his animal's head down the slope until he came to the edge of the meadow. There he stopped for a moment and looked towards the star of the boys' campfire upon the hill, then he shook his fist in their direction, with an imprecation and a threat of what was going to happen to them in a short time. Finally he turned his mustang's head up the valley and rode at a slow dog trot through the darkness, groaning considerably with the pain that the jolting gave him.

In a short time the storm overtook him and the falling hail made his pony hump himself threateningly, but his rider gave him a dig with his long and cruel spurs in the flank and that furnished the broncho with something else to think about. After several miles of hard travel, the two began going up steadily, along a narrow and steep trail, with the brawling stream below. The valley had narrowed into a deep canyon with great walls of pale granite, and uncountable black pines growing everywhere.

The hail made the trail slippery and once the horse came near slipping into the depths of the gorge below, but with a tremendous straining effort the plucky animal scrambled back to safety. It was evident that his rider was born to be hanged, for he seemed able to escape every other form of death. Having regained the trail, he rode on for some distance, then he turned into a side canyon, and his knowing horse took him through the labyrinth of trees, until there appeared a light of a campfire at the end of the trail. The gaunt forms of some men could be seen moving around it.

One of the men heard the approach of the Mexican and gave the alarm. In an instant no one was in sight, but there were a number of guns ready to take the number of the stranger whoever he might be. But the Mexican was on to their little ways. He reined in his horse, gave a low whistle, and called out something in Spanish and then rode up to the group.

There were eight in the gang, including the stout red-necked man who had given

the boys a chase early in the morning. The evident leader of the crowd was a lanky young fellow whose unusual length of limb did not indicate any frailty of physique. He was a man to be dreaded in any encounter. Gus Gols had a rather shock head of light hair, one bunch always sticking up; high cheek bones, a skin of dully burnished red, and rather small blue eyes, both keen and insolent in their gaze. He had a queer, aggressive way of hooking his head forward when speaking that was very noticeable.

He was not vicious in speech, but he was in action, and was one of the most dangerous characters in the West. He had been cowboy, cattle rustler and road agent in different parts of the country west of the Missouri. Now he was at the head of a desperate gang who raided far and wide, taking gold from the pack trains or from the individual miner, where he had struck it rich; even making raids on the settlements on the western slope of the Sierras.

It appeared as though the Frontier Boys were walking directly into the jaws of this desperate gang. They were already trailing them and might pounce upon them at any time. Physically it would seem that Jim himself would be no match for "Big Gus," as he was generally known in that section of the woods, but two of them, say Jim and Juarez, would have made it interesting for him.

Gus Gols listened to his Mexican's story of adventure with much impassiveness, then he got slowly to his feet. He had made no comment to break the course of the Greaser's narrative, only eyeing him occasionally with a squint of his hard blue eyes.

"I don't see, Mike" (his true name was Miquel José Maria, etc.), "why them fellars down there in the valley didn't choke the breath out of your black carcass; they must be soft ones, and I'm going to git their horses pretty soon now. I'm going to turn in, and I don't want you boys raising Cain around here. If you want to do any chawing be quiet about it, understand?"

They understood perfectly; Miguel José Maria, better known as "Mike," looking blackly at the slouching figure of "the boss," as the giant stooped his head through the low doorway of the cabin. What he muttered to himself was complimentary neither to Big Gus' character nor career, but he stood in great fear of him nevertheless. It was characteristic of Gus Gols' shrewdness that his gang was made up for the most part of Mexicans and half-breeds, with only two white men for lieutenants.

He could dominate these mongrels and make them subservient. Also they had to be satisfied with a small part of the spoils, while with a gang of white men he would have been obliged to have divided up evenly and he would constantly have had to prove his right to leadership. He had drilled his motley crew until they were a very dangerous band of outlaws. Naturally the Mexicans and half-breeds were poor shots, but Big Gus had trained them until he had made good marksmen out of them, and cool under fire. He had used threats, cajolery and even occasional money prizes to obtain this result.

From this it was evident that the Frontier Boys had their work cut out for them, with this dangerous gang barring their way and liable to attack them at any time. Gus Gols was even now making his plans for an ambush or a raid. The reports that his scouts had brought him in regard to the boys' horses had made him greedy to get hold of them.

His own horseflesh was not in the best of shape. Besides, he needed ammunition and other supplies which the boys had so thoughtfully brought along. He chuckled to himself as he saw how easy it all was. What chance would those tenderfoot kids have against his cunning courage, strength and the odds of numbers? He would eat them alive. In truth there seemed excellent ground for his confidence and it would take something besides luck to save Jim and his followers at this crisis. It would require hard fighting and skillful strategy.

"The Boss is planning some devilment or ruther," said the red-faced scout to the other white man. "It's a sartain sign when he chuckles to himself that a-way."

"Your diagnosis is correct, Ephraim," replied his pal, giving his black moustache a delicate twist.

"Better not let Big Gus hear you use such language, Edgar," said Eph, "because he's kind of tetchy sometimes."

Edgar only laughed. He was an odd sheep to be in such a fold, for he looked more like a consumptive than an outlaw; his face had a decided pallor, and he was subject to a hacking cough. It was evident that he also gave some attention to dress and a real diamond shone in his shirt front, once white, but now of a dubious grime.

But make no mistake. Next to the Boss he was the most dangerous man in the pack. He was a man with a certain amount of education, but it did him no good,

and if he got near a piano, he could make it hum with harmony. His chief accomplishment, however, and one which made him valuable to his chief, was his ability to use a revolver with rapidity and precision.

“You fellars better turn in;” it was the voice of Gus Gols; “I’m liable to give yer somethin’ besides conversation in a day or two. I want yer to look pink and purty if we should happen to meet them swell tenderfeet. Shet up now.” They “shet.”



CHAPTER XXIII

A HOLIDAY

“It’s going to be a fine day,” said Jim. He was standing in front of the tent on the hill and taking a preliminary look at the sky. It certainly had the appearance of being just as he said. The sun was sweeping the shining length of the valley with his fresh and early beams and there were a few fair, faint clouds drawn across the broad blue brow of morning.

“There’s nothing like the first break of day in the mountains,” said Jeems. “I’ve seen it a hundred times and I never get tired of it.”

“It certainly makes you feel fine and fit, this air after a night’s sleep,” said Jo, who stood poised on the edge of the hill, with his hands resting lightly on his hips. He did look fit as he said, and the rest of the boys, too, with their sunbrowned faces and sinewy figures, every pound of which was bone and muscle. It gave one more confidence in their ability to stand off the outlaws. One look into their keen, alert eyes showed that they were not to be caught napping, either.

“What’s the program for to-day, Skipper?” asked Jeems.

“Juarez and I are going after deer or any other game we can get,” said Jim. “The rest of you can do what you feel like, only don’t overexert yourselves.”

“I’m going fishing,” declared Tom.

“Me too,” chimed in Jo.

“I shall stay at home then,” said Jeems, “and look after things until you children get back. I shan’t mind a quiet day with no callers.”

“Don’t be too sure about there being no callers, Jeems,” warned Juarez. “Remember what happened to Jo last evening and be careful or you will be among the missing.”

“I don’t know why the other party shouldn’t be among the missing,” declared Jeems. “I’m a terrible fighter when I get started.”

“You would stop when the other fellow said ‘ouch,’” remarked Tom, “and get a drink of water.”

“I’m not much of a mule when it comes to holding a grudge, and certain that’s a fact,” admitted Jeems.

“You’re all right,” declared Jim with earnestness.

“Sure you are,” said the chorus, and Jeems in acknowledgment bowed low.

“I thank your Royal Highnesses for your appreciation of your humble servant,” he said.

“You’re welcome,” replied Jim briefly.

Jim and Juarez were soon on their chargers, and they made a fine appearance; Jim on his powerful animal, Caliente, with his strong, arched neck, body and hindquarters built for speed, and shoulders to crash through all barriers of an enemy; his gray mottled coat fairly glistened in the sun.

Juarez’s roan was a smaller horse than Caliente, but he, too, was fleet and of tireless endurance. He was somewhat wall-eyed and vicious at times, but Juarez was the master. The story of the capture of the horses is told in “Frontier Boys in Mexico,” so I will not rehearse it here.

No sooner had the two horsemen left the hill than they whirled their rifles over their heads and gave their horses the rein. Away they dashed at full speed over the level meadows, near the edge of the dark tree-clad slopes, as though they were reviewing the vast army of the pines.

“There they go like wild Indians,” said Tom. “We will have a quiet day now.”

In a few minutes Tom and Jo were going across the level meadow with the slender poles they had cut and the lines and hooks ready. As for Jeems, he proceeded to make himself comfortable, taking his blankets and spreading them out under the shade of a tree, stretching himself out upon them with his hands clasped under his head, and gazing at the distant clouds, drifting dreamily over the depths of blue, while there came through the sun-warmed air the continual

murmur of insects.

Near Jeems' side his faithful shepherd dog was curled up in lazy contentment, with his eyes peacefully closed, opening with an occasional blink, then closing again. It was a happy interval for Jeems, and he thoroughly enjoyed the quietness of the scene, for he was a philosopher by nature as well as by name, and he liked to have time for his own mind. "You can't hatch thoughts unless you sit on 'em a while," was one of his quaint phrases.

Meanwhile, Tom and Jo were walking across the sunny meadows with their minds filled with great expectations of the trout they were about to catch. It was a sort of a holiday for them, and they did not envy Jim and Juarez in the least, and were actually sorry for Jeems, since they were born fishermen. When they reached the stream they separated, Jo going up where there were some willow bushes overhanging the water, and Tom going down where he hoped to find some quiet pools.

The whole valley was a scene of utmost peace, and no one would dream that there was war gathering, as it were, in the near future, but there undoubtedly was. The only bit of tactics that Jo had in his mind at present was how to get the big trout who lurked in the shadow of the limpid pool. He cast carefully and watched the float on his line with intense interest. Five minutes passed, then came the heart-throbbing second when the float went under and there was a strong, tense pull on the line. Steadily Jo pulled until there shone in the air a gleaming trout.

It was a beauty with olive-green back, shading down the sides to white with spots of black and red. It was thirteen inches in length, and Jo promised himself quite a triumph over Tom when he should show him this prize. By noon Jo had caught ten fish varying from seven inches to a foot in length. He and Tom met down stream several miles, at noon.

"What luck?" inquired Tom.

"Better than yours," declared Jo proudly. "I've got the biggest fish."

"You have not," said Tom, and to prove it he pulled out of his bag a good big trout.

"There!"

“Huh! You just wait,” retorted Jo, fishing into his sack. “How does that strike you?” and he pulled out his champion.

“Let’s measure,” said Tom. Jo’s fish was a half inch longer, and he also had two more than his brother, for Tom had caught only eight.

They ate their lunch on a little gravelly knoll where there were some pine trees not far from the stream.

What with a couple of trout, backed by what they had brought, and the cold water from the stream, they fared very well, indeed.

“I reckon we will do better than Jim and Juarez,” said Tom. “I don’t believe that they will get anything.”

“We ought to do well this afternoon,” said Jo.

And they did. By four o’clock they had a joint catch of thirty-five trout, and decided that was enough for the present. At Jo’s suggestion they decided to give Jeems a surprise. So they approached the hill with due care, making their attack on the side towards the slope of the mountain which was best protected. They began their stealthy crawl up through the pine trees, until they came in sight of the camp.

The first evidence they saw of Jeems was his feet sticking out, being quite prominent in their blue socks with white tips, he having removed his boots for comfort. His back was against a big pine, and he was peacefully asleep. Before he could move a rope was passed quickly around his chest and he was bound firmly to the tree by unseen hands.

“Help!” he yelled. “Tom, Jo, come here quick, they’ve got me!”



CHAPTER XXIV

BIG GUS AND HIS GANG

Thus having got poor Jeems securely tied, Tom and Jo vamoosed down the hill shaking with laughter. Then they ran around the edge to the brook side of the hill and ran to Jeems' rescue, he yelling lustily for help.

"Where did they go?" cried Jo.

"Back to the woods," replied Jeems.

"How many were they?" asked Tom.

"I couldn't count 'em," answered Jeems.

"What were you doing?" inquired Jo, "while these rascals were tying you?"

"Nuthin'," replied Jeems.

"I suppose you were asleep," put in Tom.

"I was meditating," replied Jeems with dignity.

"With your eyes shut," added Jo.

"The best way," explained Jeems, "for in that way it shuts out every outside object, even outlaws."

"I wonder what luck Jim and Juarez are having?" said Jo, changing the subject.

"They ought to be showing up pretty soon now," remarked Tom.

"Maybe they have got tied up too," said Jeems.

Let us solve this for ourselves by following Jim and Juarez on their hunting expedition. Concluding their race, they settled down to the search for game. After going several miles they branched off to the northwest where a part of the valley formed a park with trees wide-spaced and grass. It was a beautiful place.

“This is the kind of country to find deer in,” said Juarez.

“It does look good,” said Jim. “We had better leave our horses here and try it on foot.”

“There is a thick clump of trees over there,” remarked Juarez, “where it will be a safe place to tie them.”

Without more ado, the two boys made their way to the grove, which formed an excellent screen, for the trees were not pine, but a kind of alder with large round leaves, and around the grove was quite a thick growth of brush. With some difficulty they got into the center of the trees, and made their horses fast. Then they started to make their way out with their rifles ready.

“Hello! What is that?” cried Juarez. “Didn’t you hear it?” The boys stood perfectly still; then in a few seconds came two reports.

“Somebody has got ahead of us,” remarked Jim. “Those were rifle shots.”

“Lucky we got in here when we did,” said Juarez.

“There go five deer,” cried Jim, “up the mountain opposite.”

“Sure enough,” said Juarez. They were going like the wind and were soon lost to sight on the wooded slope of the mountain.

“I wish they had come our way,” declared Jim, in a disappointed tone. “Those rascals have spoiled our luck.”

“It wouldn’t have been safe,” replied Juarez cautiously. “It’s some of this gang, that the Mexican came from, and they might outnumber us.”

“We will wait here a few minutes,” said Jim. “Perhaps we will sight them.” So the boys crouched at the edge of the grove with the brush for a screen, looking narrowly in the direction of the shots. A half hour passed, still they saw nothing, but they never stirred, and watched steadily. The Frontier Boys had acquired something of the patience of Indians when it came to lying in wait for an enemy.

“There they come,” at length said Juarez the keen-eyed. He had discovered several dark spots moving among the trees.

“That’s them,” cried Jim eagerly. “Four of ’em.”

“If they cut our trail, we will have to fight,” said Juarez, “unless we cut for camp.”

Jim shook his head. “I want to get a closer view of these beggars,” he said.

They were now coming within range, jogging along on their cayuses down the gentle incline between the trees. They had shot a couple of deer.

“Three of them look like Mexicans,” said Juarez. “I believe they are coming right by us.”

“If they do, we will jump the procession,” said Jim.

However, they did not get the chance, for when the hunters had come within about three hundred yards of the grove they turned at right angles and were lost to view behind a spur that ran from the southern ridge. Without a moment’s hesitation, Jim and Juarez left their covert and took up the trail. It was dangerous work, but in their moccasined feet they did not make a sound.

They crouched along at a good rate, always keeping near enough not to lose the rear horseman, who was a Mexican and rode stolidly forward. When they had the chance they closed up within a few yards of the men, so that they could overhear the scraps of conversation. Once they got a real scare when one of the Mexicans swung off his pony and came back looking for a cigarette that he had dropped.

Jim and Juarez pressed back into a tall bush and stood there not daring to breathe, while the Mexican, with his eyes on the ground, came within a few feet of them, stooped and picked up his cigarette, and then the two boys heard the clatter of his horse’s hoofs as he made haste to rejoin the rest of the procession. For two hours they followed the four horsemen through the big canyon, and the smaller side one, until they came within range of the camp of the enemy, in the pocket at the end of the side canyon.

Here the boys had to use great caution. They worked around to the slope above the cabin of the Gus Gols gang. There they got their first view of the giant they had to deal with as he came into the open in front of his cabin, with his slouching walk. Six feet four in height, lanky in build but of wonderful muscular strength and endurance. He was bareheaded, with a tuft of light hair sticking straight up. His sun-burned neck was like a column.

“You Eph!” he yelled. “Tell the Greasers and Ed I want to see ’em in the corral.”
Meaning the cabin.

“All right, boss,” came the answer in Eph’s gruff voice.

It was certainly an ugly-looking crowd that came from different directions in answer to Eph’s summons. There were seven of the Greasers, so there was a total of ten ruffians gathered in the cabin.

“I’m going to hear this pow-wow,” said Juarez, handing Jim his rifle. Jim nodded and from his position behind a big pine stood ready to protect Juarez’s retreat in case he was discovered by the outlaws. With nothing but his pistol and knife ready to his hand Juarez started on his dangerous mission.



CHAPTER XXV

A NEW FORT

He glided noiselessly down the slope, moving cautiously but quickly, until he came to the back of the cabin. It was not difficult for him to hear through the unstopped logs. Jim watched narrowly for the first move of discovery on the part of the outlaws. He could hear the rather high-pitched voice of Gus Gols occasionally, and the heavier one of Eph, but it was impossible for Jim to make out what was being said.

He could tell it was something very interesting by the way Juarez was listening. Then Jim's heart stood still when he saw Juarez rise suddenly to his feet from his listening posture, for he knew by his action that he was in danger of discovery. As in truth he was, as you will see.

The pow-wow had been going on for a few minutes when Juarez heard Gus Gols say:

"You Eph, take a scout around the corral, and see if you kin discover any interested spectators hanging around. This is an important business, fellow cits and Greasers, so we will have to be keerful."

So Eph started for the door on his tour of inspection, which he did not take very seriously, for he knew that there was no government official within a hundred miles. As for the tenderfeet in the valley, he never gave them a thought; they were probably staying close to camp, afraid that the bears would get them. As soon as Gus Gols spoke Juarez realized that he had no time to spare.

If he retreated up the slope, he was almost certain to be seen, and that meant a running fight against the gang of ten men, with a very dubious prospect ahead. He must act quickly; there was no place near the cabin where he could hide. Already Eph had stepped outside the door. Now the roof of the cabin sloped to the back with overhanging boards. Juarez saw his chance; he grabbed one of the boards and lifted himself lightly up, and lay down flat just as Eph came around

the corner of the cabin.

Jim was quivering with the excitement of the situation. Eph took one careless look around, shook his head with the muttered comment that “The boss must be losing his nerve,” and went in to report that all was quiet along the Potomac.

Juarez did not get down from the roof of the cabin, but merely moved a little to where there was a convenient knothole, through which he could hear everything that was going on in the cabin.

He stayed where he was for about ten minutes, lying as quiet as a lizard on a sun-warmed log, and this is no idle comparison, for the sun did shine down with lots of force; then he slowly and very carefully moved backwards, and let himself gingerly down to the ground, while Jim watched him intently, sure that he had found out something of importance.

Not a word did Juarez say, but motioned Jim to follow him. When they had made their escape from the pocket, then Juarez spoke up.

“That was a close call that time, Jim,” he said.

“You had me scared for a minute, Juarez,” admitted Jim. “What’s the news? Those fellows were planning some devilment.”

“They were,” said Juarez. “They are going to attack our camp to-night, when we are asleep. Kill us and take our horses and supplies.”

“Oh! ho! Is that the ticket!” cried Jim. “I thought that rangy Maverick with the stick-up hair was a bad actor. Forewarned is forearmed. We will give that bunch a surprise party, but we will have to hustle, for it’s a long ways to our horses yet.”

“I reckon we will have a couple of hours’ leeway,” said Juarez, “to get things in some sort of shape.”

“There will be plenty to do,” said Jim briefly.

As they swung along down the mountain side, Jim’s mind was busy with plans of attack and defense. The two boys traveled like Indians with a swinging, easy stride that covered a lot of ground. How they did revel in the muscular exertion in that bracing air! It was fine to feel themselves equal to their task. Around and

before them the scene was constantly changing.

Now they were going through the pine forests, then into a canyon's depths with great walls that seemed to bear the blue skies above; next along a narrow trail, with flowering bushes hiding a little creek babbling a few feet below. Then, covered with dust, hands and faces baked brown with it, they came to the grove where they had left their horses tied.

"It seems kind of good," said Juarez, "to have a horse to carry you."

"I'm just tired enough to enjoy the change," said Jim.

"It won't take us long to reach camp now," remarked Juarez.

"Cut 'em loose!" yelled Jim, and with a raucous Indian warwhoop, they let their willing horses go. I tell you that was a wild ride for speed. Caliente thundered with great leaps over the level plain, and not far behind scampered Juarez's roan. The boys at the camp on the hill, hearing the clatter of horses' feet, knew that someone was approaching, and looked out.

"Here they come like wild Indians!" exclaimed Tom.

"Somebody chasing them?" inquired Jeems anxiously.

"The same crowd that tied you, I reckon," said Tom, and, for some reason unknown to Jeems, they went into fits of laughter. In a short time Jim and Juarez were in their midst. They did not waste any time in greetings and idle chaff. They made clear to the rest of the boys in conclave assembled, that the time for action had arrived. Jeems heaved a sigh of regret. There seemed no chance for quiet and meditation. The other boys were calm, but serious.

"Let the horses graze a while," said Jim. "We have got a couple of hours' leeway. Now we have got to build a stockade to protect our horses and ourselves."

Five husky fellows can do a great deal in two hours and a half of daylight. Jim had thought out his plan and talked it over with Juarez, so there was no time lost in useless palaver. He had chosen a small open space where the horses had been tethered the night before as the place for the fort.

Jim and Juarez, aided by Jo, went to work cutting down trees. They were old hands at this business, and it was a caution the way the trees crashed and fell.

Tom and Jeems were kept busy dragging fallen logs from the slopes of the hill, and turning them up. In two hours' time the square, rude fort was well under way.

Tom and Juarez were then sent to take the horses to the stream to water them, and after that, to fill up every available pot, pan and dish with water in case they should be besieged for any length of time. This being done all hands turned in again to work on the fort, until it grew too dark to see. Then a fire was built near the center of the hill, and by the glare of its light they were able to continue their work.

Jim sent Juarez, now that the enemy might come at any time, to keep a lookout for them. He was the best of the boys for that work, being a natural scout, and of unusually keen vision, especially at night. There was a deep gully running from the foot of the hill to the slope of the mountain, and Juarez followed along that toward the mountain slope. Every once in a while he would climb up and look to see if there was any sign of the approaching gang.

Juarez was confident that there would be no direct attack even under cover of the darkness of the night. For that was not the method of Gus Gols and his gang of outlaws. They would take the most secret way of approach. In fact, Juarez was positive that they would come by this same gully that he was in. Gus Gols had spoken of the gully in his pow-wow with his clan, but he had said nothing about his plan of attack. He kept all such things to himself. Juarez could hear clearly the sound of axes as the boys worked upon their fort on the hill.



CHAPTER XXVI

A NIGHT ATTACK

The sound of the work on the hill carried far through the clear, quiet air, so that the outlaws, if they were anywhere near, would have had warning that preparations were being made to receive them. At last Juarez's vigilance was rewarded. He crouched, looking over the edge of the gully in the direction of the mountain with its heavily-wooded slope.

He was positive that he saw a line of horsemen moving along the edge of the trees. Then he heard a horse's shoe strike a stone, and the low voices of men. A thrill went through him at the nearness of the encounter. Lucky that he and Jim had been on hand to hear the plans laid at the pow-wow, for they would in all probability have been captured or killed, since the outlaws could have rushed the camp easily. With only one of the boys on guard, there would have been no chance against the ten of them.

"What are those tenderfeet a-doin' this time of night?" growled Gus Gols, bringing his column to a halt. "They seem to be mighty busy about something."

"Maybe they have got wind of our doin's," said Eph. "I wouldn't be surprised if they weren't such tenderfeet after all."

"I'm goin' to do a little lookin' ahead," remarked Gus. "We'll hitch our cayuses in the woods, and you boys stay with 'em."

Then the leader of the gang left them and made his way to the edge of the pines. He stood looking at the hill with the light of the campfire shining on it like a big red star, and the sound of the axes came faint and clear to him. "They sure are getting ready for somebody," growled the giant, "and I reckon it's us, but I'm going to find out for sartain. Where's that gully?" He stalked along until he found it, and then disappeared as though the earth had swallowed him.

Now Juarez had been debating whether to go back and warn the boys that the enemy was approaching, or to find out more of what Gus Gols was going to do

before reporting to Jim, the commander of the faithful. After a moment's hesitation, he decided to go ahead a ways further. At the time he made this decision Gus Gols had just entered the deep gully, and a head-on collision seemed imminent. It was a dangerous situation for Juarez.

However, one thing was in his favor, he was on the alert, and the giant, who was coming down the gully, did not expect to find any of the boys abroad, supposing that they would stay close to camp and not venture forth in the darkness. He was soon to learn that these same boys were not to be trifled with. Juarez was going along quickly, but very carefully, when he suddenly stopped and listened.

He could hear distinctly someone coming down the ravine. Just a few steps ahead of him was a shelf below the edge of the bank. Juarez made a spring and climbed up to the shelf in a jiffy, but he loosened a little dirt that slid down to the bottom of the gully. It made only a little noise, but enough to reach the ears of Gus Gols.

He stopped as though petrified, glaring ahead through the darkness. For five minutes he stood thus with every sense ferociously alert. Then he went forward, but with extreme caution. Every few feet he examined the floor of the gully for the signs of some footprint. Juarez waited like a graven image, hoping that the man, whoever it might be, would continue up the gully; then he would follow and trap him when he reached the hill.

Juarez could not be sure that there was only one. He could hear nothing, but he was certain that the man was very near. Some instinct told him that. Then beneath his eyes a long, bent, stealthy figure crept into view. Gols felt the footprints in the sand of the gully, then he glared up. He saw the stooping figure of Juarez and jumped instantly back around the curve of the bank.

The game was up. Juarez leaped out on the level and made a dash for a boulder a short distance away. Just as he reached its shelter Gols fired, and the bullet zinged from the side of the rock off into the darkness. Then Gols got a surprise, for Juarez fired at a dark bunch looking over the edge of the gully. The bullet breezed his cheek and Gols ducked.

The sound of the shots aroused both sides, and the battle was on. Juarez now backed cautiously down into a depression and ran with all his might to give the news to Jim. He got to the hill just in time to warn Jim and Jo not to go up the

gully.

“This is the way they will make their attack,” said Juarez. “We can station ourselves behind these trees, and, when they come out of the gully, we will let ’em have it.”

“That’s the scheme,” agreed Jim. “Which one did you have the duel with, Juarez?”

“The blond beauty himself,” replied Juarez. “He didn’t miss me far either, but I made him take to cover pretty quick.”

“They will be here in about fifteen minutes,” said Jim. “We might as well get to our places.”

Tom was left in the stockade, and Jim and the other three boys took their stations behind convenient trees upon the slope of the hill commanding the entrance into the gully. Jim and Juarez were nearest to the foot of the hill, backed by Jo and Jeems. They did not have long to wait, though the twenty minutes seemed like several hours to Jo and Jeems, before there were signs of the approach of Gus Gols and his gang.

Very carefully they came up the gully, with the tall giant in the lead and Eph close at his heels; behind them came three of the Mexicans, but where was Edgar, and the other four? Perhaps the boss was afraid lest the flashing diamond that Ed always wore in his shirt bosom might give their presence away. But without joking, it was strange that these five were not with the main party. It was hardly likely that Big Gus would leave that number with the horses. Where were they? We shall find out in a few minutes.

“Don’t you reckon those fellows have had time to make their move?” whispered Gus to his henchman Eph. They had halted in the darkness of the gully, about two hundred and fifty yards from the foot of the hill.

“Ed’s pretty quick,” replied Eph. “He said that he wouldn’t take more than a quarter of an hour.”

“I’ll give him five minutes’ leeway,” said Gus. “Then we will jump these fellows.” In a short time he looked at his watch by the quick flare of a match that showed his red, evil face with the squinting blue eyes.

“All ready now, boys,” he said in a low significant tone. “Give ’em the lead, but don’t shoot the horses.”

As ill luck would have it, Jeems Howell, who was highest up on the hill, caught the first glimpse of the outlaws as they advanced up the gully. How it occurred he never could explain, but his rifle went off before he could aim. Instantly the gang dropped behind the bank and opened fire upon the hill.

One volley had crashed out from Jim, Juarez and Jo, when Tom’s agonized voice rang out:

“Quick, boys, they are coming up the other side!”

The Frontier Boys had been outgeneraled. There was no question about that, and they were in deadly peril. There was nothing for them to do but to retreat to the stockade before it was too late.

“Come, boys!” cried Jim, and away they dashed up the side of the hill with Gus Gols and his crew in close pursuit. The bullets swept with deadly zing near them as they ran. As they neared the stockade Ed and his men came into view from the opposite side of the hill. Jim and Juarez dropped behind a rock and fired at the foremost of the crowd and they took to cover. Then they two got into the fort and were safe for the present.

The first thing Juarez did was to climb into the branches of a big pine that had been left in the stockade. From this point of vantage he could see in which direction the enemy were. He did not have to wait long before he saw one of the crowd move cautiously from behind a tree and rush for a rock nearer the fort, but Juarez was ready for him, and fired. The man fell, and, then recovering his feet, rushed down the hill.



CHAPTER XXVII

THE RETREAT

This was the luckiest shot of the fight, for it was no other than Gus Gols himself whom Juarez had struck. There was a lull now, and the boys had time to breathe.

“Jo, you get up into that tree and keep watch,” said Jim, “while the rest of us take account of stock.”

“I guess those fellows have had enough to keep them quiet for a while,” said Juarez. “It looked to me as though I had got their big chief with that shot.”

“It’s half the battle if you have done that,” said Jim. “Wait till daylight comes and we will make them skedaddle.”

“It’s remarkable how quiet the horses took all this,” said Tom.

“Oh, they have been under fire before,” said Jim. “You can trust ’em not to act up at a time like this.”

This was certainly true, though they were packed together close at the end of the corral-stockade. They made no disturbance and seemed to realize that their safety was being looked after by their old comrades, the Frontier Boys.

“I’m kind of hungry,” said Jim. “Let’s have something to eat.”

“It’s kind of late for supper,” said Jeems, “but it’s never too late to eat.”

So the boys made as good a meal in the darkness as they could, and felt better for it. They also drank sparingly of the water, for they did not know how long the siege would last. It was now about half-past one, and the boys were very anxious for the morning to break.

About three o’clock there came a furious firing from behind a hastily constructed entrenchment at the end of the hill opposite where the boys had built their stockade.

Most of the bullets buried themselves harmlessly in the soft wood of the pine logs that made the walls of the stockade. The boys replied with accuracy, but they were careful not to waste their ammunition. At last the dawn broke clear, and with the first gleam of light the boys looked eagerly out to see if the enemy still held the hill.

“They have vamoosed,” said Juarez after making a careful reconnoissance. This was true, but the boys found that the fight was not yet entirely over, for when they appeared in full view on the hill there came a volley from the bank of the creek half a mile distant, which was the nearest shelter that could be obtained on that side.

The height of the hill made the first flight of bullets fall somewhat short, and, before the crowd could fire again, the boys had got out of danger and returned the fire with interest. They had the advantage, too, in firing down instead of up, and they kept the enemy close to cover.

About the middle of the morning there was a furious fusillade from both sides, the creek bank and the gully, against the stockade, which was beginning to show quite a scarred appearance. The boys replied with vigor; then suddenly the firing slackened and then ceased altogether.

“I believe they have quit,” declared Jo.

“I wouldn’t be too sure,” warned Jim.

“There they go up through those willows, near the creek,” said Juarez.

“That’s where I caught the trout,” said Jo. He evidently considered it a more historic spot than where the fort stood, being a true fisherman.

“I really believe they are quitting,” announced Tom.

“It’s possible their ammunition has run low,” suggested Jim.

“Another thing,” put in Jo, “if big Gus is badly hurt, the rest of that gang won’t hold together.”

“That’s so,” agreed Juarez. “Those Greasers are never to be trusted.”

“He has bullied ’em too,” said Jim, “and they would naturally turn on him. But if you treat the Mexicans fair and square, you would find that they weren’t such a

bad lot after all.”

“Just as soon try to tame hyenas,” said Tom.

“You are prejudiced, Thomas,” reasoned Jeems. “That comes from being an Anglo-Saxon.”

“He’s an *angler*-Saxon, you mean,” said Jo. They all laughed at this.

“That’s pretty good for you,” said Jim. “Keep on you will be a wit.”

“I am already,” replied Jo modestly.

It seemed kind of natural to hear the boys joking so light-heartedly, and like old times. The battle was over without any dramatic crisis. Things do happen that way sometimes, and the boys were perfectly satisfied to have it end without any grand blow out or blow up. They soon found out that the enemy had indeed retreated, for they went up the gully, that is, Jim and Juarez did, with due caution, and found that Gus Gols and his gang had gone. They discovered the place where their horses had been hitched.

“Good riddance to bad rubbish,” said Jim enthusiastically.

“I wonder if they will attack us again to-night?” questioned Juarez.

“We will be ready for them if they do,” remarked Jim.

“I suppose we will start to-morrow,” said Juarez, as the two walked back across the level meadow towards the hill.

“Yes, if the coast is clear,” remarked Jim. “We can’t afford to lose any more time.”

“They are almost sure to lay for us in the canyon,” remarked Juarez. “We will have to find some other way.”

“One of us will go this afternoon,” said Jim, “and see if we can’t strike a new trail.”

It was now noon and the boys sat down to a quiet meal, with trout as the main dish, and how they did enjoy it!

“Gosh, boys,” exclaimed Jo, “but it does seem nice to sit down to a meal without

the bullets buzzing around.”

“We will get so that we won’t mind bullets any more than mosquitoes,” said Tom.

“Listen to him!” grinned Jim. “Won’t he surprise the natives when we get back to Homeville with his stories of flying bullets, war, and border ruffians.”

“Why not?” retorted Tom sullenly. “What’s the use of going through all this business if you can’t tell about it?”

“Sure thing,” said Jim.

“When are we going home?” asked Jo fervently.

Jim hesitated a minute, and then he brought his clenched fist down on his knee.

“We will go home, boys,” he declared, “before we start on our trip around the world.”

“I begin to feel homesick already,” declared Jo.

“We will stop in Kansas,” said Juarez, his face brightening, “and see my folks.”

“Certainly we will,” agreed Jim.

“I bet Juanita has grown into a young lady,” remarked Juarez.

“Your father and mother will be plumb glad to see you,” said Jo.

“You fellows, too; they think just as much of you as they do of me. And they ought to, seeing how you and Captain Graves rescued Juanita from the Indians in Colorado.”

“Will we stop and see the captain in his cabin on the Plateau?” asked Tom eagerly.

“Sure,” declared Jim. “We will spend a few days with him. He is too old a friend to pass by.”

“Won’t it be great!” exclaimed Jo. “What will the folks and all the fellars think when they see us coming on our chargers down the main street of Maysville?”

“I reckon about everybody will take to the woods. Think it is band of wild Indians coming down on them.”

“We will have to hurry and find that mine,” said Tom, “before we can strike the back trail for home.”

“I have a kind of feeling in my bones,” said Jim, “that we are going to find that mine pretty soon now.”

“We ain’t more than one day’s ride from the section where it is,” said Jeems.

“I’m going to look for a new trail this afternoon,” said Jim. “You boys can work around home.”

“It’s about time those mules and horses had some water,” remarked Juarez.

“Think it’s safe?” inquired Jo.

“To make sure, I’ll take a gallop up the valley a ways,” said Jim, “to see if they have cleared out.”

“That’s the idea,” agreed Juarez. “I’ll take the creek side on my roan.”

In five minutes they were mounted and galloped off, Jim scouting along the mountain slope and Juarez taking the other side. They met at the end of the valley where the trail started up the big canyon. Here they dismounted and examined the ground carefully.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A NEW START

“They have vamoosed all right,” announced Juarez after examining the trail.

“The whole pack of ’em, too,” affirmed Jim.

“Perhaps we can get a view of them,” added Juarez.

“We will hitch our horses here,” remarked Jim, “and try a squint up the trail from that grove yonder.”

This they did, and from their point of vantage they were able to see a part of the trail, two miles distant, where it curved around a shoulder of the mountain.

“Maybe they have got beyond that point,” suggested Jim.

“Hardly,” replied Juarez. “That’s a long steep climb up there. They will have to go slow if any of ’em are hurt.”

The boys waited a few minutes with eyes intent upon the trail. Then they saw a man on horseback ride into view, then another and another, until seven had gone round the shoulder of the mountain.

“That isn’t all,” said Jim, “there’s three missing.”

“Maybe that Gus Gols is knocked out,” said Juarez.

“It begins to look like it,” said Jim.

“There they come,” cried Juarez. “He is hurt some, for it takes two of his men to hold him on his horse.”

“They are not likely to bother us now then,” said Jim, “but all the same I am going to see if we cannot find a safe way around.”

“All right, Jim,” agreed Juarez. “I will go back to camp and look after things.”

So they separated. Towards evening Jim came riding into camp, with Caliente showing the effects of a hard climb. Jim dismounted rather wearily.

“Well, what luck?” inquired the boys.

“There is a way around,” he said. “It’s tough in places, but we can make it all right.”

“We ought to get an early start,” said Juarez.

“You are right there,” agreed Jim. “We will turn in early this evening.”

So they did, and by half-past two Jim sounded the early rising alarm. The boys all got up with alacrity, except Tom, who did considerable growling, as was his custom, but if Tom wanted sympathy he would have to find it in the dictionary, as the fellow said.

The boys lighted a fire within the stockade to get their breakfast by, but it was hidden so that no hint of their plans would be given to a watchful enemy. The boys felt jovial when they got fairly waked up. The air was cold and bracing, and they all felt that the end of their long journey was drawing near.

By four o’clock everything was ready for the start. The mules were packed, and the boys rode out in silence through the starry darkness across the level floor of the valley. Jim was in the lead, and the rest followed in order. Instead of going up the main trail through the big canyon, Jim bore to the right, making straight through the park where the men had killed the deer.

It was well for the Frontier Boys that they took this way, for Eph, Ed and a number of Mexicans were lying in ambush at a narrow and hidden part of the trail, and, with one concerted rush, were ready to send the boys down five hundred feet. Whether the Frontier Boys would have been so rash as to have walked blindfolded into this trap is doubtful. Nevertheless, when they took the other way they escaped a very serious danger.

When the first steel shining rays of dawn struck the slope of the mountain above them the boys had climbed up several thousand feet and could see the valley below and the distant snow-clad peaks to the south, rosy with the first touch of morning. It was a beautiful sight, and the boys turned sideways in their saddles, taking it all in when their horses stopped to breathe.

“Going to take us above timber-line, Jim?” inquired Juarez.

“He’s going to lose us,” complained Tom.

“Then there would be a lost kid to go with the Lost Mine,” declared Jim humorously. “Yes, boys, I’m going to take you above timber-line.”

“Well,” said Jeems philosophically, “it is a whole lot better than going over the range altogether, as might have been the case if we had taken the trail through the big canyon over yonder.”

“Say, Jeems!” exclaimed Jo, with a catch in his voice, “you never told Jim and Juarez about the time you was sitting with your back to a tree and they slipped up and tied you, and if we hadn’t come along there was no telling what might have happened to you.”

“That was a close call,” said Jeems. “It was when you, Jim and Juarez were off hunting, and the boys had gone fishing. They got back just in the nick of time.” Then he went solemnly to work to tell of the thrilling escape he had had. At the climax of his narrative, Tom and Jo burst into roars of laughter.

“What’s the matter with you two guys?” inquired Jim. “I bet my hat that you were at the bottom of this rascality.”

The two admitted their guilt, and, after his surprise was over, Jeems took it good-naturedly, while even Jim had to laugh, for it was certainly a successful practical joke.

“Sometime,” said Jim prophetically, “you two kittens will get caught up with.”

The boys had now ridden above the stunted trees that marked the limits of timber line, but they did not cross over the barren, rocky summit that rose above them for two thousand feet, covered with a broad mantle of snow, but instead bore south through a deep gorge, that threatened to close its rocky jaws upon them at every turn. But Jim was too good a scout to lead them where they would be trapped.

Before noon they had made their way out of the gorge and were upon the northwestern slope of the great mountain. Looking off, while they gave their horses time to breathe, they saw a somewhat different looking section of the range than that which they had been traveling through the past day. From the

height where they now stood the vast region beneath them was made up of low mountains, extending onward like recurring billows of the sea, hemmed in by peaks and higher mountains.

“Down there somewhere is the Lost Mine,” said Jim, with a sweep of his hand.

“Talk about a needle in a haystack,” growled Tom, “this beats it.”

“You talk as if you were sitting on the needle,” declared Jim. “Try to talk cheerful even if you do feel bad.”

“It isn’t quite as bad as it looks, Tom,” said Jeems encouragingly. “You see that mountain with the rocky hump on it. That mine, according to my calculations from the chart we have, ought to be there or within two miles of it.”

“We will dig over every inch of that mountain,” declared Tom, his eyes shining with enthusiasm, for he dearly loved money.

“We don’t want you to become a miser, Tom,” said Jim judiciously, “so I will appoint a committee to take care of your share.”

“Eh?” cried Tom, his jaw dropping, then recovering, he yelled, “No you won’t, James Darlington, I’ll go to law. You can’t cheat me of my rights.” Tom was pale with anger and Jim was disgusted.

“Ah, go on with you,” he said, “you are nothing but an Eastern money shark, anyway.”



CHAPTER XXIX

THE SEARCH

The mountain of the Lost Mine, as it may be called for the purposes of identification, did not seem more than half a day's journey from the divide where the boys first saw it, but it took them two days of hard marching before they reached its vicinity, so deceitful are the distances in the high altitudes.

Now, behold them, camped in a shallow little valley, between two spurs of the Lost Mine mountain, their tent pitched on a small shelf back from a little stream that went singing along to a larger one, between its willow bushes, and over glistening boulders of polished granite. There was a growth of grass on either side of the creek, where the horses could graze. Altogether it was a restful place to camp in, after the grandeur of the great mountains that had surrounded them, and the savage gorges they had ridden through. There was a sense of rest and satisfaction that the Frontier Boys felt in having arrived at the goal of their long journey by land and sea. True, they did not know exactly the position of the Lost Mine, but they hoped to find it with the help of the diagram which they were fortunate enough to possess.

"Let's have a look at that faded heirloom of yours," said Jim to Jeems, as they sat on some rocks around the campfire, on the evening of their arrival.

"All right, Skipper," said Jeems cheerfully. Then he took his faded coat and carefully unpinned the inside pocket, and put in his hand and pulled out nothing.

"It's gone," he exclaimed, his face paling. "I've been robbed."

"I bet it was those Greasers," declared Jo, hastily, but with conviction. Jim looked at brothers Jo and Tom narrowly, then he put a heavy and accusing hand on their joint shoulders, or their shoulder joints, if you prefer it that way.

"You are the Greasers," he said severely. "Now cough up." Jo reached down guiltily into his pistol pocket and fished up the required document.

“I don’t know exactly what to do with these fellows,” said Jim magisterially, giving them each a shake under his big clutch.

“Leave us alone! That’s what you can do,” said Tom grumpily, but Jim went on without noticing Tom’s remark.

“This is their third offense, and I reckon we will have to hang ’em this time if we can find a tree strong enough to stand the strain of two such rascals at once.”

“I tell you a better scheme,” said Jeems Howell with a twinkle in his eye. “Get a twig of the tree and touch ’em up with that.”

“That’s the idea,” agreed Jim. “Bring me the switches, Juarez.”

“Aye, aye, sir,” said Juarez cheerfully, and he started on his commission. The implied indignity of a switching was too much for the two youths. They would have much preferred to be hanged, so they prepared to leave home immediately and without due notice. Father Jim’s grasp relaxed for a moment, and, with a wrench, both boys tore themselves loose and sped away in the darkness, and from this outer darkness they hurled remarks and pieces of dirt and small stones at the three about the campfire, just as other small bad boys would do; but the grown-ups paid no attention to the culprits, merely pulled their sombreros down around their ears and began a diligent study of the diagram of the Lost Mine. So absorbed were they after a while that they forgot the outlanders, when they crept into camp.

“Let’s see,” said Juarez. “Where are we on this diagram?”

“We passed by the pine tree with the cross cut on one side,” said Jeems, “the other day.”

“That crooked line below there is the trail in this valley,” said Jo, who was too interested to keep at a safe distance.

“If it is anything crooked, you and Tom ought to be experts,” said Jim, looking keenly at the two ex-fugitives. They said nothing by way of retort, considering that silence was the better part of wit on this particular occasion.

“If that line is a path,” said Juarez, “those drawings on either side represent buildings of some sort.”

“But how about the figures at the bottom of the diagram?” inquired Jeems. “I can’t make them out.”

“Four hundred+1500-30,” read Jim. “I can add it up if that will do any good.”

“The best thing we can do,” said Jeems, the philosopher, “is to go to bed and tackle this proposition in the morning.”

This the boys did, but it was a hard thing for them to get to sleep, so busy were their brains, and they all dreamed diagram, mysterious combinations of figures and lines. When they awoke the next morning, it was with the same happy sense of anticipation that the small boy wakes up on the morning of the glorious Fourth.

As soon as it was light enough to see, the Frontier Boys started out to solve the location of the Lost Mine. Each one had a copy of the diagram with him, also a pick or a shovel, and powder for blasting. Jim and Juarez worked together, Tom and Jo also, while Jeems Howell was a lone prospector, and it seemed indeed like old times to him.

For a short ways they went all together up the shallow valley; then, after going a half mile, they took separate courses, Jim and Juarez following the line of the overgrown trail up the valley, and Jeems striking straight up the slope of the mountain. Tom and Jo wandered around eagerly and inconsequentially, expecting to see the opening to the Lost Mine at any moment.

Jeems was the first to make a discovery of importance, but bearing only indirectly on the location of the mine. After climbing up about five hundred feet he saw that there had been a tremendous landslide down the southern slope of the mountain.

“Some earthquake did that,” he said, “and not very recently either. I bet that the lost mine is under the slide.” Just then he heard Jim’s voice in a faint halloo below him. He felt sure that they had made a discovery likewise. He strode eagerly down the slope to tell Jim and Juarez what he had found out, and to see about their discovery.

“We have found part of the cabin that’s in the diagram,” cried Juarez as soon as Jeems hove in sight.

“It was the landslide did that,” declared Jeems, and he told them of his discovery. The boys were jubilant, and rightly so, for at last they had struck the trail.

The point of departure had been found, for a heavy storm had uncovered one end of a demolished cabin, over which a part of the landslide had swept.

“This is the further one,” said Jim.

“Yes, the other one is on the upper side of the old trail and is covered deep,” said Juarez.

“Now let’s take those figures in feet first,” said Jim.

“I’ll pace in yards,” said Jeems, “we may save time that way,” and he started off from the side of the discovered cabin, while Jim and Juarez measured the distance in feet, 400 straight up the valley, then 1500 at right angles, and this brought them to a point well up on the side of the mountain.

“Thirty feet straight down and we will know our fate,” said Jim.

They practically had all day before them and they set busily to work with pick and shovel, beginning at a point below where they had set the mark.



CHAPTER XXX

THE LOST MINE AGAIN

Fortunately it was not heavy going, as the dirt and gravel was comparatively loose, and in the morning of the next day about ten o'clock, they came to a nest of rocks which barred their way. By hard efforts and by loosening a large stone there was a narrow rift made, through which they crawled, with Juarez in the lead.

"Here's the entrance," he cried, his voice sounding hollow from the interior.

"The Lost Mine!" yelled Tom, and in a second they were all together in the entrance, and with a rousing cheer at what promised to be the successful end of all their trials and dangers, then home again, and after that their journey on the *Sea Eagle* into foreign countries and searching strange corners of the earth.

"Light up, boys," said Jim. "We will soon see what we have ahead of us."

"We will have to be careful," warned Juarez, "there is no telling what we will meet, we are always running into excitement of some sort."

"I guess not," replied Jeems, "we have had enough to last us for a lifetime. Let's wind this business up quietly."

"Agreed," said Jim. "We will make up for it later. Forward, march!"

With pine torches they went forward through the gloom, the light showing that the entrance to the mine had been buttressed with pine timber, but this extended only a few feet, and then they came to a narrow rift between dripping rocks.

"Low bridge, Jeems," cried Jo.

"This looks to me to be a cave," said Jim.

"It don't keep it from being a pocket mine, even if it is a cave," said Jeems wisely.

“You ought to know, Jeems,” said Juarez, “as you were a prospector before we were born.”

“Oh, I’m not that old,” protested Jeems. “Here we are getting to the workings now.”

“Sure enough,” cried Jim, a thrill of interest in his voice.

“Here is where they have picked out some nuggets,” said Jo.

“It won’t be far to the find now,” said Tom, shaking with excitement.

Jeems was looking closely with his trained eyes along the walls and into every crevice and upon the shelves of stone, for the sides of the cave-mine were not smooth, but singularly rugged.

“Struck it rich, boys!” Jeems cried suddenly, as he held the flame of his torch near the wall. “Give me the pick, take the lamp, Tom.” It was the ultimate moment of triumph for the Frontier Boys. Carefully, but with skillful precision, Jeems brought the pick down upon the surface of the wall where it was roughened into little mounds.

“That don’t look like gold,” said Tom. “It’s nothing but dingy rock.” Jeems only smiled at Tom’s comment, as he swung his pick in the light of the flaming torches.

“That’s stone-stain, Tom,” he said, then a loosened nugget fell to the floor of the cave. Jo picked it up and there was the yellow gleam of gold under the wavering light of the torches.

“There’s a whole nest of them,” cried Tom.

“I wonder where the goose is that laid them?” questioned Jo.

“I’m going to find a nest for myself,” said Juarez.

It was a most interesting search, and each of the boys made finds of their own. Jim discovered a square yard of nuggets, not close set, of course, but there must have been twenty of varying sizes, and Juarez made the biggest individual find of a nugget that was five inches tall and three thick. Every second the other boys expected to make a discovery that would discount Juarez.

After the first excitement was over, they settled down to systematic work. It was necessary to send someone back for the lanterns so that they could have steady light to work by; but who should go? That was the painful question. The work was so interesting that they all naturally wanted to stay on the job.

“Let Jeems go,” said the generous Tom. “It’s an old story to him anyway.” The good-natured Jeems would probably have allowed himself to be imposed upon, but Jim put his foot down upon Tom’s proposition.

“No you don’t,” he said. “We will draw lots to decide.” As luck or fate would have it, Tom got the shortest straw, or, rather, sliver of pine, and had to go after the lanterns. Tom was a picture of the heart bowed down when the decision went against him, and the boys laughed at his woe-begone face.

“Maybe you will be able to find an honest man with your lantern, Tom,” said Jim consolingly.

“I wouldn’t come to this gang,” he retorted bitterly, and to prove the sincerity of his belief, he took his little pile of nuggets to Jeems.

“Take care of these till I get back,” he said. Then his two brothers went into convulsions of merriment at this token of Tom’s regard.

“If you didn’t steal them you would be sure to hide ’em,” he said, and there was considerable truth in his last observation.

“If you are going to make a bank out of Jeems, you will have to pay him interest,” remarked Jo derisively. Tom regarded Jeems doubtfully and then, reassured by his belief in the latter’s generosity, he made off on his errand.

“There is one good thing about Tom’s going,” said Juarez, “he will hustle more than any of us.”

“No doubt about that,” laughed Jim. “He will scorch a trail down the mountain all right.”

It was true that Tom made extraordinary time, for he was desperately afraid lest his comrades-in-arms would get all the nuggets, but he need not have been so worried, for the boys worked busily night and day for the greater part of a week before Jim gave the orders to break camp. There was bitter rebellion on the part of Tom, and he was backed by Jo.

“You can stay,” Jim said finally. “We have enough, and more than enough. If we don’t pull up stakes now, we will be snowed under. A storm will strike us at this altitude any time at this season. We did not come here to spend the winter and we are not prepared for it. What’s the use of the gold? It won’t buy us anything if we are nothing but beautiful frozen corpses.”

“You hit the nail on the head that time, Skipper,” said Jeems Howell, the philosopher. “Gold is no good if you are dead. Men kill their souls getting it, too, pretty often in this world.” Tom had to give in, but he kept growling under his breath, and Jim turned on him fiercely.

“Another growl out of you, Tom Darlington, and I’ll give you a sound thrashing. I’m using my best judgment and I am not going to be pestered from here to the coast with your growling sulks. That’s straight. You cheer up.” Tom cheered.

They got an early start one morning and turned their horses’ heads southward. The gold was evenly divided, and the burden imposed equally upon the three mules. The triumphant procession started, with Jim mounted jauntily on his white charger, Caliente, followed by Juarez and the rest in order.

It was certainly a happy crowd when they had finally started on their return trip to the coast. The talk was all of their plans for the future, about their home-going, all of which is related in the “Frontier Boys in the Saddle,” for it was a longish journey and a thrilling one, and then home. Juarez did not say much, but it was evident that his mind was busy thinking of his people on the Kansas farm outside of River Bend.

“It will be too late in the season when we get to your place, Juarez, for a game of baseball,” remarked Jo.

“It’s too bad,” replied Juarez. “It would be fine sport to beat those Hughsonville fellows again.”

“I’m not so sure that I could pitch a baseball now,” said Jo. “It’s a long time since I have had one in my hand.”

“That would be all right,” said Jim easily. “We would have Jeems for umpire, and he would help us out.”

“Now, boys, don’t you go to planning trouble for me,” expostulated Jeems. “I

don't mind dodging sharks and being tied up by fierce outlaws, like Jo and Tom, but I won't be an umpire."

"That's settled," laughed Jo. "Anyway, if we can't indulge in baseball, we will have a game of horseshoes, behind the blacksmith's shop at River Bend.

"I wonder how the *Sea Eagle* and the old Captain are getting along?" said Jeems.

"We will see in about ten days," replied Jim. "But I'm not worrying with the old man and the engineer aboard. We will stop long enough to say howdy to 'em, leave our gold or most of it aboard ship and then hike for home."

"Do you think it will be safe on the ship, Jim?" inquired Jo anxiously.

"As safe as anywhere," said Jim nonchalantly.

The Frontier Boys rode steadily southward, taking a more direct way and an easier one than that by which they had come. They took no chance of running into Gus Gols or his gang of cutthroats. They were fortunate in not being molested or way-laid, and for the first five days the weather was fine, but the morning of the sixth day it began to snow just as they rode out of camp. The boys did not worry, however, as they were through the worst of the mountain trip. Indeed, they rather enjoyed the soft and silent fall of the snow; it was a change.

"Boys, this is Christmas weather!" cried Jeems.

"We will spend our Christmas at home this year, boys!" said Jim, turning in the saddle and looking down the line, each one riding jauntily and easily through the rapidly falling snow that softly flaked their weather-hued faces and starred the coats of their horses. "All in favor of this proposition say aye!" continued Jim.

"Aye!" roared the boys in chorus.

"You, too, Jeems," urged Jim, "won't leave you out. Make it unanimous this time!"

And they did. As for the reader, he must not be left out in the cold and the snow, and he, too, is invited to be present at the boys' Christmas at home, for it is bound to be a jolly affair, and the Frontier Boys are nothing if not hospitable. The record of their trip overland eastward and of their home-coming is bound to

be full of interest and incident; for the boys, besides being hospitable, are also very enterprising and venturesome.

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