

Inland Waterways

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or

The Cruise of the Restless

by James Otis

1889

CHAPTER I.

THE TOW LINE.

NEAR Market Street Ferry, in the city of Philadelphia, is located the shipping and commission house of Gilman & Baker; and lying at the pier directly opposite, on a certain day this summer, was a jaunty but odd-looking yacht, thirty-five feet in length, with the name *Restless* in gilt letters on her bow.

In general design she was not different from the ordinary steam yacht; but the short smokestack rising from the hurricane deck aft caused her to appear, as the cook of a tugboat nearby expressed it, "like she had been stripped half naked." Every one who saw her stopped for a moment at least, and several, on learning that she was what is known as a "naphtha launch," pronounced most emphatically against the use of such power.

"It's bad enough to run the risk of bein' blowed up by a reg'lar steam craft," the cook of the tug said musingly; "but after it comes to sailin' with what's worse'n a powder magazine aboard, I'm ready to stay ashore. When two or three barrels of oil are where a match will send the whole craft flyin' like a sky rocket, it's mightily near temptin' of Providence to run her from here to Camden."

The cook had no further opportunity to express his opinion regarding the *Restless*, for just then his own craft steamed off to answer the signal of a brig in the stream, and the approaching owners of the yacht were spared the pain of hearing her supposed defects commented upon.

Philip Gilman and Harry Baker were the two boys who believed themselves particularly fortunate in possessing such a steamer, and they had left their fathers' place of business to join a friend, Nat Hinkle, who had this moment made his appearance on the pier.

"We've been waiting nearly an hour for you," Harry said petulantly. "Father insists that we can't make the voyage unless it shall be possible to get an outfit for one hundred dollars, and with the list which we made out last night that

doesn't seem probable."

"Why not leave off some of the articles?" Nat asked cheerily. "I'd be willing to get along almost any way for the sake of running the Restless from here to the St. Lawrence River. I'm sorry you have been waiting, but it hasn't been ten minutes since father consented to the scheme. He doesn't think a naphtha boat is safe."

"If he took a run down the river in this one I fancy he would think differently. Since he has consented, however, let's attend to the outfit at once, in order to start to-morrow if possible, for everything depends upon how much we can buy for a hundred dollars."

"Where is the list?"

"Here; and we are going to Wanamaker's first. In case of a failure there, we will strike out the tent and fishing material, although I dislike to go without them."

The boys lost no time in deciding the important question. Upon arriving at the store they set about pricing each particular thing needed, a method which might have prolonged this portion of the task until all three were discouraged, and but a small assortment had been selected, when one of the salesmen said:

"I've been on such cruises myself, therefore have a pretty good idea of what will be actually needed. Give me the list and I promise to select such an outfit as will be necessary, without exceeding your limit."

"We're making a dismal failure of the job," Phil replied, with a sigh of relief, "and unless you succeed, the scheme of a long voyage will fall through, for three fellows can't get through without considerable stuff."

Half an hour later the sympathetic clerk handed them a bill, in which nothing essential had been omitted, and a number of necessary articles were added, the whole forming a very complete sea and shore equipment; but yet the total cost was nearly twelve dollars less than the amount specified.

"That will help us out on the tender we want to buy," Phil said in a tone of satisfaction, as he glanced over the items; and then he produced an order from the firm of Gilman & Baker, authorizing the delivery of the outfit on board the yacht Restless.

The work of provisioning the craft was to be performed by Mr. Gilman himself, therefore the boys had nothing more to do but receive and stow away the goods, a task which was not finished until late that evening.

A space of about three feet long directly abaft the cabin and forward of the engine was to be used as a kitchen, and here the cooking utensils were packed in a locker. The tent, cot beds and hammocks were stored in the standing room, while the remainder of the outfit, together with the wardrobe, was distributed among the many receptacles in the cabin. The extreme bow was occupied by the oil tank, therefore it became necessary to put the provisions wherever they could best be kept clean and dry.

Both Philip and Harry owned double-barreled fowling pieces, and, as a matter of course, these, together with a generous supply of ammunition, were added to the outfit.

It was not until ten o'clock on Friday morning that all the preparations were completed, and the boys wanted to begin the cruise at once, paying but little attention to the warnings of an old shipmaster who contended that it was "unlucky" to weigh anchor on that day.

"Better hold over till Monday," he said, with a prophetic shake of the head. "I've known more trouble to come of a Friday sailin' than could be told in a year's time. When I was in the China trade we left Hong Kong..."

The boys left the would-be story-teller just as he was "clearing deck for action," because time was too valuable just then to be wasted listening to yarns. Their belongings were all on board the Restless, and there appeared to be no good reason why even an hour should be spent in any other manner than journeying toward the proposed destination.

"If you really want to leave port on what sailors call an unlucky day, I see no particular argument against it." Mr. Gilman said, in reply to Phil's urgent request that they be allowed to depart without loss of time. "Who is to be captain?"

"Phil," Harry and Nat replied in chorus,

"Then it shall be as he says. And now, in case of any trouble, remember that it is better to follow one poor plan to the end rather than half execute three thoroughly good ones. Obey orders until the majority are firmly convinced that

the safety of all demands a change, when you are at liberty to depose the leader. In event of dissensions, and some will arise before the voyage of four months is ended, consult with us at home before proceeding to extreme measures, unless the matter should be so urgent that there is no time to be lost. You are almost men and, I believe, can govern yourselves; consequently there is nothing more for me to say. If the captain believes it is well to begin the cruise in defiance of all superstition, I will make no objection, since you are the ones who must gain or lose by the result.”

The boys hesitated no longer. In anticipation of leaving port on this morning, all the good-byes had been spoken, and it only remained to take leave of Mr. Gilman, who represented Messrs. Baker and Hinkle in the matter of attending to the details of the voyage.

As a common fund the young yachtsmen had one hundred dollars, and after this had been paid to them by Gilman & Baker’s book-keeper, they went on board the Restless, which was dancing about on the swell caused by a ferryboat as if to prove her right to the name.

The city clocks were striking the hour of twelve when the hawsers were finally cast off, and under full pressure of naphtha vapor the yacht left her dock, bound for the St. Lawrence River and beyond.

There was no attempt made to “speed” the little craft during the run up the river; it was sufficient for the voyagers that they were under way, and the yacht steamed leisurely on until Bordentown was reached late in the afternoon. Here she was made fast at the most convenient point for entering the canal at an early hour next morning, and the boys set about prepping their first meal on shipboard.

The alcohol stove worked like a charm, and Nat, who had assumed the duties of cook, declared that it would be no more than sport to provide the party with three “square” meals each day. When the time for washing the dishes arrived, however, his position did not appear quite so pleasant, and but for the assistance rendered by the other members of the crew, his labors would have been prolonged until a very late hour in the evening.

Tired though the boys were, sleep did not come at their bidding. The novelty of the situation was sufficient to keep all eyes open until past midnight, and when they awakened next morning the fleet of boats which had arrived during the

evening were being hauled toward the lock, the captain of each doing his best to get in first.

“We can’t stop for breakfast now,” Phil said as he made a hurried toilet. “If we wait for all these clumsy crafts to go through, it will be nine o’clock before it is possible to get under way.”

Harry went on shore to pay the toll of ten dollars while Phil and Nat warped the Restless toward the lock, it not being deemed advisable to start the engine until she was inside the gates.

Until this moment the yacht’s captain had not fancied there could be any difficulty in navigating his craft on a canal; but as the lock tenders insisted on his pulling the little boat between two unwieldy barges, either one of which would have crushed her like an egg shell had it swung down upon her, he began to have serious misgivings as to the chances of reaching New York without an accident. It was useless to shout to those near by, for not a man paid the slightest attention to his fears, and when the water was let in, the huge hulks swayed from side to side with many a resounding bump against the light timbers of the yacht.

“Phil, you and Nat stand by with the fenders while I get up steam so that we’ll have a show of slipping past these boats at the first opportunity. Keep your eyes open, for if they jam us too hard this cruise will be ended before it has really begun.”

“If they swing in toward us, it’s precious little we can do to prevent it,” Nat said apprehensively, and then he shouted to the skipper of the nearest boat:

“Can’t you take in the slack of that bow line? Our craft won’t stand much of this kind of squeezing.”

“That’s your lookout,” the man replied gruffly, and in a manner which proclaimed unmistakably the fact that with him it had been “two pulls at the whisky flask and one on the hawsers,” while the crew of the other boat appeared to think the request very comical.

“There won’t be anything to laugh about if you stave two or three timbers for us,” Phil called out sharply.

“Why didn’t you stay back till the big boats got through, if you’re so much

afraid?”

“Because we had the right to come in ahead of the others,” Phil replied angrily, and after assuring himself that there was no immediate danger, he turned once more to the engine.

Meanwhile the canal boatmen were making preparations for leaving the lock, and the crew of the Restless were so busily engaged in caring for their craft that neither took note of the fact that the men had passed a tow line directly under the yacht’s stern.

The one great advantage of naphtha for both fuel and power is the celerity with which the necessary pressure can be obtained. Before the gates of the lock were opened Phil had everything in readiness for the start, and calling Harry to stand by the engine, he went to the wheel.

Once the barriers were opened, the skippers of both barges were eager to get out; the lock tender shouted for Phil to go ahead in order that the steamer waiting in the canal might enter without loss of time, and every one in the vicinity seemed to think it necessary he should add to the general din by shouting at the full strength of his lungs,

Phil rang the bell for the engineer to open the injector, and the Restless darted forward, as if rejoicing at escaping from such undesirable company.

She had hardly cleared the gates, and the freight steamer outside was heading directly for her, when the onward motion suddenly ceased, even though the screw continued to revolve at full speed. At the same time it appeared as if a series of heavy blows were dealt the hull, causing the little craft to quiver from stem to stern.

“Hold on!” Harry shouted frantically. “The screw has caught up the canal-boat’s tow line, and you’ll have the timbers stove if the propeller isn’t stopped!”

“Close the injector!” Phil cried. “You are handling the engine, not me.”

For a few seconds it seemed as if the Restless would come to grief between the steamer and the barges, for her crew had “lost their heads,” and the end of the tow line was beating against the hull with a force that could be felt very perceptibly.

It was Nat who proved himself to be a valuable member of the party in such an emergency. While Phil and Harry were shouting to each other, he dropped the fender, ran aft and closed the injector, shut off the supply, and reached the bow again in time to do his share toward averting the impending collision.

During these few seconds the unwieldy boat, propelled by two-mule power, had forged out of the lock, and was now pulling the Restless around stern foremost, while a chorus of cries from the loungers or boatmen in the immediate vicinity, as each gave orders at the same time to the nearly bewildered boys, only served to make the confusion greater.

“Cut the rope!” Phil shouted as he did his best to push the yacht’s bow from the steamer, and the boatman who was the cause of all the trouble cried angrily:

“I’ll knock the head off the first one who puts a knife to that tow line! I don’t count on buyin’ sich things for every greenhorn who comes along to whittle.”

“If you’d kept it where it belonged, there wouldn’t have been any trouble,” Nat retorted. “Now that our screw has picked it up through your own foolishness I’ll use a knife or something, so take good care not to be in the way.”

It appeared very much as if there would be a rough and tumble fight, for the skipper of the boat, having armed himself with a stout club, was preparing to leap on board the Restless; but the impatience of those in the rear caused them to insist that something definite should be done without delay, and Nat had plenty of assistance in his work of severing the rope.

The little craft had been released none too soon; already was the steamer crowding down upon the second boat, and in a few seconds the result might have been disastrous.

The drunken captain was using very forcible language as he threatened Nat, and the latter, believing discretion to be the better part of valor, started the engine once more.

Fortunately Phil had not left the wheel, and after describing a full circle at the expense of rubbing in a very unpleasant manner over the shallow side of the canal, the Restless darted ahead with the end of the tow line thumping and pounding against the counter in a manner which told of serious damage to be inflicted in case the obstruction was not speedily removed.

“We can’t stop here, or the whole fleet will be on top of us,” Phil said, in reply to Harry’s proposition to shut off the steam. “It is against the rules to tie up at a bulkhead, so we shall have to run until we come to a basin, and if the timbers are stove we can’t help it. Slow down a little, Nat, so’s to make it as easy for her as possible.”

The cook obeyed orders; but the thumping was not decreased materially, and the crew of the *Restless* felt quite positive she would not long be in condition to continue the voyage.

CHAPTER II.

UNPLEASANT NEIGHBORS.

CRIPPLED though the yacht was, the boys found no difficulty in keeping ahead of the slowly moving fleet of laden boats, and after what seemed a very long while the *Restless* arrived at the little settlement known as Baker’s Basin, so called because of the pond-like body of water which leads from the canal.

“It’s a case of going overboard to cut the rope from the screw,” Phil said, as he gave the signal to stop. “By opening this draw we can get in out of the way of other boats until such time as we are ready to continue the journey.”

None of the villagers were in sight; but the boys knew there would be no offense given by helping themselves, under the circumstances, and in a few moments the yacht was moored inside the towpath, at the rear of a small storehouse.

There was no particular necessity to set about the work at once, and all three made preparations for an elaborate breakfast, the unusual and early exercise having whetted their appetites until an ordinary amount of food seemed all too small to allay their hunger.

With but one stove, and that a small one, considerable time was required for the ordinary operations, therefore it was nearly noon before this very important portion of the day’s duties had been finished.

“If you’ll put the food away, Nat, and wash the dishes, Harry and I will try our luck on the screw. We must undress, of course, and I reckon it will be a cold job before we’re through. You see...”

At that moment a rough-looking man came down the towpath, and, observing the yacht, turned in at the basin as if to make a social call.

He nodded familiarly, surveyed the Restless critically, and then said in a whining tone, as he stepped aboard without waiting for the formality of an invitation:

“Say, boys, can’t you give a feller some of that ‘ere grub? I’m a carpenter who has been on the tramp for a job, an’ it’s a good many days since I’ve seen such a layout as you’ve got there.”

He was not the sort of a person any of the boys would have cared to be brought into very close contact with; yet as he had asked only for food, no one wanted to refuse him, and Phil replied:

“You are welcome to what you need.”

“Now that’s what I call generous,” the man said, with a coarse laugh, and, instead of taking the food ashore, as Phil had supposed would be the case, he seated himself at the folding table in the standing room, beginning the meal in a provokingly leisurely manner.

Harry was about to make an angry protest, but Phil checked him with a gesture, and said:

“Let’s get at the work. Nat will attend to matters here,” and when they were in the cabin, he whispered: “He’s going it rather strong, but we won’t spoil his dinner by acting as if we thought he wasn’t good enough to be allowed on board.”

“If we are to run a floating restaurant for tramps, I suppose it’s all right; but in the future they must be content to have their meals ashore.”

After this slight exhibition of temper he undressed himself, and in five minutes later the undesirable guest was almost forgotten as he and Phil stood in the water to their chins, discussing the best means of getting at the offending rope.

Both had sharp knives, and each in turn dove beneath the surface to work as long as possible at the manilla hawser, which was wound around the shaft so tightly as to be nearly as hard as metal. They could remain under water but sixty or seventy seconds at a time, and the work progressed very slowly, only two or

three threads being brought up at each laborious effort.

“At this rate we shan’t get through before sunset, and won’t reach New York until to-morrow morning,” Harry said, as he stopped for a moment to rest.

“You can’t get out of the canal after ten o’clock to night on account of to-morrow’s bein’ Sunday,” a voice cried from the deck and looking up, the boys saw their unbidden guest seated comfortably on one of the forward lockers, filling a short black pipe, with the air of one who intends to extract the greatest possible amount of enjoyment from his surroundings.

The announcement that they would be forced to remain in that, or some other equally undesirable place for thirty-six hours, prevented Phil from paying any attention to the free and easy manners of their guest, and he asked in dismay:

“Isn’t it possible under any circumstances to get through the locks after ten?”

“I don’t reckon the governor of this ‘ere State could do it, ‘cause them as tends the gate ain’t any more fond of workin’ than other folks, an’ they’re bound to knock off whenever the rules allow ‘em. This is a snug place for you, a good deal better’n can be found between here an’ Brunswick, so things ain’t so bad as they might be after all.”

“We could go back to Trenton,” Nat suggested. “It would be more pleasant staying there.”

“I don’t want to turn round after we have once started,” Phil replied after some thought. “If this is the worst hardship we shall run across during the cruise there won’t be much suffering,” and then looking up, as if noticing for the first time the occupation of their guest, he added, “See here, stranger, we don’t fill pipes at the same table we eat from, and if you feel like smoking there’s nothing to prevent your going ashore.”

“That’s all right, my boy. If I’d knowed you was so pertic’lar I’d a’ brought along some two for a dollar cigars; but as you say, there ain’t nothing to keep me aboard, an’ I’ll toddle on. Hope you won’t get lonesome betwixt now an’ Monday morning.”

Then he walked leisurely out to the towpath, nodding his adieux in a jaunty manner, and sauntered back in the direction from which he had come.

“It wouldn’t have done any harm if he’d thanked us for the five or six square meals he’s stowed away. There was enough on the table when he sat down for half a dozen hungry men, but it has all disappeared,” and Nat continued his work of washing the dishes.

Phil looked after the stranger an instant, and then said thoughtfully: “We won’t feel sorry for having given a hungry man something to eat. But we may as well hurry up this job, even if it is necessary to stay all night, for the water chills a fellow through and through.”

From this time until late in the afternoon the boys worked with a will, Nat doing his share after the cook’s duties had been performed, and not until then was the hawser entirely removed.

There was no possibility of getting through the canal before ten o’clock, and they settled down with a certain degree of patience to the fact that the enforced halt could not be avoided.

A supper of ship’s biscuit, potted meats and hot tea was easily prepared, and after it had been disposed of they made themselves comfortable in the cabin. Harry urged that the tent be set up in order to try the experiment of shore living; but both Phil and Nat were opposed to it because of the extra amount of labor involved, and the probability that their stay would be short. The cabin lockers could be lengthened by means of a sliding shelf until they formed reasonably roomy beds, and before nine o’clock these were called into service, for all hands were thoroughly tired.

It seemed to Phil as if he had but just fallen asleep when the motion of the yacht aroused him, and before his eyes were fairly opened the sound of voices came from the standing room.

“There’s only three of ‘em on board, I tell you, an’ we can bluff them into setting up whatever we want,” he heard someone say in cautious yet familiar tones. “If we work the thing right there’s nothin’ to prevent our travelin’ like swells from here to Brunswick.”

For a few moments Phil was literally bewildered, and then like a flash of light came the knowledge of where he had heard that voice before.

“It’s the tramp whom we fed,” he said to himself, “and it begins to look as if we

might have a little trouble.”

The fowling pieces were in the locker upon which Nat was sleeping, therefore it was necessary to waken his companions before it would be possible to prepare for any offensive measures, and to this end he stole softly across the cabin with the intention of covering the cook’s mouth to prevent any word that might tell the intruders their presence had been discovered.

In doing this, however, he made the fatal mistake of passing his hand from the sleeper’s forehead down, and before Phil could prevent him Nat started to his feet, crying loudly:

“What’s the matter? Who are you?”

Phil hurriedly began to explain matters when the tramp replied, evidently believing the question had been addressed to him:

“Don’t get skeered; it’s only me — the friend what took dinner with you this noon. I was kinder ‘fraid some of these ‘ere reckless fellers might make trouble, so I come to see if things was all right.”

As he spoke he pushed back the sliding door, which the boys had not thought it was necessary to lock, and walked boldly in.

“Look here!” Phil cried angrily. “We’ve had enough of this, and I’ll give you two minutes in which to get on shore!”

“Don’t get excited, my boy; I’m here to spend the night with you in a sociable manner, an’ this ain’t the right way to treat a friend,” the intruder replied, as he seated himself on the locker just vacated by Nat.

Phil’s first thought was to grapple with the man and, by the aid of his companions, throw him out bodily; but before he could make the first move toward carrying this into execution two other men entered the little cabin, filling it rather more than comfortably full, and by this very contraction of space preventing the young yachtsman from making an attack.

Neither Harry nor Nat had spoken; the former stood near the after door, trying to decide upon some plan of action, while the latter began lighting the cabin lamps, a very necessary proceeding, whatever course might be adopted.

Even if Phil had not overheard the fragment of conversation from the standing room, he could have told by the actions of the men exactly what they proposed to do. All three had seated themselves on the lockers as if to show their determination to remain aboard, and to prove how thoroughly he felt at home, the spokesman deliberately lighted his pipe.

“I’m ‘fraid you boys ain’t overly glad to see us,” the tramp said, as he began to puff great volumes of smoke, filling the cabin so full of the noxious vapor that it was with difficulty one could discern objects at the opposite end. “It’s only your good that we’ve come for, an’ the least that can be done is to give these gents, who are partic’lar friends of mine, a bite of something to eat.”

“If there is a constable in town I will give you free lodgings!” Phil cried, no longer able to control his anger.

“Well, seein’s how there ain’t anything of the kind this side of Trenton, I reckon it’ll be better to treat us somewhere near civil, an’ then there won’t be any hard feelin’s on our part.”

“Do you intend to leave this boat?” Harry asked, in a voice trembling with rage.

“Of course we don’t, after takin’ so much trouble to get here. Now listen to me,” and the man changed his tone of pleasantry for one of anger: “We’ve come to stay till this craft reaches Brunswick, whether our company’s agreeable or not. If there’s any kickin’ you may be the ones who’ll have to go ashore, so the least you say an’ the better we’re treated, the easier matters will be for all hands. Now fetch out something to eat.”

The anger which the boys felt could not blind them to the fact that resistance would be useless while they were without weapons, and after a brief pause Phil replied, in a tone of apparent submission:

“You ate all the cooked food we had. It seems rather rough to be ordered around in this way aboard our own craft; but since we can’t help ourselves I suppose it will be necessary to prepare supper for you gentlemen.”

“Now you’re talkin’ sense, young feller. Treat us square an’ you won’t find three more sociable men in the country; but once our hair is rubbed the wrong way there’s no holdin’ us.”

The tramp grinned as he spoke, probably thinking himself a very witty fellow, and Harry whispered to Phil:

“Are you going to obey that gang?”

“Keep close to me, and be ready to follow my example when the time comes,” Phil replied, as he opened one of the upright lockers to get the dishes. Then he added to Nat, “bring out some of the potted meat, and help set the table.”

“We’ll tend to that part of it,” the spokesman of the tramps said, quickly. “Pass the grub to me, an’ I’ll see that it’s put where my friends can get at it handy like.”

“It will be necessary to eat in the standing room in order to admit of putting up the stove here where the wind won’t extinguish the flame,” and Phil produced the yacht’s cooking apparatus, placing it directly in the corner of the cabin.

Meanwhile Nat, warned by a peculiar look from his friend, began to take from the port locker the choicest of their provisions.

The tramps waited until Phil lighted the alcohol stove, and was breaking eggs as if to make an omelette, after which they went forward where the folding table was yet standing, the two strangers beginning their meal by devouring several biscuits plentifully covered with butter.

Phil continued his duties of cook until the men were seated, and then, with a meaning look at his companions, he said sharply:

“Nat, get the bacon from the starboard locker.”

Before the order could be obeyed he raised the mattress which covered it, opened the cover, and leaned over as if searching for something.

It was hardly a moment that he was thus occupied, and on standing erect once more his fowling-piece was this shoulder with both hammers cocked.

“I will put two bullets into the first man who takes a step in this direction!” he cried, “and there will be one or two more dead tramps in this place if you are not on shore before I count ten!”

“Don’t give them so long as that!” Harry shouted, as he also appeared at the door with his weapon ready for immediate use. “Shoot first and order them away afterward.”

This was a change in the aspect of affairs for which the unbidden guests were not prepared. There could be no doubt in their minds but the boys would do exactly as they threatened, for the law would uphold them in such a course, and they scrambled ashore in a hasty manner, tumbling over each other in their anxiety to get beyond range of the unfriendly-looking weapons.

No halt was made by the departing visitors until their precious bodies were hidden behind the storehouse, and then Phil said, with great emphasis, as he stepped into the standing room to guard against a possible attack:

“This serves us right for keeping guns in the locker where they can’t be got at in time of need. That first tramp didn’t see any guns around, so he concluded we were unarmed; and if he had been smart enough to stay where he first sat we’d been forced to dance to his piping.”

“But what are we to do now?” Nat asked. “I don’t believe they will give in so easily.”

“Get the hawsers inboard and we’ll pull out into the middle of the basin, where there’ll be no danger they can set the yacht on fire.”

“Why not raise steam and run down the canal to the next lock?”

“Because we should be no better off so far as assistance from the shore is concerned; and, besides, they could make it uncomfortably warm for us from either bank.”

The force of this argument was apparent to all, and the Restless was soon anchored in the basin twenty feet from the shore, while her crew, none of whom felt very much like sleep just then, remained on the alert for the slightest suspicious sound.

CHAPTER III.

DIFFICULT NAVIGATION.

THERE was sufficient light to enable the boys to see surrounding objects quite distinctly, and they kept their eyes fixed upon that portion of the canal lying in the immediate vicinity of the storehouse.

Nearly an hour had passed, and Nat was beginning to think it might be as well for him to take “forty winks” or more while everything was quiet, when Harry whispered:

“I can see one of the gang. He just came around from the corner of the building, and is now hidden by the deep shadow on this side.”

Even as he spoke the other two tramps appeared in view for an instant as they crept toward the bank of the basin in such a stealthy manner that there could be no doubt but that they meditated mischief.

“There is a chance those fellows may be thinking of swimming across, with the belief it will be possible to get on board without our knowledge. Go aft, Harry, while I watch here, and Nat walks back and forth to make sure we’re both attending to business.”

After another long time of waiting, during which not a sound was heard, the tramps came out of cover, and walked down the towpath in the direction of New Brunswick.

“I guess they’ve come to the conclusion that it is no use to try to catch us napping; but we won’t run any risks. One shall sleep an hour while the other two watch; and by that means we’ll be on duty only a couple of hours apiece. You take the first trick below, Nat, and Harry shall have the second.”

In the absence of any immediate danger it is not difficult for one to close his eyes in slumber after a hard day’s work, and the cook did not waste many moments lying awake.

From this time until sunrise the utmost vigilance was maintained, but there was no sign of the enemy. The tramps had disappeared; but since it was quite possible they might return with an increased force, the yachtsmen did not feel secure.

After breakfast had been served the same rule was observed in regard to guard duty; and at no moment during the twenty-four long hours which followed was

the Restless without two sentinels.

“We’ve made what might be called a bad beginning,” Nat said, as he awakened Phil a few moments before sunrise on Monday morning, “and if this thing comes from our having started on Friday morning, the sooner we turn around and try it over again, the more certain we’ll be of ever seeing the St. Lawrence River.”

“We won’t act quite so foolishly as that,” Phil replied laughingly. “After the yacht is in the canal once more you set about getting breakfast, while Harry and I run the craft.”

“We may meet those very particular friends of ours who want to make the trip to New Brunswick.”

“If we do, both guns will be where we can use them, and I’ll answer for it that no one gets on board without our full permission.”

After this no delay in continuing the journey was made; it required fully half an hour’s hard work to get the little craft out of the basin, and then as Nat set about cooking breakfast the Restless darted down the canal, as if rejoiced at having her liberty.

Several times during a run of six miles did Harry fancy he saw their old enemies; but on each occasion the alarm proved to be without foundation, and after breakfast had been eaten in the standing room while Phil remained at the wheel, they congratulated themselves on having finally escaped from such unpleasant acquaintances.

“We are getting so near the end of the canal, and there are so many boats around that they don’t dare to make any — Hello! who’s that?”

As he spoke he pointed toward the towpath, where a boy of seventeen or eighteen stood beckoning frantically for them to steer nearer the bank.

“To judge by his clothes he must be a tramp, too,” Harry said in a whisper. “Perhaps he’s one of the gang we’ve been watching for, and is trying to get us in where the others can jump aboard.”

“They can’t think we’re such fools as to give them a chance to try that game, no matter how near they were to the path,” Phil replied. “Let us find out what he

wants.”

“Don’t do it. There’s no sense in taking any risks, and, besides, we’ve shown all the charity we can afford to at this end of the trip.”

Phil did not heed his friend’s remonstrances. At this point the canal was unusually wide, and he gave the yacht a sheer which sent her within a few feet of the path, Harry standing with his gun raised expecting each instant to see the three men.

“It will serve us right if we get into a regular row,” he muttered, and before any reply could be made to the remark the stranger asked, as he stood on the very edge of the bank:

“Won’t you give a fellow a lift for a few miles? I’ll do all I can to earn my passage. It’s mighty hard, slow work tramping along the path on a hot day like this.”

“Where are you bound?” Phil asked, as he gave the word to slow down, for the stranger was now forced to run at full speed in order to keep within speaking distance.

“To New York, where I count on getting work enough so’s I can buy a railroad ticket to Watertown, in the northern part of the State, where my people live.”

“Shall we do it?” Phil asked, as he signaled for Nat to stop the engine entirely.

“I don’t fancy picking up any and everybody we may meet,” Harry replied. “It seems rather fishy for him to be begging a passage on a canal if his parents live within reach of the postal service.”

The stranger must have heard the last portion of Harry’s remark, for he said earnestly:

“I know things look against me, and you are not to be blamed for believing I’m a regular tramp; but that isn’t true. Six weeks ago I ran away from home rather than work on a farm, and I would walk every step of the way back rather than ask father for money with which to come back. When I do get there, though, you can bet I’ll stay till I see a sure chance of earning a living in the city.”

“How far have you traveled?” Phil asked.

“From Philadelphia. That was the place I struck for when I ran away, and during five weeks I’ve been hunting a job, but couldn’t get one. When my money gave out there was nothing to be done but take a trip on Shank’s mare, and I followed along the canal in the hope of getting a chance now and then on some of the boats; but so far I haven’t had much luck. If you only take me as far as New Brunswick it will be a big favor, and perhaps I can scrub the decks or the cabin to pay for the passage.”

“Oh, take the poor fellow in,” Nat said in a low tone. “He surely can’t do us any harm, and it seems selfish to say no when it’s only a question of giving him a chance to sit down.”

Harry had nothing to say. He was more suspicious than the others but no less generous, and construing his silence as consent, Phil said, passing a line ashore:

“Pull her bow in till you can jump aboard, and we’ll land you in New York if nothing breaks.”

There was no delay on the part of the stranger; it seemed as if Phil had hardly ceased speaking before he obeyed, and once more the Restless glided on towards her rather vague destination.

The stranger introduced himself as “Jim Powell,” and, this formality over, was about to make his promise good by scrubbing the floor of the standing room when Phil checked him by saying:

“There’s no necessity of doing that until we get into port. Have you seen three tramps anywhere around here!”

“Three? I’ve seen fifty,” was the laughing reply. “There are places where it seems as if the tow path was actually crowded with them. It is — say, can it be that you are the ones I heard a party of men talking about last night?”

“I shouldn’t wonder; we had a visit from some Saturday night while lying at Baker’s Basin.”

“Then I can tell you something interesting. There are five who count on doing considerable damage to your craft about three miles further down. They were

laying plans to pelt the yacht with rocks, and if any of you were hurt there might be a chance to get on board.”

“Do you have any idea of where they will be?”

“None, except that it was at a point below here where there are plenty of trees to shelter them. By dropping the windows and running at full speed whenever we come to such a place there couldn’t be a very great amount of damage done.”

“You’re right. Harry, pull one of the mattresses aft to cover you on the port side, and stand by the engine in case it should be necessary to stop suddenly. Nat, you and Jim lower the windows, and then bring anything here which will shield me.”

These orders were obeyed in the shortest possible space of time, and the yacht had a vague resemblance to a blockade runner as she dashed on with a quantity of bedding and the tent shielding the wheel on the port bow, and a similar barricade aft. Every window was open, and such things in the cabin as might be broken, were placed on the floor under the lee of the lockers. The engine was running at full speed, and Harry lay close beside the rail, protected by a mattress.

“We are coming to a piece of woods!” Phil shouted as the Restless began to turn a slight bend in the canal. “Nat, you and Jim get into the cabin out of the way!”

The little craft was running so rapidly that but few seconds elapsed from the time the words were spoken until she was opposite the place referred to, and the boys had but just thrown themselves on the cabin floor when a perfect shower of missiles came from the grove.

Had the Restless been near the bank, or running at ordinary speed, as would have been the case but for Jim’s warning, the plot must certainly have succeeded. Under the circumstances, however, the only damage done was to the glossy paint which had been scratched in a dozen places. Four heavy rocks entered the cabin; one passing entirely through, and the others falling harmlessly on the floor.

“We’re well out of that scrape!” Harry exclaimed as he came forward after shutting off some of the oil supply to prevent the yacht from making such time as was against the rules of the waterway. “It’s mighty lucky we were prepared for them.”

“You’re right!” Phil replied emphatically, “and we have to thank Jim for the

warning.”

From that moment the repentant runaway was treated as a friend rather than a stranger, and Phil began to think seriously of inviting him to remain on board until the yacht arrived at his home, for it would be necessary to pass through Watertown before reaching the St. Lawrence.

The unavoidable delay at the last lock, and the tortuous course of the Raritan River, so far prolonged the voyage that instead of making fast to a dock in New York City that evening as he had anticipated, the yacht came to an anchor off Staten Island.

As a cook for a small party Jim was an unqualified success, and before the first meal at which he assisted had been prepared, Nat willingly reduced himself to the rank of “helper.”

Now that there were four, the crew was divided into two distinct watches, Phil and Harry standing the first trick; and it can readily be understood that all hands were on the alert until it was sufficiently light to permit of their running up the harbor, where at eight o'clock the yacht was made fast to a pier near Chambers Street Ferry.

“We may as well stay here one day and see the town,” Phil said while they were engaged in “cleaning ship”; “and in the morning we’ll make an early start.”

“I’ll try for a job as soon as this work is done,” Jim added in a tone which showed he had no idea that he was to be allowed to remain on board any longer; “and I hope you fellows won’t run afoul of another crowd of tramps; but in case ___”

“Look! Look there!” Nat shouted, pointing toward the head of the pier where a tugboat was backing in as a heavy barge loaded with hay was being swung around by the current while trying to make fast to the end of the dock. “There’s going to be a collision unless—”

The crash came before he could finish the sentence. As the steamer stood motionless for an instant when the screw was reversed that she might shoot ahead, the heavily loaded vessel struck her on the port side amidships, crushing the timbers and planking, and literally riding up on the hull until it seemed certain the tug would be swamped.

Nothing could be done to avert the catastrophe, and, believing the least delay would be fatal, the crew scrambled over the shattered rail on to the bow of the craft which was doing so much mischief. The engineer was the last to reach the deck, and then the vessel had rebounded, as it were, being so far away that the frightened man was forced to leap into the water.

The danger had appeared to be so imminent that no one thought of anything save his own safety, and the engine, which an instant before was started at full speed, now forced the tug ahead swiftly, while the momentum caused her to right almost immediately. Instead of being in a sinking condition, she was apparently all right, and under a full pressure of steam darted out into the stream, threatening destruction to everything in her erratic path.

A brig, which was being towed down the river, received the first blow, and was pulled toward the opposite shore, evidently in a sinking state, while the force of the collision shifted the tug's helm, causing her to head toward the point from which she had just come,

As a matter of course, the boys were watching the career of the wild steamer; but no one thought of the possibility the Restless might be in danger until the tug was within an hundred feet of the pier, coming at full speed directly for the little yacht.

CHAPTER IV.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

THERE was something particularly terrifying in the appearance of the tug as she dashed through the water, controlled only by the mighty power of steam which was urging her on an errand of destruction, and three of the boys aboard the Restless stood gazing at her as if fascinated by the peculiar danger.

Jim was the only member of the party who preserved the least semblance of control over his fears. The others had abandoned all hope of saving their yacht and stood on the port side ready to leap aboard the steamer at the first crash; but just at that moment the former's one thought was regarding the possible safety of the little craft by means of which he had been spared so many weary miles of walking.

There was not even time to cast off the stern hawser, because in order to do that

it would be necessary to traverse the length of the yacht; but he let go the forward rope, and at the instant when it seemed as if the runaway tug was upon the smaller boat he gave a vigorous push, sending the bow of the Restless away from the pier barely a second before the steamer struck.

Had the blow been full amidships the yacht would have been cut down in the merest fraction of time; but Jim succeeded in giving her so much sheer that the huge cutwater glanced past, sending her yet further away, and the pier actually shook under the shock as the tug struck head on, recoiling several feet, when, with another shift of the helm, she dashed up the dock where half a dozen vessels and barges were moored.

The blow on the yacht's rail was sufficient to send Jim backward into the water, while the swell from the powerful screw dashed him to and fro among the piling, in imminent danger of being crushed to death.

The crew of the yacht, bewildered quite as much by their narrow escape as by the tossing and plunging of the boat, had no idea of the boy's peril, but stood gazing at the scene of destruction as the tug battered first one craft and then another, without a single thought of him who had probably saved their lives.

It was the engineer of the tug, himself just saved from drowning, to whom Jim was indebted for his rescue. The man rushed toward the Restless when his craft was first headed that way, probably thinking he could leap from the yacht to her deck, and he reached the edge of the wharf a moment after Jim was thrown into the water.

"Ahoy on the yacht!" he shouted. "Can't you see that one of your crew is likely to drown if you don't stop gaping at them vessels, an' do something to help him?"

Having thus attracted the boys' attention to their comrade's peril he ran at full speed toward the scene of confusion, and it can readily be fancied that the owners of the Restless stopped "gaping."

Jim was swimming the best he knew how toward the boat; but, hampered as he was by his clothes, made very little headway.

The bow hawser was trailing in the water, and this Phil hauled aboard, throwing one end to Jim at the instant that two other tugs, coming to catch the runaway,

entered the dock. So excited were all hands that it was possible he might have been run down but for the fact of his getting a firm clutch of the rope at the first attempt, the boys literally pulling him from beneath the very bow of the foremost steamer.

“That was a narrow squeak,” Jim stammered as he clambered over the rail, so nearly exhausted that he made no effort to rise to his feet, but lay at full length on the deck.

“Why didn’t you yell?” Phil asked sternly. “You would surely have been run down by those tugs if a man hadn’t told us you were in the water. We didn’t even know you had gone overboard.”

“I knew it,” Jim replied with a grimace. “I was just pushing the yacht out when the steamer struck us, and the blow sent me headlong, while the swell banged me about so much that there wasn’t breath enough left in my body to scream with.”

“This is the second time you have done us a good turn, and the Restless would be on the bottom now if you hadn’t been aboard. If you want to stay till we get to Watertown, or wish to finish the cruise with us, just say so. We’re ready to share anything we’ve got,” and Phil looked round at his companions as if to see what they thought of his hospitable proposition.

Harry nodded his head to show that he approved of admitting this new member to their party, and Nat said emphatically:

“An hour after he joined us I would have agreed to this same plan, and now it’s the very least we can do.”

“You won’t ever know how thankful I am, ‘cause it’s no use for me to try to find words to express it; but I’ll work so much that you can’t say I didn’t pay for what grub I ate.”

“You’ll do no more than each one of us; every fellow must perform a fair share,” Phil replied quickly; “but we can settle all that some other time. See them trying to catch the tug!”

The latter was doing a great amount of damage as she rammed first one and then another of the craft at the head of the dock, and no less than twenty men were trying to get on board of her, a matter which was extremely difficult owing to the

wild plunges back and forth across the narrow waterway. After a few moments, however, she forced herself nearly to the bulkhead, and, the helpless vessel now hemming her in, her rightful engineer succeeded in clambering aboard.

When the engines finally stopped she appeared to be quite as nearly a wreck as did those vessels she dashed into so viciously, and these looked as if they had been visited by a small-sized cyclone.

During the next hour confusion reigned in the vicinity of this particular dock, and there was such a coming and going of tugs, warping vessels from one side to the other, and so general a shifting of berths that Phil said solicitously:

“At this rate we shall soon be nearly as bad off as if the steamer had struck us. They are swinging these vessels around so recklessly that we will get a bad squeeze unless our quarters are shifted pretty soon.”

“Where can we go to?” Nat asked.

“Almost anywhere up the river. Perhaps it would be better to pull beyond the ferries.”

“If we are to get up steam why not keep on to Yonkers, or some other town on our road?” Harry asked.

“There is no especial reason why we should stop in this city, except to get a boat, and I fancy we can buy one as cheap almost anywhere.”

Neither member of the party was very anxious to go ashore, therefore Harry’s proposition was agreed to by all without discussion. A few strokes of the air pump, a lighted match applied to the supply of oil, two or three turns of the naphtha valve, half-a-dozen strokes of the second pump, and the Restless was ready to continue the journey so long as the supply of fuel should hold out.

With Phil at the helm, Harry near the engine, where he could slow down or stop her in case of danger, and the other members of the crew finishing the work of “cleaning ship,” she left the scene of destruction, dodging here and there to avoid clumsy barges, or stopping from time to time while the huge ferryboats crossed her bow, until the city had been left behind and it was nearly plain sailing again.

Jim was not idle a single moment of the run up the river. It seemed as if he did not consider that his services in saving the Restless from destruction entitled him to a passage home, but felt that it was necessary he should take upon himself all the work possible by way of payment.

More than once did the other boys insist on his trying to extract some enjoyment from the sail, but his answer was always the same:

“This isn’t anywhere near as hard as walking would be, and I’ll feel more comfortable in my mind if I keep on squaring accounts.”

“What you did this morning would have paid your way if the voyage should last twice as long as we propose to make it,” Phil replied gravely each time, but Jim never relaxed his efforts.

On reaching Yonkers the yacht was made fast for the night, even though it was early in the afternoon. The fresh provisions which they had proposed to buy in New York were to be purchased, and Phil thought it would be best to replenish the oil tank while there was ample opportunity.

To this end he and Harry went on shore, leaving Nat and Jim to “keep ship” and receive the goods which would be sent down.

The last mentioned member of the crew could no longer find any work to do, consequently this halt resolved itself into a long loafing time, which was enlivened by a visit from two men who came alongside in a rowboat. They were very curious regarding the destination of the Restless, the port from which she hailed, the length of time allotted for the cruise and, in fact, every item of information relative to the yacht and her owners.

These questions were not asked in an offensive manner, and Nat had no hesitation in giving his visitors the fullest particulars, even carrying his hospitality so far as to invite them on board for an inspection of the craft and her engine

After remaining nearly an hour, the men rowed to a small catboat at the next dock above, and in a short time the boys saw them set sail on their way up the river.

Neither Jim nor Nat thought there was anything strange in the curiosity which

had been displayed, and only spoke of the visit incidentally when the remainder of the crew came aboard.

“I suppose it would seem queer if we refused to answer ordinary questions, and probably we shall find a good many curious people before we get back,” Phil said, thoughtfully, when he heard of the visit; “but, at the same time, it isn’t well to tell strangers too much.”

Nothing further was said regarding the callers, for at that moment the stores began to arrive, and soon all hands were busy stowing them away.

When this work was finished, Phil proposed that Nat and Jim take a look at the town, but neither felt inclined for exercise, and the remainder of the day was spent in discussing the probable length of time before the prospective trip through the canal should be finished.

“There’s no use standing watch to-night,” Phil said, in reply to Harry’s question. “Lying so near the center of the city, with vessels all around us, we have nothing to fear, so it will be best to get what rest we can while there’s a chance.”

None of the crew were averse to retiring at an early hour, and, now that they were in a measure accustomed to their floating home, slumber visited them at the first summons.

It seemed to Phil as if he had been asleep several hours when he was awakened by the violent tossing and plunging of the yacht, and two or three minutes elapsed before he realized that such a condition of affairs was radically wrong.

He had but just begun to have a dim idea that danger of some kind threatened them, when the loud tooting of a steamboat whistle, mingled with shouts of command, caused him to spring to his feet in alarm.

“Turn out, fellows,” he cried. “A tug must be trying to come in alongside of us!”

An instant later, and before his companions were fairly awakened, he was in the standing room gazing around in perfect bewilderment.

Instead of being at the dock the Restless appeared to be at sea with vessels and steamers close aboard, the twinkling lights rising and falling in every direction. Dead ahead loomed up the enormous hull of a paddle-wheel boat, and from her

deck he heard the angry question:

“What’s the matter aboard that yacht? Are you anxious to be run down?”

It was several seconds before he could make any reply, and then he said, helplessly:

“We must have gone adrift. Where are we?”

“You’ll be at the bottom in about five minutes at this rate. Why don’t you get out of the way? Stand by to fend off; we can’t lay here all night!”

Then the engineer’s gong was heard; the huge wheels churned the water into foam, and the steamer bore directly down upon them.

By this time the remainder of the crew had come from the cabin, and Harry asked, in alarm:

“What has happened? That craft is going to run us down!”

“Get forward here, and push off as she comes!” Phil shouted. “We shall be under her wheels in an other moment unless something is done!”

Nat and Harry sprang to his assistance, but Jim delayed long enough to get one of the tent poles from beneath the locker. He had just raised it when the swirl of waters sent the yacht’s bow so far away from the steamer that the frightened boys could not reach the towering hull, and this change of position forced the stern around in a corresponding degree.

Anticipating this danger Jim had already started aft, and he arrived there just as it seemed certain the little craft would be sucked beneath the mighty wheels.

Now the tent pole was the most effective instrument he could have had. Launching one end against the stranger’s hull he set all his weight against it, shoving with an energy born of the knowledge of imminent peril, and this proved barely sufficient to send the Restless a few feet beyond the revolving paddies.

The yacht pitched and tossed upon the swell as if bent on going to the bottom, and then the big steamer passed, leaving the boys literally faint from the

consciousness of the great danger so narrowly escaped.

There was little time to congratulate each other; a dozen moving lights could be seen close at hand, and warning whistles came from out of the darkness as if the river was crowded with steam craft.

Only for a moment did Phil stand irresolute, and then he cried, running aft with all his speed:

“Help me start the engine and work quick. The next time it may not be possible to get out of the way. We’ve made an awfully tight squeak of it.”

The boys began to have a dim idea of what had caused the yacht to be in this dangerous position, and all hands worked with a will until there was sufficient pressure to move the screw, when Phil said to Harry, as, calling the others to join him, he went forward:

“Stay aft ready to stop or send her back at the first signal.”

No one had the slightest idea of what portion of the river they might be on; but it could be no more dangerous to go ahead than to lie still in the track of passing craft, and word was given to start the engine at half-speed.

“Keep a sharp lookout,” Phil said to Nat and Jim, “and at the same time you had better overhaul the hawsers ready to make fast if we are lucky enough to find a pier before morning.”

“There isn’t a single rope aboard!” Nat cried after a moment. “Even the anchors are gone!”

“Light the lanterns! Jim, you put up the signal-lights, that should have been done in the first place. I reckon there is good reason why the yacht went adrift.”

After these orders had been obeyed, and while the little steamer was running slowly toward the row of gaslights which told of the river front, an examination was made, and what was learned did not tend to make them very cheerful in mind.

Every movable thing outside the cabin was missing, with a few trifling exceptions, and there was not sufficient rope to make fast with upon their arrival

at the dock.

“Most likely these visitors of yours were the thieves,” Phil said, after a short pause. “They had a chance to see everything, knew we were green at the business of sailing, and made a good haul. The wind blows pretty fresh and we have been carried down the river to the point from which we started yesterday morning. That’s all there is to it, and perhaps after this we shall be more careful about inviting strangers aboard.”

“Do you think it is possible we are so far from Yonkers?” Jim asked in surprise.

“Certainly; it doesn’t require much study to tell us this city is New York, and,” he added, after looking at his watch, “it is nearly morning. The wind and current combined have brought us thus far, and the only wonder is that we were not run down two or three hours ago, for the yacht was probably set adrift at a reasonably early hour in the evening.”

“I don’t believe the men who came aboard at Yonkers are the thieves,” said Nat. “Besides, they seemed anxious to get up the river as soon as possible.”

“There was nothing to prevent them from coming back after dark,” Phil replied. “Now the important thing is to get into a dock, and as soon as daylight comes, we shall have to make such a big hole in our money buying things to replace those which have been stolen, that I fancy it will be necessary to get along without a tender.”

“We might send home for more,” Nat suggested.

“I wouldn’t like to let father know we have been such fools. At this rate it is only a question of time before some one steals our heads, and the least we say about the matter the less we shall be laughed at,”

During this conversation the Restless had been steadily drawing near the piers, and ten minutes later she was alongside a bulkhead, the boys making shift with the tent poles to hold her in position until a lot of new hawsers could be purchased.

CHAPTER V.

A BARGAIN.

WHILE waiting for the great city to awaken to the noise and tumult of another day, the boys had plenty of time in which to discuss the robbery, and although circumstances seemed to point to the visitors of the previous afternoon as the guilty parties, neither Nat nor Jim believed such was the fact.

The latter argued that it would not have been necessary for them to take the precaution of sailing up the river if they intended to commit the crime, and also that there was no reason why they should have put themselves in the way of future identification by coming aboard.

“They could see what was in the standing-room by going on the dock,” he said, “and it would have been foolish to run the risk of exciting our suspicion by asking the questions.”

“So long as there is precious little chance of ever catching them it doesn’t make much difference who they are. What interests us most just now is the fact that we must spend nearly all our money buying hawsers and anchors,” and Phil gave vent to a long-drawn sigh, “In addition to getting on without a tender, we must be very economical in the way of provisions, or we shall be on short allowances before leaving the canal.”

Then Phil made a careful estimate of such articles as it was absolutely necessary they should have, and by the time it had been finished the day was so far advanced that he could make the purchases.

Not until twelve o’clock were they ready to leave the dock, and once more was the Restless in condition to continue the voyage, while the treasury had been sadly depleted.

The yachtsmen were not in particularly high spirits when the little craft’s bow was again pointed up the Hudson. All realized fully that so far they had been very careless, and when the snarl of ferryboats and tugs was passed, thus giving an opportunity for the entire crew to be forward, Phil said emphatically:

“There’s one thing certain, we shan’t have any more trouble because of not standing watch, for two shall be on duty every moment, even if we are forty miles from a human being. After going to sleep once, allowing thieves to do as they pleased, we ought to learn part of the lesson.”

There was no chance for an argument on this score, for every member of the

crew shared his opinion, and after scolding themselves roundly, all hands so far recovered their usual spirits as to be able to enjoy the charming sail on that most beautiful river.

By running until a late hour in the evening they arrived at Tarrytown without further misadventures, and the yacht was made fast to a pier, her crew being so tired that the only pretence at “cleaning up” was by Jim while standing his portion of the watch during the night.

Here it might have been well if all hands had enjoyed their well-earned rest, for not even a visitor troubled them, and at daylight next morning the journey was resumed, Jim cooking breakfast while Phil steered and the others washed down the decks.

This run ended at Poughkeepsie, for the boys had no idea of pushing the little boat to her utmost speed, and there was no particular event to mark it, save that Jim made a fish chowder which his companions thought the most delicious thing they had ever eaten.

Another early start, and on this day, which was Friday, the crew of the Restless were determined to make Albany even if it should be midnight before they arrived. Harry watched the engine jealously lest any of the bearings should become heated, while Nat and Jim alternately relieved him.

Just after the dinner-table had been cleared and the dishes washed, while Nat was sitting by Phil’s side, they were hailed by the occupants of a small sloop which was vainly endeavoring to beat against the light head wind.

“Jemmima!” Nat exclaimed, “there are the men who came to see us at Yonkers — the ones whom you thought were the thieves. Now it is certain they couldn’t have come back after leaving that town, otherwise we would have seen them before.”

“That is true,” Phil replied, in a tone of perplexity, and then answering the hail he cried, “Ahoy on the sloop! What do you want?”

“Pull in on this side of the river where we can talk with you.”

“Shall we do it?” Phil asked Nat in a low tone.

“Why not? We can soon settle the question as to whether they could have stolen our stuff, and that would surely be worth while.”

It was necessary to describe half a circle in order to reach the sailboat, and while this was being done Jim and Harry came forward to learn the meaning of the delay.

“Isn’t this the same craft we saw at Yonkers?” one of the men asked, when the yacht ran alongside and a hawser was passed aboard to prevent the boats from drifting apart.

“Yes,” Phil replied, “and on that same night we were robbed of every movable thing fore and aft.”

“River thieves!” the spokesman exclaimed, and then, as if a sudden thought had occurred to him, he added: “Did you have any idea we might have been the culprits?”

Phil was confused by the directness of the question, and he betrayed the fact most decidedly as he replied with a stammer:

“Oh, no; only it seemed a little queer that after you had asked for so many particulars the thing was done.”

“That would hardly be sufficient evidence by which a well-founded suspicion could be raised,” the second man said gravely. “We did go on board your craft, but only through curiosity, and after learning that she was bound over the very course we intended to take. As a very great favor to us, will you kindly make sure we have nothing of yours on our boat?”

“I am perfectly satisfied already,” Phil replied, now sorry he had spoken of the robbery. “The fact that you have got so far up the river against a head wind is enough: and I hope you won’t think again of my foolish words, which were uttered simply because you were the only people with whom we had any extended conversation in Yonkers.”

“I am more than sorry there should have been even the shadow of a suspicion against us,” the man who had hailed them said, earnestly, “for we are about to ask a great favor of you.”

“Don’t think we are prejudiced in the slightest,” and now Phil tried to atone for the injudicious remark by an unusual courtesy of manner. “We will do whatever is possible to aid you.”

“We prefer to make it a matter of business at the start, and the favor will be in your acceptance of our offer. We are bound for Herkimer, on the line of the canal, and it is of the utmost importance we should get our boat there within a certain time. These head winds have delayed us beyond what we calculated on, and it becomes necessary to take a tow or lose considerable money. If you will give us a lift to that place we will pay fifty dollars, and feel under many obligations. It cannot delay you very much after we are in the canal, where all boats are restricted to a speed of four miles an hour, therefore the great inconvenience will be only from here to the first lock.”

While the man was speaking Phil thought that this might be a good opportunity to replenish the treasury with but little cost to themselves, and their finances were at such a low ebb as to make the proposition enticing.

“What do you say, Harry?” he asked. “Fifty dollars is nearly the amount spent to replace what was stolen, and if we earn it there will be no need of sending home to ask for money, as we shall be obliged to do unless we cut the journey considerably short of the St. Lawrence River.”

“Can we tow the boat?” Nat asked, eagerly.

“Of course.”

“How much time shall we lose by doing it?”

“Not much more than one day.”

“Then I go in for accepting the offer rather than cut the cruise short.”

Harry was not so ready to decide; he felt quite as eager as did his companions to earn the money, yet feared it might require too much time.

“Your yacht can tow our boat four miles an hour after we reach the canal,” one of the men said; “therefore the only question to be considered is whether you are willing to lose less than half a day from here to the first lock?”

As a matter of course, Jim was not entitled to any voice in the discussion; but Phil asked for his opinion, and he thought, as did the others, that it was a wonderfully good opportunity to make up the losses caused by the thieves.

“We’ll try it, at all events,” Phil said, after a short pause. “We shall be able to tell in an hour whether the yacht can pull you or not, and if it is a failure there will have been no harm done.”

The men were profuse with their thanks, and after one introduced himself as Dave Summerfield, and the other as Ned Bristow, bound from Newark to Herkimer on a combined trip of business and pleasure, the sloop was made fast astern. Both the men remained in her, since it was necessary one should steer, therefore the boys were quite as much alone as before; but the yacht’s labored movements told that the journey would be delayed even more than had been anticipated.

After running at full speed until nearly midnight, the day’s sail was ended at Albany, and when the crew of the sloop declined an invitation to sleep on board the yacht, the port-watch went below, leaving two very tired boys on duty in the standing-room.

Jim and Nat were on guard when the sun rose next morning, and they prepared an appetizing breakfast before awakening the others.

“If we are going to put in as many hours as we did yesterday, there will be more work than sport to this cruise,” Harry said, with a yawn, as he came on deck. “I feel even more tired than I did last night.”

“Pulling the sloop was what detained us,” Phil replied. “It is positive the Restless can’t go at more than half speed with such a drag astern, and we must now decide whether the job is to be continued.”

“I should say ‘no’ without any discussion if we didn’t need the money so badly,” Nat said, promptly; “but in view of that melancholy fact, and also that the rules of the canal forbid a greater speed than four miles an hour, I think it is best to keep the tow-line.”

“I had rather do almost any amount of work than send home for more funds,” Phil added, decidedly, and this brought the conversation to a close, for the others were equally averse to acknowledging their carelessness.

Breakfast served to lend a more cheerful aspect to the matter, and the journey was resumed at a reasonably early hour.

The men in the sloop appeared eager to get on as fast as possible, and they rendered no slight amount of assistance at the entrance to the canal. With them to aid in fending off there was but little danger the yacht would be crushed by the clumsy boat which entered at the same time, and the boys felt quite well acquainted with them when the Restless passed out through the gates.

By running at full speed they could make about the regulation time, and no unnecessary halts were indulged in during the day; therefore it was believed by the yachtsmen that they were forty miles from Albany when darkness overtook them.

“This is as good a place as we could ask for in which to spend Sunday,” Phil said, as he ran alongside the bank opposite the towpath, at a point where a clump of trees would afford grateful shelter from the sun next day.

“You don’t count on staying here until Monday, do you?” Bristow asked, in surprise.

“Certainly; we can’t get through the locks even if we should start.”

“We might at least keep on to the next one, and save just so much time.”

“I had rather start an hour earlier. Besides, it will be more pleasant lying here than where half a dozen boats are hauled up. We can set the tent and be comfortable, with no one to trouble us.”

Then, having made the yacht fast, Phil and Harry began cleaning the engine, while Nat and Jim prepared supper. Neither Bristow nor his companion made any further protest just then against remaining until Monday, but appeared to be having a private discussion on board their own craft. They refused the invitation to join the boys at table, and did not even pull alongside the yacht until the tent was about to be taken on shore, when Summerfield asked, gruffly.

“Do you still hold to the idea of lying here till Monday!”

“Of course,” Phil replied, in surprise. “Even if we had no objections to Sunday traveling, there would be little use in running to the next lock, so far as saving

time is concerned”

“Then we shall go on alone,” Bristow said. “It is important that we arrive at the earliest possible moment, and an hour is of considerable value. How much shall we give you for towing us this far?”

“I hardly know. Phil replied, in perplexity. “Why not let us carry out the original bargain?”

“I have told you why. Think the matter over, and well square things before leaving.”

Then the men went ashore to cook their supper by a fire built on the bank, and the boys looked at each other in dismay. They were eager to earn the money, and it was a sad disappointment to lose it when the hardest portion of the work had been done.

“How far away do you suppose the next lock is?” Nat asked, after a short pause.

“I don’t fancy it can be more than half a dozen miles, certainly not ten,” Phil replied.

“It won’t take three hours to do it, so why not agree to their plans, for we want that fifty dollars?”

Both Harry and Jim believed as did Nat, and Phil called to the men, announcing the decision to run as far as possible next morning.

“That is where you are sensible. We would be sorry to push on ahead; but, as I said before, it must be done unless you continue the journey.”

“If you save an hour by such a plan I’m very much mistaken,” Phil said, in a tone so low that only his companions could hear the words.

Watch was kept as usual, neither Bristow nor Summerfield offering to do their share, and half an hour after sunrise the Restless was in sailing trim. A mistlike rain had begun to fall at midnight, and the general indications were that this unpleasant weather would continue during the day.

“Tent life wouldn’t be the most charming thing in the world on a morning like

this,” Bristow said, with a laugh, as he and his companion got out the towing line once more.

“The rain isn’t any less disagreeable in the standing room than it would be on shore,” Phil replied, as he took his seat at the wheel, while Harry attended to the engine.

“We shall at least find a comfortable place in which to spend the day,” Summerfield said, and from that moment, without any especial reason for doing so, Phil began to believe the men had some motive, other than a desire to conclude the journey quickly, for wishing to reach the lock.

For five minutes the yacht dashed ahead much as usual, and then her speed gradually decreased until she came to a full stop.

“What’s the matter?” Bristow shouted.

“That’s exactly what I am going to find out,” Phil replied, as he went aft. “I fancy the injector wasn’t open enough.”

“I fixed it properly,” Harry said, “and the fact that we have been running at all proves it.”

A hasty examination of the engine showed that everything was apparently as it should be; but yet the machinery remained motionless. Phil worked both pumps; opened, closed and opened the valves again without success. The supply of oil seemed to be entirely cut off.

“Nat, look at the tank, and see if it has been leaking,” Phil cried, and a moment later came the reply:

“It is nearly full. There doesn’t seem to be a bit of trouble at this end.”

“Anything serious?” Summerfield asked as he pulled the sloop up and came aboard the yacht over the stern.

“There is some difficulty with the feed pipes. I never knew any good to come of running Sunday,” and Phil spoke in a petulant tone.

“Nonsense! The day has nothing to do with your engine. How long will it take to

overhaul the pipe?"

"Not less than three or four hours. We must work inshore and tie up, for we can't drift around here while I am at the job."

"We'll soon fix that part of it," Bristow said cheerily, and by using the oars on the sloop the Restless was soon moored to the bank, after which Phil made ready for the task to be performed before the journey could be continued. could be purchased.

CHAPTER VI.

AN IMPERATIVE DEMAND.

THE two men watched Phil with the utmost attention for fully half an hour, and at the end of that time Bristow said impatiently:

"At this rate you won't be able to go on before afternoon. It looks as if you would be obliged to take the craft entirely apart. Do you think the damage can be repaired?"

"That depends upon how much of a machinist I am," Phil replied. "At all events, it is certain we shan't go any further to-day, and it isn't fair to keep you here when we may have to lie still even longer than that."

Before a reply could be made a canal boat drawn by a sorry-looking mule appeared from around the bend, and Summerfield hailed the man at the tiller:

"How far is it to the next lock?"

"About five miles, as nigh as I can reckon."

"Are you going there?"

"I am for a fact. You don't allow a decent man would haul up here when Benner's place is so nigh, do you?"

"Who is Benner?"

"You'll find out after drinkin' one horn of the stuff he keeps. Folks 'round this

way allers make it a pint to stay there over Sunday if they're in the neighborhood. You'll find a lively set of boys at Benner's."

Bristow looked significantly at his friend for a moment, and then said to Phil:

"We'll leave the sloop here and go on ahead. If you don't overtake us by noon, Monday, I'll come back to see, what the matter is."

"But suppose I can't make the necessary repairs, and am obliged to take the yacht back to Albany?"

"If you have to tow her, it will be just as well to go to Fonda, so we'll see you anyhow."

Phil would have objected to being left in charge of the craft if there had been an opportunity; but the men did not wait for his reply.

"Swing in toward this bank a little, and we will go with you as far as Benner's," Summerfield cried out to the skipper of the boat.

The request, which sounded very much like a demand, was complied with, and as the clumsy craft swept past within a few inches of the sloop's stern, both men jumped aboard, Bristow shouting:

"We'll see you to-morrow."

"Well," Nat said as he watched the boat until she was some distance away, "for people who are in such a very great hurry to reach Herkimer, they are acting queerly according to my way of thinking. We may not be in condition to leave for several days, if it becomes necessary to tow the yacht where a machinist can be hired, and in that case they would be delayed a good deal more than by lying here over Sunday."

"It's their lookout; but I'm beginning to wish we had settled with them last night. Very likely the strain of pulling that sloop is what has caused all the trouble, and how we are going to remedy it is what I don't know."

Then Phil went to work again, the others acting as assistants; but at noon he was no nearer completing the job than when he began. The rain still continued to fall, and matters were far from being pleasant. Jim proposed that the tent be put up on

shore where, with a camp fire he could prepare an elaborate dinner, and his companions agreed, Phil saying when his opinion was asked:

“We shall all feel better for something in the way of a feast. Harry can stay with me while Nat plays second fiddle to the cook.”

Not until late in the afternoon were the amateur machinists summoned ashore, and then the long task was nearly completed. A valve in the pipe which did not set properly was the cause of the trouble; and now that the difficulty had been discovered, Phil felt that the hardest portion of the work had been finished.

“There’s one thing certain,” he said when they were testing Jim’s skill as cook, “we shan’t be able to leave here much before noon to-morrow, and I fancy those men will come for their boat by that time. It would have been a clear saving of at least a day for them if they had taken her along. I wish she was behind that canal boat, for I don’t like the idea of towing such a load.”

“They could have hired a team at the next lock, and it is strange they didn’t do something of the kind if it was so important to reach Herkimer at a certain time,” Harry said, musingly.

“It’s none of our business what they do, so there’s no reason why we should worry,” and Nat dismissed the subject thus unceremoniously in order to pay more attention to the “spider cake” which Jim had prepared as a sort of pleasing surprise.

In view of the fact that he knew it would be possible to repair the damages, Phil proposed that no more work be done on this day, and the tired yachtsmen rested in the tent until morning, the watches having been begun immediately after dinner.

At the first break of day all hands were on board; the tent was left ashore for the sun to dry, and the repairs pushed forward with the utmost celerity.

At two o’clock in the afternoon, with a pressure of twenty pounds as indicated by the gauge, the Restless started, Nat steering the sloop until her owners should be overtaken.

To the great surprise of the boys none of the men were at the lock. After spending several moments in making useless inquiries of the gatekeepers, Phil

visited Benner's groggery, and there learned that two strangers had taken passage on the canal boat Mary Jane; but they had left no word for the boys.

"We'll tow the sloop to Herkimer, if they don't turn up before we arrive there," Phil said to his companions, "and now in addition to dragging that weight, some one must steer her. We are getting a good price for the job; but they won't be able to say the money wasn't

The boys had expected to overtake the Mary Jane in a few hours at the most; but when night came she was still ahead, so much did the sloop retard the little yacht's progress.

"If we can't run as fast as one or two mules pull a loaded boat, it's time we tried some other kind of a steamer," Harry said laughingly. "I wouldn't be surprised if they got to Herkimer and half way back again before we met them."

"I fancy we are going just about as swift as a canaler," Phil replied. "The yacht drags her share of dead water in this narrow channel, and the sloop does the same, therefore it's little wonder we move slowly. Now that our passengers have gone ahead, however, we can take matters leisurely, and have the satisfaction of knowing we are earning good wages—"

He was interrupted by a shout from the bank of a small stream which evidently served as a feeder to this portion of the waterway, entering the canal opposite the towpath, where had been constructed a series of sluices to shut it out entirely whenever the level should be raised too high.

As the boys turned around they saw Bristow, Summerfield and a stranger, all of whom appeared to have landed from a rowboat.

"Steer this way," the former shouted. "We began to think you were never coming."

The yacht was stopped as quickly as possible; but not before she had gone a considerable distance beyond the point where the owners of the sloop were standing.

"Can't you come out to us?" Phil replied. "We will have to turn completely around in order to get there, and I shall make a snarl of it trying to swing the sloop."

“Set her adrift; we can pick her up again,” Bristow Said peremptorily, and Harry muttered:

“It would serve them exactly right if we cast off the hawser, and left the crowd to finish their journey the best way possible, since they are too lazy to pull half a dozen strokes.”

“Think how nicely their money will help out on our losses,” Phil whispered, and then he gave the word for Jim to let go the tow line.

It required several minutes to turn the yacht in the narrow channel without running her aground, and during this time the men made no move when it would have been only necessary to come a short distance in their boat to avoid all the trouble.

Phil finally succeeded in reaching the point where they awaited his coming, and he said, throwing a heavy line ashore:

“You can get aboard by hauling her nose around,so there will be no need of making her fast.”

“But that is the very thing we want you to do, my boy,” Summerfield said in what he probably intended should be a friendly tone. “We have met a friend of ours, and find that it is no longer of such great importance to reach Herkimer so soon.”

“Then we are to leave you here?” and Phil plainly showed the pleasure he felt at being rid of the troublesome sloop.

“We intend to remain in this vicinity some time, but don’t propose to have you leave us yet awhile if satisfactory arrangements can be made,” Summerfield replied.

“What do you mean?”

“You are out on a pleasure trip, therefore a few days added to the journey can be of no consequence when your leave of absence lasts all summer. We have some business which you can attend to in the yacht, and we will pay you well for her use. It’s only a question of putting up the tent here and having a regular lark while earning considerable money.”

“What do you want us to do?” Harry asked impatiently.

“Go to Schenectady for some goods and freight them up the stream a short distance.”

“But you have just passed through that city!” Harry exclaimed.

“That doesn’t prevent us from wanting to send after our property,” Bristow said, with a smile.

“But boats leave there every day, and it would be cheaper to have what you need come up on some of them.”

“Not understanding the matter as well as we do, you are liable to be mistaken,” was the reply, in a half satirical tone. “The only thing to be discussed between us is whether you are willing to let your craft and your services for two or three days, providing we pay twenty-five dollars for each and every twenty-four hours’ detention.”

“But why don’t—?”

Summerfield interrupted Harry by saying:

“There are no ‘buts’ about it; it is to our advantage to have the use of a boat like yours and such a crew as she has on board. We shall make enough out of our speculation to warrant the payment of the amount named. Do you accept the proposition?”

“Say, why don’t some of you fellows come out and tow me in, if you are going to stay there all day?” Nat cried, in a tone of irritation. “Presently a canal boat will come along and there will be a shipwreck, with your humble servant as the only mariner in distress.”

“Back the yacht out and get his hawser,” Bristow said, as he jumped on board the Restless. “When you pull the sloop ashore all hands can talk the matter over; but I shouldn’t think there would be much need of discussion in view of the prices offered.”

Phil obeyed; a dozen turns of the screw astern and as many forward were sufficient to rescue Nat from a possible collision, and then the yacht was made

fast to the bank, while the boys sat in the bow deliberating upon the unexpected proposition.

“It wouldn’t do any particular harm to remain here a week, or even longer,” Phil began by saying; “but the whole thing seems so strange that I’m afraid we might get into some kind of trouble. Why didn’t they stop for their goods when they came through Schenectady?”

“We could easily leave if there was any crooked business,” Harry suggested. “It looks like a good chance to get all our expenses without working very hard. If they choose to pay so much in order to run back and forth on the canal, I don’t know as it concerns us.”

At this moment the third man, who had been standing on the extreme end of the narrow point of land which made out into the canal, as if watching for somebody or something, stepped quickly to the other two, and, after whispering a few hurried words, leaped on board the yacht, while Bristow and Summerfield cast off the hawser.

“What’s the matter?” Phil asked, rising from the locker as if to bar their way to the standing room.

“We want you to run a short distance up the stream,” Bristow said in a low tone.

“I’m not going to put the boat into water that doesn’t look deep enough to float a canoe! We don’t care about running her on a rock.”

“Keep in the middle of the stream, and you will have a depth of four or five feet for the next two miles,” the stranger replied.

“But I don’t want to leave the canal,” Phil insisted.

“Start her ahead if you know how,” the man said to Bristow. “There’s no knowing who may be in the craft which is coming around the bend, and it won’t do to be seen loafing here.”

It was evident Bristow did not know how to obey this order, for he said persuasively to Phil;

“The whole amount of the story is that we have discovered oil in this vicinity,

and it is of the greatest importance that we keep out of sight. Do as we wish, and I guarantee no harm will come to your craft.”

Phil looked at his companions as if to learn their views in the matter, and while he thus hesitated the stranger said angrily:

“Summerfield, haven’t you got sand enough to make a crowd of boys do as we want? Let them send the boat ahead, or I’ll take a hand in this chat myself.”

The party thus appealed to hesitated no longer. Grasping Harry by the collar he dragged him aft as he whispered, for the voices of those on the approaching craft could now be heard quite distinctly:

“I will give you thirty seconds in which to start that engine, and if the boat is not moving then, there will be trouble for all concerned.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE SECLUDED DWELLING.

MUCH as Harry disliked to obey Summerfield’s imperative demand, he knew it would be worse than useless to resist, for there could be no question but that the men were ready to execute every threat made. Apparent submission had won the day for them at Baker’s Basin, and, profiting by that experience, he started the engine at half speed.

In the standing room Phil was pursuing similar tactics; after the stranger grasped the steering wheel and spoke in such a threatening tone to Summerfield, he threw himself on the locker, saying in a low but firm voice:

“You shall be held responsible for any damage done to the yacht, and at the first opportunity I will oblige you to answer in a court of law for this unwarranted seizure of our property.”

By this time the little craft was moving through the water, and such fact restored the stranger to something approaching good humor.

“We don’t intend to work any injury either to you or your property,” he whispered, “and you will realize that after we have a chance to explain. Just now it is of the utmost importance that we remain hidden from view, therefore it was

impossible to pursue any other course, since to stop long enough to argue the matter would have been fatal. Wait half an hour, and there will be no reason to complain.”

“Judging from present appearances that is exactly what we shall be obliged to do,” Phil replied grimly, and then he shook his head meaningly at Jim, who was glancing alternately from him to the fowling-pieces which hung in the cabin just above the port locker, as if to say that they might be useful.

Nat remained seated on the starboard rail, not having changed his position since the men thus virtually took possession of the boat; but the expression of his face told that he was not disposed to submit tamely to the indignities offered.

Steered by the stranger the Restless ran up the stream about half a mile, and, as the sun sank behind the tree tops, glided into a small pond three quarters of a mile in diameter, on the western shore of which stood a rudely built cabin from twenty-five to thirty feet square.

“We’ll come to an anchor here if you will give your engineer the signal to stop,” the helmsman said in a very friendly tone, and when the screw ceased to revolve, as Phil obeyed the request, the Restless was swung around in such a manner as to straighten out the hawsers attached to the sloop and the small boat, thereby preventing the crafts from coming together as would otherwise have been the case.

It was such a manoeuvre as could have been performed only by one well acquainted with the management of steamers, and Phil gave vent to a low murmur of admiration.

“Not so badly done, eh?” the stranger said as he dropped the anchor and turned to face the owners of the yacht. “I have had considerable experience in work of this kind, and reckon your boat won’t suffer from any handling of mine. Bristow, moor your sloop a short distance off, and then we will go ashore after making our peace with these young gentlemen.”

Summerfield and Harry now came forward, and the former said, as he motioned toward the stranger:

“This is a partner of ours, Sam Small, and a right good fellow, who will explain why we turned pirates for the time being.”

“You have already been told that we discovered signs of oil in this vicinity, and are now engaged in making further investigations,” Small began. “Already some of the boatmen suspect why I am around here, and to have been seen by any of them would reveal nearly the whole story. It was a case where we could not delay, and you have suffered but little at our hands, while we have shown you a delightful place in which to spend the night. If this explanation is not satisfactory, we are prepared to pay any fair sum for the use of the boat during the past twenty minutes.”

There was no reason to doubt the truth of the man’s statement, and Phil felt just a trifle ashamed of himself for having refused to run up the stream as requested, while the other boys looked as if they believed all of the party had acted foolishly.

“I was thinking only of the yacht,” Phil stammered. “The channel was so narrow it didn’t seem as if she could make a dozen yards without going aground, and that might be quite a serious matter where the current is strong.”

“Then you no longer contemplate summoning us before a court to answer to a charge of piracy?” and Small laughed as if he thought the threat a very good joke.

“Under the circumstances, we can hardly blame you for getting out of sight,” Nat said, and Summerfield answered, cheerily:

“So that portion of the business is settled, and after supper we will try to make the trade which was so rudely interrupted. Won’t you come on shore and share what Small may have on hand in the way of food?”

“We’ve got plenty of provisions, and, as the yacht is yet to be cleaned up for the night, it is best we stay here. This will be a fine chance to dry our tent, and if the weather is pleasant to-morrow we’ll set it up, for the canvas was rather damp when taken down.”

“In that case we can talk over affairs in the morning at our leisure,” Summerfield replied, as he stepped aboard the small boat which Bristow now brought alongside.

With a kind “good-night, boys,” the party rowed ashore, and the yachtsmen were left alone, apparently free to do as they chose.

“Well,” Nat said, as they went into the cabin, where Jim immediately began preparations for supper, “it looked one time as if we were in a bad mess; but all hands were more frightened than hurt. It isn’t to be wondered at that these men would do almost anything rather than have their secret discovered.”

“After our experience with the tramps it was only reasonable to suppose this crowd were playing the same sort of a game, and thus try to cheat us out of the money we had earned towing the sloop,” Harry added. “Now that we are here, and in a pleasant place to stop, I shan’t be sorry to stay two or three days. In the morning we’ll try the camera, and get a picture of the yacht as she lies at anchor.”

Each moment the boys’ satisfaction at the turn affairs had taken increased, and by the time supper was ready they were in high spirits. With no danger of being run down by passing canal boats, and in such a secluded spot, where it was not probable any intruders would come, there seemed to be no reason why watch should be kept.

“If we are to lie here to-morrow it will be as well to clean ship in the morning, and I advocate turning in mighty soon, for we have done considerable hard work since daybreak,” Phil said.

This arrangement was agreeable to all, and many hours before the lights in the solitary dwelling were extinguished, the crew of the Restless gave themselves up to such slumber as visits the weary.

Had the boys kept watch they would have observed that the house was brilliantly illuminated as the night wore on, and the sound as of heavy blows struck at regular intervals came apparently from one of the upper rooms, a circumstance not in keeping with the ordinary duties of that class of men to which those ashore were supposed to belong.

Of these things the young yachtsmen were ignorant, however, and when they awakened, hardly more than an hour after the sounds of activity in the building ceased, everything was in the most peaceful condition. The songs of the birds and hum of the insects, as all nature welcomed the new-born day, caused the scene to appear doubly beautiful, and increased the boys’ desire to make at least a short halt here.

Harry did not delay his proposed experiments with the camera. He “shot” half a

dozen views of the surroundings while Jim and Nat were cooking breakfast, but was forced to postpone making a picture of the yacht until one of the men should bring the boat out to admit of his getting ashore.

“I’ve got two views of the house, as many of the entrance to the pond, and one up the stream,” he said, in a tone of satisfaction. “When the oil inspectors come I’ll have a try at them.”

After the morning meal had been ended the work of setting things to rights began. Although no one hurried, owing to the fact that a long day was before them, the task was finished fully two hours before any of the men made their appearance.

“They like to lie in bed better than any crowd I ever saw,” Harry said petulantly, as he sat holding the camera on the rail waiting for an opportunity to get another negative. “Suppose I swim ashore and pull that boat out here?”

“I wouldn’t try it,” Phil answered quickly. “It isn’t probable they’d object; but it is just as well not to give any cause for fault finding. If you think we—”

“Look there!” Nat interrupted in a whisper as he pointed toward a small window under the overhanging roof of the house. “Who can that be?”

“Where?” the others asked in chorus as they sought in vain for any strange object.

“I saw the face of a boy or girl at that pane at glass, and when I pointed it disappeared. They didn’t tell us there was any one besides themselves in the building.”

“You must have made a mistake,” Phil replied. “If a fellow, or even a girl for that matter, was inside, we would surely have seen him or her last night. Most likely it was one of the men.”

“Most likely it wasn’t,” Nat said indignantly. “Don’t you suppose I could tell the difference?”

“It doesn’t seem probable, if you insist upon the statement,” Harry added, “and now I am certain you are wrong, for here comes the face you saw.”

Bristow had just opened the door of the house, and he started toward the water as Nat whispered:

“You must think I am blind; when it isn’t—”

“Up early, eh?” Bristow cried. “I reckon you’d like to get ashore?”

“We would for a fact,” Phil replied. “I began to think you were going to sleep all day.”

“There wasn’t much chance of that, although we do stick to the bed pretty late when we are here,” said Bristow, stepping leisurely into the boat, and paddling her toward the yacht.

“Better put your camera out of sight,” Nat whispered, “for he might turn rusty if he knew you’d been collecting pictures of where the oil is supposed to be.”

“A photograph of the house and pond couldn’t do any harm.”

“It would show people who were at all familiar with the place exactly where the men are working.”

“I never thought of that,” and Harry made haste to slip the camera into the locker before the man reached the yacht.

“Didn’t I see you at the window a few seconds ago?” Phil asked as Bristow came aboard.

“Which one?” was the question in a quick, almost angry tone.

“That with two panes of glass in it just under the side of the roof.”

“What are you spying—” the man checked himself suddenly, and added with a forced laugh, “Oh yes, of course it was me; I looked out to see if you were awake.”

For an instant Ned acted as if about to make some reply; but he refrained from speaking, and after an awkward silence, during which he glanced scrutinizingly at first one and then another, Bristow said:

“If you want to go ashore, come now, for I must get my breakfast. Keep the boat alongside, and it will be possible to land at any time.”

The tent was bundled into the tender, all save Hank followed it, and a few moments later Bristow disappeared inside the house, leaving the boys to move about as they chose.

“Now do you believe it was his face I saw at the window?” Nat asked when they were alone.

“I can’t say; but if it was his he acted queerly. He almost called us spies simply because, not being able to get ashore, we looked at the old place.”

“I’ll keep watch on those two squares of glass, and know whether it could have been possible to make a mistake,” Nat said decidedly, as he turned to assist Jim, who had begun to stretch the canvas.

Harry delayed going ashore with his companions in order to put away his camera, which he had hastily dropped in the locker, and he was on the point of carrying it into the cabin when all three of the men came from the house, standing outside of the door for a moment as if for the purpose of giving the amateur photographer the opportunity he desired.

“I suppose I could have got their pictures by asking them to sit for me,” he said to himself as, having exposed the plate sufficiently long, he turned once more to place the instrument in its case. “But they might have suspected what has already been done, and insist on my giving up the negatives of their country residence.”

The occupants of the lonely dwelling did not long remain outside; it seemed very much as if they had come because of something said by Bristow, and after talking together a few minutes all three entered the building again.

The task of setting up the tent was a short one, and when completed Phil rowed out to the yacht.

“What do you say to a little hunting?” he asked. “There ought to be game here, and it won’t take a great while to find out.”

“We can’t leave the yacht alone, for somebody might happen to come up the stream.”

“I didn’t intend to be quite so foolish. We’ve got only two guns; Nat and Jim will stay here with the understanding that it shall be their turn next.”

“But what about talking business with the men? Even if we shouldn’t accept their offer to go to Schenectady, it is necessary to settle matters regarding the towing of the sloop.”

“There will be plenty of time for that; I only think of staying an hour or so.”

Harry made no further objections; bringing the guns and ammunition from the cabin he accompanied Phil on shore, and the ship keepers received their final instructions.

“We won’t go so far away but that it will be possible to hear you call in case anything happens,” Phil said. “Don’t get steam on under any circumstances, and in the event of staying ashore be careful not to lose sight of the little craft.”

Then the yachtsmen-turned-hunters went to the door of the house where they knocked twice without receiving any reply. It was Bristow who finally answered the summons, and he acted as if afraid the boys might get a glimpse of the interior, for he squeezed his body through the narrowest possible space as he came outside.

“I only wanted to say that we are going a short distance into the woods,” Phil explained. “You are in no particular hurry to resume yesterday’s conversation?”

“No, no,” the man replied nervously. “Go where you choose, and after having a good time, we’ll square accounts or open new ones. If by chance you should happen to meet any person don’t speak of this place, and above all, be sure not to mention our names.”

“We will be careful,” Phil replied; “but I don’t fancy we’ll see anybody, for we shan’t go near the canal.”

Then the two walked away, and Bristow stood gazing after them until they were lost to view in the distance, when he reentered the house as cautiously as he had emerged.

Nat and Jim lounged around on the shore nearly an hour, and during all that time it was as if the building had no occupants. Not so much as a face was seen at the

windows, and the boys concluded to go aboard the steamer.

“The place may be pretty enough,” Nat said disconsolately; “but there ain’t much fun to be had lying around the shore.”

“I had rather find some work, and I reckon it won’t do any harm to get things ready for dinner, for when the others come back they will be hungry.”

The little tender was paddled out to the Restless and made fast alongside, Jim disappearing in the cabin immediately after, while Nat made up a bed on one of the standing room lockers, where he could see all that took place around him.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SIGNAL.

LEFT thus comparatively alone, Nat could find nothing in the scene to attract his attention; even the birds had sought relief from the sun’s fervent rays by retreating to the cool recesses of the forest, and there being no particular charm about the rude dwelling, he gave himself up to speculations regarding the probability of reaching the St. Lawrence before the vacation came to an end.

Jim was working in the cabin over some mysterious compound with which he proposed to astonish his companions at the dinner-table, and paying no heed to anything else.

The profound silence, together with the heat, caused Nat’s eyes to grow heavy, and he was on the point of yielding to the desire for sleep when a slight sound from the house aroused him. Looking up, but without changing his position in the least, he saw three men coming toward the shore.

“I reckon our oil hunting employers will need their boat, Jim,” he said, lazily; and, as the amateur cook leaned forward to get a glimpse of the beach Nat leaped to his feet in the greatest excitement,

“What’s the matter?” Jim asked, in surprise, looking eagerly around.

“Did you see? Now there’s no chance of a mistake this time; I knew it wasn’t Bristow at the window yesterday, even though Phil was so certain!”

“Say, what’s the trouble?” Jim asked in bewilderment. “Have you gone crazy?”

“Don’t be foolish,” Nat replied, impatiently. “Didn’t you see anything just after I said the men were coming?”

“Yes, I saw them.”

“Well,” and Nat drew a long breath, as if trying to suppress his excitement, “I happened to glance toward the house as I spoke to you, and from that upper window— the one which has only two panes of glass— something white, like a handkerchief, was pushed out and waved for a second or so. Then it was pulled in quickly, as if whoever made the signal feared being seen by the men.”

“Do you believe any one is locked up there?” Jim asked, in a whisper, after a short pause.

“Can you account for it in any other way? Think how queerly Bristow acted when Phil asked him if he had been looking out? I am certainly not mistaken to-day, for all three of the men were on the shore when this signal was made.”

“But what does it mean?” and now Jim’s excitement equaled that of his companion.

“That is just what I can’t tell; but we’ll find out before leaving this place.”

“What’s the matter with you boys?” Summerfield shouted impatiently. “Are you both so deaf that it’s impossible to hear us until we’ve hailed half a dozen times?”

“It seems like it,” Nat replied, hardly knowing what he said. “Did you want us?”

“We would like to have the boat if you are willing to pull ashore.”

“All right; we’ll be there in a minute,” Nat replied, and then he whispered to Jim, “Don’t let them think we suspect anything; but try to act the same as ever when they come aboard.”

“You’ll have to straighten your face then, for anybody would think you had seen a ghost.”

Nat tried very hard to assume an ordinary expression as he jumped into the boat and pulled toward the shore; but, judging from the look Sam Small gave him, he did not succeed remarkably well.

“Anything the matter on board?” the latter asked.

“No— not exactly, we— we were feeling rather worried because Phil and Harry haven’t come back,” Nat stammered.

“Don’t you reckon they’re big enough to take care of themselves in a place where the largest game to be found is a squirrel?” Summerfield asked, as he scrutinized the boy.

“I don’t know what kind might be in these woods, and, besides, it’s time they were here unless we intend to stay until to-morrow.”

“Well,” and now it was Bristow’s turn to stare at the boy, “that we thought understood when you set up the tent.”

By this time Nat had recovered some portion of his usual composure, and he said carelessly:

“Phil and Harry may have decided to stay; but I would like to go on. There’s no fun loafing around here.”

Whether he succeeded in deceiving the men or not, nothing further was said on the subject, for just at that moment the two hunters appeared from among the bushes looking heated and tired; but without so much as a feather to show for the morning’s tramp.

“Anything wrong?” Phil asked quickly as he saw by the faces of all that the conversation had not been of the most pleasing nature.

“Your friends got so frightened about you that it was as much as this one could do to talk,” Summerfield replied with a loud laugh, “and we have been trying to persuade him the chipmunks were harmless.”

Nat’s face grew very red; but he refrained from making any answer, and Sam Small said impatiently:

“We were going out to the yacht to have a chat with all hands, so suppose we get aboard.”

Phil thought it rather queer that they were not invited to the house; but since it was hardly his place to suggest anything of the kind he went toward the boat, saying as Nat pushed her bow off:

“It will require two trips to carry the crowd, and we might as well start the ferry.”

When the party were in the standing room and Jim had been summoned from the cabin, Small began the conversation by saying:

“Of course you understand the sloop is to be towed no further, and it is time our account should be settled. How much do we owe you for the work already done?”

“I don’t like to answer that question,” Phil replied after waiting a moment to learn if his companions had any suggestions to make. “Mr. Bristow set the first price himself, therefore it was no more than fair for him to say what proportion we have earned.”

“We wish to satisfy you,” the gentleman referred to said, “so if my figures are not large enough, change them to suit yourself. We have been towed about one third of the distance agreed upon; but the first day’s work was harder than the remainder would be. Suppose we say thirty dollars?”

“I think that is more than the job is worth,” Phil replied. “Of course we wanted the money, otherwise we wouldn’t have undertaken the task; but none of us care to be overpaid.”

“That part of it is all right,” and Bristow took a bag of money from his pocket. “We are perfectly willing to settle on that basis.”

Nat would have joined Phil in protesting that the amount was too large; but Harry checked him with a look, and Bristow laid on the locker a ten and a five dollar note, together with fifteen silver dollars.

“Now that we have had such good luck in concluding the bargain, suppose we talk about our offer of last night when you boys thought we were going to steal

the yacht,” and Small laughed heartily as if the memory of the scene was very comical.

“You mean in regard to running down to Schenectady?” Phil asked.

“There, or anywhere else on the canal we choose to send. I promise that the voyages won’t be long, nor the work hard. The fact of the matter is,” and now Small assumed a confidential tone, “we need a craft like this very much; but can’t afford to buy one, because after a week or ten days she would be of little use to us. Owing to those circumstances we are ready to pay remarkably well for your services.”

“Our business won’t be any more than a continuation of your pleasure trip,” Summerfield added. “This is a beautiful place in which to camp; you will be here every night, and there’s no question but that you can get to the St. Lawrence River and back long enough before your vacation comes to an end, even if the journey isn’t continued for a fortnight.”

“You can readily understand, since we have explained what is being done, that it is of the utmost importance none of us three should be seen in this vicinity,” Small said. “You boys could do the business for us better than any one else, because none of the boatmen would suspect the yacht was being used other than in the way of sport. Suppose you go aft, where the consultation can be strictly private, and decide?”

The boys acted upon this suggestion, and the men stretched themselves at full length on the lockers, as if it was immaterial to them how long the matter remained under discussion, provided the issue should finally be favorable to them.

“What do you think, Phil?” Harry asked when they had closed the cabin doors behind them. “Twenty-five dollars a day will soon amount to considerable, and at that rate it wouldn’t take long to pay for the Restless.”

“The question is whether we are willing to delay the cruise. They appear to have plenty of cash, and are not mean, as we know from the way they just settled with us. Gracious! I left the money where Bristol laid it.”

“I’ll get it,” Jim said, entering the cabin before any one could prevent him.

The forward doors were open, and as he stepped inside Summerfield was saying in a tone sufficiently loud to be heard by the boy:

“There’s no doubt but that he has been seen, and a change must be made if we want to avoid trouble with this party.”

By the time the remark had been concluded Jim was at the entrance to the standing room, and as the man saw him he added quietly:

“How simple our work would be if nobody else had an idea that oil could be found here!”

For an instant Jim believed they were talking about the supposed discovery made by Nat: but the last words, spoken as if they were but a continuation of the first, dispelled his suspicions.

“Come for the money, eh?” Bristow asked, laughingly, as the cook took the notes and silver from the locker near the man’s feet. “I thought it was strange if you had so much that this was of no account. But it didn’t concern me, so I said nothing.”

“The idea of going into the freighting business caused the skipper to forget everything else,” Jim replied in a bantering tone, and then he went aft again with the cash in his hand.

“We all think it would be best to stay here a week, at least,” Phil said as Jim came from the cabin. “Now what is your opinion? We will allow fifteen dollars a day for the use of the yacht, and divide the remainder among the crowd.”

“But I’m not entitled to any.”

“Of course you are,” Nat said quickly. “Surely the cook should have as much as the others.”

“My pay comes in through getting a passage home, and it will be a big saving of time even if we stay here three weeks, so do as you please, and count me in only for a share of the work.”

“Then it is arranged,” Phil said, “including the fact that one fourth of ten dollars a day is to belong to you, so we won’t say anything more about the wages until

the time comes for a settlement. Shall we go forward now?"

"Wait a moment," Nat said in a whisper, and then he told what had been seen.

"You must be mistaken again," Phil replied; but he did not speak so confidently as before, because he remembered the peculiar behavior of Bristow when they stopped at the house to tell of the proposed hunting excursion.

"If there should happen to be any one imprisoned there, it can't take us long to find out. We'll keep our eyes open to everything, and the men won't be able to get much the best of us."

Phil led the way to the standing room, announced to the men the decision arrived at, and stated that the Restless was at their disposal from that moment.

"Very well," Stone said in a tone of satisfaction as he rose to his feet. "It is a little past noon, but we will allow that the twenty-four hours began at twelve o'clock, and the charter dates from that time. Come," he added to his partners, "there's no reason why we should stay here any longer."

"But what are we to do!" Phil asked in surprise as the men leaped into the boat.

"Stay on board, that's all," Small replied with a laugh. "We don't intend to work you too hard at the start. It is uncertain when the yacht will make the first trip under our management, so you must be prepared to move at a moment's notice. No more squirrel hunting until the contract expires."

"Judging from our experience of this morning we shan't indulge in that sport again while the yacht lies here, no matter how many opportunities offer," Phil said merrily, and by that time the men were on shore walking toward the house.

"Now that we have gone into the freight and express business it will be necessary to carry it on properly, and we can't do better than have dinner at once," Harry said, as he pulled the folding table from beneath the locker.

Dinner was cooked and eaten as expeditiously as possible that they might get under way without loss of time if their employers should suddenly give orders to that effect, and thus Jim's pudding, which he had fancied would be such a wonderful success, received no especial attention; the boys ate it much as if such things were of every day occurrence while they were out yachting, and the cook

was sadly disappointed.

While Jim and Nat cleared the table and set things to rights in the cabin, Phil and Harry examined every portion of the engine to make sure it was in perfect working order, and after all this had been done the crew gathered in the standing room where they speculated upon the precise time when their services would be required.

“It will be necessary to start pretty soon if they want to leave before to-morrow,” Phil said, “and I hope we’ll get sailing orders right away, for it doesn’t seem the proper thing to take pay for loafing.”

“That was the agreement. If we keep the yacht here ready for work our part of the bargain has been carried out as much as if we were sailing all the time,” and Harry made himself comfortable on one of the lockers with the air of a fellow who is perfectly indifferent whether he exerts himself or remains idle.

Now that he had so much time at his disposal Nat began to think more earnestly of what he had seen, and, quite unconsciously, kept his eyes fixed upon the solitary dwelling.

“Watching for another handkerchief?” Harry asked, banteringly, and before Nat could reply the door of the house was opened as Bristow and Small appeared, each carrying two satchels which appeared to be very heavy.

“Now we’re off!” Harry exclaimed in a tone of satisfaction, and he would have raised the necessary pressure in the engine if Phil had not checked him by saying:

“We had better make sure before getting ready to turn the screw. It won’t take five minutes to start after they come aboard.”

It was well Harry waited. The two men rowed out to the yacht, deposited their bundles in the cabin, and while Small threw himself on one of the lockers as if thoroughly tired, Bristow went on shore.

“Are we going to leave soon?” Nat asked, and to the surprise of all Small replied:

“Not until after sunset.”

The boys looked at each other in dismay.

CHAPTER IX.

A FLIGHT.

Weed Small calmly announced that the first trip made by the Restless under the new management was to be begun after nightfall, the boys were panic-stricken. It had never occurred to them that such might be the case, until this moment, and Phil was considerably disturbed at the prospect of running through the narrow channel when it would not be possible to see either bank very clearly.

“What are you going to do about it?” Harry asked in a whisper, and Phil replied:

“I can’t see but that orders must be obeyed. We have let the yacht, and agreed to run her, without stipulating that all the sailing should be done in the daytime, consequently it’s a case of grin and bear it,”

“But we stand a good chance of piling her up on the bank.”

“I wouldn’t back out now if I knew she’d come to grief before we reached the canal,” Phil replied, and Harry walked aft in anything rather than a cheerful frame of mind.

If Jim had misgivings as to the trip, no one was aware of the fact; he continued to “putter” about, as Small expressed it, cleaning the brass works here, or scouring the already clean paint there, until Harry nervously insisted that he keep quiet “for five minutes at least.”

Nat had remained in the standing room from the time the men came out of the house, watching eagerly the window through which he was positive a signal had been made to them.

Until six o’clock matters were unchanged, and then Bristow and Summerfield emerged, locking the door carefully behind them. Paddling out to the yacht they moored the boat where she could be got at on the return without running the Restless too near the bank, and then came aboard, going directly into the cabin.

The boys confidently expected that word would now be given to weigh anchor; but no sign was made by the charter parties until nearly half an hour after sun

set.

When the shadows of night began to fall, and there could no longer be any question but that they were to make a night journey, Phil and Jim set about getting out the signal lanterns. After they had been placed in position, one on either side the upper deck, two were swung near the engine, and Jim ventured into the cabin to light the hanging lamps.

“What are you up to now?” Small asked, gruffly.

“Getting ready to leave port. We’ve got to make some kind of a show, or those lumbering canal boats will run us down.”

“I suppose you have been illuminating all around!”

“We’ve only got up the number required by law,” Jim replied, considerably surprised by the tone in which the man spoke.

“Well, toddle out and pull every one down,” Small said, sharply. “When we want any lights shown, I’ll send you a telegram.”

“But it will be necessary—”

“You’ll find it decidedly necessary to do exactly as I say, so obey orders and stop chinning.”

Jim was thoroughly bewildered as he went forward and told Phil of the singular demand.

“What!” the captain exclaimed. “Do you mean that they count on running without lights?”

“That’s the way it looks from what he said.”

“But I can’t do it. Not knowing much of anything about the canal, it will be hard work to keep in the channel and not smash into the first craft we meet, to say nothing of the chance of some boat cutting us down.”

“We will take care of that part of the business,” Small, who had entered the standing room unperceived, said, as he seated himself by the wheel. “Get up

steam, and as soon as you are ready to turn the screw we'll be ok."

"We can't attend to the engine in the dark," Phil said decidedly.

"That is just what you must do; we can't afford to let it be known that the yacht is in the canal, and if there are no lights aboard there is a good chance of slipping through unobserved. You should have expected some inconvenience when we offered twenty-five dollars a day for the boat."

This last remark was sufficient to silence Phil. He felt that they were bound by the bargain to obey orders, and it seemed dishonest to make any serious protest now when the fulfilment of the first portion of the contract was demanded.

"You and Jim stand by to raise the anchor," he whispered to Nat. "Harry and I will attend to the engine."

"Put her along the best you know how after we are in the canal," Small said as Phil started aft. "If any harm comes to the craft we will stand good for it."

Harry was in a frame of mind bordering upon insubordination. Phil found him on one of the lockers near the air pump, and it took quite a lengthy argument before he would consent to let the yacht be started.

"This business isn't just what it ought to be, or these fellows wouldn't sneak around in the darkness at the risk of drowning all hands," he said, in a tone so loud that Phil was afraid that Bristow, who yet remained in the cabin, might hear him. "I am not willing to have the steamer leave her anchorage."

Phil insisted that their precautions were no more than might be expected from those who, having made a valuable discovery, were afraid others would deprive them of the pecuniary advantages, and he laid great stress on the fact that they were in duty bound to carry out the Contract.

Harry finally agreed to obey orders; but not until Small had sent aft to know the reason of the delay, and then the two set about raising the necessary power.

Five minutes later the screw began to revolve, and as the yacht ran up on her cable the boys forward hove in the anchor while Small headed her for the narrow channel leading to the canal.

The voyage had but just begun when Bristow came aft with the standing room awnings, and, at the expense of considerable labor hung them around the engine in such a manner as to shut out from view the two tiny globes of light visible from the apertures through which the vapor is ignited.

Harry shook his head as the man went forward again, and said in a tone of deep conviction:

“It’s no use trying to explain matters in an honest way. One would think from all the precautions that we were going to run a blockade, and I tell you, Phil, things are not as they should be. This desire to make the trip so secretly doesn’t look right, never mind how much oil they have found.”

“I will admit that there is good ground for suspicion,” Phil replied thoughtfully; “but just now I don’t see that we can pursue any other course than the present one. At the first real sign of wrong doing we’ll throw up the contract, even if it becomes necessary to lose the money we may have earned; but until then our part of the bargain must be kept. I wish we knew whether Nat really saw anybody at the window.”

“There’s no use of making such a silly wish as that,” a voice said from the gloom of the cabin, and Nat joined his friends. “I know some one signaled to us, and you can be certain these men have a prisoner at the house. When we get back I’m going to make it my business to find out the whole story.”

During this conversation the Restless had been running at half speed down the stream, and now Jim came aft with an order from Small to “let her out.”

“We are in the canal,” he said as Phil obeyed the command, “and it is so dark that you can’t see a dozen feet in either direction. That man ought to know the waterway pretty well to put her ahead at full speed.”

“If you boys must talk, whisper,” Bristow said in a low tone as he put his head into the cabin. “We might as well have all the lights burning as such a racket”

“This was sufficient to silence the yacht’s crew, and it also caused their suspicions to increase, for surely there could be nothing culpable in the conversation.

From this time until half an hour had passed not a word was spoken. The yacht

glided over the dark waters at a greater speed than the boys had ever before forced her to, and, save for the pulsations of the screw, any one on the towpath would have remained in ignorance of her passage.

There were no locks between the stream from which they had come and the city of Schenectady, therefore nothing occurred to delay the journey. It was yet reasonably early in the evening when Small gave the word to shut off the supply of fuel, and a moment later the Restless was made fast to a bulkhead on the outskirts of the town.

if> The boys confidently expected the men would go on shore; but in this they were at least partially mistaken. Small came aft and in a whisper informed them that no noise could be allowed during such time as they remained there, and a moment later Bristow landed, moving up the street in a manner which showed that he wished to avoid notice.

Nearly an hour passed, giving the owners of the Restless ample opportunity for disagreeable thoughts, and then two strangers, accompanied by Bristow, came aboard.

They were ushered into the cabin, the doors carefully closed as if to prevent any possibility that the conversation might be overheard, and for an hour the boys could distinguish nothing more than a low murmur. Before this interview came to an end Nat proposed that one of the party go on shore to purchase such supplies as were needed, and Jim volunteered for the service.

“We want whatever in the way of provisions you may find,” Phil said as he gave him five of the silver dollars received for towing the sloop. “If you see anything that you think may be serviceable, buy it, for we can afford to have some few luxuries in view of the fact that we are getting twenty-five dollars a day for our services.”

Both Harry and Nat thought of several articles in the provision line which they would like, and Jim noted every item carefully, departing only after his companions had each given the orders in detail.

It was hardly nine o'clock; there could be little question he would fail to find the different shops open, and the boys had no idea but that it was perfectly proper to transact such portion of their business without any reference to those who had hired the yacht.

Five minutes after Jim left, Bristow came from the cabin and said:

“We will start as soon as you can get power enough to turn the screw.”

“We shall be obliged to wait until Jim comes back,” Phil replied in a matter of fact tone. “He went up town for provisions, but it won’t be long before he returns.”

“What kind of money did you give him?” the man asked quickly.

“What kind?” Phil repeated. “We gave him some of what you paid us.”

“Do you mean the silver?” And now it was evident that Bristow was excited.

“Of course; there was no reason why we should keep it.”

The man made no reply, but hurried into the cabin as if he had heard something to disturb him, and before the boys could arrive at any definite conclusion regarding his agitation, Small came aft.

“So you dared to land one of your crew without saying anything to us?” he said interrogatively.

“Why shouldn’t we?” Phil asked in surprise “We needed provisions, and it couldn’t do you any harm if he bought them. The people who may be hunting for oil wouldn’t have an idea he was connected with you.”

“Perhaps not; but—”

Before he could finish the sentence a man came to the edge of the bulkhead, whispered a few words, and then hurried away as if his safety depended upon his leaving the yacht in the least possible space of time.

Small spoke quickly to those in the cabin, and as they hastened on shore he said to Phil:

“We must leave here at once. Get up steam as soon as you can.”

“But Jim is buying provisions, and we can’t go until he comes back.”

“Then it will be necessary to leave him behind, for in five minutes we must leave

this place,” Small said in a decided tone, and Phil replied quite as decidedly:

“I shan’t start until he arrives. You hired this craft; but as nothing was said about where we should purchase provisions, and since we are obliged to have some I refuse to so much as turn the screw before Jim returns”

“Come out here, Bristow,” Small said hurriedly, opening the cabin door. “This is no time to fool, and you must take charge of matters aft. We are bound to leave here without loss of time, for nobody knows what kind of a scrape that boy may get us into.”

“I’ll guarantee that he doesn’t so much as speak of oil,” Harry said, but no attention was paid to his words. As Small went forward Bristow came aft and spoke in a way which could not be mistaken:

“I have got a revolver here, and shan’t hesitate about using it if the yacht isn’t under way in five minutes. I mean what I say, as you will find out unless our orders are obeyed without a question.”

“Do as he commands,” Nat whispered. “We’ve got all we want of oil speculations, and will throw up the job two seconds after we land this precious crowd at the place we started from. Then there will be plenty of time to pick up Jim.”

“Start your engine!” Bristow said hoarsely, and as Harry echoed Nat’s opinion, Phil obeyed. The naphtha vapor was ignited, the pump worked until sufficient pressure was obtained, and when Bristol cast off the hawsers the yacht darted ahead.

Jim was left behind to confront such dangers as the remainder of the crew could only guess at.

CHAPTER X.

THE PRISONER.

NOTHING less than the threats made by Bristol would have induced the boys to leave Jim behind. Although not a member of the original party, he had rendered such service, and was so much of a favorite, that all looked upon him as a friend whose safety and well-being should be considered equally important with their

own.

Bristow's menaces, and the belief that he would not hesitate to carry them into effect, might have forced them to abandon temporarily even Phil; but they were by no means willing to desert the repentant runaway.

To discuss the matter at this moment would be useless, for the alleged oil speculators were fully armed and ready to carry out their plans at almost any hazard. The owners of the *Restless* were fully alive to all the phases of the situation, and they sat in silence beside the engine as the little craft dashed on through the darkness at imminent risk of coming to grief against the first clumsy barge which chanced to be in her path.

Not once was the speed checked until the yacht had arrived at the mouth of the stream leading to the solitary dwelling, and here it was absolutely necessary to proceed very slowly in order to avoid entering the wrong channel. The men spoke in whispers, as if afraid they might have been pursued, and when Bristow came aft to give the word for slackening speed, he used the utmost caution to prevent so much as the sound of his footsteps on the deck.

Even when they reached the anchorage every care was taken to preserve silence. Summerfield let the cable slip slowly through his hands that there should be no splashing of water as the iron sank, and neither of the party spoke as they paddled ashore in the boat, leaving the boys alone.

Phil had not so much as looked forward during the time Small and Bristow were making preparations for landing; immediately the engine was stopped he set about wiping the machinery with a bunch of cotton waste, as if it was in the highest degree necessary every piece of metal should be polished brightly before he retired, and from his manner of working one could readily understand that his mind was occupied with other thoughts.

Harry and Nat watched until the men entered the house, and then the former said in a low tone:

"I think it's high time we gave up this job. I feel very certain that this run had nothing whatever to do with any alleged oil discoveries, and it stands us in hand to leave before trouble comes."

"We do not need to discuss that subject very much," Phil replied, grimly. "I've

got enough of this kind of work, and even though we might be willing to remain in their employ, something must be done for Jim. We can't leave him in Schenectady."

"Why not go back there the first thing in the morning?" Nat asked.

"That is what I want to do; but will we be allowed to go where we choose?"

"If we throw up the job they'll have no right to stop us," Nat said, decidedly. At noon to-morrow they will owe us twenty-five dollars, and we can let them keep it rather than stay here any longer."

"So far you are right; but if these men are engaged in something unlawful, it is not certain they will let us off so easily."

"That is exactly my idea," Barry said; "and I think our best plan is to slip away without their knowledge— say in the morning while they are asleep."

"But the tent is ashore and we would not be warranted in losing that," Nat added, quickly.

"We can get it aboard to-night by letting the yacht drift close inshore. I'll guarantee to have it here within two hours. Then we shall be in a condition to run away from this place, if it is finally decided that we ought to leave."

"Harry's plan is a good one," Phil said. "It can do no harm to make all necessary preparations, and if we should conclude to fulfill our part of the contract it will amount to only a little extra work."

During this conversation, which had been carried on in whispers, the boys remained aft? but now Phil led the way forward where, to the surprise of all, the upper portion of the house was seen to be illuminated.

"It won't do to make any attempt at getting ashore until the men go to bed," Harry said. "They are most likely discussing the cause of their fright, and it can't be a great while before all three turn in."

"I'll draw the curtains in the cabin, get the stove cut, and do a little cooking," Nat suggested. "According to the appearance of things, this will come pretty near being an all-night job, and we may as well prepare for it."

“Don’t make any noise,” Phil said, warningly. “If they should learn that we are awake one of them might come aboard to find out what was the matter, and I’m not anxious to have any conversation with any of the party just now.”

Nat crept softly into the cabin, closed the door beside him, and his companions remained on watch, listening intently for any sound which might betoken the coming of those whom they had begun to consider as enemies. Quite naturally they talked of Jim, speculating as to what he was doing, and wondering if he had any suspicions as to why he was left behind.

When half an hour had passed, the thud of heavy but muffled blows dealt at regular intervals caused the boys to spring up in alarm, and Nat ran forward, forgetful of the necessity for preserving a strict silence.

“What is it?” he asked, breathlessly.

“That is just what we want to know. It sounds as if a blacksmith was at work.”

For ten minutes the boys remained leaning over the rail listening intently, but unable to form any idea of the reason for such sounds of industry at so late an hour.

“I’m going to know the meaning of that,” Harry whispered “Perhaps by learning what is being done we shall get a clue to the flight from Schenectady.”

“I know what it means,” Nat exclaimed suddenly, “and most likely we are more frightened than hurt. They are boring for oil, and work only in the night to guard against discovery.”

“That noise is in the upper portion of the house,” Harry said, as if this fact was sufficient to disprove Nat’s theory.

“Probably because the building serves as a derrick. The well is no doubt in the center, and they are obliged to be at an elevation to get at the drills effectively.”

It certainly seemed as if Nat had solved the apparent mystery, and his companions would have accepted this explanation as fact had it not been for the abandonment of Jim.

“Your idea is reasonable,” Phil said, slowly, “and I am almost inclined to believe

it. We will do as Harry proposed, however, and thus settle all doubts.”

As he ceased speaking he slackened the hawser, and with one of the boat hooks began to force the yacht toward the shore.

“I’ll go aft,” Harry whispered, “for it won’t do to let her run aground so firmly that we can’t pull her off without much trouble.”

It required some considerable time to get the little craft in the desired position, but it was finally done to the satisfaction of all. With the rudder hove close down and the post just touching the bank, the Restless was in such shallow water that the boys could get ashore by wading a few feet, and Phil tautened the cable to hold her steady.

After removing their shoes and stockings and rolling up their trousers, the boys dropped over the stem without causing the slightest splash of the water, and in a few minutes were within the shelter of the trees opposite that end of the house from which Nat had seen the signal.

Here they halted, uncertain how to proceed, for the lower portion of the building was shrouded in darkness, and there was no way by which they could gain the height necessary to peer in at the window.

“We might find a tall tree further in the woods,” Nat suggested; but Phil shook his head. He knew that the smaller growth in front cut off the view, therefore the labor would be useless.

Beckoning to his companions, he walked entirely around the dwelling, still keeping within shelter of the underbrush, but discovering no point of vantage.

“We shall have to give it up,” he said, in a cautious whisper. “There is too much risk trying to get at the windows, and we’d better go to work on the tent.”

Recognizing the fact that it was not possible to accomplish anything, Harry started toward the shore just as a slight grating noise, which could be heard in the interval between the blows, caused him to turn back.

“The window is being opened,” Nat exclaimed excitedly. “Come nearer and we shall soon know who it was I saw waving a handkerchief.”

There could be no question but that some one was trying to raise the narrow sash without giving the alarm to other occupants of the building, and the watchers crept from among the foliage until their forms could have been seen in the dim light. Here they paused, for the noise had suddenly ceased; and when so much time elapsed that it seemed certain they must have been mistaken, Phil beckoned for the others to join him in a retreat just as a low “s—s—sist” was heard.

Now Nat did not hesitate; regardless of whether or not he might be seen by one of the men, he arose to his feet and walked boldly forward until close to the end of the house.

There it was possible for him to see an arm pushed through the narrow space, the hand waving to and fro as if to attract attention, and he whispered:

“Say, are you the same fellow I saw this forenoon?”

“Yes; who are you?” came in the same cautious tones.

“One of the crew of the yacht that has been lying here.”

“How long have you known Small or his gang?”

“Only since we met them on the canal. Why don’t you come out where we can have a talk?”

“I’m locked up in a regular cage, and have been ever since you came.”

“What for?”

“So I couldn’t talk with you; and if Small knew what I was up to now he would just about break my head. I got it hot for waving the handkerchief.”

By this time Phil and Harry stood beside Nat, and the former asked:

“Where are the men?”

“At work,” the stranger at the window replied. “You want to get away from this place as soon as possible; but don’t go without taking me along.”

“Is there any chance of your getting out of the house?”

“There will be after you leave. Couldn’t you wait for me up the canal a piece? I believe I might give these fellows the slip if they allow me to move around as before you came. They will—”

The sentence was left unfinished, as if something inside had alarmed the speaker, and, fearing the men were on the point of entering the room, Phil threw himself at full length on the ground, the others following his example as they crowded close together against the side of the house in their efforts to escape observation.

Motionless and silent they remained in this position fully five minutes, hearing nothing to betoken that their presence was discovered, and then came the low hiss which had first called them to the window.

Again they rose to their feet, and the stranger resumed the conversation by asking:

“How long are you going to stay here?”

“Only until morning,” Phil replied.

“What about waiting up the canal for me on the chance that I slip away? They won’t keep me locked in after you go.”

“We will do it if possible. Unless something serious prevents we’ll stay on this side of the canal two or three days, but perhaps not quite so near as you say. Can’t you get through the window now?”

“The bars that form this cage are so near together that it is all I can do to get my head between them.”

“What are these men up to?” Harry asked. “Is it true that they have discovered oil?”

“Of course not, and you’d find that out mighty quick if the officers caught you. They are—”

“What are you muttering about?” a voice cried, and the boys had no difficulty in recognizing it as Small’s. “If you don’t keep quiet I’ll knock the head off your shoulders. Lie down, and if I hear so much as a grunt from this part of the place I’ll make it hotter than it was the last time you tried to cut a caper.”

At the first word the boys threw themselves on the ground again, and not until fully a quarter of an hour had passed did they dare move. Then Phil arose cautiously, listened intently several moments, and, satisfied that the men had no suspicions they were away from the yacht, motioned for the others to follow him.

Silent as shadows, not daring to so much as speak, the boys retraced their steps until the shelter of the undergrowth was gained once more, when they skirted swiftly around to the tent. Here the same profound silence was maintained as they lowered and rolled up the canvas into a portable form.

After this had been done it was not difficult to board the yacht, and when she had been pulled to her former anchorage, the crew crept into the cabin to discuss the startling discovery they had made.

“If you’d asked the question at first we should know what the men are up to,” Harry said impatiently. “What was the use of so much talk before we understood the true condition of affairs?”

“I was so excited at finding there really was a prisoner in the house that I never thought about anything else,” Phil replied, half apologetically. “What a pity Small hadn’t waited about five seconds longer before coming into the room.”

“We know by what the fellow began to say that some work of a criminal nature is being carried on, and that’s enough to make me mighty anxious to get away from this place,” Nat said quickly. “Don’t you suppose it would be safe to run down the stream in the darkness?”

“I wouldn’t dare try it;” and Phil spoke with regret. “If we should put her aground the men could soon reduce us to subjection, and it isn’t probable they would hesitate to add to the number of prisoners if it is important to keep their whereabouts a secret.”

“It will be better to wait until daylight,” Harry said. “Perhaps we can get away before they are awake, and in that— Say! if we pull the small boat out here, they won’t be able to stop us without swimming to the sloop, and we can sail off in a proper manner.”

“That’s the very idea!” Phil said exultantly, rising to his feet. “I don’t believe they have got another craft, and we shall be safe, so far as they are concerned.

Come on, the job must be done as soon as possible.”

By pushing the yacht toward the bank, as on the previous occasion, it was but the work of a few moments to make the little boat fast alongside, and on returning to the anchorage for the second time it seemed certain they were in a position to do as they chose.

“Now I don’t care whether they know what we are up to or not,” Phil said triumphantly. “We’ll finish that breakfast you had begun to cook, Nat, and be ready to leave this place at the first signs of day.”

“Are we going to take their boat away with us?” Nat asked.

“Of course not; well set her adrift this side the canal, or make her fast to those sluice gates. It is half-past two, and by the time the cooking has been done it will be light enough to make the start.”

The boys were so confident they were safe from any attack that they lighted the cabin lamps, and no effort was made to prevent their movements from being heard. All three conversed in an ordinary tone, and Nat even indulged in whistling, until a hail from the shore caused them to understand that it might have been as well to less publicly announce the fact of their intended departure.

“On the yacht!” Small shouted. “What’s the matter?”

The crew of the *Restless* made no reply, but stood gazing at each other in dismay until the question was repeated, this time in an angry tone.

“You’ll have to answer him, Phil,” Harry said, and the captain bent forward, knowing that now must come the declaration of war.

CHAPTER XI.

RUNNING THE GAUNTLET.

WHEN Phil went into the standing room, Harry and Nat followed close behind as if to encourage him by their presence, the latter saying in a whisper:

“Tell him just what we mean, and don’t be afraid, for we’ve got the upper hand of that crowd.”

“What are you doing out there?” Small repeated. “It won’t take me very long to pay that boat a visit if some of you don’t answer mighty quick.”

“It will take longer than you think,” Nat said in a low tone, and with a chuckle of satisfaction.

“Be quiet; we don’t want any trouble if it can be prevented,” and Harry seized his friend by the arm ready to drag him inside if he indulged in remarks calculated to ruffle the not particularly good temper of the alleged oil operator.

“Can’t you answer?” Small roared, and although it was impossible for the boys to see him, owing to the darkness, they knew by the noise of his movements that he was searching for the boat.

“I don’t know why we should take any special pains to answer questions which are none of your business,” Phil replied, displaying quite as much anger as had the man. “When we agreed to let the yacht there was nothing said about reporting whenever we chose to cook breakfast. We own this craft, and intend to act our own pleasure, more particularly when lying at anchor.”

It really seemed as if Small was unable to speak because of overpowering rage. For several seconds he remained quiet; then he said with a vain effort to speak calmly:

“I saw your lights, and came to find out what had happened. It isn’t usual for boys to remain awake all night, even in case they do own a yacht.”

“If you had spoken in that way before I should have told you that we were getting breakfast in order to make an early run to Schenectady after our friend, and for some more fuel.”

“And you meant to sneak off without saying a word to me?”

“There was to be no sneaking about it; we would have told any one who chanced to be awake when we were ready to leave,” and Phil spoke in a matter-of-fact tone well calculated to disarm the man’s suspicions that they might have learned that his story regarding the oil discoveries was false.

“But I don’t choose to have you go!” Small cried. “You are taking our money for the use of the yacht, and we have the right to say what shall be done with her.”

“You might if all our crew were on board,” Phil replied. “We were forced to abandon one, and now, whether you like it or not, we intend to go back where he is probably waiting for us. Besides, we haven’t taken your money yet on the charter of the steamer. All that has been paid was the amount due for towing the sloop, consequently if we never return you will lose nothing.”

“Then you are thinking of going back on your word?”

“Most certainly, since it is impossible to say how many of the crew may be left behind in the future according to your fancy. We don’t care to sail in that way.”

“Bring the boat ashore!” Small cried in a voice literally hoarse with rage, and Phil replied calmly:

“I don’t think it will be safe to do anything of the kind. We will either leave her here in the pond when the yacht leaves, or make her fast somewhere near the entrance to the canal.”

No answer was made to this bold declaration, much to the surprise of the boys. Not even a footstep was heard, and they were unable to determine whether Small had returned to the house in order to consult with his partners, or was yet on the shore trying to form some plan of action.

“There can be no question but that he will go to any length for the purpose of holding us here,” Phil said, “and it stands us in hand to prepare for defense. I think we had better get up steam in case they swim to the sloop.”

“I’ll attend to that part of it,” Harry replied, “while you and Nat stand guard. It would be a good idea to bring out the guns.”

Nat evidently thought the same, for he hurriedly brought the weapons into the standing room, thrusting one into Phil’s hands as he said:

“We have the right to defend our property, and under the circumstances I believe in using every possible method.”

“I should hate to fire at a human being,” Phil replied, thoughtfully, “and we’ll try our best to run away, even if we are obliged to take the risk of going down the stream before daybreak.”

“It will be light enough if they wait half an hour before beginning operations,” Harry said as he went aft, and not more than sixty seconds elapsed when it became evident the men did not intend to waste any time.

The boys could hear hurried footsteps on the bank, and they understood that Small had waited to notify his companions before attempting to bring the crew of the chartered craft into a state of subjection.

“It will take them at least five minutes to swim out to the sloop,” Phil whispered, “and by that time we shall be able to turn the screw.”

“But they are not going to do anything of the kind,” and now Nat was puzzled. “It sounds to me as if the whole crowd was running away.”

There was no question but that the men were going rapidly toward the canal, and when their footsteps had nearly died away in the distance Small shouted from the shore at the point where the boat had been moored:

“Take my advice, and give over trying to raise steam. The moment that craft leaves her anchorage I shall open fire, while Bristow and Summerfield will do the same at the narrowest part of the channel. You can’t escape us all, and we are bent on keeping the yacht the length of time agreed upon.”

By way of giving emphasis to his words he fired three shots from his revolver, the bullets whistling uncomfortably near Phil’s head.

Nat returned the compliment by discharging both barrels of his fowling-piece; but in the darkness it was impossible to take aim, therefore the worthy Mr. Small was in no serious danger of being wounded.

“Don’t do that again until there is some chance of hitting the mark,” Phil said sharply, and then he added to the man on shore:

“We are armed also, and I assure you there will be no hesitation in shooting you down if any attempt is made to stop us. Besides, the boy who was left at Schenectady would soon have officers of the law here in search of us if we were not to be found when he comes, as he surely will do unless we go after him.”

Small must have concluded that he had been too liberal with his threats, for he began to retreat from the bold stand taken by saying, in what he probably

intended should sound like a friendly tone:

“Now see here, boys, you can’t understand just how we feel at the chance that a crowd of people may come here and cheat us out of what is rightfully ours. If we can keep your boat, and make sure you can’t betray the secret during the next ten days, our fortunes will be made. Let’s settle this matter friendly like; if you want more money, say so, and I’ll do the square thing. Of course I don’t intend to hurt so much as a hair of your heads.”

“I thought not by the way those bullets whistled around a few minutes ago,” Phil replied with a nervous laugh.

“That was when I felt pretty nigh crazy at the thought that you might sell us out. Come ashore, and let’s talk this thing over.”

“I had rather not run the risk of leaving the boat,” Phil said, and at this moment Harry came from the cabin.

“Why do you waste your breath talking to him?” he said impatiently. “We know what he means by trying to be so sweet.”

“I understand that well enough; but don’t you realize how soon it will be daylight? If he spends much time here we shall be able to leave without trouble,” Phil whispered, and Small cried from the shore:

“That’s right, talk the thing over among yourselves, and it won’t take long to see on which side your bread is buttered.”

To repeat every argument he used as an inducement for them to come ashore would be wearisome. Suffice it to say that he made all sorts of promises to accomplish his purpose, and meanwhile the sky was growing lighter and lighter.

During this time the screw had been revolving slowly; and the little steamer tugged and strained at the cable as if eager to be free.

“He will fire at us as we leave, that’s certain,” Phil whispered, as Small, tiring of persuasion, began to use threats once more. “Lie down near the engine, Harry; Nat, you stay out of sight in the cabin after we get the anchor inboard, and we’ll make one dash for liberty.”

Now that the moment for action had really come, both Nat and Harry lost their courage.

“Perhaps we’d better not try it,” the latter whispered. “You will be on your feet at least a portion of the time, and it’s only reasonable to suppose one of the men can hit so big a mark.”

“If we don’t go now they’ll give us quarters near the fellow we talked with last night. I had rather take the risks,” Phil said grimly, as he put the helm hard down. “Start her at full speed, Harry, while Nat and I get in the anchor.”

There was no delay in obeying these orders; as the engineer went aft, both the boys forward seized the cable, hauling in with a celerity born of the knowledge that their movements would be the signal for the battle to begin, and thanks to the shortness of the hawser, the task was accomplished before Small fully realized what was being done.

“Drop that anchor again, or I’ll fire!” he shouted, as the little craft began to gather way.

“Get into the cabin!” Phil whispered to Nat, and, as there was no immediate danger of going aground, he stooped below the combing at the moment Small discharged the cartridges remaining in his revolver.

Instead of seeking shelter in the cabin, Nat had followed his friend’s example in the standing room, and the two crouched side by side until the fusillade ceased, when Phil raised himself sufficiently to look over the bow.

Swift as the Restless was, it required but a few seconds to head her for the stream, and the stem presented the only target for the angry man on the shore.

“Lie low, Harry!” Phil shouted, closing the forward door to shut off the view through the cabin, and then to Nat he said: “Make yourself as small as possible, for the most dangerous time will be when we arrive opposite Bristow and Summerfield.”

The yacht was driving ahead at the rate of not less than ten miles an hour, when the two men could be seen on the bank at the place where it would be necessary to make an abrupt turn in order to gain the channel of the stream, and the helmsman shut his teeth tightly, for, whatever the danger might be, it was

imperative to keep to his post.

The four minutes which followed seemed, when they had passed, like some horrible dream, rather than reality, to the boys who were staking all on this venture. To Nat it seemed as if a dozen men were firing as rapidly as their weapons could be reloaded; but Phil counted every shot, fancying the next would surely lodge in his body.

CHAPTER XII.

JIM.

HAD the day fairly dawned, the chances are that the boy at the wheel of the Restless would have been disabled if not killed; but the dim light, which distorted objects instead of rendering them distinct, served to thwart the enemy's purpose.

The polished woodwork was splintered and scarred in half a dozen places; but the crew had not received so much as a scratch when the yacht gained the narrow channel, thus again hiding the two forward from the view of the desperate men.

"Are you all right, Harry?" Phil shouted, and the reply came in a cheery tone:

"There's been no damage done here; but it isn't advisable to show myself yet awhile."

"We'll soon be out of reach. Don't move until she strikes the canal, for—"

Phil ceased speaking very suddenly as the onward motion was abruptly checked, and the yacht heeled to starboard in a manner which could not be mistaken.

"We're aground!" Nat cried as he leaped to his feet, but the words were hardly spoken before the Restless righted, lurched to port, and then, as if leaping upward, passed clear of the obstacle.

She had caught on the end of a muddy point which projected from the left bank; but the momentum was sufficient to carry her entirely across. Had the delay been ten minutes instead of only as many seconds, the flight would have come to an end, for the men started forward at full speed as they observed the slight halt.

It was possible, however, the little craft had been crippled, since the least injury done the supply pipes, which ran outboard either side the keel, would shut off the fuel.

“Does the oil come freely?” Phil asked.

“I can’t see any difference,” Harry replied. “It won’t take long to find out, however. “What did we strike?”

“The bottom; and another experiment like that will end the cruise in favor of Small.”

The Restless dashed on like some living thing, and not until the men were lost to view in the distance did Phil give the word to “slow down.” They were now approaching the most dangerous portion of the channel, and to strike ever so slightly would be fatal.

It was sunrise when the yacht finally emerged from the stream into the waters of the canal, and Phil ran her near the towpath, where the power was shut off in order to admit of an opportunity to ascertain the amount of damage done.

“It isn’t likely any boats will be along here so early,” he said to Nat; but you had better keep watch while Harry and I look around. If a craft should heave in sight we can get up steam quickly enough to crawl out of the road.”

So far as could be learned, the supply pipes were uninjured. The oil flowed freely, and, if any fracture had been sustained, it was so slight as not to affect the pumps. Here and there a bullet in the woodwork afforded proof of the short but sharp engagement wherein one party had done all the shooting; but nothing more.

“We’ve come out of that scrape mighty cheap,” Phil said, in a tone of relief, when the examination was ended. “An escape from those men is worth a good deal more than what we have paid.”

“I don’t consider we are through with them yet,” Harry replied, gloomily. “We must find Jim, and then do what we can to help that fellow whom we saw in the house, before the business is ended. “But there’s one thing certain; we’ve got enough of trying to earn our expenses on this trip. When the money runs short we’ll head the yacht for home; that will be the safest plan.”

“I agree with you on that point,” Phil replied, laughingly, “and it won’t be necessary to talk very long in order to convince Nat of the same thing. Now that there are no repairs to be made, suppose you start her again?”

Harry lost no time in acting upon this suggestion; they were yet too near the alleged oil speculators to admit of his feeling perfectly easy in mind, and in a few minutes the Restless was headed toward Schenectady.

The boys kept watch astern until the mouth of the stream had been shut out from view by the bend in the canal; but nothing was seen of the men who adopted such desperate measures to prevent them from leaving the vicinity of the solitary dwelling.

The morning breeze was strong enough to permit of their sailing the sloop down the narrow river; but they could make little headway after entering the artificial watercourse, therefore the yachtsmen did not fear any extended pursuit.

The Restless was several miles on her journey toward where the missing boy was supposed to be when Harry came forward in an excited manner exclaiming:

“We forgot to leave the tender; she is still towing astern, and if those men are so disposed they can have us arrested for stealing her.”

“Reverse the engine! We’ll try to turn here without going aground, and make the boat fast to the sluice gates,” Phil said hurriedly. “It won’t do to give them the slightest hold on us.”

Before this order could be obeyed Nat, who had just come from the cabin, cried:

“Who’s that on the towpath signaling to us? It looks like Jim.”

“That’s who it is,” and Phil steered the yacht to the opposite bank as Harry ran aft to stop the engine. “But what that load may be that he has on his back I can’t make out.”

“I was just wondering how I could get across the canal,” Jim said in a matter-of-fact tone, as if his being left behind was an incident to be expected in an ordinary yachting cruise. “It would have come kinder tough if I’d had to stay on the bank till you fellows went on another trip for the bosses.”

By this time the bow of the steamer was against the bank, and Jim passed over two well filled bags before clambering aboard.

“What have you got there?” Phil asked.

“The provisions you sent me after, of course.”

“And you have brought them on your back all this distance?”

“That’s just exactly what I did. It wouldn’t do to leave the stuff behind, you see, so it was a case of ‘must.’”

“How long have you been on the road?”

“All night.”

“But why didn’t you wait in Schenectady for us?”

“I wasn’t dead sure you would come back, and, besides, I might as well be traveling as lying sucking my thumbs.”

“Here comes a barge,” Nat shouted. “We shall have to get out of the way or be run down.”

In his astonishment at seeing Jim with such a load Phil had forgotten his duties as captain; but he made amends for the momentary neglect by bringing the little craft around until she was heading up the canal once more, after which Harry came forward to listen to the story Jim was expected to tell.

“Weren’t you surprised at finding we had run away from you?” he asked.

“It was an hour before I made up my mind that the yacht had really gone, and then I concluded it was the men’s doings. Why did you start so suddenly?”

Phil gave a detailed account of all that had happened, and when the story was finished the steamer had arrived at the mouth of the stream.

“Now we must work lively, for I don’t care about giving that crowd another chance to use us as targets. Swing the boat around, Nat, and we will back up to the gates, then make her fast somewhere, and get out of this neighborhood in

short order.”

The work was quickly and readily performed, and after a delay of hardly more than two minutes, during which time nothing suspicious was seen, the Restless continued up the canal at half speed.

“We won’t run but three or four miles,” Phil said, “and it will be better to go slow in order that a lookout can be kept for a good place to hide the yacht.”

While they were skirting as near the bank opposite the towpath as the depth of the water would permit, and running considerably slower than the rules of the canal specified, Jim told the story of his movements during the night.

“When I came back to the bulkhead with about as much as I could carry in my arms,” he said, “I felt rather blue at not finding the boat. Of course there wasn’t a suspicion that you had run away; but things looked queer. Then I thought perhaps you would be back in a short time, and I made myself as comfortable as possible until a man asked me what I was doing there. When I told him he said the oil men had gone home, and advised me to get out of town right away. He was mighty inquisitive as to how much money I had spent, and wanted to know whether it was in silver or notes. It didn’t pay to fool long with him, especially when there was so much of a tramp ahead of me, and after buying two bags to carry the stuff in, I started. That’s all there is to it. I kept right on, resting once in a while, till I saw the Restless, and perhaps I wasn’t glad when she hove in sight.”

“I wonder who the man was that took so great an Interest in you?” Phil said half to himself.

“Of course I don’t know; but he didn’t get any satisfaction, so there’s no harm done.”

“How much did you buy?” Nat asked.

“Three dollars’ worth, and I had to pay fifty cents for the bags.”

“You get something to eat and then turn in. I’ll cook breakfast for all hands while you lie still and rest.”

“I’m able to do my full share; but first tell me about the boy you saw. Will it be

possible to help him?”

“I don’t believe we can do anything,” and Phil spoke in a tone of regret. “We’ll hang around here two or three days, and if he succeeds in escaping from the house we stand ready to do the rest.”

“That looks like a good place to lay,” Nat cried as he pointed ahead to where the bank of the canal had apparently given way, forming a sort of basin which was fringed with trees. “How would it do to see whether the yacht can get in there?”

“We’ll try it. Run her as slow as you can, Harry, until I give the word to shut off the power entirely.”

With the screw barely turning, the little craft ran up to the shore as Phil stood on the bow with the boathook to ascertain the depth of water, and after the engine had been stopped she glided into a narrow strip of water with seven or eight inches beneath her keel, the trees shutting her out completely from view of any one on the canal. It was possible to make fast directly alongside the bank, the earth having caved in or been dug away at this point, and no better mooring place could have been imagined.

“No one saw us come in,” Phil said gleefully, “and it will be an easy matter to stay here a week, if we wish, without being discovered. Later in the day we’ll see how the land lies, and make some kind of an arrangement whereby that fellow may know where we are.”

Only a few seconds were necessary in which to let off the vapor in the boiler, and with two hawsers out in such a manner that the yacht could not swing beyond the fringe of trees, the boys went into the cabin, where Nat and Jim had already begun preparations for breakfast or dinner, whichever it might be called.

It was possible to hear the voices of the boatmen as they passed to and fro on the canal; but the foliage screened the Restless as with an impenetrable veil, and the boys felt a most perfect sense of security.

In order to be prepared for any change in this very desirable condition of affairs, however, Phil and Harry reloaded the guns, placed both weapons where they could be got at handily, and otherwise made ready to defend their property.

During the meal the conversation, carried on in such low tones that there was no

danger of the words being heard twenty feet away, was regarding the men from whom they had escaped, and each one had an equally improbable theory to explain the very singular maneuver.

“There’s one thing certain,” Phil said decidedly. “The man in Schenectady who asked Jim so many questions was a friend of those at the pond— perhaps one of the same party who came aboard the yacht.”

“And it is also positive that they didn’t show any signs of running away until Jim had gone on shore,” Harry added. “It seems as if they were afraid of him.”

“Small pretended to believe we might be tempted to reveal the secret of his oil discovery; but of course there can be no truth in that, for honest people don’t shoot at fellows who are only doing what is square.”

This was about as near as Phil could come to solving the mystery. For what purpose the men needed a steamer, unless it was to visit friends in the neighborhood, neither of the boys was able to decide, and when they rose from the table all were as completely befogged as when they left the pond.

While Nat and Jim washed the dishes and otherwise set matters to rights in the cabin, Phil and Harry examined the hawsers, wove the branches together here and there where it might be possible any one could see through, and thus improved what previously seemed like a perfect hiding-place.

At two o’clock all the crew were lounging in the standing room, for Phil did not think it advisable to explore the surrounding country until evening. Secure as was the retreat, time had begun to drag, and Nat was about to propose that they try to aid the prisoner by reporting his case to the authorities at Schenectady, when the sound of oars caused Harry to peer through the leafy screen.

“All three of the men are coming this way in the sloop!” he whispered an instant later, his face giving evidence of considerable fear. “They’re rowing because the wind has entirely died away.”

“There isn’t much chance of their passing this place without finding out what is behind these trees,” Nat said as he pulled one of the guns toward him. “It’s a question of fighting unless we are willing to be taken back, and I’d rather run the risk of having a good many bullets fly about our ears than allow that to happen.”

“Don’t be foolish,” and Phil wrested the weapon from his friend, “They are not here yet, and there is reason to believe they will go by without stopping. Keep perfectly quiet, and watch until it is certain the sloop is to be put in this side. There’ll be plenty of time after that is known positively.”

By pulling a few leaves aside the boys could look into the canal, and what they saw a moment later was not calculated to diminish their fears. The men had ceased rowing upon arriving nearly opposite the hiding-place, and it seemed very much as if they proposed to ascertain what the trees might conceal.

Hardly had this fear taken possession of the spectators when a mule and its driver came in sight, and then the cause of the stoppage was made apparent,

“They’re going to hail the boat,” Phil whispered. “Most likely they want a tow.”

In this he was partially correct, for as the clumsy craft with her one mule power appeared, Small cried:

“Hello there!”

“Hello yourself,” responded the man at the tiller, as he waved his hand for the “engineer” on the towpath to slacken the already very slow speed.

“Have you seen anything of a small steamboat between here and Schenectady?”

“Nary a steamer. Joe Cook’s boat is the only one that’s passed me this morning.”

“What will you take to pull us half a dozen miles?”

“I can’t think of puttin’ another pound behind that air mule. He’s got a heavy load, an’ ain’t in the best of spirits as it is.”

“Suppose you go on ahead,” Bristow said to Small. “We can’t make two miles an hour with the oars, and there’s just a chance you might overtake them at one of the locks.”

“It’s a mighty poor one; but I’ll try it,” Small replied, and then he added to the man at the tiller, “I reckon you’d be willing to take me aboard if I paid a fair price!”

“That’ll be all right. I’m agreeable to carryin’ the three of you; but it won’t do to tow the boat.”

The sloop was rowed alongside the barge, Small clambered aboard, and the mule power was applied once more, Summerfield and Bristow anchoring their craft within a dozen yards of where the boys were hiding.

“We’ll come on after a spell,” the latter cried, and Small replied:

“Don’t loaf around too long, for there’s no knowing how soon we may want to make a big jump.”

Then the boat passed on out of sight, and the boys literally held their breath in suspense as Summerfield said:

“We might as well pull in under the shade of the trees.”

“Crawl beneath the awning if the sun is too hot for you. I’d rather stay out here in case that yacht should happen to come along. It isn’t positive they didn’t go to Schenectady, for a dozen steamers might have been laying there without being seen by that boatman, and it is good policy to be where we can stop them.”

“Those boys are twenty miles from here by this time.”

“That couldn’t be if they went after their friend, and it ain’t likely he’d be left behind. We made a mess of the whole thing by not sleeping on board while they were in the woods.”

“How could we do that and attend to our work? My idea is that the trouble began by leaving the boy. It would have been as well, and a good deal better as things have turned out, if we had waited till he came back.”

“Well,” Bristow said petulantly, “it don’t make any particular difference what oughter been done so long as we are in the scrape. If we can’t overhaul them it won’t be safe to stay in this part of the country.”

“There’s more truth than poetry in that; but all the talking in the world can’t change matters. So I’m going to take a nap. Wake me when it’s time to buckle down to them oars again.”

“So I’m to do all the watching, eh?”

“If you are foolish enough, yes.”

Then Summerfield crawled under the canvas which had served as cabin during the run up the river, and Bristow solaced himself with a short, black pipe and some very strong tobacco.

“What are we going to do if they stay there the remainder of the day?” Nat whispered as Phil stole noiselessly toward the cabin.

“Keep as quiet as we know how, and hope they won’t take it into their ugly heads to pull any nearer the shore.”

CHAPTER XIII.

DIVIDING THE FORCES.

WHY the men had suddenly concluded to remain at anchor when a few moments before all appeared eager to push ahead at the best speed, puzzled Phil greatly, and, as if it would be possible to arrive at the correct solution more readily when alone, he entered the cabin. The only conclusion which seemed to be at all reasonable was that they fully expected Small to overtake the yacht and bring the boys back, in which case it would be as well to remain there until his return.

“I can’t believe they are such fools as to think that could be done,” he said, half to himself, “for all three of them know we would make a big fight rather than go back to the house in the woods.”

After spending half an hour vainly trying to decide why Summerfield and Bristow chose to remain in that particular place so long when they had good reason to fear their secret might be discovered, he went on deck, where his companions were holding a whispered consultation upon the same subject.

Summerfield was yet under the awning, probably sleeping, and Bristow remained on guard. Two or three barges had passed on their way up or down the canal; but, instead of hailing any of them, the men appeared desirous of escaping observation.

“It won’t be long now before Small returns,” Harry said, in a whisper, as Phil

seated himself by his side. "He must surely find out that we didn't go through the next lock, and not waste time by traveling in that direction."

"Then we'll hope our neighbors will conclude to move on," Phil replied. "I'm getting hungry; but it wouldn't be safe to get a meal just now for fear they might smell the food."

"Suppose Small comes, and they make up their minds to search along the banks for such places as this?" Harry suggested.

"We won't bother our heads about that yet awhile. Of course we'd have to fight; but if the time comes for anything of the kind there'll be little need for elaborate plans. I'm thinking we ought to do something to help that boy; he may be hunting around for us this very minute."

Just then an unusually large boat hove in sight from the direction taken by Small, and, after peering furtively at the helmsman a few seconds, Bristow shouted:

"Hello! Have you seen anything of a small yacht to-day?"

"Not a yacht."

"Could one have passed before daylight without your knowing it?"

"Not unless she went overland, for I laid at the lock last night, and was the first to go through this morning. There's more than you looking for such a craft, it seems. A fellow asked the same question about ten miles back."

"Thank you," Bristow replied, but without offering any explanation regarding the other inquirer, and then he said in a low tone to Summerfield, who had been aroused from his slumbers by the conversation: "Now you see I was right about their having gone to Schenectady. It stands us in hand to get back to the shanty, and make ready to leave this part of the country."

"I don't allow that it does," Summerfield replied, moodily. "The further we go from there the safer we'll be, and besides, the craft ought to be kept here until Sam comes, unless we run up to meet him."

"There would be no sense in doing that, because he'll most likely come down on a boat, and it'll be a clear waste of time if he thinks as I do about going to the

shanty.”

Summerfield made no reply, but crawled under the awning once more, and Bristow relighted his pipe, pulling at it with great energy, as if deeply disturbed in mind.

“Trying to help that boy will only result in our finally being overhauled,” Harry whispered. “I go in for making one bold dash. We’ve run the gauntlet of their bullets once, and can again. They wouldn’t dare to do very much shooting if we should come out just as a boat hove in sight.”

Phil beckoned for his companions to follow him into the cabin, and once there he said, in a low tone:

“This thing must be decided, and we had better talk here, where there is less danger of being overheard. I believe in keeping our promise to the fellow we saw at the pond; but it isn’t right to say we shall do it unless the majority agree to the plan, because we are running a good many risks— perhaps more than we ought. There is no question but that we can get out of this hole by doing as Harry proposes, and all hands should settle what is to be done.”

“I’ll go and keep watch,” Jim said as he went toward the door. “This is something that I haven’t the right to interfere in, so there’s no need of listening to the arguments.”

“You have just as much voice in the matter as any one else,” Nat replied. “This concerns every member of the party, and your vote will be counted with the rest.”

Jim would have protested that he was not entitled to take part because of the position he occupied, but neither Phil nor Harry would listen, and they called upon him for his opinion as to what should be done.

“I ought to be the last one to advise that you go away, leaving that boy to get out of his trouble as best he can, for I stood in a similar position when you gave me a passage. If it was my boat I’d hold on till it seemed pretty sure he couldn’t leave, then see the authorities of the nearest town, and tell them what we know.”

“Why couldn’t we do that in the first place, instead of staying here where there’s every chance of getting into difficulty?” Harry asked.

The discussion occupied considerable time, for all were bent on convincing Harry that common humanity demanded that they remain; while he tried equally hard to prove that their best course would be to let the officials of the county take the matter in charge. The result was, however, that three votes were cast for staying in the vicinity at least twenty-four hours, and Harry accepted the defeat without a murmur.

“I’m willing to help anybody when it can be done with some show of success,” he said finally; “and now that it’s settled, I’ll do everything possible to carry out the plan. My idea is that some one should go on shore pretty soon, because he may come along at any time.”

Phil proposed to take the dangerous duty upon himself; but Jim urged that he be sent, arguing that the crew of the yacht should remain on board in case of an emergency, and he would be the one least missed in the event of some unforeseen accident.

The others recognized the utility of this suggestion, and preparations were made for landing him. The yacht was pulled noiselessly toward the bank until the bow just touched it, when Jim sprang lightly ashore, waving his hand in adieu as he disappeared among the foliage.

Then the Restless was warped back to her former position, and the boys took turns in watching until late in the afternoon, when Jim came to report that there were no signs of any one having been in the neighborhood recently.

“There is a road about three miles from here,” he said; “but I don’t think it leads to the house by the pond. If you say the word, I’ll go back and learn if that fellow succeeded in getting out. It isn’t likely the men will see me.”

Phil was opposed to dividing the party, as was also Harry; but Nat thought the idea a good one.

“It’ll save our hanging around here two or three days,” he replied, “and I’ll go with him. We can be back by daylight if we get there before dark, and I believe in trying it.”

His companions at first objected most strenuously; but after considerable argument, during which Jim and Nat urged that the scheme be tried, they finally came to believe that it might be to the advantage of all if the yacht could

continue on up the canal next morning.

“Be careful!” Phil said, warningly. “If you find there is any chance of running against the men, come back. We are not bound to help him at the expense of getting ourselves into trouble.”

“And be here sure by daylight, whether you succeed in finding him or not,” Harry added.

The boys promised faithfully to follow these instructions, and as soon as possible they landed, Phil saying as they plunged into the undergrowth:

“It seems as if Jim’s plan was a wise one, yet I can’t help feeling that they are taking too much risk. Perhaps we ought to have insisted that the party remain together.”

“It’s too late now. They’ve gone, and it stands us in hand to keep a sharp lookout on our friends, for there’s no knowing when they may take a notion to learn what is behind these bushes.”

Then both seated themselves on the starboard-locker forward where a view could be had of the men in the boat, and these positions had hardly been assumed when a barge came in sight, on the deck of which stood Small.

Bristow recognized him at once, and awakened Summerfield. The two pulled their craft into the channel where the leader could then step on board.

“He has found out that we did not go up the canal,” Phil whispered. “It is most unfortunate that Nat and Jim went just as they did.”

Harry made no reply. He was watching intently the men as they pulled the sloop to her former anchorage, and not until the barge had passed on so far that those aboard could by no possibility overhear the conversation did Small speak. Then he said with an imprecation:

“The little villains have outwitted us after all! They must be in Schenectady, and no doubt the whole story has been told by this time.”

“Then the sooner we light out the better,” Bristow said in evident alarm.

“I don’t count on leaving everything at the pond. We must fix affairs there first, and after that, if we do not find the scoundrels it will be clear that they have gone home. But,” and Small struck a heavy blow on the gunwale of the boat by way of emphasis, “I haven’t given over all hope of getting my hands on them once more. Instead of pulling straight ahead with the idea of catching the yacht, we should have looked into every hole where there was any possibility they could hide. There’s plenty of places along the banks to run under cover.”

“It’s no use to do that now,” Summerfield replied with a yawn, as if the discussion did not concern him. “They couldn’t fail to see us when we came up, and if your supposition is correct, they slipped down the canal when we passed.”

“That remains to be found out,” Small said decidedly. “I don’t intend to give up the snug place that cost us so much trouble to locate, until it is absolutely necessary, and am willing to do a good deal of work on the chances of being successful. There’s no time to be lost, for we have already thrown away one day. Give me some grub and well begin the job.”

“They’ll certainly come in here,” Harry whispered. “What shall we do? If the other boys were on board it would be a case of running the gauntlet as before; but it won’t do to give them the slip.”

Phil made no reply for several moments. He knew perfectly well if Small carried out his plan, that portion of the bank would be the first to claim his attention, and it was not possible to avoid discovery. A hand to hand fight— two against three — could hardly be thought of, and he was completely at a loss to know what should be done.

Meanwhile Small was leisurely eating the meal which had been drawn from under the awning, washing it down with copious draughts from a suspicious looking bottle, and searching the banks of the canal with his eyes as if well aware how near his intended victims were.

“We must use our guns if they attempt to come on board,” Phil said at length, and the words had but just been spoken when Small concluded his meal.

“Now turn to,” he said. “Begin by looking at the shore behind that clump of bushes; there are enough of them to hide two or three yachts like the Restless.”

“It isn’t likely they are there,” Summerfield replied, with a laugh. “We’ve been here all day, and would know if any one was in the vicinity.”

“We’ll have a look all the same,” Small said in a tone which admitted of no argument. “I intend to do this thing thoroughly.”

Bristow and Small made ready for rowing, Summerfield looking on discontentedly from his seat in the bow, and Phil seized one of the guns as he said:

“Our only chance now is that a canal-boat may come along before they can get on board. If one heaves in sight we must do some tall shouting.”

Harry raised the remaining weapon, taking up a position within the cabin where he would be sheltered to some degree, and grimly watched the movements of the enemy.

It was evident that none of the three men, not even Small himself, had any idea the yacht was so near. They pulled leisurely toward the bank as if believing this portion of the work to be useless, and Summerfield did not so much as turn around when the sloop approached the shore.

“They are coming beyond a question,” Phil whispered hurriedly as he went to Harry’s side. “I am going to fire once over their heads, and if they do not stop we must try to disable them.”

CHAPTER XIV.

RECONNOITERING.

WHEN Jim and Nat landed they spent no time in forming a plan of action; but pushed on down the canal only far enough from the bank to prevent being seen in case either of the three men chanced to double back unexpectedly. As Jim had spent half an hour getting a general idea of the lay of the land, Nat was perfectly willing he should take the lead, and they walked through the tangled underbrush at full speed nearly twenty minutes without speaking.

Then both felt the need of a breathing spell, and when the one in advance threw himself on the ground, his example was immediately followed by the other.

“This is what I call tough work,” Nat said as he used his hat for a fan. “We must be somewhere near the house by my reckoning.”

“I fancy it’ll take an hour longer before we reach the stream,” Jim replied, panting heavily. “It won’t do to stop long, for unless we manage to strike the place before dark we shan’t be able to find it until morning.”

“I’m ready when you are; but I don’t think there’ll be any damage done if we wait ten minutes.”

Jim was willing to devote that length of time to resting, but no more, and it seemed to Nat as if they had just halted when the former rose to his feet.

“Come on,” he said, and the boys did not stop again until they were at the narrow watercourse down which the Restless had carried her crew in safety from the bullets of their pursuers.

It was a most exhausting journey; but neither cared to confess that he could not hold out as long as the other, and the result was both were forced to take a rest before following up the stream to the pond.

It was nearly dark when they pressed forward once more, now taking but little care to conceal themselves, because they knew the enemy to be a good distance up the canal.

“It’s certain the sloop can’t get down here for some time,” Jim said, “so we can count on having things pretty much our own way till late in the night, even if the men started back the same minute we did.”

Under these supposed circumstances, the tramp was continued at a leisurely pace until the mantle of night had shut out from view all save such objects as were close at hand, and then the gloom and the profound silence caused them to move a trifle more rapidly,

They were almost directly against the house before either was aware of its close proximity, and Jim made a complete circuit of the place to convince himself there was no mistake.

Then they went to the window at which the prisoner had been seen; not a sound, save their own cautious footsteps, broke the stillness.

“He either got away and couldn’t find the yacht, or else the men carried him off when they started to chase us,” Jim said, after gazing at the building several moments. “We’ve had our journey for nothing, and the sooner we turn back the quicker we’ll get there. It won’t be a very pleasant walk in the night, but we can keep close to the canal and perhaps—”

He ceased speaking suddenly, for at that instant something resembling a muffled cry was heard from the interior of the house.

“What was that?” Nat whispered in alarm as he seized his companion by the arm.

“I reckon it’s the fellow we are looking for,” Jim replied in a matter-of-fact tone. “The men have tied him up where he can’t so much as get his nose out of doors.”

As if to prove that Jim was correct in his surmises the cry was repeated, and this time there could be no doubt as to the direction from which it came.

“We must get in there before Small and his friends come back,” Nat said, as he ran to the door and shook it violently. “It would be cruel to leave the poor fellow now.”

Jim had already worked too hard to be willing to abandon the attempt at the very moment when the time for action had arrived; but how it would be possible to get into the house was what perplexed him. Nat’s vain efforts soon showed that an entrance could not be effected through the ordinary channels, and instead of wasting precious minutes in conversation he once more made a circuit of the building in the hope of finding some vulnerable point of attack.

The windows in the lower story were closed with wooden shutters, and the only place at which success seemed at all probable was where they had talked with the prisoner.

“There are some old timbers back of the house,” he said to Nat, “and by bringing them around here we may manage to rig up something in the shape of a ladder. Come and help me.”

“We’ll soon find a way to get you out,” Nat shouted to the prisoner, and then, waiting only long enough to hear the muffled cry which came in reply to his cheery words, he followed Jim.

The boys did not build anything very secure in the way of a platform, even though they worked industriously nearly half an hour; but they had that piled against the side of the house by which it was possible to reach the ledge of the window, and both mounted as soon as the last timber was in place.

Here they attempted to peer through the glass; but the darkness prevented them from seeing anything of the interior, and after several trials Jim succeeded in raising the sash. The cage of which they had heard projected only half across the space, and it was probably through the bars at the extreme end that the boy had forced his head. So far as could be judged by the limited view from the corner of this impromptu prison, the room was empty, and believing they had made a mistake as to the location of the muffled cries, Jim called softly:

“Say, is there anybody in here?”

Again the reply came in the shape of a moan, and Nat said excitedly, as he pulled himself up by the ledge:

“I’ll find out what’s the matter in here if the men come this very minute.”

It was not a simple matter to force his body between the cage and the window casing, but he succeeded after some difficulty, and found himself in an apartment which apparently occupied half the floor space on the second story. Nothing more than this could he make out in the gloom. The room seemed to be deserted.

Just as he was about to call upon the supposed prisoner again, a slight noise from the further end of the cage attracted his attention.

“Don’t stay in there any longer than you can help!” Jim whispered hoarsely, “for it won’t be very pleasant if the men catch us here.”

“I guess I’ve found what we came for,” Nat replied as he went toward the wooden bars, and a few seconds later he saw the form of some one lashed to the timber several feet from the window.

It was but the work of a moment to ascertain the true condition of affairs. The boy was tied to the uprights, with a gag in his mouth, and in such a position that he was powerless to move ever so slightly.

Nat’s first care was to remove the stick which held the unfortunate fellow’s jaws

open, and then he busied himself with untying the ropes wound several times around his limbs.

Upon being released the prisoner sank to the floor, the circulation of blood having been impeded so long that he had no power over his cramped and aching legs.

This alarmed Nat; he feared they had come only to see the boy die, and he cried to Jim:

“Come in here quick. He don’t seem to have any life left in his body, and it’s no wonder, considering how he’s been trussed up.”

When Jim made his way through the narrow aperture Nat was doing his best to break into the cage in order to reach the sufferer; a task of no mean magnitude owing to the thickness of the timbers.

“Find the door,” the former whispered. “There must be some way to get into the place, and you’ll never succeed by pulling on those joists.”

Fortunately the amateur cook had a small supply of matches with him, and after lighting two, the entrance to the prison was found in the shape of a door at the end, secured by a stout padlock, close under the roof of the building.

To remove this a lever must be procured, and Jim lowered himself out of the window, pulling from the hastily improvised platform a short piece of joist. Scrambling back into the room, he pushed it between the bars just beneath the padlock, and with two or three vigorous wrenches the staples were withdrawn from the wood.

By this time the prisoner had recovered sufficiently to make his way out unassisted, Jim and Nat following him to the open sash.

“Gracious! But it feels good to be able to move once more,” he said, in a half whisper. “I thought one spell they’d left me to starve.”

“How long have you been tied up in that style?” Nat asked, as the boy leaned from the window and inhaled deep draughts of the pure air.

“Ever since you fellows left the pond in the steamer. I suppose Small was afraid

I might get away if he didn't fix it so's I couldn't wink."

"But what are they keeping you here for?" Nat asked, curiously. "Is either of the crowd your father?"

"Not much; if I thought any one of them was a relative of mine I'd get a new name right away. You see I came here looking for a job, and was unlucky enough to find out what they were doing."

"What do you mean?" and now Jim spoke impatiently. "Aren't they hunting for oil?"

"So they gave you that same yarn, eh? The only oil they've seen around here has been in a can, and, what's more, they don't look for any. Haven't you tumbled to their game yet?"

"No; although none of us believed they were telling the truth after firing at us when we wanted to leave."

"Did you happen to see them have any silver dollars?"

"Yes; they paid us a lot for towing the sloop up here," Jim replied, in a tone which showed that he was perplexed by the odd question.

"Well, that's their business. They make them dollars in this house, and that's why they don't want to let anybody know what's goin' on."

"Why, they're counterfeiters!" Nat exclaimed.

"True as you live, and I reckon they carried a lot of the stuff off when they went away in your steamer."

"How long have you been here?" Jim asked.

"Three or four months; but say, it won't do to fool around many hours, for if the crowd catches us it'll go tough with all hands. Let's get over to your boat mighty quick; I don't hanker after givin' Small another chance to pound me."

Strange as it may seem, neither Nat nor Jim had so much as thought the men might return; but this timely suggestion recalled them to a very lively sense of

the situation, and Nat led the way through the window, followed by the others.

Once on the ground, he would have struck into the woods without giving heed to anything save leaving the place immediately; but the stranger stopped him by saying:

“We’d better put this lumber back where you found it. If Small sees the stuff when he first arrives he’ll know exactly what has happened; but if things look all right they may not pay any attention to me for a good while, and we’ll want as much time as possible.”

“That’s so,” Jim replied, hurriedly. “Take hold and help us fix it.”

The boy could perform his share of the work, as was seen when they began the task. He labored with a will, doing nearly twice as much as his companions, and in a very short time the lumber had been replaced.

Then the journey through the wood commenced, Jim leading in what he believed to be the nearest direction to the canal, intending to strike it some distance above the stream.

Traveling single file, and in close order to prevent the possibility of being separated in the darkness, they walked at full speed until reaching the bank of the waterway, after which there could be no chance of their going astray.

An hour passed, during which not a word was spoken, and then a halt was made, when Jim said, as he threw himself upon the ground:

“We’ve done work enough to be entitled to loaf a bit. It’ll be an easy matter to reach the yacht before daylight, and we may as well take things leisurely.”

The others were only too glad to rest, more particularly since it seemed positive the escape was assured, and for several moments nothing was heard save their heavy breathing. Then Nat broke the partial silence by asking abruptly:

“What’s your name?”

“Dick Dudley.”

“Where do you live?”

“Nowhere since mother died. I came from Albany when I struck this beautiful place; had been in a hotel there, but thought the work too hard, so started out to find an easier job. Met Small in Schenectady, and believed the yarn he told. They used to work mostly in the night, and I had the cooking to do. Things went along smoothly, and I had no reason to complain, till one night I heard ‘em pounding. Like a fool I went to see what was up, found the whole crowd makin’ silver dollars, and since then they have kept me—”

“Hark!” Jim whispered. “There’s a steamer coming down the canal. I can hear her screw!”

Without thought of the true state of affairs he stepped to the edge of the bank just in time to see the Restless— there could be no mistake regarding her, even in the gloom— coming at full speed, while behind was being towed the sloop,

CHAPTER XV.

THE CAPTURE.

IN order to relate the incidents in their proper sequence, it is necessary to return to the yacht at the moment when Phil proposed offensive measures with the slight hope that the advance of the men might be checked.

When the sloop was hardly more than thirty yards away he discharged one barrel of his gun, taking good care, however, to aim above the heads of those whom he knew to be enemies, and before the echoes had died away the progress of the sloop was checked as the men sought such shelter as the low rail afforded.

“Keep back! Phil shouted, his hopes reviving as he observed the effect of the random shot. “I shall fire with the intention of hitting the mark next time!”

An exclamation of mingled surprise and gratification came from Small’s lips as he realized that the yacht was yet where it might be possible to capture her, and then, evidently for no other purpose than that of gaining time, he shouted:

“Say, what do you mean by doing a thing like that? Anybody would think you were afraid of us.”

“So I am, when you get too near,” Phil replied boldly. “Our previous experience makes us cautious, and we don’t intend to run the risk of having you for very

near neighbors. We are prepared to shoot the instant that boat moves this way again.'

"We're willing to leave," Small continued; "but why not give us a chance to reason this thing out? You haven't treated us square; but we are ready to keep to the trade if the yacht is put at our disposal again."

"I want nothing more to do with you," Phil replied. "The work which has already been done we ask no pay for, and only insist that you keep at a proper distance from us."

Small had already begun to row the sloop stern foremost down the stream, and Harry said when she passed out of view behind the foliage:

"Now is the time we could easily get away if Jim and Nat were on board. Why not leave them for a while, and come back after this crowd has got tired of waiting?"

"That would be mean, for these men are sure to get hold of them. According to my way of thinking we are bound to stay here, no matter what happens."

Harry really had no intention of deserting his companions, although it was but natural he should, for the moment, feel badly because the opportunity of making their escape must be lost. He realized, instantly Phil spoke, that by leaving the rendezvous the absent ones would be in great danger of capture, and added as he leaned forward to peer through the foliage:

"Of course we have to wait; but I couldn't help thinking what a chance we had to slip out. It's a case of keeping our eyes open pretty wide just now, for I don't believe those men will give the thing up so easily."

Phil was of the same opinion; but nothing could be done save to remain on the alert, for the sloop was concealed from view.

For the next ten minutes nothing was heard of the enemy, and then the sound of oars told they were working their craft to her former position.

"Be ready to use your gun, and make every shot count," Phil whispered. "Almost anything is preferable to being taken back to the pond."

The attention of both boys was riveted to matters on the water side, and neither thought of an attack from the rear until the voice of Bristow was heard among the foliage as he said sternly:

“Drop those guns or I’ll tumble one of you over! Move quick; we’ve got no time for nonsense!”

At the same instant the sloop came in view, Summerfield and Small with their weapons leveled, and by turning his head ever so slightly, Phil saw that the man on the bank was where he could shoot them down before it was possible to raise their own guns.

“Do as he commands,” Phil said, as he set the example. “We’ve been such chumps as to let them creep up behind, and must take the consequences.”

Harry was disposed to resist; but knowing only too well how sadly they were at a disadvantage, and having good reason to believe the threat would be carried into execution, Phil seized his gun and threw it on the deck as he whispered:

“It would be the height of folly to hold out now, when they have the upper hand of us so completely, We have lost the yacht; but there must be some chance of giving them the slip later.”

By the time these words had been spoken, Bristow came on board, having pulled in on the hawser until the stern of the Restless was near the bank, and he announced the victory to his companions by saying:

“Come on; these young cubs are harmless, but two of them are missing.”

“Where are the rest of your crowd?” Small asked, savagely, as he forced the sloop’s bow into the leafy hiding-place.

Phil made no reply; but when the question had been repeated, he said, quietly:

“They went on shore about an hour ago.”

“What for?”

“Almost anything was better than lying still, waiting for the sloop to pass on,” Phil said, evasively.

“You are lying now; but it won’t take long to find a way of extracting an answer.”

“It isn’t possible to make me say more than I know, no matter what you do.”

“Perhaps they went for help when we anchored so near them,” Summerfield suggested.

“If that is all, it makes little difference to us,” Small said, with a coarse laugh, “It would take two days of brisk traveling to find any one who would come here on the strength of what they can tell.”

Then Small looked in every locker, as if fancying the missing ones might be secreted on board. Failing to find any traces of the remainder of the crew, he came forward where Bristow was standing guard over the prisoners.

“Now that we’ve got the steamer these boys let to us, we can afford to rest easy like. There’s no need of attracting attention by running down the canal before dark, and we’ll stay here. If the others come back we’ll take charge of them, and if they don’t, we can be so far from here by morning that it won’t make any difference what kind of a yarn they spin. We’ll haul the sloop in under cover, and settle down for a spell. It’s a mighty lucky thing we hired the craft, otherwise this taking possession of her would be a good deal like stealing.”

“That’s just what it is!” Harry cried, passionately, “and you’ll find it out to your cost when we get away, as we surely will in a short time.”

“I always like to give boys good advice,” Small replied, in a mocking tone, “and if you remember what I say it may be the means of saving you considerable trouble and hard feelings. We hired this boat with your full consent, and intend to keep her. If I hear another word out of your head in the way of threats or impudence, you’ll get hurt, and it won’t be any common flogging, either. Keep your mouth shut and obey orders, if you want to live until our charter expires. “

“Send them aft,” Summerfield said, with a grin. “They’ll only be needed to run the engine and cook, and there’s no reason for their staying here.”

Small pointed toward the stern, and Phil, knowing that the mute order would be enforced mercilessly at any show of resistance, pushed Harry in front of him as he went through the cabin.

“The more cheerful and contented we appear the better will be our chances,” he whispered. “There can be no use in kicking when they are ready to go to any length for the sake of effecting their purpose.”

Harry made no reply. He was in that mental condition where conversation is disagreeable, and, with his face buried in his hands, he remained motionless and silent.

Phil was hardly less disturbed in mind; but he made a brave show of indifference in order to cheer his friend, and at the same time watched keenly everything which was being done by the men.

CHAPTER XVI

BACK TO THE POND IN THE RESTLESS.

THE sloop had been hauled alongside the yacht within shelter of the trees, and Summerfield was already making preparations for the continuation of his nap by piling the cabin cushions on one of the lockers.

Small and Bristow kept watch on the canal, as if fearing some interruption from that point.

What distressed Phil most, excepting, of course, the seizure of the yacht was the fear that Jim and Nat might return before Small was ready to start, and thus also be taken prisoners. Without knowing how it would be possible for them to render any assistance, he had great faith they could, if not deprived of liberty, aid Harry and himself to escape. For this reason, however much cause he had to dread being carried back to the pond, he was most eager to hear Small give the signal for departure.

Once when a canal boat passed Harry suggested they should shout for help; but Phil opposed such a plan vigorously.

“There isn’t one chance in fifty that we could cry loud enough to be heard before the men jumped down on us, and those on the boat wouldn’t have the slightest idea what it meant. It isn’t likely any of the boatmen would stop unless assured that something serious was the matter, and our hail could have no other effect than to get us into a bad scrape with Small’s crowd.”

Harry was satisfied Phil had stated the case correctly; but he did not feel willing to submit so tamely.

“What shall you do if they order us to start the engine?” he asked.

“Get up power as quickly as possible, in the hope of leaving before Nat and Jim heave in sight.”

“I suppose you are in the right,” Harry replied with a sigh; “but it goes terribly against the grain to knuckle down to this gang.”

“What can’t be cured must be endured, old fellow;” and Phil spoke cheerily, although on the very verge of despair. Then he began to map out a course of action which it was hardly possible could be carried into execution; but it had the effect of relieving his own and Harry’s despondency in a certain degree.

Not until sunset did the men indulge in any extended conversation, and then as Summerfield aroused himself from his long nap he asked if Jim and Nat had returned.

“No,” Small replied, “They must have gone in search of help.”

“Why not truss them cubs up, and make ‘em tell where the other fellows are?” Bristow suggested.

“That would only be a waste of time, and besides, some of the canalers might try to find out what the trouble was, for they’d make a big noise before we succeeded in getting the truth from them.”

“It isn’t certain that they won’t meet some one who will undertake to help them, and we can’t stay very long at the pond in safety,” Bristow said, moodily.

“There’s no show of anything happening to-night, and before sunrise we’ll be ready to go through the upper lock. It’s getting pretty dark, and we may as well make a start. Tell the boys to raise steam, and stand by to see that the order is obeyed, while Dave and I swing the sloop around.”

Bristow did as commanded, and greatly to his surprise Phil and Harry worked as if they were about to make the voyage for their own pleasure.

The sloop had hardly been got into position before there was sufficient pressure to turn the screw, and Small complimented them upon the prompt obedience.

“Keep on as you’ve begun and there’ll be no trouble,” he said magnanimously. “Carry out the bargain made with us, and we shall get along like old friends.”

Then, without waiting for a reply, he went forward, and the little steamer left the place of concealment on her way to the pond.

Both Phil and Harry felt relieved in mind now there was no possibility their companions would run into the trap, and the yacht was kept at full speed until

Small gave the word to “slow down,” when they entered the stream.

“Suppose the boys should think we had come after them, and make their appearance on the bank just as Small stepped ashore?” Harry asked, as a new cause for fear suddenly occurred to him.

“There is little chance of anything like that happening. They have probably left before this, and if still here could have a pretty good idea of the condition of affairs by seeing the sloop towing behind.”

Not a sound was heard from the shore when the yacht came to an anchor near the head of the pond, and Small made preparations for landing in the sloop with Summerfield. Bristow came aft, making a great show with his revolver, and the boys knew he was to be left behind as guard.

“Don’t fool with them if they attempt any funny business,” Small said as he and his companion started. “If there is the slightest show of giving us the slip, shoot, and make sure you hit the mark.”

“You needn’t be afraid of our taking any risks,” Phil replied, speaking purposely loud in order to warn Jim and Nat if, by any possibility, they should be in the vicinity.

“That’s where you are wise,” Bristol said approvingly; but kept his revolver ready for use as if not giving full credence to the statement.

Ten minutes passed, and Phil had pinched Harry’s arm as if to say there could no longer be any doubt but that Jim and Nat were well on their way to the sloop, when voices in angry conversation were heard, and Small shouted to Bristow:

“Tie those boys up so they can’t so much as wiggle, and make ready to come on shore! There’s trouble here!”

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FLIGHT.

NED Bristow did not waste any time because of an attempt to carry out Small’s orders in a humane manner. The apparent submission of the boys counted as nothing to him, and he set about the work as if both had been making the most

strenuous efforts to escape.

“Don’t think you can fool with me,” he said threateningly. “You heard the command, and I’m going to execute it if I have to fill you full of bullets.”

As he spoke he advanced toward Phil with a heaving line in one hand and his revolver in the other, actually looking disappointed that there was no show of resistance.

At first Harry started for the locker as if to assert his rights; but a reasonably severe blow in the side by Phil’s elbow brought him to a thorough understanding of the situation, and he resumed his former position of indifference.

Bristow proceeded to obey Small’s instructions with unnecessary harshness. He not only tied the boys hand and foot in such a manner that the least movement was impossible; but also lashed them to the deck stanchion that they might not be able even to see the shore unless the yacht should swing around to the cable.

By the time this fettering had been finished, Summerfield rowed the sloop alongside, and as Bristow stepped over the rail, after assuring himself again that the boys could not release themselves, the former said hurriedly:

> “Don’t waste any time. That boy Dick has given us the slip, and there’s no telling how long he’s been away. Sam insists on hunting for him; but according to my idea the safest plan would be to skip this minute.”

“It’s rank foolishness to hunt for him in the night,” Bristow replied, discontentedly. “He won’t have any trouble in keeping out of our way if he has taken to the woods, as is most likely.”

“That’s what I said; but you know how Sam is when he gets a notion, and there’s no use trying to argue with him.”

As these last words were spoken, the men stepped ashore, and it was impossible for the boys to hear any more of the conversation.

When the sound of footsteps died away in the distance, thus proclaiming that the counterfeiter had reached the house, Harry said grimly:

“We’re getting plenty of adventure on our excursion, but precious little fun.

What's to be the end of all this?"

"I wish I knew," Phil replied with a sigh. "There's one thing certain, however, if we lose our courage we shall be worse off than ever, and to prevent such a condition of affairs it will be better not to think of ourselves."

"That advice is pretty hard to follow, more especially when a fellow is tied up so tightly that it is almost painful even to breathe."

"They can't keep us in this position very long if the yacht is to leave here to-night. She should start not later than midnight in order to reach the upper lock by sunrise, and we will be needed to work the engine. I wonder where Jim and Nat are?"

"On the canal trying to figure out why we ran away from them, I reckon. It is to be hoped they won't come back to the pond thinking we started after them, for then the party would be separated with a vengeance if the men carry out the plan agreed upon."

"Unless they met the boy somewhere near where the Restless was hidden, it would be impossible to get back here before we leave, and they'll surely see the yacht as she runs up the canal."

Then the boys discussed their chances of escaping within a few hours, and this topic of conversation only served to increase their distress of mind, for neither could devise any scheme which promised the slightest hope of success.

During the time they were thus occupied, but little could be judged of the counterfeiter's movements. Now and then their voices were heard, evidently from the thicket in the immediate vicinity of the house, yet so far away that the words could not be distinguished. At the expiration of an hour Summerfield and Bristow pulled out in the sloop, unloaded quite an amount of apparently heavy baggage into the steamer's cabin, and then the former went ashore, leaving his companion on board.

"See here," Phil said after the man had busied himself forward some minutes without paying any attention to those who were in such painful positions, "why don't you set us adrift? There can't be any chance of our running away while the yacht is so far from the shore. We have done our share of the work, and it's no more than fair that we be treated half way decently."

“You’ll stay where you are till Small comes aboard, and then it’ll be lucky for both if he doesn’t deal out a worse dose. We know now why your chums were not on the yacht, and you’ll be called upon to settle for what they have done.”

Then Bristow, having come aft while speaking, pulled the fetters a trifle tighter by way of showing what might be expected, and went forward again with the air of one who is thoroughly dissatisfied with himself and everything around him.

“I’d rather lose the yacht entirely than be forced to go with this crowd and bear whatever cruelties they may see fit to inflict,” Harry whispered

“So would I,” Phil replied: “but just now I can’t figure out how we can bring about a change in affairs. After a day or two, when we are near some large town, it may be possible to slip away.”

“They wouldn’t be very likely to bother about us a great while if it wasn’t for the yacht.”

“There can’t be any other reason for holding us, and I have been thinking perhaps they’d set us ashore when we are so far away that it would be useless to make a complaint against them.”

“I don’t intend to wait so long as that,” and Harry spoke in the most cautious tone. “It would be an easy matter to sink the little craft while they are forward and we are running the engine. We could swim ashore without any difficulty, and the men will have all the business on hand they can attend to looking after their precious selves. There is a seacock on the port side close by the engine, and if we leave it open five minutes the job is done.”

Phil was startled by the bold proposition. He had made up his mind to abandon the yacht without regret, if by so doing they could escape; but to deliberately destroy her seemed little less than a crime.

“It would be better to do that than go wherever the gang choose to take us, and be lashed up like this every time anything goes wrong,” Harry whispered as he saw that his companion hesitated about adopting such desperate measures.

“There’s no knowing how far from home we may be before it becomes possible to make the first move toward escaping, and at the last we’ll have to leave the little craft. I’d rather sink her a dozen times over than know such brutes are taking comfort on board.”

Viewing it in this light Phil felt less repugnance to the plan, and after a moment's thought he replied:

"It's a good idea; but I'd rather wait twenty-four hours in the hope that something may turn up in our favor. We may find a chance to get assistance at the lock."

Harry was eager to put the plan into execution at the first opportunity; but after some discussion it was decided that if no change for the better had been made by the end of the next day, the yacht should be scuttled as soon afterward as possible.

Once this was agreed upon both felt very much relieved in mind. The fact that they had a plan which at least promised some degree of success, even though it would be attended with danger, raised their spirits wonderfully, and Phil actually indulged in a laugh, much to the surprise of Bristow, who came aft in great haste as if believing they were on the point of escaping.

Before he could take any further steps toward subduing the prisoners, as appeared to be his intention, Small shouted from the shore, and he was obliged to attend to the second load of goods.

"Pack them in the cabin where it won't be possible any one who may come snooping around can see them, and work lively, for I want everything ship shape before we leave."

"Are you going for the rest?" Bristow asked as the sloop was backed off again.

"No; everything else must be left. We've already got more than it's safe to take."

"It seems too bad to send so much up in smoke," Bristow said, gloomily. "Why not carry the best of the stuff into the woods somewhere?"

"Because we haven't the time, and then again it would be the height of foolishness to leave a single thing here," and Small spoke impatiently. "Why don't you set those boys loose, and make them help you?"

"I thought you wanted to dress 'em down a bit, so's to find out how much they know."

“We can do that some other day. Just now there are very few minutes to spare.”

Small was on shore again before he ceased speaking, and Bristow began to untie the ropes as he said:

“If I had my way you’d stay here for the next forty-eight hours; but since Sam thinks best, why he must run the risk. I shall keep my eye peeled, though, and if you so much as look crosswise there’ll be trouble. Take hold and help me to stow the stuff away; but remember that it’ll be dangerous to play any tricks.”

It was several moments after the boys were released before they were able to move as lively as Bristow thought proper; but when the circulation of blood was restored he had no reason to complain of their indolence. Both were eager to do all that was possible in order to make it appear as if they were indifferent regarding the future, and, despite his gruffness, the counterfeiter wore something resembling a friendly air when the goods had been stowed snugly in the various lockers.

This work was but just completed when Small and Summerfield came on board, the former saying as he made the sloop fast astern:

“We will run her in at the same place where we found the yacht, and she may be of service to one of us if things go wrong.”

“Have you done as we agreed on?” Bristow asked.

“You’ll see before we get into the canal,” was the reply, and then as Small examined the cabin to make sure there was nothing of a criminating nature in sight, he added: “Get under way as quick as you can, boys, and if there is any loafing I shall ask the reason why in a way that won’t be agreeable.”

The owners of the yacht did not waste any time. True to the plan already agreed upon, they worked with the utmost alacrity, and the instant it was possible to turn the screw the anchor was weighed.

With the sloop towing astern, the Restless left the pond, and the boys were free to converse as they chose, for their captors were all forward. Before three miles had been run a peculiar glow was seen on the sky in the direction from which they had just come, and both speculated as to its cause until Phil guessed the true solution of what at first seemed a mystery.

“That explains what Bristow meant when he spoke of ‘sending so much up in smoke,’” he exclaimed. “They have set fire to the house at the pond in order to burn the evidences of whatever crimes may have been committed, because they are now fearing that the boy who has escaped may send the officers of the law on their track.”

This supposition was evidently shown to be correct as the glare increased, until there could be no longer any question but that it was caused by a burning building.

The yacht continued on at full speed to the place where the men had captured her, and here a halt was made while the sloop was moored behind the screen of trees.

As soon as the craft had thus been disposed of, word was given to send the yacht ahead once more at the best speed.

“Now we are running directly away from Jim and Nat, wherever they may be,” Harry said, mournfully. “I am afraid we made a mistake in not scuttling the Restless to-night, for by to-morrow we’ll be a long distance from them.”

“It is better as we have arranged it. The men are suspicious they’ll be pursued, and will feel even more alarmed to-morrow, therefore they’ll pay less attention to us then, provided we do everything we can in the meanwhile. I don’t—”

The sentence was never finished, for at that moment the yacht struck some obstacle which caused her to recoil several feet, and as the screw sent her ahead again a second blow followed, after which she remained immovable as if aground.

At the first shock Harry started forward for the purpose of learning what had occurred; but Phil stopped him by saying:

“Stay where you are. If things have gone wrong while they are at the wheel, so much the better for us. No matter what has happened, it can’t be as bad as we would have done to-morrow. Now is the time when we must watch our chances, for it may be the opportunity has come for escape.”

“But why don’t you stop the engine?” Harry asked.

“Because the harder she goes aground the better I shall be pleased, and also because I haven’t got such orders from the captain. When he wants the screw stopped it will be time for us to act.”

Then Phil opened the supply pipe to its fullest extent, and each instant the little craft forced her bow higher in the air.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PURSUIT.

NAT and Jim stood gazing at the water some time after the yacht had passed, as if bewildered by her sudden disappearance.

Both knew, because the sloop was towing astern, that Small’s party had succeeded in gaining possession of her by some means, and there was no longer any question of continuing the journey up the canal.

“What’s the matter?” Dick asked, as his companions remained silent. “Why didn’t you hail your friends? I’m almost certain that was the yacht.”

“So are we,” Nat replied, bitterly; “but the counterfeiters are in possession, and we’re puzzled to know what ought to be done.”

“We should be able to settle that part of it mighty quick,” Jim said, thoughtfully. “They are bound for the house, and we must go back and see how it will be possible to get them out of the scrape.”

“I don’t think that would pay,” Dick replied, “From what you heard the crowd say it seems certain they are making ready to light out, and it isn’t likely they’ll stay at the pond very long. By the time we got there the yacht would be on her way up or down the canal.”

This supposition seemed to be very reasonable; but the question of what should be done yet remained to be decided.

“By going to the mouth of the stream we could at least see in which direction they sailed,” Nat suggested.

Neither of the others had any better plan to propose; but Dick urged that they

proceed leisurely. Having been kept a close prisoner so long he was not in good condition for much traveling, and he added:

“It isn’t probable they’ll leave before morning, and there is lots of time to reach a point where we can watch them. Let’s take a good long rest before starting.”

Both Nat and Jim were thoroughly tired, and since it really did not seem as if there was any especial reason why the tramp should be begun at once, they very willingly concluded to continue the halt two or three hours.

There was but little speculation indulged in concerning the manner in which the capture had been effected. It could readily be fancied that the men had begun to search along the bank; but the boys felt quite positive a decided struggle took place before the yacht was surrendered.

“It will come out all right after a while if none of them have been hurt,” Jim said, when Nat bewailed the ill luck which appeared to pursue them. “All the counterfeiterers want is to leave this part of the country, and it isn’t likely they’ll follow up the canal very far.”

“Small will make it hot for your chums while they are with him,” Dick added in a matter-of-fact tone. “He was pretty near wild when you fellows got away before, an’ it seemed as if the whole gang vented their spite on me. Then was the time when they tied me up, an’ one spell it looked as if I wasn’t ever goin’ to get out again.”

“Did they start the minute we left?”

“About an hour afterwards. There were a good many things in the house which had to be hidden before they dared to leave.”

Then Dick went into the details of his life with the counterfeiterers, and their methods of working, prolonging his story until the halt had been continued fully three hours.

“We mustn’t loaf around here any longer,” Nat said, as he rose to his feet with considerable difficulty, owing to the stiffness of his joints. “No one knows that the gang won’t leave the pond immediately after arriving, and if that has been done, we’re too late now to see where they go. Hello!” he added, as a bright glow suddenly appeared from above the tree tops. “There’s a big fire near here.”

“Small’s crowd have left!” Dick cried excitedly, after gazing several moments at the point of light. “There isn’t another house anywhere around, and they’ve set the one at the pond on fire. We’ll have to hurry up if you want to see your boat again. I’m good and rested now.”

As he ceased speaking the throbbing of a screw could be heard from the direction of the stream, and the three boys, knowing full well what it meant, crept close to the edge of the bank, remaining there silent and motionless until the outlines of the Restless were seen in the gloom as she sped on up the canal.

“Come on!” Jim said in a whisper. “They can’t get through the next lock before daylight, and we may overtake them.”

Without waiting for any discussion he started at full speed, the others following close at his heels, although all three fully realized that there was little chance they would be able to aid Phil and Harry.

There was no thought of fatigue. Each pushed on at his best pace, with never a desire to halt, and when they reached the spot where the Restless had been concealed, she was but a short distance away on the same side of the canal, lying as if at anchor.

“Why do you suppose she didn’t keep on to the lock?” Nat asked in a whisper, as he peered through the underbrush at the dark mass on the water which represented the jaunty little yacht.

Jim strained his eyes to discover the meaning of this singular cessation of what had evidently been a flight. The voices of the men could be heard distinctly, although it was not possible to distinguish the words, and the watchers began to grow uneasy because there was no evidence that Phil and Harry were on board.

“I know what the matter is!” Jim suddenly exclaimed in a guarded tone. “The yacht has run aground, and the gang are trying to float her; but what can have happened to the boys? They’d surely have to work at such a time.”

The Restless could be seen lying there heeled at an angle of twenty degrees, as if half her keel was on the ground, and the counterfeiter had been trying to force her off by the aid of poles at the bow. Had either Phil or Harry spoken the tones of their voices would have been recognized, and because of this silence the little party on the bank were greatly alarmed.

“The villains have left the poor fellows at the pond, probably lashed to a tree,” Nat said, mournfully, “and the best thing we can do is to go back at once.”

“That would be a foolish move before we found out whether they were on board,” Jim replied.

“But that can’t be done until morning, and in the meantime they will suffer as Dick did.”

“We’ll know all about it before another hour goes by,” Jim said, as he began to undress.

“What are you going to do?”

“Swim out to the yacht.”

“You can’t do it.”

“I’ll show you whether I can or not in about five minutes.”

“But the men will surely see you,” and now Nat began to grow frightened.

“I’ll go there and back without being discovered by any of the gang,” and Jim continued to remove his clothes.

“I don’t see how it will be possible to effect anything.”

“Neither do I; but there’s nothing like trying. By coming up close under the stern I can have a pretty good idea of whether the boys are there.”

Dick had taken no part in this conversation. He did not think it would be a difficult matter to reach the yacht, therefore, in his mind at least, there was no reason why the plan should not be tried.

Jim went on with his preparations as if swimming half across the canal at the risk of being observed by those who would not hesitate to inflict mortal injury was the most natural thing to do, and before Nat had concluded his remonstrances he was ready for the venture.

“Stay here and listen,” he said, as he waded into the water. “Of course you can’t

do any good if they should happen to get hold of me; but I'll manage to let you know whether Phil and Harry are there if things go wrong. In case I am caught, it'll be wisest for you to get into Schenectady as quickly as possible. There you can notify the officers, and, perhaps, help me out of the scrape."

This in itself was sufficient to show that he had many doubts as to the ease with which the scheme could be worked, but at the moment the boys did not realize it. They shook hands with him, as if his stay was to be of long duration, and watched eagerly when he entered that portion of the canal where it became necessary to swim.

After it was impossible to distinguish even his head, they waited in anxious suspense for some sound which should tell he had succeeded, or failed in such a manner as to leave him prisoner in the hands of the counterfeiters.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN INTERVIEW UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

DESPITE the fact that it was warm weather, the water felt most uncomfortably cold, and Jim's teeth chattered as he took the final plunge; but after that the temperature seemed suddenly to have grown higher, and he began to enjoy contact with the cooling liquid.

Moving cautiously, careful not to betray his whereabouts by the slightest splash, he gradually approached the yacht, which was lying on a shoal not more than twenty yards away.

The men still remained forward. He could now hear each word spoken, and at times distinguish their forms quite clearly; but neither Phil nor Harry was in sight.

"If they are on board I shall find them near the engine," he said to himself as he altered his course in order that he might gain the extreme after end of the steamer.

Inch by inch he advanced until it was possible to see two figures on the port-locker, and from that instant speed rather than silence was his aim.

Phil and Harry, who had remained aft from the moment Small gave the word to

stop the screw, were rejoicing because the little craft was disabled for the time being.

“I had rather they wrecked her than for us to have done it,” Phil was saying. “The engine drove her up on the shoal for at least ten minutes before we got the signal to shut off the power, and now she ought to be fixed so firmly that it will take a pair of mules to float her.”

“Do you suppose she is injured?” Harry asked.

“I hope one or two planks are stove, for then there will be no question but that Small’s crowd will have to give up the journey.”

Before Harry could reply a dark object appeared above the rail directly behind where the two were sitting, and a low exclamation of surprise burst from Phil’s lips as a warning voice whispered:

“Don’t make a noise or I may get you into more trouble. We didn’t know whether you fellows were on board or not, so I came out to see.”

“It’s Jim!” Harry said so loudly that the newcomer let go his hold on the rail, sinking beneath the surface a moment lest the men might have heard the exclamation; and he did not reappear until it seemed probable the incautious remark had passed unheeded.

In the fewest words possible he then told of what Nat and himself had done, described Dick’s escape briefly, and asked how the yacht had been captured.

Phil gave a full account of what had happened since he went on shore, and concluded by saying:

“You and the other fellows had better strike out for Schenectady, or some town where there’ll be no chance that this crowd can get hold of you. We’ll manage to give them the slip before long, and then hunt you up.”

“It is best to stay close by in case you should need us,” Jim said, decidedly. “Counting us three ashore, you’ve got a party of five now, and if it comes to a pinch we ought to be able to do considerable against the men, even if they are armed.”

“You’d better not show yourselves,” Phil said. “If they float the yacht and run her to-morrow we are going to scuttle her, and two can do that job as well as a dozen.”

“Then all the more reason why we should hang around. You fellows can be sure we’re right alongside on the bank in case of any row.”

Phil made no further objection. There was much comfort to be derived from the fact that friends were in the immediate vicinity, even though they might not be able to render any assistance, and he whispered:

“Be cautious, whatever you do, and tell Nat to write home if he gets the chance. Harry and I may not have a chance to sink the yacht for some time, and it won’t be a bad idea to let the folks know what a perfectly jolly time we are having.”

“I will see that a letter is sent from the first post office we run across, and now it’s safer to go ashore than wait till they learn I’m here. Why don’t you abandon the craft rather than risk being carried far up the canal!”

Phil shook his head.

“I prefer to stay by the little boat until we’ve made sure there isn’t a possibility of saving her. No one knows what will happen before she’s floated again, and if you fellows are near by we may see a show of getting the best of Small’s gang.”

“All right. Count on our being within hailing distance,” Jim replied, and just at that moment the sound of footsteps in the cabin told that one of the men was coming aft.

The head which had been literally hanging over the rail disappeared as noiselessly as it came, and when Bristow entered the engine-room Phil and Harry were alone.

“You don’t seem to take it very hard because your boat is aground,” he said, and Harry replied:

“Why should we? She’s no longer under our control, and if you people don’t know how to steer it makes little difference what happens, providing there’s no danger of our being drowned.”

Bristow hesitated a moment, as if about to make an angry reply, and then turning on his heel he went forward again, saying to Small, when he reached the standing room:

“There’s nothing wrong with them, except I reckon both are glad this thing has happened.”

CHAPTER XX.

FRIENDS IN AMBUSH.

JIM did not waste any time upon taking leave of Harry and Phil. His long submersion had thoroughly chilled him, and as soon as he could reach the shore, after exercising the requisite caution to avoid giving the counterfeiter cause for suspicion, he dressed himself with the utmost celerity.

Not until this was done and circulation restored in a measure to his benumbed limbs, did he inform Nat of the condition of affairs on board the yacht.

“It’s mighty lucky we didn’t start for the pond again,” he said, “because there’s little doubt but that they’ll need our assistance before long, more especially if the yacht is floated and it becomes necessary to wreck her.”

“Why didn’t they come ashore with you?” Nat asked.

“That’s what I wanted them to do; but perhaps it is better they hold on awhile longer. Small’s crowd won’t stay there many hours in case the steamer refuses to come off the shoal, and we may get possession without much trouble.”

Neither Nat nor Dick viewed the matter in such a hopeful light. The latter was positive the counterfeiter would not grow disheartened, knowing it must be quite a while before the authorities could arrive, even if he had started immediately upon his escape to notify them, and Jim finally shared his opinion.

“We must hold on here at all events,” he said. “It’s too late now to go in search of help. I think Small will hire some of the boatmen to pull the craft off in the morning. It could readily be done with a pair of mules, and we must do our best to keep up with the steamer until the boys scuttle her.”

“What time do you suppose it is?” Dick asked.

“About midnight, I should judge.”

“Then we’d better try to get a little sleep, else it will come pretty hard to do a full day’s work to-morrow.”

“That’s a fact. You two lie down for a while, and I’ll stand watch till my turn comes.”

Dick and Nat acted upon this suggestion at once, and it was not many seconds after a bed had been made among the foliage before both were sleeping soundly.

Jim’s vigil was a long one; considering himself the leader of the party he felt forced to perform the greatest amount of work, and did not waken either of his companions until it was impossible to keep his eyes open another moment.

During all this time he saw very little of what was taking place on board the yacht. Now and then a dark form could be distinguished moving back and forth on the Restless, but presently everything appeared to be in a state of repose. The men had no doubt recognized the uselessness of their labors, and were indulging in needed repose.

If Phil and Harry had reconsidered the determination to remain by the steamer, now was their opportunity, and the sentinel strained his eyes to peer through the gloom, half believing they would come ashore.

Nothing of the kind occurred, however, and as the moments passed he was forced to the conclusion that they also had sought the sweet oblivion of sleep.

Dick was the next to act as watchman, and he in turn aroused Nat shortly before daylight.

As the heralds of the rising sun dispelled the gloom it became possible to see the little craft clearly, and the sentinel was obliged to conceal himself behind the screen of foliage lest the counterfeits should discover that they were being followed.

With the first rays of light Phil and Harry both showed themselves above the rail, as if to convince their friends in hiding that as yet it was well with them.

Nothing could be seen of the men, and Nat was unable to resist the temptation of

stepping out in full view a few seconds.

Phil motioned for him to go back, and then waved his hat, probably meaning to convey the idea that they were hopeful as to the result of that day's work.

"I hope it won't be necessary to wreck the yacht in order to get rid of those villains," he said half to himself; but yet so loud that Jim, who had just arisen from his not very comfortable bed among the leaves heard the words and said cheerily:

"If they simply sink her there won't be much harm done so far as the boat itself is concerned. She can be easily raised again."

"But it makes me angry to think it may be necessary to do such a thing in order to clear those scoundrels out. Here we are in the State of New York where such lawlessness is not supposed to rule, and yet matters could not be tougher had we suddenly been transported to some uncivilized portion of the world."

"It's not quite as bad as that, for we might be much worse off. Keep up your courage, and by night things will have changed considerably."

"I wish they might change now sufficiently to admit of our having breakfast. I feel as if I'd had nothing to eat for a week."

"It's likely to be some time before we get a square meal, and thinking of hunger only increases it. If we can't find any berries close by it'll be a case of waiting."

Now that Jim had suggested such a possibility, Nat started in search of something eatable; but he was not absent more than ten minutes when he returned in great excitement, holding half a dozen pieces of hard tack in each hand.

"Where did you get those?" Jim asked in surprise.

"The sloop is made fast at the very place where we hid the yacht, and there's a lot of provisions on board. If they float the Restless and go up the canal, we might follow in their own craft."

"I don't think that would be wise. In the first place we can walk faster than she could be sailed, and with less exertion. There isn't any sport in rowing a heavy

boat like her.”

“Perhaps you are right. I’ll go back and get food enough to last us till night, if no more.”

“Don’t take so much that they will miss it in case any of them come ashore, because our best show for helping the boys is owing to the fact of the gang’s ignorance concerning our whereabouts.”

Calling Dick to join him Nat set out, leaving Jim alone, and at the same moment Small entered the Restless’s standing room.

He had evidently just awakened, and was examining the situation of the yacht now that it was possible to do so with some degree of accuracy.

Because the engine had been kept at full speed at least five minutes after she struck the shoal, the bow was well up on a bank which appeared to have been formed by a landslide during the spring. Being opposite the towpath where it did not obstruct the channel, it had not been removed. When the sloop was swung into the cut behind the trees the helmsman had failed to sheer far enough from the shore, and the steamer grounded at the very end, where, by aid of a landing plank, one could have stepped on the bank without wetting his boots.

Now she was heeled slightly over to port with the bow raised high in the air, and had probably settled considerably during the night.

One glance was sufficient to show Small that his party could not float the steamer unaided, and he seated himself on a locker to wait, as Jim believed, until a canal boat should pass that way.

Half an hour later Nat and Dick returned from their foraging expedition with some more hard tack, some dried beef, and three boxes of sardines.

“We could have taken twice as much, and left plenty behind; but it might have been missed. Now, unless they made a list of the stores, it will be difficult to say anything has been taken away.”

“I’m glad you didn’t stay longer, for we must make a move. That crowd are going to tackle the first skipper who passes, for the use of a team, and we’d better skirt around this cut at once, otherwise they can easily run away from us.”

“Perhaps the yacht won’t float. Her timbers may have been strained so badly as to open the seams, in which case there’d be no necessity for Phil and Harry to scuttle her.”

“We can see all that happens,” Jim replied, as he led the way through the bushes, taking good care to keep quite a distance from the water’s edge, until certain they had circled entirely around the yacht.

At this point the boys were even nearer than before, and could see much more distinctly, since the port side was thus exposed to view.

“We didn’t get here any too soon, for there comes a boat,” and Nat retreated further among the bushes.

“And Small is getting ready to hail her,” Dick whispered. “There’s some kind of a squabble near the engine, and when it is finished you’ll find that your friends have been tied to prevent their asking for help.”

In this supposition Dick was correct, as could be told a few moments later when Bristow and Summerfield carried into the cabin two burdens which bore a strong resemblance to human forms.

“If I ever get a chance to square accounts with those villains they’ll have some idea of what it means to be trussed up in that fashion,” Jim said angrily, shaking his fist in impotent rage at the counterfeiters.

This outburst ended the conversation for the time being. The boys had but just been concealed when Small hailed the approaching boat by asking:

“What will you take to pull us off this mud?”

“I don’t know as I care about foolin’ round very long. You see I’m ‘most two days behind time already. How’d you happen to get so far over?”

“We were running last night, and piled up here before we had an idea the yacht was out of the channel. Say, it won’t take ten minutes to yank us off after those mules are hitched on, and we’ll pay a mighty good price.”

The skipper showed sufficient interest in the matter to give word for the mule driver to stop the team, and then proceeded to ascertain how much money might

be made by performing the work.

“What do you reckon it’s worth?”

“Ten dollars.”

“If it could be done in as many minutes you might have the rights of it,” the skipper replied cautiously; “but then again it may take two or three hours.”

“I’ll pay that amount for the use of your mules thirty minutes, and it’s just ten times as much as the job is worth. You can take it or leave it; for there’s plenty of boatmen on this canal who would jump at the chance,” Small said petulantly.

“I ain’t so certain about that; but I’m willin’ to help anybody that’s in trouble,” the skipper replied with a benevolent air, as he proceeded in a leisurely fashion to make the barge fast to the bank.

“Now is our time to run on ahead,” Jim whispered. “They can pull the yacht off easily, and once she is free we shall be readily distanced.”

“Let’s first make sure she is all right,” Nat replied. “I’ve an idea they will have considerable trouble before the job is finished, and it won’t do to get too far ahead.”

Jim felt positive his proposition was the one which should be followed, but Nat appeared so determined to remain that he did not think himself at liberty to say anything more, and the little party crouched among the bushes to watch operations.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LAST RESORT.

ALTHOUGH the skipper of the barge had professed to have such an exalted idea of the value of time, his movements were anything rather than rapid.

Nearly a quarter of an hour was occupied in running the tow line to the stern of the Restless, and after that had been done he made sure everything was in perfect working order before proceeding to the important portion of the business.

“I don’t intend to have the half hour begin until you are ready for work,” Small called sharply, and this had the effect of quickening his movements very decidedly.

“Get aft, every one of you!” he shouted, “and when the mules straighten the line, push on them poles for all you’re worth.”

The animals were urged forward; but, despite the skipper’s cries and the driver’s blows, they failed to move the little craft an inch.

“Slack up a bit, and give them a breathing spell,” Small cried.

“I told you it would be foolish to go away before the yacht was off the bank,” Nat said, triumphantly. “She won’t leave that place to-day.”

He did not feel so confident five minutes later, when the mules settled down on the hawser once more and slowly the steamer was pulled into deep water, floating so jauntily there could no longer be any question but that she had come off uninjured.

As the yacht was towed alongside the barge, Small handed the boatman a ten-dollar note, and Bristow began to work the engine.

“They know how to run her without any help from Phil or Harry,” Nat whispered; “and if the boys are obliged to stay in the cabin there will be no chance to get away.”

“I reckon Bristol won’t do that kind of work long,” Jim replied. “After the yacht leaves here the boys will be forced to take hold. It’s time we were going if we count keeping ahead.”

But they had already lost the opportunity. Even before it was possible to make the first move the yacht darted up the canal, and in a remarkably short while was far in advance, running at full speed for the lock.

Neither Phil nor Harry had believed the yacht could be floated so easily. Sitting in the engine room and judging from her position as indicated there, one would have said the entire keel was imbedded in the mud.

Therefore when the boys were bound, gagged and carried into the cabin to

prevent any possibility of their appealing for help, both felt positive the Restless could not be moved during the forenoon at least, and confidently expected they were to remain close and uncomfortable prisoners the greater portion of the day.

Their surprise was as profound as the disappointment which came upon them when, from the motion of the little craft, both understood she was once more in condition to aid Small and his men in escaping those who might call them to an account for the crimes committed at the house in the woods.

Harry glanced towards Phil when Bristow took his place at the engine, and the expression of his eyes told plainly the regret he felt because they had not crippled the steamer when it was possible to have done so without danger of arousing their captors' suspicions.

Phil also began to believe he had exercised too much caution in trying to save the yacht; but as no benefit was to be derived from dwelling upon the mistakes of the past, he resolutely put such thoughts from his mind. Owing to the fact of his being nearer the after door than Harry, he could see all that took place around the engine, and in a very few moments it became apparent that the counterfeiter did not longer depend upon them to care for the machinery.

"Their next move will be to put us ashore in some desolate place," he said to himself, "so if we have the slightest show of carrying out Harry's plan before that happens, there must be no delay."

Meanwhile the steamer was making rapid progress towards the upper lock, and both the prisoners knew their friends were being left behind, for it would not be possible for them to keep pace with the little craft.

Twenty minutes passed, during which time Bristow watched the machinery as if uncertain whether it would be safe to leave it even long enough to consult with his comrades forward, and then Small cried out:

"Set one of them cubs adrift, Ned, and come out here until we're somewhere near the next settlement."

The man looked around sulkily as if debating whether it would not be better to disregard the command, allowing the machinery to care for itself, and then he approached Harry, saying, as he unfastened the ropes:

“You are to take charge of the engine, and I shall keep my eye on you all the time. If the slightest move is made towards releasing your chum, or if you leave the starboard locker for a second, there’ll be a heap of trouble. Mind what you are about now unless both want to go overboard.”

Harry made no reply. He understood that the opportunity he so ardently desired had presented itself, and pretended to be very submissive lest Small should reconsider the question of releasing him.

After removing the ropes and the gag, Small watched jealously until the boy assumed the required position, and when he began oiling the machinery as if such attention was absolutely necessary, the counterfeiter joined his friends forward.

“Can you hear me?” Harry asked in a low tone, as he bent his head so that the movement of the lips might not be seen in case Bristow carried out his threat of keeping “his eye on them.”

Phil nodded, and Harry continued:

“I’m certain they intend to put us ashore some time after we pass the next lock, in which case there’s no question that we have lost our yacht, so we won’t be any worse off to sink her now. I can cut the ropes from you before she goes down, and guarantee to get both of us out of the scrape with nothing more serious than a thorough wetting. What do you say?”

As a matter of course Phil could not say anything; but he nodded his head as vigorously as the bonds would permit, and Harry accepted this action as unqualified approval.

“All right, I’m going to do it this minute, for I don’t know how soon Bristol may come back to truss me up.

Again Phil expressed assent by motions, and Harry hesitated only long enough to say:

“I’ll open my pocket knife so as to have it ready, and when the water gets as high as the cabin floor, give the alarm. Don’t be frightened, for you shall be attended to in time to get ashore.”

Suiting the action to the words he laid the open knife on the locker beside him, and, stooping over as if to oil some of the lower bearings, unscrewed the sea cock.

Instantly a stream of water spurted up so high that he was forced to hide it with his body lest Bristow should discover it in time to repair the mischief; but after two or three minutes it subsided to such a gush as one sees in a boiling spring.

“It won’t take more than a quarter of an hour to fill her,” he said for Phil’s benefit. “I have put the cap in my pocket. We may want to use it again, and it can easily be got rid of if they suspect what has been done.”

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RESTLESS GOES TO THE BOTTOM.

RAPIDLY the water rose; but owing to the inclination of the yacht, the after portion would be nearly submerged before anything was observed by those forward, and Harry watched eagerly, delaying to give the alarm until the last moment.

Phil was not comfortable in mind, as could be told by the expression of his eyes, regarding the possibility of being aided when the yacht should suddenly sink, and Harry said reassuringly:

“Don’t be worried, I’ll see to you. This crowd will have all they can do to look out for their own precious bodies, and won’t bother their heads about us. Be ready now, the water is nearly to the top of the lockers.” Then he started toward the cabin door as if in great alarm, and cried excitedly: “The steamer is sinking! Some damage must have been done when we ran aground, and she can’t float many minutes at this rate!”

As he spoke both Bristow and Summerfield came aft hastily, and Harry ran to Phil’s side, unloosening the bonds by the time the men were where it was possible to see the evidence of impending disaster.

“Run her in to the bank!” Summerfield shouted. “She’s half full of water already.”

Bristow appeared to have suddenly become dazed. He darted from the bow to

the stern repeating Summerfield's words, but making no effort to aid his companions.

Neither of the men paid any attention to the boys. They had gone into the standing room instantly Harry severed Phil's fetters, and stood near the rail ready to leap overboard if the steamer went down before gaining the shore, while the counterfeiters seemed to accept their presence there as a matter of course.

Small had headed the little craft for the bank opposite the towpath, and when she was yet a dozen yards away he cried to Summerfield:

"Get out some of that stuff; it won't do to lose everything. Turn to with him, boys, and work lively."

To disobey would be to arouse suspicions as to the part they had played, and both Phil and Harry "turned to" with the greatest celerity. In a few seconds the contents of the locker were thrown on the cabin floor, and to the surprise of the prisoners the *Restless* still floated when her bow was run on to the land.

"Throw that stuff ashore," Small shouted, setting the example, and nearly all their belongings had been thus transferred when the yacht lurched heavily to port, her stern settled deeper and deeper, and those on board barely succeeded in gaining the bank before she sank in ten feet of water.

Although this was the result of their own act, Phil and Harry were depressed by the loss of their jaunty little craft, and as they stood by the edge of the canal gazing at the flag staffs which alone remained above the surface, the most suspicious person could not have fancied they had been concerned in the disaster — had in fact been its authors.

"I'm sorry for you, boys," Small said in a tone of real regret. "If you send word home it may be possible to raise her in time to continue your cruise; but even if that can't be done she is far from being lost. By diving, the tent can be recovered, and I advise that some of you remain here until orders are received from your parents; otherwise there may be a big bill for salvage if anybody else gets the yacht up while you are away."

Then he added something in a low tone to his partners, and the two started down the canal at once, while Small began collecting the property which was strewn in every direction, as if counting on being able to remove it immediately.

“His advice is good,” Phil said in a low tone to Harry, “and we may as well begin operations. I reckon they won’t bother their heads about us any more; but I’d like to know where those two men have gone. The other fellows must be following us, and a meeting just now between them and the counterfeiters might be very awkward for our friends.”

“They are after the sloop,” replied Harry. “It is plain Small intends to leave here, and their boat will serve for the flight until something better is found. There’s one thing certain, the gang are through with us, and we have saved the yacht by sinking her.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

WRECKING.

SINCE nothing could be done in the way of preventing a meeting between their friends and the counterfeiters, the boys set about making ready for a protracted stay in the vicinity. A shelter was the most important thing, and, acting, upon Small’s suggestion, they decided to dive for the tent.

This Phil insisted upon doing, he being the most skillful swimmer, and Harry yielded the point, whispering as his friend began to undress:

“I wish you’d try for the camera at the same time. If it doesn’t stay in the water too long the outside case will prevent the pictures already taken from being spoiled. and I’d like to preserve these mementoes of our friend Small’s party.”

“Where is it?”

“In the standing-room locker, on the portside, near where the tent is stowed.”

“I’ll get it if I can.”

Then, having removed all his clothing, Phil lowered himself in the water, not daring to dive lest he should hit his head against some portion of the steamer.

By this time Small had finished his work, and stood by Harry’s side as if deeply interested.

Phil remained beneath the surface nearly a minute, and when he reappeared held

one end of the heaving line in his hand.

“Make that fast to a tree,” he said; “it will be a big help in going down. I’ll get the tent next time.”

Waiting only until Harry had done as directed, he disappeared from view again, and on rising once more brought an end of the canvas with him.

“Reach over and pull it up while I try for something else.”

It was an open question in his mind whether it would be safe to secure the camera while the counterfeiter was watching the work; but since the instrument and all it contained would soon be spoiled if not removed, no great harm could be done in case the man insisted on examining it.

Ten minutes later the walnut case had been thrown carelessly among the trees as if of no particular value, the yacht’s axe lay on the bank, and Phil was dressing himself that he might assist in the erection of the tent.

No little time was spent in the work of cutting camp poles, and before the wet canvas had been raised Bristow and Summerfield arrived in the sloop.

“Help me to carry this stuff aboard,” Small said in his old commanding tone, “and then we’ll leave you to raise the yacht at your leisure.”

The boys would have been willing to do very much more in order to get rid of such harsh and disagreeable task-masters, and the heavy packages were carried to the boat as if they had weighed ounces instead of pounds.

When everything was ready for the departure of the men, and Bristow and Summerfield were already on board the sloop, Small said as he handed Phil a number of silver coins:

“Here is something toward repairing the damage done. If you had followed our instructions from the time we first chartered the yacht, I should feel bound to make the loss good; but since she never would have been in this position if you hadn’t tried to give us the slip, the fault lies with you as much as us.”

“We don’t want your money,” Phil replied, trying in vain to repress his anger. “We gave you notice that the bargain would not be carried out, and the steamer

has been held without the slightest show of right, regardless of what you may say about a charter.”

“Don’t waste your breath on the cub,” Bristow cried. “We can’t afford to loaf around here when probably a party from Schenectady are on their way to the pond.”

Once more Small extended his hand in which was the silver; but as Phil refused to take it he went on board the sloop, saying as she was pushed off:

“I only wanted to square matters, for it’s sorter tough to sink your boat, although it makes very little difference to me if you choose to be a fool.”

Harry was on the point of making an angry reply; but fearing the outbreak might cause the man to come on shore again, Phil whispered:

“Keep quiet. All we want now is for them to leave before Nat and Jim come in sight.”

This silenced Harry, and the men started, all three working at the oars, while the boys watched the departure with a feeling of intense relief.

“There’s one little bit of satisfaction about it,” Phil said when the heavy craft had reached the channel and was moving slowly up the waterway; “they can’t sit idle on board the Restless and go where they choose. They’ve got to labor in order to leave this part of the country.”

“And we are free at last to do as we please, for it isn’t likely we shall run afoul of them again.”

The two boys stood on the bank, silent and motionless, until the sloop was so far in the distance that the forms of her crew could only be seen indistinctly, and then Phil said, as he turned toward the spot where the wet canvas had been left:

“It’s good-bye and good riddance to them, I hope. Now let’s get ready for a pretty long spell of camping out.”

It seemed as if this movement served as a signal that it was safe to approach, for just then Nat, Jim and Dick came from among the bushes, the former giving vent to a shout of triumph as he rejoined his friends once more.

“It was a splendid idea to get clear of them by wrecking the yacht,” he cried, “for it’s neither safe nor pleasant to run back and forth with a party of counterfeiters at the risk of being arrested.”

“Are they counterfeiters?” Phil asked, surprised at the information, even though he had known for some time that they were not honest men.

“So Dick says, and he ought to be pretty well posted after living with them two or three months.”

Then Nat insisted that the prisoner whom he and Jim had aided to escape should repeat his story, and fully an hour was spent in listening to it.

“Well, we are out of the scrape at last,” Phil said when Dick concluded, “and now we must get to work. I believe in trying to raise the yacht without asking assistance from anybody, and it can be done if we go at the job in earnest.”

All save Harry were disposed to think Phil was taking a larger contract than could be carried out successfully; but they were perfectly willing to make every effort in the task, and Jim asked:

“What shall we do first?”

“Put up the tent so it’ll dry before night; the poles are cut, and we shan’t have much trouble. Then we must take turns diving, and bring ashore such things as can be got at easily.”

While the others were carrying out Phil’s instructions, Harry examined the camera, and, to his great delight, found it apparently uninjured. The outer case had fully protected the instrument during the brief submersion, and the leather covering was not even stained by water.

In ten minutes the tent was raised as well as the wet canvas would permit, and there remained nothing to prevent the work of diving from being begun in good earnest

“We’ll divide forces in this way,” Phil said as the party gathered on the bank; “Dick and Nat are to cut twigs for beds. Something of the kind will be needed when the day’s work is finished, and we are forced to sleep without coverings. The rest must take turns diving. I’ll start first, Harry shall follow the instant I

come up, and after him Jim tries his hand. By that means one is at the bottom nearly all the time, and we ought to be able to accomplish very much before sunset.”

Nat did not fancy his portion of the work; but he could make no objections, and soon the boys were busily engaged.

Two heaving lines were made fast from the hull to the shore, and the amateur divers alternately descended at the bow and the stern, seldom failing to bring some portion of the outfit to the surface each time.

Harry fished out two lanterns which would be very useful in the tent at night, while Phil, after three attempts, pulled up the oil stove. Then came bedding, tools of various kinds, provisions decidedly the worse for a wetting, and quite a supply of canned goods, which, of course, were uninjured.

The picture of a veritable band of wreckers was that presented as the recovered articles were spread on the bank to dry, and every boatman who passed insisted on knowing all the particulars of the disaster.

One skipper was so minute in his inquiries, and appeared bent on occupying so much of their time when every moment was precious, that Phil said impatiently:

“The whole story is we ran aground, and perhaps started a few planks. At any rate, the yacht sank, and now we are trying to save some of the things, and mustn’t stop to talk, or a good portion will be ruined.

“What’ll you pay to pull alongside and help raise her? I reckon that’s what you count on doing, ain’t it?”

“We can’t make any trade to-day.”

“I’ll do the job mighty cheap, an’ know jest how to set about it,” the man persisted.

“But we don’t want any assistance yet awhile.”

Even this did not discourage the canaler, and he continued to urge that a bargain of some kind be made, until Phil cried:

“We don’t want her out of the water for a few days.”

The man stared at him as if believing something was radically wrong regarding the sinking of the yacht; but another boat coming from the same direction obliged him to move on, evidently against his own desire.

As a matter-of-fact, neither Phil nor Harry would have raised the yacht then had it been possible. The counterfeiters were not so far away but that they might return and attempt once more to take possession of her.

“There’ll be no further harm done if she stays down a week or more,” Phil said, “but if we want to do any work it will be necessary to print on a board a full account of the whole affair, otherwise we shall spend all our time answering questions.”

Despite the many interruptions by inquisitive boat men the boys succeeded in accomplishing very much before sunset. It would have been dangerous had they remained in the water many hours, and this Phil attended to in a most economical manner.

At the end of the second hour Nat and Dick, who had not yet finished the task of bed-making, were called upon to try their skill at diving, and those who had just come from the water worked vigorously around the camp as a preventive to possible chills.

“We’ll have things right comfortable by to-morrow night,” Harry said in a tone of satisfaction when the labor was finally brought to a close, and Jim and Dick detailed to prepare supper. “What we have taken out to-day will be dry, and if a small stock of provisions can be got matters are sure to be much better than we expected.”

Notwithstanding the fact that the Restless was at the bottom of the canal, her owners were really in a cheerful frame of mind when Phil asked:

“Now what do you fellows think we ought to do about writing an account of our misadventures to the folks at home?”

“I go in for holding our tongues until the yacht has been raised, or we are convinced that it can’t be done without assistance,” Harry replied. “We can say it has been decided to stay here a while, and are camping on the shore; but nothing

more is necessary, according to my idea.”

“What do you say, Nat?”

“The very same. If we succeed, then it’ll be all right to tell the story; but I don’t want to do it until we have got ourselves out of the scrape.”

“I’m not sure that it’s just the square thing to let our parents remain in ignorance of what has occurred, and yet it doesn’t seem as if there could be any harm in so doing now we are rid of the counterfeiter,” Phil said doubtfully. “I believe we can float the little craft in ten days or so, and there can’t be much damage done to the engine, because the water is fresh.”

“Then let’s settle it that nothing be said yet awhile, at all events,” Nat added as the cooks announced that supper was ready.

A hearty meal, composed chiefly of preserved meats and vegetables and prepared with an unexpected amount of skill, for Dick proved himself to be a fairly good hand at such work, served to make the party feel very jolly. During the twilight they remained outside the tent planning how the steamer could be brought to the surface once more, and when that subject was partially exhausted, Phil inquired of Dick whether he would prefer to go on instead of staying with them.

“Where should I go?” the boy asked as if surprised that there was any reason for the question. “I’m worse off than Jim, because I haven’t got a home; but if you fellows think best I’ll mosey down toward Albany and try to find a job.”

“Had you rather keep with us?” Harry asked.

“Of course I had; this kind of work ain’t much more than fun, an’ I’d like to have it last all summer.”

“Then you shall stay and go home with us. Perhaps father will give you a situation,” Phil replied, decidedly, and Jim said with a hearty laugh:

“It’s a pity you couldn’t pick up two or three more fellows who have made fools of themselves. If Dick hadn’t been anxious to get a place where there was nothing to do, and if I’d stayed where I belonged, you wouldn’t have been bothered with us, and we would not be begging a chance to earn our passage.”

“I don’t think we should hesitate to add a few others to the party, because of such good luck with those we did find. It was fortunate for us that you wanted a passage home, and a cook like Dick isn’t to be sneezed at. But we mustn’t sit here chinning any longer. It’s time we turned in,” and Phil set the example by entering the tent, which was brilliantly illuminated by the yacht’s lanterns.

“Isn’t some one going to stand watch?” Nat asked in surprise. “It strikes me that after all the trouble we’ve had through leaving the boat to care for herself, we ought to be mighty careful about such things.”

Phil did not think such a precaution necessary, and said it was not probable any one would come that way; but Jim advised that guard duty be performed.

“There are a lot of tramps traveling up and down this canal,” he said, “and it wouldn’t be very pleasant to find we’d worked all day to give them a chance to steal the stuff.”

This suggestion, together with the possibility that the counterfeiter might return, aroused the boys to a sense of duty which should be performed. The departure of Small’s gang had been such a great relief that, for the moment, it had not seemed as if any other danger could menace them.

Now there were five in the party, it was only necessary each sentinel should remain on duty one hour, and the watching was begun by Nat, the others seeking the restful slumber such as can only be obtained from a bed of pine or hemlock twigs.

Nothing occurred during this first night in camp to disturb the repose of the tired party. Not a boat passed in either direction, and the only sound heard was the hoot of an owl, or the occasional whirr of his wings as he pounced upon some sleeping mouse.

When the day broke Jim and Dick set about cooking breakfast, and the remainder of the party discussed the work to be performed.

“While on watch last night I figured this thing out to my satisfaction, at least,” Phil said to the other owners of the Restless, “and you shall decide whether the plan is to be executed. We need fresh provisions, and must also have some kind of a heavy craft if we expect to raise the yacht. Two of us could walk to the next lock this forenoon, buy what is needed, and try to hire a scow. With a flat-

bottomed boat and a couple of chains the work might be accomplished beyond a question. Then again we would know positively whether Small and his friends had continued on up the canal.”

“Is there any necessity for doing that immediately?” Harry asked.

“No indeed; but since it is to be done within a day or two, why need there be any delay?”

“Whom will you take to help?” Nat asked.

“Either you or Harry. That must be decided between you two.”

“Do you think we can get back to-night?”

“By starting as soon as breakfast is over it ought to be done easily, even if we pull a heavy boat.”

“Then let’s have the job ended as soon as possible.”

Even if Harry had been disposed to object, he could not have done so under the agreement that the majority should rule, and he decided with Nat by drawing lots, as to who should accompany Phil. In this way he was elected to remain with the wrecking party, and the intending travelers aided in the preparation of breakfast that they might set out as soon as possible.

The sun had but just shown his warm face above the tree tops when the boys left camp, Phil calling out cheerily as he disappeared from view:

“We’ll be back before dark, and then Dick can try his hand at making bread, for I’m going to buy flour.”

After watching the departing ones until it was no longer possible to catch so much as a glimpse of their clothing among the foliage, Harry turned his attention to the work of wrecking.

“We’ll see how far the job can be carried before they come back,” he said. “It will do no harm if each fellow stays in the water two hours at a time, and in order to keep the thing going one of the crowd shall remain on shore awhile. Jim and I’ll start it, and at the end of the first hour Jim must take Dick’s place. Then

the tricks will come even.”

According to this arrangement the task was begun, and at noon very much had been added to the miscellaneous collection in front of the tent.

A great many heavy articles had been brought up, by the diver making a heaving line fast to them, and then hoisting from the shore. Among these was the anchor and cable, the cabin fixtures, and the water buckets.

All hands were tired, almost exhausted, therefore a long “nooning” was indulged in, after which the fatiguing labor was recommenced, and continued until nearly sunset, when everything movable had been taken from the sunken steamer.

Now it was time for Phil and Nat to return, and the little party watched anxiously for them; but when the mantle of night covered the earth the travelers were still absent.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PICTURE WRITING.

WHEN Phil and Nat left the camp to go in search of a boat they had every reason to believe the journey would be comparatively short. Judging from the movements of the counterfeiter, the lock could not be more than half a dozen miles away, and the boys set off at a leisurely pace in order to husband their strength for the return, when they hoped to bring back everything necessary to complete the work of wrecking.

On the towpath the tramp would have been much less fatiguing; but Phil was afraid of meeting some friends of Small's, in which case new complications might arise, therefore they plodded on through thickets, over plowed land, or across marshes where the first misstep meant a mud bath.

This kind of traveling was provokingly slow, hardly more than two miles an hour being made, and at last Nat said impatiently:

“I believe it would be better to take our chances on the towpath. Unless there is a change pretty soon we shan't reach the lock until to-morrow, besides, there isn't one possibility in a hundred of meeting the counterfeiter, or anybody who knows them. They're most likely going ahead as fast as the sloop can be urged

along.”

“Wait a few moments more. I don’t care about swimming, and by the looks of these fields we must be near a house. If we are, we can get some one to row us across.”

At this moment a whitewashed fence appeared in view, forming an angle in the corner of the field, and running parallel with the canal, inclosing a neatly kept garden situated just beyond a fringe of trees.

It was the first evidence of a dwelling they had seen since leaving camp, and both felt considerable curiosity concerning those who might be living here.

Following the fence they arrived at a path which led back from the canal two or three hundred yards to a grove, and on the gate of finished boards were several rude pictures or hieroglyphics.

“Why don’t you come on?” Nat asked, impatiently, as Phil stood studying the shaky lines drawn with red chalk. “Some of the children who live here have been trying their skill as artists, and yet you look as if it was something wonderful.”

“It wasn’t done by children,” Phil said, decidedly. “It’s the work of tramps, and these are signs for those who follow.”

“Well, admit that to be true, how can it interest us?”

“It stands us in hand to keep a mighty sharp lookout. If tramps are so thick in this section of the country that they leave directions for their friends, we may have considerable trouble before the Restless is floated.”

This suggestion was sufficient to give Nat great interest in the chalk lines; but, study them as the boys did, it was impossible to gather any meaning therefrom.

After spending fully five minutes on this profitless task the owners of the Restless were about to continue their journey when the sound of voices ahead, and on the same side of the canal, caused them to look up in alarm.

“Get in behind those bushes until we see who it is,” Phil whispered. “I haven’t any idea that Small’s crowd has come back; but we may as well take every precaution.”

By running back twenty paces a good hiding-place was found among a small clump of saplings, and here the boys crouched, concealed only from view of those directly in advance, when two men appeared.

“Now you’ve got the chance to find out whether those pictures were made by children or tramps, for these fellows belong to the last class without a question,” Phil said in a low tone, as the newcomers, who were fair counterparts of the ones met at Baker’s Basin, drew nearer.

The men were talking and pointing across the canal, as if discussing how they could reach the opposite side; but on arriving at the gate both halted suddenly.

“If Slim Sim hain’t been ‘round here I hope never to holler,” one of them said as he pointed to the chalk marks.

“An’ he’s left it fat for them as foller,” the other replied. “A widder, two open winders an’ a good garden don’t come across every feller’s path. What do yer say, shall we try it?”

“P’rhaps some of the boys has got ahead of us.”

“They wouldn’t a run the chance of puttin’ friends in a hole by leavin’ them things there when one rub with a coat sleeve takes ‘em off. I reckon Slim was alone, an’ didn’t dare tackle the job.”

“He couldn’t been ‘fraid of a woman when there wasn’t so much as a dog around.”

“Maybe he had a better snap, an’ then agin there might be a boat or two hauled up near by.”

“We’ll have a look at the place any way,” the first speaker replied as he gazed around scrutinizingly. “We’re alone, an’ needn’t show ourselves until after makin’ sure the coast is clear.”

Then, opening the gate carefully to prevent the hinges from giving a warning creak, he lounged up the path as if simply bent on paying a social visit after the usual fashion of tramps, his companion copying every movement.

“Now you see I was right,” Phil said when the men were so far away there was

no possibility of the words being overheard. "But what puzzles me is, how they knew so much about the place by those few figures on the gate."

"That's where the picture writing comes in, I suppose," Nat replied with a smile, "and since it isn't probable we shall discover the key, we might as well push on toward the lock while that cheerful-looking couple are out of sight."

"But if they were correct, and there is no one save a woman in the house which must be behind the trees, isn't it mean to leave, knowing they may rob her?"

"What can we do by staying? If we had the guns here they could be induced to obey us. With nothing but our fists I'm afraid they would be masters of the situation."

Phil remained silent several seconds. He realized the truth of Nat's words, yet was unwilling to go away without at least making one effort to warn those who were in apparent danger.

"We can reach the lock by noon if we take to the towpath," he said at length, "even should an hour be spent here, so let's find out what those tramps are doing. Possibly they read the pictures incorrectly, and there may be men around, in which case we can get them to carry us across in the boat I saw hauled up on the bank just beyond this thicket."

"It seems like a clear waste of time; but if you are bent on going that settles it. We had better finish the job quickly," and Nat rose to his feet, moving directly toward the gate.

"Don't go that way," Phil called in a loud whisper. "We will creep along the fence until opposite the trees, when we can, perhaps, get over on the other side without being seen."

"All right, you go ahead and I'll follow," Nat said, in a tone which showed that he was not particularly annoyed because of the contemplated delay to the journey.

Phil made his way from the thicket with greatest caution until reaching the line of palings which ran straight back from the water course, and then bending his body sufficiently to prevent his head from showing above the boards, he walked swiftly up the field.

CHAPTER XXV.

TO THE RESCUE.

THE path bore more to the left than did the course pursued by the boys, and when they arrived within sight of a comfortable-looking farm-house with several outbuildings, they were so far away that but little could be discerned owing to the fruit trees which were scattered here and there. Between them and the barn were two haystacks, about a hundred yards to the right, and Phil whispered:

“We must take our chances of discovery while we run across. Once behind those piles of hay we can creep pretty near the house unobserved.”

“And if, in the meantime, the farmer should happen to espy us, matters might be disagreeable, for he’d surely think we were trying to steal something,” Nat replied with a grimace. “If we have come to rescue a dozen or fifteen people from the clutches of two tramps, it would be wiser to walk boldly up, instead of sneaking around like thieves.”

“Don’t make sport,” Phil said, just a trifle petulantly. “If we see a man that settles it, and we’ll go back feeling our duty has been done.”

“Go on,” and Nat tried in vain to repress a smile. “I wasn’t making sport of you; but it does seem ridiculous to crawl around here after two tramps when we couldn’t do anything but run if they came toward us. The trees shut out the canal, and they might do almost anything to us without fear of discovery. Now we’ve started, however, I propose to go on until either they or the farmer gives us a sound flogging.”

Before Phil made any reply, the men were seen moving cautiously among the trees as if examining the house, and it was no longer possible to reach the intended hiding place.

A moment later a woman came from the dwelling, returned with something in her hands which looked like a milk pan, and then a young girl appeared in the doorway.

The tramps watched eagerly from their screen of leaves, and when the door had been closed, made their way directly toward the barn.

“I declare it begins to appear as if the picture writing was correct, or else the farmer is at work a long distance away,” Nat said, growing interested, and thinking no longer of a possible flogging. “We can go back the same way we came, and reach the house by passing the trees on the other side. Come on, we’ll block their little game this time.”

He did not wait to see if Phil was willing to follow him; but started at full speed toward the bank, and would have continued straight across the path but for his companion who overtook him at that point.

“Go down close to the canal before turning,” Phil said breathlessly. “They are probably watching, and it won’t do to let them see us yet awhile.”

Upon reaching the water’s edge both gazed eagerly around, hoping some craft might be within hailing distance; but nothing was in sight. It seemed as if the canal was deserted on this particular day.

“It’s no use to hope for help,” Nat said, now displaying more excitement than had Phil. “Step out lively, or they’ll do some mischief before we’ve a chance to prevent it.”

The depression of the bank served to screen them from the gaze of any one on the other side of the fence, and when the short distance had been traversed it was possible to make a direct course for the house without being seen.

Five minutes later they were at the front door, which was at the end opposite the outbuildings, and Phil asked, as Nat was about to summon the inmates by knocking:

“What are you going to say if the woman comes?”

“Tell exactly what we heard, and ask whether her husband is anywhere near,” Nat replied, pounding vigorously on the door as he spoke.

It was the girl who answered the imperative demand for admittance, and for an instant neither of the boys knew what to say. They were decidedly embarrassed at being thus unexpectedly confronted with a very pretty girl about sixteen years of age, and not until she asked what was wanted did Phil manage to stammer:

“We would like to see your mother. There are two— that is— you see we came

because—”

Fortunately she did not wait for explanations; perhaps the boys acted so queerly that she believed it would be best to have an assistant in the duty of receiving such very odd visitors, and Phil had but just recovered his usual presence of mind when the lady of the house appeared.

“While coming up the canal on our way to the next lock we saw two tramps enter your premises. We followed until they took a deliberate survey of the place and hid behind the barn, where they are now. I’m afraid they mean mischief, and we are ready to do anything in our power to aid you.”

“If you’ll tell us where your husband is, we will go for him,” interrupted Nat.

“I am a widow, and at this time of day I don’t know where you could find any one to aid me,” the woman said, growing very pale. “My friends have repeatedly advised me not to live here alone; but it didn’t seem probable danger was to be apprehended so far from the towpath, and with the house so nearly concealed from the view of any person passing.”

“Perhaps we are frightening you without cause,” Phil hastened to say, as he saw how greatly both the lady and her daughter were alarmed. “They may go away peacefully, in which case we have acted very foolishly.”

“I wish you would come in; I shall at least feel safe while you are here,” and as the boys complied, she led the way to a cozy little sitting-room; but before the visitors had time to examine their surroundings very critically, the young girl cried as she pointed towards the window:

“See! The haystacks are on fire!”

“Don’t go out!” Phil shouted, as the lady was about to run with all speed toward her burning property. “That is their scheme to get you from the house, and instantly you leave they will enter to steal. It also serves to show whether you are alone.”

“But something must be done!” she cried excitedly. “The barns will be destroyed if the flames are not checked at once.”

“You and your daughter must stay here, keeping the doors locked, while Nat and

I go.”

“At the corner of the shed you will find a pump—”

The boys did not wait for the sentence to be completed. In the kitchen beyond were two water buckets, and seizing these they rushed toward the burning hay only to be met by the tramps, who, armed with stout clubs, were apparently bent on preventing them from doing anything in the way of fighting the flames.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FIGHTING FLAMES AND TRAMPS.

NEITHER of the boys had supposed the tramps would attempt to prevent them from fighting the flames, since such actions must prove conclusively that they had set the straw on fire, and for an instant both were at a loss to know exactly what should be done.

Each moment the danger became greater, and there could be no question but that the barn would be destroyed unless immediate steps were taken to avert the catastrophe.

“It won’t do to fool around here very long,” Nat said, as Phil came to a full stop in front of the men.

“We may succeed in preventing any very serious conflagration by beginning now; but in a few seconds it will be too late.

“We’ll break your heads if you make a move toward that haystack,” one of the men said, as he brandished his club.

“That’s exactly where we are going, and somebody will be the worse for the encounter if a hand is raised to prevent us,” Phil cried angrily.

“Hurrah! That’s the way to talk!” Nat shouted, as he seized a fence rail from a pile close at hand. “With a couple of these we can walk away with any two tramps on this canal, and I believe in showing what can be done before wasting much time on such as they.”

Phil armed himself in a similar manner, and no words were needed for both the

boys to make an attack at the same instant.

While the tramps were standing with uplifted clubs, as if believing their attitudes were sufficient to prevent hostilities, Phil and Nat rushed forward, each swinging the heavy rail in “charge bayonet” fashion, and the length of the clumsy weapons saved them from injury. It was in vain that the men flourished their short clubs; not a blow could be struck, and in the merest fraction of time the boys passed them, one being overthrown by a vigorous thrust on the part of Nat.

“I’ll see to it that they don’t do any mischief while you tackle the fire,” the latter cried, as he wheeled suddenly, interposing his rail as one of the men aimed a blow at Phil “It can’t be long now before the officers arrive, and then they’ll learn what it means to destroy property in this fashion.”

The reference to imaginary officers was sufficient to check the advance already begun on the part of the tramps; they must have understood that the boys were strangers to the inmates of the house, and, since they were aware of the intended attack, it was only reasonable to suppose others had quite as much information.

Phil did not wait to aid his friend. The flames were approaching dangerously near the barn, and, leaving Nat to hold the men in check, he ran to the pump, filling both buckets in the least possible space of time.

“The tramps are going to the house,” Nat shouted, as the men, realizing that nothing could be gained by an encounter with the boy, and fearing what he had said might be true, started with all speed for the dwelling. “Shall I follow them up?”

“No; the widow can keep them out for awhile, and unless you help, the fire will gain the mastery. Throw water on the hay while I look for a pitchfork. If that pile can be overturned it won’t take five minutes to extinguish it.”

Dropping the rail, Nat began drawing and throwing water while Phil disappeared within the barn, returning very shortly with the much needed tool.

The fire had been started at the base of the stack, and was already near the top; but as yet fed only from the surface. The greater portion of the hay remained untouched because of the firm packing, and with each pail of water what had threatened to be a serious conflagration was checked.

Regardless of the dense smoke Phil mounted the stack, throwing big forks full of the blazing hay in every direction, and Nat continued to drench the mass with water until, after five minutes had been spent in such manner, all danger from this particular source was past.

“We can afford to leave long enough to learn what the men are about,” Phil said, when the pile was decidedly reduced in size and nothing but smoldering embers told of what had threatened to do so much damage. “If they believe all you said about the officers the fight won’t be a serious one.”

Nat seized his rail once more, Phil carried the pitchfork, and a most formidable weapon did it appear to be, the two running at full speed toward the front of the house where the tramps had last been seen.

The boys did not arrive too soon. At the front door the men were endeavoring to force an entrance, pounding at the barrier with heavy stones, and Nat shouted as he pressed on with the rail held above his head:

“Come along, Phil. Don’t stand on ceremony; but put that fork clear through the villains if you get the chance.”

It was unfortunate that he felt so certain of victory at the first charge, for his assurance made him careless, and as he poised the rail for a blow one of the men threw the rock he had been using on the door, with such accurate aim that the boy fell as if dead.

The sight of the blood which welled from Nat’s cheek, and the thought that he might have been killed banished every idea of prudence or humanity, and Phil dashed forward intent on inflicting the greatest possible amount of injury.

Parrying the blow aimed by the tramp, who as yet retained the stone which he had used on the house, Phil gave a vicious lunge with the fork, sending one of the prongs into the fellow’s arm, and at the same instant the widow opened the door.

Her only weapon was hot water; but she had fully two quarts, and succeeded in throwing it so skilfully that the man who had stricken Nat down received the greater portion in his face.

These vigorous measures were too much for the attacking party, and they beat a

rapid retreat to the barn, threatening to burn every dwelling on the place.

Phil paid very little attention to what they said; Nat lay on the ground motionless, and his only concern for the time being was regarding him.

The widow and her daughter did not hesitate to come out of the house even before the men retreated, and the unconscious boy was soon carried into the sitting room, where restoratives were immediately applied, while Phil lent such aid as was possible, and at the same time kept a general watch through the window.

“He isn’t seriously injured,” the widow said, when finally the sufferer opened his eyes, “although the blow might have resulted fatally had it been dealt upon his head. It is certain, however, that he must remain here until to-morrow. Do you think it is safe to send Nellie to the canal? There surely are boats passing, and two or three men will be able to dislodge the tramps before they can fire the outbuildings.”

“If any one goes in search of help it must be me,” Phil replied. “They’d follow her, and neither of us ought to leave the house yet awhile. When Nat is better we’ll decide upon some plan for getting rid of those fellows.”

“But in the meantime they may burn the house.”

“They’ll hardly do any more mischief; at least not until after learning whether we are to have visitors, as Nat caused them to believe.”

The lady evidently thought her idea was the best; but she could not well remonstrate with Phil after what he had done in her behalf, and during the next few moments all her efforts were directed to restoring Nat to consciousness.

Although the boy’s eyes were open, he did not appear to understand what had occurred, and asked in a hesitating way:

“What is the matter? Where am I?”

“One of the tramps struck you with a rock; but they have been driven away, and just as soon as you get better we’ll force them to leave the premises.”

“Oh, you are the lady whose barn they were trying to burn!”

“Yes; my name is Townsend, and this is my daughter Nellie. Do you suffer much pain?”

“Only a little. The blow must have made me foolish for a moment, but I remember everything now. Where are the men, Phil?”

“I haven’t seen anything of them since they went over by the haystack. As soon as you can move around a bit it will be a good idea to see what is being done.”

“I am ready to go now;” and as he spoke Nat attempted to rise; but the first movement caused him so much pain that he was forced to sink back on the couch again.

“He must not try to get up before morning,” Mrs. Townsend said, decidedly. “Just at present the blow is not felt, but he will be very sensible of it later.”

“We can’t stay here all night,” Phil said quickly. “The remainder of the party are a few miles below on the canal, and would be alarmed if we did not return before dark.”

Then he gave the widow an account of their misadventures from the time of leaving Philadelphia, saying in conclusion:

“We can easily raise the Restless after getting a boat of some kind, and then continue the journey, unless Nat has been seriously hurt. We must start to-night, for those men were on their way down the canal, and if they find the camp there will be trouble.”

“Whatever the circumstances may be, he certainly cannot be moved to-day. I have a boat and you can use her to return, or, what is better still, bring your friends here. We can readily accommodate you all until the yacht has been floated.”

Phil was not disposed to accept such a sweeping invitation; but he soon came to understand that it would be useless to think of disturbing Nat for some time. The poor boy had relapsed into a semi-unconscious condition, and was lying with half closed eyes, paying no attention to anything around him.

The situation of affairs was by no means pleasant. The tramps might begin hostilities at any moment, and it seemed dangerous to make an effort toward

gaining the canal. If attacked while alone Phil could soon be overpowered, and yet it was necessary something should be done without loss of time.

“If I only had a gun or pistol,” he said, half to himself; and the words had but just been spoken when he saw on the table a steel for sharpening knives which had a curved horn handle causing it to resemble, when viewed from a distance, a revolver.

“I believe I can frighten them with that,” he said quickly. “It won’t do any harm to try it, at all events.”

“Are you going out alone?” Nellie asked.

“I fancy it will be necessary, since Nat is in such a bad condition.”

“I’ll go too. With some one to carry the pitchfork, even if it is only a girl, you’ll be better off than alone.”

Phil was not disposed to accept this proffered assistance, however much it might be needed; but Mrs. Townsend appeared to think it perfectly natural her daughter should do something in her own behalf, so he could not well offer any decided objections.

LIGN=Justify> Holding the steel where it would readily be observed, he started for the barn, closely followed by Nellie, who carried the pitchfork as if determined to use it should occasion demand.

“There they go,” Nellie cried, pointing toward the half burned haystack, around which the men were skulking as if to avoid notice.

“Now I’ll find out what my revolver amounts to,” Phil whispered; and then he shouted, as he leveled the supposed weapon: “Halt, or I shall shoot!”

Instantly the men came to a standstill, one exhibiting such a very great desire to hold up his hands that there could be no question as to what they believed the knife sharpener to be.

“I want you to make tracks for the canal, and get back where you came from as quickly as possible. If you hesitate a single instant after I give the word to start, I’ll use this in a manner to surprise you.”

“But we are headin’ for Schenectady, an’ it comes kind o’ tough to double back,” one of the tramps whined.

“It isn’t half as tough as what you would do if I hadn’t this revolver, and you are lucky to get off free after nearly killing my friend. You ought, to be marched to the nearest settlement, and given into the charge of the officers.”

“We’ll go wherever you say,” the man replied, and Phil said sternly:

“March toward the canal, and don’t so much as turn your heads this way. Remember,” he added, as the fellows obeyed very quickly, “I will have the one arrested who is in the vicinity five minutes from now.”

With Nellie and Phil following gravely behind, the tramps walked rapidly down the field, and, passing through the gate, kept straight on up the waterway.

“Don’t you dare show your faces around here again,” Phil shouted as they disappeared among the foliage, and, now that they were out of sight, one of them answered insolently:

“Oh, give us a rest. You happen to have the upper hand to-day, but we’ll get square before long.”

“I wish this was a revolver,” Phil said to Nellie “They would soon forget the idea of squaring matters if I could send a bullet about their ears. I’m afraid we are worse off than ever, for they’re bound to go down the canal between now and morning, when there can be no question but that the boys at the camp will have trouble.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE NICK OF TIME.

PHIL and Nellie waited near the edge of the canal until nothing more could be heard of the tramps, and then the former said:

“I don’t believe they will make a second attempt at robbery here because of the supposed pistol; but there is considerable work for me to do between now and morning.”

“What do you mean?”

“Those men are bound to go down the stream in spite of my threats, and I don’t care to have them come upon the boys unawares.”

“But it will be impossible to leave while your friend is so ill.”

“I’m not sure of that. Your mother and you can do more for him than I, so why couldn’t I go at once and come back after daybreak?”

“You had better talk with mother about it before going away.”

“That is my intention. Let’s go to the house; the visitors have disappeared, and we shall gain nothing by standing here.”

“We might learn if the men intend to keep on down the canal,” Nellie said, as if desirous of remaining where a watch could be kept over the approaches to the house.

“They’ll take good care not to come around this way while it is light, and that reminds me of the time. It must be past four o’clock, and I ought to do something at once unless I intend to stay here all night.”

Nellie would have been very much better pleased had Phil announced his intention of remaining, regardless of what might happen at the camp; but she made no protest against his proposition, and the two, after one more glance either way on the canal, went rapidly up the path.

Nat was still in the same condition as when they left. He replied to their greetings, but in a listless manner, and there was no necessity for asking if he might be moved with safety.

“I think he will be as well as ever by to-morrow,” Mrs. Townsend said, in reply to Phil’s look of distress. “The blow can hardly be dangerous; but if he has not improved by morning you must have medical advice.”

“Isn’t there any need of calling a physician now?”

“Certainly not. Unless there is a change for the worse, I am positive he will soon recover.”

“Then I ask that he be allowed to remain while I go to the camp,” and Phil explained what he feared might happen there.

“Go by all means,” the lady said quickly. “Your friend shall be well cared for, and you can use our boat. It should not take you more than an hour to row the whole distance I fancy you traversed this forenoon.”

Phil had no fear of arriving too late provided he started before nine o’clock, and he prepared for departure in a leisurely manner.

He first made a tour of the outbuildings to assure himself the tramps had done no mischief, and then he bundled the partially burned hay together where the wind could not scatter it from one end of the farm to the other. Nellie assisted him to launch the boat, and he took the oars and sail out of the barn.

When these last had been carried on board, the preparations were completed, and he went to say adieu to Nat before starting.

The invalid was asleep when he entered the room, and Phil said to Mrs. Townsend:

“Tell him I shall be back early to-morrow morning, and if he is not well then, we’ll send word to Philadelphia, for I am beginning to think that the sooner this alleged pleasure trip is cut short, the better it will be for all hands except Jim and Dick.”

“Remember you are at liberty to bring your friends here in case you feel so disposed,” the lady said, and Phil left the house with little anxiety concerning Nat’s welfare.

The boat was a light one, and it seemed but a trifling matter to row five or six miles. He took up the oars, half determined to keep on to the lock and purchase such provisions as were needed; but the lateness of the hour, and the possibility that the tramps might have already started toward the camp finally decided him.

“I reckon they can get along one more day with what they have on hand, and it would be foolish to take any needless risks,” he said to himself, as, turning the boat’s bow down stream, he began to pull vigorously.

During half an hour, in which time he believed two miles had been traversed,

neither a man nor craft was seen, and then a gentlemanly looking pedestrian stepped out from among the trees as he cried:

“Hello there! Pull this way and take me across, will you?”

It was but a trifling service to perform, and Phil complied without hesitation, although at the moment it seemed strange any one should want to leave the towpath for the opposite shore, where the nature of the land rendered walking both laborious and difficult.

Instead of entering the boat when he had an opportunity to do so, the stranger seized the painter as he asked:

“Didn’t I see you pass Schenectady in a queer-looking yacht not long ago?”

“Very likely,” Phil replied, carelessly. “We came up the river several days since; but ran back to the town one evening.”

“Where is the steamer now?”

Phil hesitated an instant before replying. From the beginning of the voyage he had had good cause to be suspicious of inquisitive strangers, and the first impulse was to give an evasive reply. Then came the thought that the Restless could not be harmed while she lay in the bottom of the canal, and he said:

“She sank day before yesterday, and we are making arrangements to raise her.”

“Oh, she did, eh?” and the stranger’s tone caused the boy to look up quickly.

“Where are the men who were with you?” the man asked.

“When the accident happened they went along the canal in a sloop-rigged boat.”

“Don’t you know where they are now?”

“No; and what’s more, I’m not troubling my head about it very much. If you want to be taken across you’ll have to come aboard, for I can’t fool around here any longer.”

“There’s no need of either you or I gaining the other shore yet awhile. I’ve a

warrant for your arrest, so get ashore lively. If there is no attempt at resistance every thing will be done quietly; but try to give a signal to those who may be in the vicinity, and I'll use an amount of force that won't be agreeable."

"You arrest me!" Phil exclaimed in bewilderment, "What do you mean?"

"Just what I said. When you or some of your crowd, shoved that counterfeit money in Schenectady the other day, you were altogether too careless."

"I didn't know these men were counterfeiters until after Dick escaped, and then we did our best to get away. You can't mean to take me in charge for what was done innocently," and as he spoke Phil stepped ashore, hardly conscious of his movements.

"My orders are to bring you, and as many of your gang as I can find, back to Schenectady," the officer replied, seizing Phil suddenly as if believing he was about to make some desperate effort to escape. "It seems you did know you were with counterfeiters, and that I reckon will be enough to convince a jury the State ought to take care of you for a while."

"But when I explain who I am?"

"I don't care about that. The only thing which concerns me is where the rest of the party are hidden, and if you'll give that away I'll do what I can in your behalf when the trial comes off."

"I tell you the men went on up the canal."

"And I don't believe it. Where are the other boys? It seems that all hands of you have been in this business, so if the leaders have given us the slip I'll try to be contented with the smaller fry."

It can readily be imagined that Phil was not in a very calm frame of mind. The idea that he was a prisoner, charged with counterfeiting, had prevented him from understanding anything else clearly, but instantly the officer spoke of taking the others into custody the fog suddenly lifted. He felt quite certain that he would not be allowed to communicate with his parents after being lodged in jail, and also that all hope of freeing himself in the eyes of the law lay in such efforts as Harry might make by sending home for his father.

These thoughts passed through his mind very rapidly, and in a few seconds he had determined on a course of action.

“Well, where are the rest of the gang?” the man asked impatiently.

“You have no right to call them a ‘gang,’” Phil replied angrily. “Of my party not one knew what these men were doing until after they tried to shoot us down. I am not obliged to tell you anything, and shall keep my mouth shut unless I’m convinced it should be opened.”

“I thought you wasn’t as green in the business as you tried to make me believe,” the officer said with an air of exceeding wisdom. “It makes very little difference, however, for we know the yacht has not passed the upper lock, nor has any of her crew; therefore it can’t be long before we bag the whole crowd.”

Phil made no reply. He was sick at heart, and all his energies were centered on the effort to devise some scheme whereby his father or Harry could be informed of the terrible misfortune which had overtaken him.

Finding that Phil would not answer any questions, the officer began to prepare for his journey by first making the boat fast and then half dragging the boy toward a clump of trees standing near the towpath by a country road.

Here he indulged in a series of piercing whistles which, after a few moments were answered by some one a long distance away, and then the man seated himself on the grass as if expecting an arrival.

Ten minutes elapsed before the sound of carriage wheels was heard on the road, and during this time the officer held out every inducement to persuade Phil to give him the desired information.

“There can be no question but that you will be convicted,” he said, “for the evidence is mighty strong against all hands. We know when the yacht came into the canal, how much money has been passed since then, in fact, almost every move you have made for the last four days, so your only chance is to turn State’s evidence. Then I’ll try to have your sentence made lighter than the rest.”

“If you know that, then there is no use for holding me,” Phil replied, doing his best to speak in a firm tone. “I shall not say a word more until after communicating in some way with my parents.”

The officer seemed to think the best way to draw out the desired information was by enlarging upon the certainty of Phil's being convicted; but this only served to render the boy more positive he should remain silent.

To all the arguments advanced he made no further reply, and when a carriage, containing one man, came down the road, both the prisoner and his captor were silent, one from fear and the other because his anger was too great to permit of speech.

"Nabbed one, eh?" the newcomer asked as he alighted. "He looks rather young for that kind of work; but boys are getting on mighty fast nowadays."

"I'll have the rest before this time to-morrow," the officer replied in a tone of satisfaction. "Take the fellow into town for he's too smart to give the others away, and then drive back to the same place. Say to the chief that I would like to have the boy kept by himself. Give him no opportunity to communicate with any one for the next twenty-four hours, and he may be more willing to talk."

"When I can send word to my father in Philadelphia I'll tell all I know; but not a thing until then."

"Very well," the driver of the carriage said. "Bundle in here now, and perhaps you'll be more supple by morning."

He did not even wait for Phil to comply with the command; but pushed him roughly into the wagon, as if justice demanded that he be particularly brutal.

"Don't stop to speak with any person on the way, and return as soon as possible," the first officer said, when the second was ready to leave. "I shall stay right here, where I've had such good luck, and try to get another load. Now that we've a boat it won't be difficult to board every craft that comes along."

"I'll attend to my part properly," was the reply, as the man urged his horse forward at a sharp trot, and Phil was in the lowest depths of despair when finally the canal had been shut out from view.

Half an hour passed before the driver spoke, and then his words were not calculated to lessen the grief in the prisoner's heart.

"If you can tell where the rest of the gang are you'd better do it," he said. "It's

about the only chance left to get out of the scrape.”

“I told the other man I was not guilty of any crime,” Phil replied angrily, “and I will not allow you to speak of my friends as a gang. We came out this way in our own yacht, and it is only necessary to write my father to learn the whole truth.”

“Oh, yes,” the officer said, mockingly. “You’ve fixed matters so’s to make a good showin’, of course: but that won’t go with us. We have the business down too fine for such a game to work.”

Phil began to realize how useless were his efforts at trying to free himself from the suspicion of being a willing member of Small’s party, and he resolved to say nothing more for a time at least.

The refusal to speak again was construed as another evidence of guilt, and the man did not cease congratulating himself upon having the honor of carrying such a desperate character to prison.

When the ride came to an end Phil, half-stupefied with fear, and wholly tired because of the mental agony as well as the cramped position he was forced to occupy in the carriage, suffered himself to be led into the jail without a word of remonstrance.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE NIGHT ATTACK.

WHEN darkness put an end to the diving operations, and Phil and Nat had not returned despite their positive assurance that the journey could be completed before nightfall, the little party at the camp were in the most painful state of anxiety.

Neither believed the counterfeiter had come back now the yacht could be of no service to them, and, speculate as they might, it was impossible to make even a satisfactory guess as to the cause for the delay.

Dick and Jim prepared a hearty supper, but none of the three enjoyed it. The lanterns were lighted and hung in the camp, yet all hands remained out of doors, as if believing their companions would come more quickly if a close watch should be kept.

“Most likely we are doing this worrying about nothing,” Harry said, after a long time of silence. “Perhaps they had a good distance to go before finding a boat, and couldn’t get back as was expected. The chances are we shall see them between now and midnight.”

Probably he did not have any more faith in the truth of this conjecture than did the others; but they were willing to deceive themselves in preference to relinquishing hope entirely, and during the next hour talked only of raising the Restless, taking care not to so much as mention the names of those who were absent.

By ten o’clock the boys could no longer keep up even this faint show of hopefulness, and Jim said, with a long-drawn sigh:

“It is certain that something has happened, and I think we ought to try and find out where they are.”

“It wouldn’t do much good to go fooling around in the dark,” Harry replied. “If we didn’t lose our way we might pass within a dozen yards of them and not know it. I don’t see any other course than to stay here until daylight, and even then not more than one must leave, because of all this stuff which would be stolen by the first party of tramps who happened along.”

“But suppose both are disabled? At least two would be needed to help them into camp.”

“Don’t suggest anything so terrible,” Harry said, impatiently. “It’s bad enough to wait like this without trying to imagine all kinds of dreadful possibilities.”

Again the mournful party relapsed into silence, which was broken a few moments later by Dick, who cried in a joyful tone as he leaped to his feet:

“There they come now! Hark! Don’t you hear the sound of oars?”

After listening intently several seconds, Harry distinguished the noise referred to, and he shouted:

“Hello, Phil! Is that you?”

No reply came, although the hum of voices in animated conversation appeared to

be close at hand.

“Hello!” Harry repeated, and this time he received an answer.

“Who are you lookin’ for?” some one from the canal asked.

“A couple of boys who went up stream this morning.”

“Was they on foot?”

“Yes; have you seen them?”

“I reckon we did. It was them what sent us down here with a message.”

Before the words were spoken all three of the boys were at the water’s edge, eagerly watching a couple of rough looking men, one of whom appeared to be wounded in the arm, as they landed from a small boat.

Had Phil been there he would have recognized the little craft as that from which he had been taken by the officer, and the men themselves as those whom he drove from Mrs. Townsend’s farm by the liberal display of her knife sharpener.

“Why have the other fellows stayed away so long?” Harry asked, as the tramps landed with the greatest deliberation, and proceeded to pull the boat up on the shore.

“Wait a bit, lads, till we fix things here, and then we’ll tell the whole story,” one of the men said with a chuckle of satisfaction. “It ain’t any joke to row a boat so far, even if she is small, an’ we’re mighty near tuckered out.”

“Are they coming back to-night?”

“That wasn’t their calkerlation when we left. Let’s see, what did they go for?”

“A boat to help raise the yacht, of course. Didn’t Phil explain?”

“I reckon so; but he hurried us off; an’ I don’t remember exactly what he did say.”

“Are they at the lock?”

“About three miles the other side; leastways, that’s what I should call it, eh, Jake?”

“Nigh to three,” the other replied, walking directly toward the brilliantly illuminated tent, as if to hide the grin on his face.

“When are they coming back?” Jim asked.

“To-morrer, if nothin’ happens to give ‘em a set back. They want two of you to come up there.”

“What for?”

“I dunno, ‘cept that the boat may be too heavy, an’ they count on havin’ help.”

“I should think they could hire one of the canalers to tow her down,” Harry said half to himself.

By this time the men were in the tent, looking around as if the sight of so much property gave them great pleasure.

“It ain’t so bad, Jake,” the spokesman said in a whisper; “an’ if we can get the story right, I reckon it won’t take long to square that little scrimmage in great shape.”

“What’s that?” Harry asked suspiciously, as he overheard the last four or five words.

“I was only sayin’ that a chance to bunk in a place like this kinder squared up for the work we had to get here.”

“If you are rested sufficiently perhaps you can tell us what Phil said, and then there will be nothing to prevent you from turning in whenever you choose.”

“You’re right, my bantam, so here goes. This chum of yours hailed us while we was a comin’ down the canal, an’ said as how you’d give us supper, lodgin’ and breakfast if we’d keep on instead of stoppin’ over at the lock. He wanted you to know they wouldn’t come back to-night, an’ they’d have to get some help before the boat could be brought along.”

“Dick, give these men what they want to eat,” Harry said, and as the boy began to overhaul the food left from supper, he asked, “Did Phil say we were to come to him?”

“That’s jest the idee. He thought two would be enough.”

“But that only leaves one to take care of the tent, and it doesn’t seem safe to leave so much property without a proper guard.”

“Why, bless your heart, you might leave the bank of England a lyin’ on this ‘ere shore, an’ nobody’d touch a hair of its head. If you’re feelin’ troubled, though, me an’ my partner’ll stay till you get back. We ain’t in no great hurry to strike Albany.”

Harry neither accepted nor rejected this very generous offer. He was so busily engaged speculating upon the manner of craft which Phil had hired, according to the statement of the visitors, that the proposition passed unheeded for the time being.

“It seems foolish for him to charter a boat so large that four fellows are needed to manage her,” Harry said to Jim as the men made a vigorous onslaught on the food set out by Dick. “It is surely wisest to wait for a tow rather than leave the camp almost entirely unprotected, and I shan’t stir from here until more satisfactory explanations have been made. Then again, why couldn’t one of them come down here to talk with us about it?”

“Have you made up your mind not to do as your chum says?” the elder of the tramps asked, speaking with difficulty because of the large amount of food in his mouth.

“I don’t intend to go away from here during the next twenty-four hours,” Harry replied, decidedly. “If they can’t get a tow it will surely be possible to hire two or three men.”

“Of course you are bound to do as you please,” the tramp said, with an evident effort to speak in a careless tone; but the most casual observer could understand that he was by no means pleased with the decision.

The longer Harry thought the matter over the stranger did it seem. Phil could as well have written his instructions, when there would be no possibility of a

mistake, and the neglect to do this, together with the general disreputable appearance of the messengers, aroused his suspicions.

While the tramps were literally gorging themselves, swallowing the food as if after a fast of long duration, Harry lounged carelessly out of the tent, beckoning Jim to follow.

The latter, who must at least have felt uneasy regarding the strangers, waited only long enough to overthrow a pile blankets on the guns, which had been taken apart for the purpose of cleaning, and joined Harry at the water's edge, where an ordinary conversation could not be heard in the tent, while at the same time the encampment remained in full view.

"Do you believe what those fellows have said?"

"I don't know," Jim replied, hesitatingly. "They must have met the boys."

"If they did come especially to give us the message it would be rather rough to let on that we thought the story was a lie, therefore I want to take every precaution, and at the same time be prepared for whatever may happen. You shall stand the first watch, and I'm to be called in an hour. Don't hesitate to awaken both of us if they act queerly."

"Doesn't it look odd for us to come out here?"

"I'll go back and say the boat is all right, as if I left on purpose to see to her, while you stay on guard. Keep your eyes open mighty wide, and we'll take good care one of the lanterns remains lighted. Watch the canal as well as the tent, for there may be others belonging to this party down here when it is believed we are asleep."

Then Harry walked leisurely back to the camp, spoke to the men as had been arranged, and began making his preparations for the night

"Where's Jim?" Dick asked, after a short time.

"It's his first watch, and he has gone on duty."

"Do you take the trouble of posting sentinels here where there's no show that any one will come along?" one of the men inquired.

“We had rather have a little extra work than run the risk of losing anything,” Harry replied, carelessly.

“Canalers ain’t given to travelin’ after dark,” the tramp said with a laugh, “‘cause they get it pretty tough from sunrise to sunset.”

“I don’t fancy there’s the slightest danger of being disturbed; but we are in the habit of doing this sort of thing. I’m going to sleep, and you can camp anywhere you please.”

Then Harry motioned Dick to lie down, and the latter threw himself on the same blanket, the men watching all the movements curiously, but saying nothing. They filled their pipes, seated themselves on the ground just outside the flap, and smoked in silence.

Jim paced to and fro half a dozen yards away until one of the visitors said, as he arose to his feet:

“If them boys are countin’ on goin’ to sleep, I reckon it wouldn’t be a bad idea to put out that lantern. The light shines full in their faces.”

“Don’t do it,” Jim whispered, as he came nearer. “We always keep it burning in the night.”

“Try it once and see how much better you can sleep.”

“Those are the captain’s orders, and we don’t care to make any change.”

The man muttered to himself a moment, and then sat down once more, while Jim resumed his monotonous walk to and fro.

Half an hour passed, and the condition of affairs was not altered. The tramps showed no disposition to retire, and from the tent could be heard the sound of heavy breathing, which told that the watch off duty had succumbed to the drowsy god.

Jim was beginning to feel decidedly sleepy. The fear of possible treachery had already been partially banished from his mind, and it was only by the greatest exercise of will power that the weary, aimless march could be continued.

Then came the time when the sentinel should be relieved, and he approached the tent for the purpose of awakening Harry.

“What’s up now? Goin’ to turn in?” one of the tramps asked in a whisper.

“Yes, when the next fellow takes his turn at the work.”

“Now see here, why not let us do our share?” and as the man spoke he rose, standing directly in front of Jim. “We don’t want to be treated like visitors, and besides, me an’ my mate ain’t anxious to go to sleep yet awhile.”

Before any reply could be made to this apparently kind proposition the man seized the boy suddenly, claspng one hand over his mouth to prevent any outcry, and the struggling prisoner realized that the capture of all hands would be easily effected unless in some way he could give an alarm.

CHAPTER XXIX.

PERPLEXITY.

REALIZING that everything depended upon awakening his companions before the tramps could overpower them, Jim struggled desperately to free himself sufficiently to permit of at least one cry.

The man had evidently expected it would be an easy matter to make the boy a prisoner, especially after taking him at such a disadvantage; but in this he made a great mistake. Jim was quite as strong as the tramp, and during the next sixty seconds so far gained the mastery that his captor was forced to call for help.

“Come here quick, Jake, or the jig will be up,” the man whispered hoarsely, and his companion sprang forward, halting an instant for the opportunity to seize Jim from behind, since the combatants were rolling to and fro so rapidly as to render them almost indistinguishable.

Thus far Jim had been unable to release his mouth, although the two were now on very nearly equal terms, and he waited his chance to deliver an effective blow when the second adversary should be within striking distance.

The tramp, eager to render the desired assistance, incautiously bent over the boy’s back without paying any attention to his heels.

This was exactly what Jim wanted, and, gathering all his strength for the effort, he planted both feet directly on the fellow's stomach.

With a cry of pain the man staggered backward, coming in contact with a guy rope, and, being unable to recover his balance, plunged headlong into the tent.

"I guess that settles the row," Jim thought, now giving his undivided attention to the assailant beneath him.

A fortunate twist of the head brought the fleshy portion of the fellow's hand between the boy's teeth, and the tide of battle had turned.

Owing to his fears regarding Phil and Nat, and the suspicions concerning the visitors, Harry, on awakening, instinctively knew what had happened. When he arose to his feet the butt of one of the guns was in his hand, and as the tramp gathered himself up after falling over the bedding, he brought the weapon down upon his skull.

"Get out, Dick, there's trouble here!" he shouted, as the enemy dropped like one dead, and in another instant he stood by Jim's side.

"Don't strike!" the visitor cried in alarm. "I give in beat, an' it's all a mistake."

"Yes; but the mistake comes by your thinking it would be an easy matter to get the best of three boys," Jim replied pantingly, as the man released his hold. "I ain't sure but the best plan's to give him one good clip, and then if he wants to talk nobody'll interfere."

The fellow evidently believed Harry was about to follow this suggestion, and he begged for mercy until Jim said:

"It don't pay to spend much time on such a cur. March him down to the boat, and I'll see he stays there while you get the other one on his feet."

"I'll go now if you'll give me a chance to get up," and when Harry lowered his weapon the man went toward the water's edge at full speed.

"Hold on!" Harry shouted. "Don't you dare leave without your partner. Come back and lug him, for I don't believe he feels very much like walking."

After a slight show of hesitation this command was obeyed, and the boys stood idly by, but on the alert for any treachery, as the insensible tramp was roughly dragged by the heels to the boat, into which he was bundled without ceremony.

“Our guns have been taken apart because they were wet, otherwise you wouldn’t have got off so easily,” Harry said as the visitors departed. “They will be in working order ten minutes from now, and at the first sight of your faces we’ll shoot without asking questions, so be careful about coming back.”

One of the assailants could not answer, and the other remained silent, for if this party of boys could protect themselves so well unarmed, as the wound on his head gave evidence, they were hardly to be trifled with, and he did not even indulge in threats.

“Come up to the camp; there isn’t much chance they’ll return to-night,” Harry said when the boat was lost to view in the gloom. “Tell us how the row happened, Jim.”

The particulars of the attack were quickly related, and as the narrator ceased, Harry said, taking up the guns:

“We can’t do better than put these together immediately. It isn’t likely any of us care to sleep yet a while.”

“Do you suppose those fellows did anything to Phil or Nat?” Dick asked as they set about the task.

“It doesn’t seem possible,” Harry replied gravely, for this same thought had been in his mind from the moment the boat, with its ruffianly occupants, left the shore.

“But they certainly met the boys.”

“That might be true, and yet not prove any mischief done. Perhaps the message was sent as they delivered it, and on arriving the sight of so much stuff tempted them to steal it.”

This appeared to be a very reasonable explanation; but still neither of the party felt satisfied. Their anxiety concerning the absent ones increased each moment, and when the weapons were in working order, Harry said:

“If the cartridges have not been spoiled you two fellows can hold your own here, and I will go up the canal in the morning.”

“It won’t take long to settle the question of ammunition,” Jim said, and he discharged his gun in the air. “That one was all right, and it’s pretty good proof the remainder are in the same condition.”

“Then there is nothing to prevent my leaving at daybreak. It would require a big party to get the best of you with two loaded fowling pieces as a means of defense.”

“We might do more toward making sure of holdin’ on to the traps,” Dick said. “It won’t be much work to move this tent back among the trees where it couldn’t be seen from the other bank, an’ what’s been taken from the yacht should also be stowed away.”

“That’s a good idea,” Harry exclaimed as he leaped to his feet. “Suppose we lug a lot of the things now? I’d as soon do that as sit here and worry about Phil and Nat.”

The other two were perfectly willing to perform any work he might suggest, and the task was begun without delay. It was not so dark in the thicket, and the laborers moved about with very little difficulty. So eager were they to hide the evidences of their presence there that when the first light of day appeared nothing save the tent remained on the shore.

“It paid to lose our sleep,” Harry said in a tone of satisfaction as he surveyed the scene. “Now we’ll put the camp behind that thick clump of bushes; then everything will be completely out of sight. Take hold, Jim; let’s do it while Dick gets breakfast. The next boat which comes down the canal can report we have left.”

It was only necessary to raise the canvas, since Jim and Dick would have plenty of leisure to make it secure after they were alone, and by the time the morning meal had been prepared all signs of an encampment had been obliterated.

The flag staff, and even the smoke stack had been taken from the sunken steamer; therefore, she also was hidden under the water.

Harry ate hurriedly in order to set out at the earliest possible moment, and while

doing so gave the final directions to his companions.

“Don’t show yourselves to any one; but stay in the bushes where you can see every craft that passes. We’re all sleepy; but you fellows will have the best of me, for by standing watch and watch both can be rested by night.”

“We’ll get things into shape before resting much, I guess,” Jim replied. “The place is to be straightened up, things piled together better and covered with underbrush, while the boughs cut for beds must be brought over here in case Phil or Nat are in a condition to need nursing. With all that I don’t fancy we shall sleep a great deal.”

“Well, keep out of sight whatever you do, and have the guns where they can be got at quickly. I shall come back as soon as the boys are found; but not sooner.”

“Hadn’t you better take some grub?” Dick asked.

“No, I’ve a little money, and it isn’t probable I’ll find any difficulty in buying what I need.”

The meal was ended. Harry arose, nodded a silent good-bye to his companions, and struck off into the woods at a course parallel to the canal, walking rapidly as if afraid to trust himself in any parting conversation.

“Now we’re alone,” said Jim, when Harry was lost to view among the foliage, “an’ after what those fellows have done to help us, we must obey orders mighty sharp.”

“Do you believe Phil and Nat are above the lock?”

“No, I don’t.”

“Then where are they?”

“That’s what I can’t even guess at. I’m afraid something serious has happened, an’ it may be a good while before we see either of them again.”

“It looks pretty blue,” Dick said, with a long-drawn sigh, and then he turned his attention to removing the bed of boughs.

When this task had been completed, and the tent restored to its former appearance, so far as the interior was concerned, Jim proposed that one stand watch while the other packed the goods into such shape that they could readily be covered in case of a storm.

“It’s about time some kind of a craft went by, an’ I don’t think it is safe to let anything go on in the canal without our knowledge.”

“All right; you’re the boss when we two are alone, so give the orders.”

“If that’s the way you are goin’ to put it, crawl into the bushes nearest the water, while I fix things here.”

Dick did as directed, and during the hour which followed he saw three boats pass; but no one aboard appeared to think anything on the opposite bank demanded attention.

At the end of that time a skiff came in sight from some point below, rowed by one man, while two others sat near the bow regardless of the proper trim.

The voyagers seemed to be hunting for something along the shore, and this was sufficient to arouse Dick’s suspicions as to their honesty of purpose.

Creeping softly back to the tent he told Jim of what he had seen, and the boys approached as near the edge of the bank as was consistent with their desire to remain hidden, lying in the bushes where it would be possible to see all that would take place.

“I’m certain the other fellow came from this vicinity,” the listeners could hear one of the men say; “but if that is true the camp should be in view.”

“It isn’t likely they’d stay after knowing everything has been discovered,” the second man replied. “We ought at least go as far as the lock, for they can’t get past those who are below, and we may cut them off there. The game is so nearly in our hands now that it’s a pity to spoil it by impatience.”

“I don’t like to spend two or three days hunting for boys, especially when I know they are probably within a mile of this place.”

“Better take a week than run any chance of losing the little rascals; besides, until the steamer is reported from one settlement or the other, we shan’t make a mistake.”

“Perhaps you are right,” the first speaker replied; and then to the man at the oars he said: “Keep straight on. If a boat overhauls us we’ll take a tow.”

“Much chance we’ve got of being caught by a pair of mules,” the rower replied

sulkily as he turned the bow of the craft from the bank. "I reckon the whole boilin' lot of 'em have doubled back, an' are in the Hudson by this time."

"Never mind what you 'reckon'. This isn't your line of business, and the sooner you give over having an opinion the better we shall get along."

The man was reduced to silence, and the skiff continued up the canal until the watchers on the bank could no longer distinguish any words which might be spoken.

"They are hunting for us," Dick said as he turned towards his companion.

"It appears so— that's a fact; and now the question is, who are they? Did you ever see them at the pond?"

"Nobody came there except the three you know. These men don't look like counterfeitters. Do you s'pose they can be officers?"

"Of course not; else why would they lay 'round here when Small's gang have gone ahead?"

"Perhaps they don't know that, though."

"Well, there'll be a good chance to find out if they keep on rowing long enough."

"They might be friends of the fellows who came last night, an' think there's something to steal," suggested Dick; and although Jim did not believe such to be the case, he was willing his companion should remain of that opinion. As a matter of fact, Master Powell had begun to have a dim idea of what this visit meant; but he did not intend to frighten Dick with it, and assuming a careless air he said:

"It's none of our business, any way. I'll tackle the work at the tent again, and you stay here a while longer."

Then he went back into the thicket with plenty of food for thought, chief among which was a vague suspicion that those who had been so kind to him might not be the rightful owners of the Restless, and that these men were searching for her.

CHAPTER XXX.

WAITING.

AT the Widow Townsend's, after Phil left to go down the canal to the camp, matters were far from cheerful. Both the lady and her daughter were fearful lest the tramps should return, yet neither dared venture out in search of aid.

Had they been entirely alone the situation might have appeared different; but now to leave the house it would be necessary to abandon the wounded boy, an idea which was not for a moment entertained.

"If he gets better before dark we will cross the canal and remain all night at Deacon Blake's," Mrs. Townsend said to Nellie, as the latter returned after Phil had started on his journey; but even as she spoke both knew Nat could not be safely removed that afternoon.

When the cow came home the house was securely closed, the invalid remaining inside, of course; then Nellie watched while her mother milked and cared for the animal, after which the two ran back as if an army was in pursuit.

Fear did not prevent them from preparing a most appetizing supper for Nat, and when the meal had been eaten he seemed to be greatly improved.

"It isn't likely Phil will be back before noon," he said, after being told where his companion had gone, "and then he will go to the lock, I suppose; so there is nothing for it but to stay here nearly twenty-four hours, unless you grow so tired of me that humanity demands I go away."

"We'll be glad to have you all summer providing you hurry and get well," Nellie replied, laughingly. "If you had lived in this lonely place as long as we have it would be possible to realize how welcome an agreeable stranger is."

"But what about invalids?"

"We don't allow people to be sick a great while, and after the supper you have eaten I'm sure we can't call you much of an invalid. How does your head feel?"

"It aches badly, but nothing compared to the pain I felt an hour ago. If Phil was here now I'd try to go back with him."

"I wouldn't consent to anything of the kind," Mrs. Townsend said. "There is no

reason why you should leave until the yacht has been raised, and if the tramps do not burn the house over our heads to-night I shall insist on your remaining as long as possible.”

“Of course I must do my share of the work, otherwise the invitation might be accepted as soon as given; but under the circumstances I will be obliged to go when Phil comes for me.”

“We can talk about it in the morning,” Nellie replied. “Just now the important question is what are we to do in case the tramps pay us another visit.”

“They won’t do that.” And Nat spoke confidently. “It wouldn’t be a bad idea, however, to stand watch until morning, and I’ll take my turn.”

Nellie was going to protest that he must remain perfectly quiet, but her mother checked her by saying:

“I shall be awake the first portion of the night, and when I am tired he can take my place.”

With this understanding, and after the fastening of every window and door in the building had been carefully examined, Nat was shown to a neat little bedroom on the floor above where Mrs. Townsend left him with a motherly kiss and an injunction to go to sleep as soon as possible.

Without really intending to do so, Nat obeyed in a very thorough manner, and the sun had been streaming in at his window fully an hour before he opened his eyes.

“This is a fine way to help stand watch,” he said to himself while making a hurried toilet. “They’ll think I’m a pig to sleep so long.”

“I didn’t intend to awaken you,” Mrs. Townsend said when he finally descended, and would have apologized for what he considered neglect of duty. “I remained downstairs until nearly two o’clock and then retired. The tramps were evidently frightened away, and we need not have worried. How are you feeling?”

“As well as ever except that my head is a trifle sore. Is there anything I can do?”

“Nellie and I are so accustomed to helping ourselves that we do not need

assistance, and, besides, the chores are all done. After breakfast you and she had better go out for a walk. Waiting for Phil will not seem as tedious with something to occupy your attention.”

For an invalid Nat ate a very hearty meal, and the morning was well advanced when he and Nellie finally started toward the canal.

Had he awakened half an hour earlier, or been a trifle more eager to leave the house, the two must have been on the bank of the waterway when Harry passed. As it was, they reached the gate hardly more than ten minutes from the time he went by without a thought there might be a dwelling hidden among the trees, and thus by the merest chance the friends avoided meeting at a moment when it was of the highest importance each should know of the other’s movements.

During the next two hours Nellie and Nat sat near the water’s edge expecting to see Phil coming in the boat, and then as Nat’s head began to ache he proposed returning.

“It isn’t absolutely necessary to stay here,” he said; “and if I’m going back to camp to-night it stands me in hand to make some preparation in the way of resting. I’d find it difficult to walk a mile just now.”

“If that is the case it will be better to stay here a few days longer, for you can’t be of much service where hard work is to be done.”

“I must be with them, nevertheless,” Nat said almost fretfully, and then the two retraced their steps to the house, Mrs. Townsend saying, as she met them at the door:

“I can see by your face that you have been out too long. Lie down awhile, and when Phil comes you will be in condition for the journey.”

Nat followed this suggestion all the more readily because he realized his own weakness, and on awakening again the shadows of night were already beginning to lengthen.

“Is Phil here?” he asked as he entered the sitting-room where Nellie and her mother were sewing.

“We have seen no one since you went upstairs,” the widow replied, and from the

manner in which she spoke Nat fancied Phil's delay in returning had been the subject of conversation immediately prior to his appearance.

"Why does he stay away so long?" he asked half to himself, and Nellie replied:

"Perhaps they have found some means of raising the yacht, and he is waiting to come in her."

"That can't be possible. Even if the Restless was afloat this minute, it would be two or three days at the very least before she was fit to use."

"There is no reason why you should be worried," Mrs. Townsend said quickly. "He knows you are safe, and probably thinks it just as well to consult his own convenience."

"But he doesn't know whether I'm able to be about, and must know, too, that if I was seriously ill you could not cross the canal, because he has your boat."

The widow had made the same remark to Nellie hardly ten minutes previous, and now she was silent, for this view of the case caused Phil's absence to be unexplainable.

"Either he or some of the others will surely be here by morning," she finally said, "therefore try and be content until then."

"But I can't. I'm strong enough to walk to the camp, and I shall start at once," Nat replied in a very decided tone. "By leaving immediately it will be possible to reach there before dark."

"It is nearly six o'clock, and you were three or four hours coming up. To go now would be to lose yourself in the woods."

Nat was quite positive he should set out; but after some little discussion he realized that Mrs. Townsend was correct, and he said with a sigh:

"Of course I must stay until morning; but there's no doubt something serious has happened at the camp."

"I will awaken you at daylight. By starting early you'll arrive about noon. That admits of very leisurely traveling, in which case there can be no real danger even

if your head troubles you again.”

This was clearly the best that could be done under the circumstances, and Nat tried hard to appear patient.

During the evening Nellie made every effort to entertain him; but all in vain. He could not rid his mind of the idea the boys were in trouble, and when the little party retired it really seemed a relief to separate.

It was a long while before Nat’s eyes closed in slumber, and at least a dozen times did he get out of bed to see if the light of coming day could be seen in the eastern sky.

When Mrs. Townsend knocked to awaken him he was already dressed, and, breakfast over, nothing prevented his departure.

“Nellie and I will go a short distance down the canal with you,” the widow said, as the three walked through the field, “and she shall remain on the bank during the forenoon in order to let Phil know you have gone on. By that means he will be saved both time and labor.”

“I’m afraid he won’t come,” Nat replied, gloomily.

Nellie and her mother tried to drive these forebodings from his mind; but he was by no means cheerful when the moment for parting arrived.

“If anything has happened don’t hesitate to return and stay with us until your parents can be communicated with,” Mrs. Townsend said after the adieus were spoken, “and under any circumstances we shall expect to see you again soon.”

“In that you shan’t be disappointed, for both Phil and I will want to thank you once more for the kindness shown us.”

Then he pushed on through the underbrush which at this point prevented him from following the bank of the canal, and the lonely tramp had really begun.

For two hours he walked rapidly, despite the many obstacles before him. Often the pain in his head threatened to put an end to the journey; but thoughts of what might have happened served to lend fictitious strength, and when it seemed as if the day must be well spent he arrived within view of the first encampment.

The absence of the tent caused him to halt in dismay; but an instant later Jim appeared from among the trees, waving his hand and making the most violent demonstrations of silent joy.

“Where’s Phil?” Nat asked as he drew nearer.

“Don’t you know?” and now it was Jim’s turn to look frightened.

“Of course I don’t. What time did he get back?”

“Why, I haven’t seen him since he left with you.”

“Wasn’t he here night before last?”

Jim shook his head, and Dick, who had come up by this time, said:

“Harry went to hunt for both of you, and he hasn’t got back yet either.”

Nat was bewildered. It seemed positive his companions were playing upon his fears, and he asked impatiently:

“Are they both missing? Tell me all that has happened.”

The story was not a long one, and when he in turn related the adventures at Mrs. Townsend’s all three were completely mystified. For fully five minutes they stood gazing at each other in silence, and then, as sounds in the distance proclaimed the coming of a boat, Jim said:

“Harry’s last orders were that we keep out of sight, and I begin to think it’s a wise precaution. Let’s go to the tent.”

Nat followed like one in a dream; fatigue was forgotten in fear, and conjecture seemed worse than useless.

“Do you know anybody at home who might have reasons for chasin’ you?” Jim asked, his suspicions that there was some flaw in the title of the Restless returning with redoubled force.

“Of course not. Why should we be chased?”

“I don’t know, but thought you could think of something to explain why the

other fellows stay away.”

“It is impossible even to guess. Unless an accident has happened, Phil and Harry should both be here.”

“Harry may have gone a long distance beyond the lock, believing those tramps told the truth,” Dick suggested.

“That is possible,” Jim replied gravely; and then, with the pretense that it was necessary to carry out Harry’s orders regarding the watch to be kept upon the canal, went to the thicket on the bank to think the matter over alone.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SEARCHING.

WHEN Harry left the camp to go in search of Phil and Nat, he felt disposed to believe that at least a portion of what the tramps told was true. It seemed positive the men had met the boys, otherwise the former could not have carried on the conversation they had.

“It’s just possible the scoundrels came across them at the lock,” he said to himself as he walked rapidly on, at times literally forcing himself through the foliage. “It can’t be that either has got in any trouble, and very likely I shall meet both coming down in a boat.”

Thus trying to convince himself there was no real cause for alarm he continued the journey, keeping close by the bank of the canal in order that nothing in the shape of a craft should pass without his knowledge, until he arrived at the gate which led to Mrs. Townsend’s house.

Here he halted a moment to look at a boat being slowly drawn down toward Albany, and never dreaming that one of those whom he was so anxious to find was but a short distance away.

For him, however, neither the gate, nor the path, nor the possible house had any interest. He believed his friends were not to be found this side the lock at least, and the one desire was to reach there as soon as he could.

During the remainder of the journey he saw several buildings, for, thanks to the

bridge, the towpath was now on the same side of the stream as the encampment; but no thought came in his mind to inquire about his friends. Phil would undoubtedly have asked the lock keeper where a boat could be found, and in all probability received the desired information from that official if the boys had passed through the settlement.

Upon arriving at the village he went directly to where the huge crafts were being raised and lowered as their destination might lie in the north or south, and when there was a momentary lull in the labor, asked the man in charge:

“Did you see two boys who wanted to hire a flat boat for the purpose of raising a yacht?”

“What yacht? There’s none around that I know of.”

“A naphtha launch, sunk just below here, and I am one of the owners. My friends started out to find a boat, and haven’t returned yet.”

“No; I’ve not seen any strange youngsters. There’s enough now to make a man’s life unhappy, an’ I’m glad the ones you speak of didn’t turn up if they’re anything like what we’ve got in this town.”

“Those whom I am seeking are nearly men, and they must be somewhere in the vicinity.”

“That might be, my friend; but I don’t know anything about ‘em. Ask Fernald—he runs that store over there. I’ll warrant nothin’ strikes this place that he ain’t posted on. Trade’s kinder dull jest now so he’s got plenty of time to keep his eyes open for strangers.”

Harry was beginning to grow seriously alarmed, and acted upon the suggestion immediately.

Mr. Fernald insisted on knowing why the boys were to have visited the village, what they intended to do while there, and, in fact, all the particulars, before he would make any answer, and then he said, regretfully:

“Wa’al, I ain’t seen hide nor hair of ‘em. They mighter come late in the night when I wasn’t ‘round.”

“That isn’t likely,” Harry replied, his heart growing very heavy. “They couldn’t hope to hire a boat after dark, and I’m sure neither would have gone through without stopping, because we needed provisions.”

“Then it’s safe to say they didn’t come this way.”

With this very positive statement the worthy Mr. Fernald brought the conversation to a close in order that he might wait upon a boatman who had just come in, and Harry remained at the door staring out into vacancy as if completely bewildered.

It was possible, but not probable, that the boys had passed beyond the village without being seen, and were at the point spoken of by the tramps.

“It won’t do any harm to go there at all events,” he said to himself, after standing near the door until the attention of the loungers in the immediate vicinity had been attracted. “They couldn’t have got lost between here and the canal, therefore they must be somewhere on the towpath.”

There was so much which seemed mysterious about this disappearance of his companions in a country where law and order prevailed, that, almost without being aware of the fact, Harry tried to leave the settlement unperceived. He walked aimlessly around a few moments, and then, when quite positive no one was watching, started at a rapid pace up the canal.

“People would laugh at me if I should tell that two boys old enough to take care of themselves are lost,” he thought, “and the least said about it the better.”

He was wholly ignorant of the fact that before the village had been left a quarter of a mile in the distance, a gentleman, evidently accustomed to exercising authority, approached the lock keeper with the question:

“Didn’t that boy who was here a few moments ago ask you about some men?”

“No; he claimed to be huntin’ a couple of his chums.”

“What did you tell him?”

“That I didn’t know anything of the boys. There’s enough work here to keep one man busy without lookin’ after strangers,” the man added impatiently, as if not

caring to prolong the conversation, and the newcomer crossed to Mr. Fernald's store where he made the same inquiries.

Meanwhile Harry was walking rapidly up the towpath, keeping a close watch on either bank, hoping for some sign of those whom he sought.

Before two miles had been traversed it became apparent that he was on a wild-goose chase. There were no longer any houses in sight, and it seemed positive Phil would not have gone so far without first learning at the lock whether a boat could be procured there.

"This is a clear waste of time," he said finally, coming to a full stop. "I'll go back and send a letter from the village, for it's time someone helped us out of what looks like a pretty bad scrape."

In great mental distress he began to retrace his steps; but before arriving within view of the settlement he was halted by the same man who had visited Mr. Fernald.

"Well," the stranger said in a friendly tone, "did you find your friends?"

"No; did you see anything of them?"

"Perhaps so, if you are one of the party which was at Schenectady in a steam yacht."

"I am," Harry replied eagerly. "Where are the other fellows?"

"I'll give the particulars when you tell me where the men are. I've some important business with them, and want all three at once."

"That's just what I can't do; when the yacht sank they went on in the sloop, and must be a long distance up the canal by this time."

"Both of you have the story down fine," the man said, ironically; "but it won't wash. You've got the chance to help yourself by telling the truth; but it's none of my affairs if a lie is stuck to. The other fellow was just as stubborn, and I reckon he's sorry for it."

"Do you mean Phil?"

‘Philip Gilman, or at least that’s the name he gave at the jail.’

“Jail!” Harry repeated in astonishment.

“I took him to the county prison, where he will answer to the charge of passing counterfeit money, with every prospect of being convicted.”

“But we ran away even before knowing they were counterfeiters. We surely can’t be held responsible for what these men did,” Harry replied, so bewildered as to hardly know what he was saying.

“If you prove that it may be all right,” and now it seemed as if the detective was beginning to think he had been a trifle too hasty in jumping at conclusions. The surprise which the first prisoner exhibited might possibly have been a sham; but it was not reasonable to suppose Harry was equally as good an actor.

“My orders are to take the whole party to jail, and that’s what I shall do before long. If you boys are innocent, tell me where the men are, and the case can be settled quickly.”

“I’ll send a letter to my father, and when he arrives we shall know what to do.”

“You are my prisoner, and I’ll allow nothing of the kind. The district attorney may be willing; but I don’t take any risks.”

“Do you mean that I can’t send word home?” Harry asked, growing more and more alarmed.

“That’s exactly the size of it. I won’t even take you back through the village, for the men are probably hiding somewhere around, and would know what was being done.”

Harry stood silent a moment trying to decide upon the proper course of action. He realized how important it was his parents should know of the trouble he was in, and thus arrived at the same conclusion Phil had.

It appeared from what the man said that but one had been arrested, therefore Nat must be somewhere in the vicinity, and he would send home for assistance on finding himself deserted. Clearly it was wisest to answer no questions.

“Well?” the man said peremptorily. “Where is the remainder of the crowd?”

“I shall say nothing to you. If the authorities promise to inform my father, I’ll tell what I know.”

“After that, it isn’t any use to think you boys are innocent. Both are too smart for fellows who were never nabbed before.”

“I can’t see how that proves anything. We certainly would be foolish to do exactly as you demand without some assurance that so simple a thing as sending a letter may be allowed.”

“Will you come up to the road peaceably, or must I use force?”

“I’m not such an idiot as to fight under these circumstances. Which way are you going?”

“Down back of the village where a man is waiting to carry you to Schenectady.”

“I’ll do whatever you say. If I am to go to jail the sooner we arrive there the quicker I’ll meet some one who can exercise common sense in a case like this.”

“Better keep a civil tongue in your head; it’s in my power to help you considerably, or make matters mighty black for both.”

“It’s your duty to tell the exact truth, and that I’m not afraid to have spoken,” Harry replied with no slight show of dignity. “I admit that we were with the counterfeiters; but it’s easy to prove we did nothing wrong knowingly.”

“We’ll see about that,” the officer said angrily, as, seizing the prisoner by the arm, he forced him along a pace in advance,

“If you are in a hurry, take hold of my arm properly, and I’ll walk as fast as you do. Even if I am guilty you’ve got no right to hurt me, and when my father comes, as he surely will immediately after being summoned by the authorities, he may want to know why rough treatment was necessary.”

The quiet way in which the boy spoke, and the fact that what little he had said coincided with Phil’s statements, caused the officer to be a trifle uncertain as to the correctness of his theory, and from that moment he conducted himself in a

more temperate manner.

The two walked nearly back to the settlement, and when within sight of the lock turned sharply to the left, up a road which evidently led to a railway track. In twenty minutes they were where the same man who had taken charge of Phil was sitting half asleep in a carriage drawn up near a small grove of fir trees.

“Hello?” he cried as the officer hailed him. “Caught another, eh? But why don’t you go for bigger game? While you are layin’ for boys, men may be showin’ their heels.”

“Hold you tongue and attend to business. I want you to get into town and back as soon as possible. Drive to the nearest station and take the cars.”

“Have you seen anything of the men?”

“He hasn’t, and isn’t likely to at this rate. They went up the canal in a sloop, and while he covers himself with glory by capturing a party of boys who are here on a pleasure excursion, the criminals have good opportunity to escape,” Harry said, boldly.

“See here, Baker,” the man said as he turned the carriage that the prisoner might get in, “I wouldn’t wonder if there’s some truth in what these fellows tell. Why don’t you jump a long distance ahead, and find out if it’s so?”

“You attend to your business, and I’ll take care of mine,” was the angry reply.

‘All right, you’re the boss; but it pays sometimes to take advice from even a fool.’

Then, Harry having entered the carriage, he drove up the road, while the other officer returned to the lock, arriving at Fernald’s store in time to hear a rough-looking man accused of passing counterfeit money.

“What’s the matter?” he asked, and the shopkeeper replied:

“It’s more of them pesky dollars. It seems like as if every second one is bad.”

“I got it from four boys who hired me to help ‘em on a little steamboat,” the stranger said. “They gave me five, an’ this is the first time I had reason to pass

any.”

“Where were they?” the officer asked excitedly.

“About three miles below here.”

“How long ago did you see them?”

“Three days, or so.”

“Then there isn’t much chance but that they’ll come this way, unless the arrest of two has frightened them,” the officer said half to himself, and the stranger asked:

“Are you a detective?”

“Yes.”

“Then take this stuff, for I don’t want to get into a scrape by keeping it. I shall be around town all day, an’ if I can do anything to help you, let me know.”

The man walked quickly out of the shop, lounged a few moments, and then crossed the canal, muttering to himself as he reached the opposite side:

“If this don’t convince Small it ain’t safe to hide anywhere near here, Dave an’ I will go by ourselves, for the place is too hot, an’ it’s time to leave the sloop.”

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN CAMP.

MEANWHILE the occupants of the camp were in the most painful state of perplexity. Neither could make even a satisfactory guess as to why Phil and Harry failed to return, and the mystery which surrounded their absence was more terrible than would have been the knowledge of positive danger.

After talking a long while with Nat, Jim was forced to believe there could be no dispute regarding the ownership of the Restless, and conjecture seemed worse than useless.

Strange as it may appear, although Small and his friends were counterfeiters, and some of the base money must have been passed in the vicinity, the boys never

fancied the true state of affairs. Innocent as all were known to be, the possibility of arrest for the misdeeds of others was not for a moment considered.

During the first twenty-four hours of his return Nat kept strict watch upon the canal, while Jim and Dick did the necessary work around the camp. But that time having passed, and still no signs of his companions, the poor fellow could not restrain himself longer,

“Something should be done at once,” he said, when they were eating dinner. “It’s certain the boys are not staying away of their own free will, and we must learn what the trouble is, regardless of any prospective loss. Even if all this stuff is stolen, it would be as nothing compared with the suffering which Phil and Harry may be enduring.”

“I don’t see what you are goin’ to do until we have some clew to their whereabouts,” Dick returned, despondently. “They ought to be here now, no matter how big a boat was hired, an’ I’m beginning to think Small’s crowd has got hold of ‘em.”

“That’s the only way I can explain it,” Jim added.

“But how could such a thing be possible? The men went on up the canal.”

“I’m not sure of it,” Jim replied.

“Very well, suppose they are this side the lock, why would they want to hold either of the boys prisoner?” and Nat believed this question settled the matter effectually.

“I can’t say; but we’re pretty sure they are prevented from returning, and it’s more reasonable to accuse Small’s party of the mischief than any one else,” Jim said quietly. “I believe a thorough search of the country between here and the next settlement should be made.”

“That seems like waste of time.”

“What else can we do?”

“I’ll write to father; we’ll mail the letter at the lock, and in a few days everything will be settled.”

“Do you mean to camp here while waiting the reply?”

“No. Mrs. Townsend wants us to stay at her house at least a week, for she proposed that all hands come there, and with headquarters so near the settlement it may be possible to hear something of the boys.”

“And what about the things?” Dick asked.

“I won’t bother my head concerning them. We’ll leave the whole lot, and run the chance of finding it again. The question of saving property mustn’t prevent us from searching for Phil and Harry.”

It was evident from the look on Jim’s face he did not approve of the plan; but, under the circumstances, no very strenuous objections could be made because he really had nothing at stake.

“When do you mean to leave?” he asked, after a short pause.

“This afternoon. I feel as well as ever now, and it won’t take over two hours to walk to Mrs. Townsend’s. We will hide all we can of these traps, and I don’t think there’s much chance of being disturbed, for the tent is completely screened from view by the trees.”

“What do you propose to do when you get there?” Jim asked.

“Send the letters, notify some of the farmers that two boys have mysteriously disappeared, and make inquiries of the boatmen.”

“Don’t you think it’s a good deal like sponging for Dick and I to go? Your father’ll pay her if any charge is made; but we have to bunk in on charity.”

“I’ll guarantee the bills will be paid, if it comes to that, so don’t worry,” and Nat began to collect the smaller articles preparatory to hiding them.

See here,” Jim said after a pause, during which he seemed to be studying some important question. “What you’ve laid out to do won’t require all three, and at least one of us’ll be in the way.”

“But we can’t separate when there’s so much trouble.”

“It’s just the time, and I propose to stay here if you have no objection.”

“Alone?” Nat and Dick cried in chorus.

“Why not? Nobody wants to steal me, and I might possibly find the others. If you are going to leave the stuff for the first tramp who comes along to pick up, I shan’t do much harm.”

“I wasn’t thinking of anything like that. You are welcome to stay as long as you please; but I can’t see what advantage is gained by remaining.”

“Perhaps none; but since you are prepared to lose it, matters won’t be any the worse for my camping here. You and Dick can do what is required, and in case of an emergency, I know where to come. It costs nothing to try my plan, nor will it interfere with what you do.”

Nat did not fancy leaving behind one who had been such a good friend; but at the same time he disliked to abandon the camp, and since Jim appeared reluctant to accept the widow’s hospitality he was only too well pleased to put him in charge of the property.

“I don’t like to separate now that only three out of five are left,” Nat said; “neither do I wish to veto the proposition. Dick and I’ll take a gun and half the ammunition; if we are not successful in the search, or if father doesn’t come soon, one of us will be down to see how you are getting along before many days pass.”

“Don’t do that,” Jim replied quickly. “I’m not intending to stay here, except, perhaps, now and then for a night, and unless the tramps take possession there’ll be nobody at home.”

“What do you intend to do?”

“Hunt for the boys. I haven’t yet made up my mind they are any considerable distance from here, and some one must be able to tell what has become of them.”

“If you make a discovery, will you let us know at the earliest possible moment?”

“Of course, I’ll strike for Mrs. Townsend’s immediately the first clew has been found.”

“Then we’ll leave at once,” Nat said, as he finished putting the goods into a compact pile. “There’s provisions to last a good while, so you won’t suffer from lack of food.”

“I’ve seen the time, and not so very long ago, when this lay out would have made me feel rich, so don’t worry about that part of it.”

Then Jim helped the others pack such articles as they intended to carry with them, and toward three o’clock in the afternoon Nat and Dick set out, the latter perfectly indifFerent as to where he went provided there was a reasonably good prospect of finding food and shelter.

“Hunt around the lock, and I’ll satisfy myself they are not here,” Jim said cheerfully as the two left, looking anything rather than happy.

“There’s no chance you can do much in this locality,” Nat replied, “and if you get sick of staying alone remember you can join us with the certainty of the bills being paid in case Mrs. Townsend charges us board.”

“I’ll not forget,” was the laughing answer, and a moment later the trees hid him from the view of those who were forsaking the camp.

“He’s got some scheme in his head,” Dick said, as he and Nat struck through the thicket on such a course as would admit of their seeing the water which must serve as guide.

“I’m afraid it won’t amount to anything,” was the mournful reply. “It isn’t reasonable to suppose the boys have stayed near here, and he’ll come to the widow’s, for one night alone will satisfy him.”

Dick had considerable faith in Jim’s ability; but he was not prepared to say he acted wisely on this occasion, and believed with Nat that the boy would not remain many hours at the camp.

Both the travelers kept a sharp lookout for any signs of their missing friends; but nothing was seen. Two or three boats passed, yet the boys thought it unwise to hail them, even though they might have received some tidings of Phil, or at least of the skiff in which he went away.

Nat retold the story of the fight with the tramps as the two walked up the path

leading to Mrs. Townsend's house, and the recital had not been concluded when a joyous cry from Nellie told that their approach had been observed.

"That sounds as if they were glad to see you," Dick said, in a tone of satisfaction.

"I never had any doubts about our welcome, and there'd be no difference if Jim was with us."

By this time they were at the house where Mrs. Townsend and her daughter literally overwhelmed them with questions

Nat gave a brief account of the condition of affairs at the camp, and concluded by saying:

"I believe our best way will be to stay here, if you allow us to pay for board. Father is sure to come as soon as my letter is received, and from this point we have a better chance of hearing something from the poor fellows than while remaining at the tent."

"We will be glad to have you remain until both the boys are found, and as to payment, that can be settled later," Mrs. Townsend said as she ushered them into the house. "I hope the one who has been left behind will soon conclude to join you."

Now it was Nat's turn to ask questions, and the widow could answer them all in a very few words.

"We have seen nothing of the tramps since you went away. In fact only one person has called, and he was a farmer living on the other side of the canal. I spoke to him about Phil; but he had met no strangers in the vicinity. It is singular the boat has not been picked up if any accident has happened."

"Do you suppose he turned around after Nellie left him, and went to the lock?"

"That can easily be learned, for I think one or both of you had better go there tomorrow. It is just possible Harry went above the settlements to make inquiries, and when one is found the whereabouts of the other will become known."

It was now so late in the afternoon that any idea of leaving the farm would be

foolish, and Nat resigned himself to inactivity a few hours with the best grace he could.

The boatmen passing up and down the canal might give some information, however, and he went with Nellie to the water's edge where every person who passed was questioned as to whether the missing boys had been seen.

All made the same reply. Nowhere above the lock were there any strangers, and before sunset Nat began to believe Jim might be right in searching between the point at which the Restless lay and Mrs. Townsend's farm.

"We'll go to the settlement, of course," he said to Nellie when, after remaining on the shore until nearly dark, they returned to the house; "but it's certain Phil and Harry both cannot have gone astray in the same place, and, if we hear nothing from either, something has happened below."

"And in that case it's surely best to await your father's coming," she replied.

"Why not try to learn what has caused the troubles?"

"Because Harry disappeared mysteriously while searching for Phil, and it seems wisest you remain in a safe place until others are here to aid in the hunt. There is something in this that neither you nor I can understand, and it'll do no harm to take every precaution, no matter how foolish it may appear."

In this opinion Nellie received the support of her mother later, when it was laid before her.

"It is right you should send for your father," the widow said, emphatically, "and you will do nothing more, with my advice, until he arrives. I am quite positive those counterfeiters are mixed up in the affair, even though you are convinced they are so far away, and an older head than yours is needed."

"But the boys may have met with an accident."

"Is it reasonable to suppose both have done so especially since Phil left here in the boat? There is another reason for their absence, however, and, while I advise you to go back to the lock, I believe your father can fathom it."

After this very decided prediction the widow busied herself with the preparations

for supper, and because she said no more Nat's alarm was increased.

"I believe we should have stuck by the camp," he said to Dick when they were alone in their sleeping apartment that night. One of us could easily run up to mail a letter, and matters would not be any worse if all hands stuck together."

"This is a pretty good place in which to stay," Dick replied, drowsily. "We had an awful fine supper, an' I believe breakfast will match it. What's the use of fussin' if you are goin' to send for your folks?"

"But a fellow can't help feeling worried, no matter how well he's fixed," Nat replied, impatiently.

"I can, an' what's more I'm going to sleep now, for it's been a long while since I was in a reg'lar bed," and a moment later Dick's heavy breathing told that he was taking advantage of this unusually good opportunity for slumber.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

JIM'S PLANS.

WHEN his companions left Jim had a very well defined idea of what he wanted to do in the way of solving the mystery which hung over the disappearance of the boys.

Convinced there was nothing wrong regarding the ownership of the Restless, he could think of but two reasons for their absence. The first that the officers of the law had taken the boys, and the second that they were prisoners of the counterfeiters.

"If I can't find them within two or three miles of this place it's certain they've been arrested," he said to himself, and it was with the determination to search the vicinity thoroughly, that he made the proposition to remain behind.

He did not put these thoughts into words when Nat and Dick were present for fear of giving offense by suggesting the others were in prison, and, possibly, the desire to solve the mystery unaided prevented him from speaking. At all events, no sooner had the boys disappeared than he proceeded to arrange matters after his own fashion.

The second fowling piece he loaded carefully, tucked half a dozen cartridges in his pocket, together with four or five hard biscuits, and thus prepared for almost any emergency which might arise, started up the canal not more than a hundred yards behind Nat and Dick.

“There’ll be no great hardship in staying alone one or two nights,” he said to himself, “and if I don’t learn anything at the end of that time the Townsend farm won’t run away.”

He had no idea of loitering there to care for the property. If the owners were willing to risk leaving it, he surely had little reason to feel anxious, and with this thought in his mind started on what seemed a foolish errand.

“If Small’s gang are still this side the lock, the sloop is hauled up somewhere near, therefore I’ll look for her,” and acting upon the supposition he forced his way through the foliage along the extreme edge of the canal.

By pursuing a direct course he passed over a portion of the way to Mrs. Townsend’s which the others had avoided to prevent being seen by anyone on the waterway, and before proceeding half a mile saw a sloop hauled up among the underbrush in such a manner that she was entirely concealed.

“It begins to look as if I might be right,” he said to himself with no slight amount of satisfaction. “I wonder what Nat would say if he saw this proof that the boat did not go beyond the lock? Of course the men may have left her; but it won’t take long to find out.”

Sitting just within the friendly shelter of a clump of bushes he prepared for a lengthy vigil, for it would be dangerous to push on at random, and after waiting an hour his patience was rewarded.

He saw Bristow emerge from the trees, board the craft stealthily, and, having taken a package out of her cuddy, return in the same careful manner.

Jim did not hesitate to follow him. It seemed certain the solution of Phil’s and Harry’s disappearance was near at hand, and no one well versed in woodcraft would have moved with more caution.

He crept slowly after the counterfeiter until, hardly five yards away, it was possible to distinguish a well made hut about thirty feet from the bank, where a

watch could be kept on the canal.

Here he was not surprised to find both Small and Summerfield, since he fully expected they were in the vicinity; but, greatly to his disappointment, he saw nothing of those for whom he sought.

“The boys must be here somewhere,” he thought, beginning to make a circuit of the place, “for the gang had every reason to prevent them from going on.”

It required half an hour to make his way entirely around the encampment, and then his bewilderment was complete. There were no signs of any prisoners, and it seemed positive neither of the boys was in the neighborhood.

So certain had he been that these men were in some way responsible for the disappearance of Phil and Harry that the fact of their not being at the hut was no proof to the contrary, and Jim crept nearer in the hope of learning that which would guide him in the proposed search.

In this he was successful. Bristow had evidently taken provisions from the sloop, and when these had been distributed among the party, an earnest discussion ensued.

“You’ve got a scare on,” Small said, derisively, as if replying to something said by Bristow. “We are safer here than anywhere else, for the officers think we’ve gone up the canal. By staying in hiding no one’ll have the least suspicion where we are.”

“But two of the boys have been arrested,” Bristow answered impatiently.

“What of that?”

“They’ll be sure to tell all they know.”

“Which isn’t anything. So far as they are concerned we ran away, and, the supposition would naturally be, kept on toward the north. In a few days our plan is to make for the Hudson.”

“Didn’t I tell you a detective was loafing around the lock?” Bristow asked, angrily.

“You did. That fact in itself shows how safe this hiding-place is,” Small replied, and Summerfield gave his undivided attention to the food as if the subject had no interest for him.

“Once the boat is seen they’ll know where to hunt, and then there’ll be no chance of slipping away.”

“It won’t take very long to sink her, and by pulling out the mast she also is hidden.”

“You may sing a different tune in a day or two,” Bristow said, sulkily. “I believe in leaving this part of the country while we’ve got the opportunity; but you know so much more’n anybody else it’s no use to talk.”

“Now see here, Ned,” and Summerfield spoke in an unusually friendly tone. “Don’t you suppose word has already been sent to every town in either direction? It only takes a few minutes to notify the government officials in this section, and your man at the lock isn’t such a fool but that he’d attend to those common means of catching us. To show our heads in any city would be to invite arrest, and I believe in staying right here until the matter blows over a little.”

“You’ll have your own way, as you always do; but if things get too hot, I’ll skip without the trouble of saying good-bye.” And then Bristow relapsed into sullen silence.

Now Jim knew exactly why Phil and Harry had disappeared, and he also had every reason to suppose that Nat and Dick would share the same fate if they visited the settlement at the lock to make inquiries.

“It looks as if we’d got into a pretty tough mess,” he said to himself as he crawled a short distance back where there would be less chance of discovery. “By goin’ after the other fellows I run a big risk of suddenly findin’ myself in jail if they’re anywhere near the settlement, an’ yet something must be done mighty quick, for there’s no tellin’ when this gang may take a notion to clear out.”

Just what the best course would be was impossible to decide immediately; but he remained under cover in deep thought.

At the hut the men sat outside smoking, evidently believing themselves securely hidden, for the time being at least, and there appeared to be no disposition on

their part to leave the place. Bristow had ceased urging his companions to flee, and took up a position a short distance from Small as if struggling with some weighty problem.

To Jim one thing seemed certain, he ought to acquaint the officers of the law with what he had learned, in order that the innocence of Phil and Harry might be made plain. He could effect nothing here, unaided, and to push on toward the lock would be to run directly into the arms of the detective stationed there.

“If the man didn’t listen to the other boys, it ain’t likely I’d have much chance of explainin’ matters,” he said to himself, “an’ the best way is to get down the canal where I’ll find somebody willin’ to give fair play.”

So intent was the boy on carrying this skeleton of a plan into effect, that he paid no further attention to the men, but crept through the underbrush in the direction from which he had just come.

Hardly a rustling of the leaves could be heard as he made his way out of the thicket, and, feeling positive his presence was unsuspected by the counterfeiters, he prepared for a hurried journey.

The gun would impede his progress, and the first care was to secrete it near by, rather than waste precious time returning to the tent.

A pile of decaying leaves heaped beside a moss-covered log furnished a fairly good place of concealment, and in a few seconds the weapon was hidden.

“Now I’m ready to go even as far as Schenectady,” he said in a low tone while rising to his feet, and the words were hardly spoken when Bristow stood before him.

“Hello!” he exclaimed, in surprise. “Where did you come from?”

“The camp, of course,” Jim replied, after a slight show of hesitation.

“What are you doing here?”

To tell even a portion of the truth would surely subject him to detention, and, trying to put a greater distance between himself and the man by edging carelessly away, he replied:

“I’m goin’ to the lock. We want to hire a boat so’s the yacht can be raised.”

“Hold on!” and Bristow seized Jim by the shoulder. “Don’t think you can give me the slip in that way. I ain’t sure but you’re lying; and then again it will be best to have a little chat before we separate.”

“Now what are you up to?” and Jim affected great surprise. “You’ve done enough to us fellows already without trying any more funny business. Your crowd sunk the steamer, an’ that oughter satisfy all hands.”

“But it don’t happen to, while things are in such a muddle. There’s a couple of gentlemen over here who will be glad to see you a few moments, so come with me.”

Jim tried in vain to twist himself from the man’s detaining grasp; but Bristow’s suspicions had been aroused.

It was useless for Jim to either beg or struggle, and of this he was soon convinced. Bristow dealt him two severe blows on the head as evidence of what might be expected, and then forced him to walk by his side until the hut in the thicket was reached.

“Here’s what I found by the shore, and after all that’s happened I reckon it’ll be well to kinder hang to him awhile,” the man said, as Small and Summerfield sprang to their feet in alarm.

Jim mentally braced himself for the ordeal he knew he must go through, and hastily decided upon the story to be told.

“What are you doing here?” Small asked, sternly.

“Nothing; an’ I wouldn’t a’ come, but Mr. Bristow dragged me along, pretty near jerkin’ my head off, thinkin’ I wanted to run away.”

“Impudence will only make things worse,” Small said, sternly. “Where’s the rest of your crowd?”

“Phil and Harry left the camp two or three days ago. I reckon they sneaked home, for we haven’t seen them since. The other fellows an’ me are goin’ to raise the yacht, providin’ we can hire a boat.”

“And the remaining boys?”

“They were at the camp, just where you left us, two hours ago,” Jim replied, evasively.

“Do you intend to go to the lock?”

“It’s the only place we can get a boat, unless you’re willin’ to lend us the sloop.”

Jim spoke in such a tone of sincerity that all the men appeared to believe his statements; but yet there was no disposition manifested to release him.

Small called Summerfield aside, talked earnestly a few moments, and then turned to Bristow.

“It won’t do to lose sight of him now he knows where we are hidden. Dave thinks as I do, that it’s safest to stay here a while longer, so there’s nothing for it but to hold the boy till we get ready to leave.”

“I’ve said all I could to persuade you into acting sensible, and if you are still determined to hold on when we’re liable to be snapped up any minute, it’s no use to argue. I’ll have no hand in keeping him, for I intend to skip out mighty soon. Somebody else must see he don’t get away.”

“I wouldn’t be a fool,” Small replied, angrily,

“That’s exactly what I’m trying to avoid. Take the the boy, wait till the officers come nosing around; but you needn’t expect me to stay.”

“Of course you can do as you please.” Summerfield said as he seized Jim by the coat collar, and Bristow walked toward the shore as if bent on leaving at once.

“If they are goin’ to fight among themselves I may find a chance to get away,” Jim thought as the two men remained silent until their companion had disappeared from view.

“We’ll do as agreed on,” Small said at length, “and if he’s bound to go now it can’t be prevented. This boy must be tied up in some way until the time comes to jump.”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SUSPENSE.

UNCOMFORTABLE in mind though he was, Nat slept soundly the night of his return to the Townsend farm. Dick's example appeared to be contagious, and when he refused to talk, the junior member of the firm of Gilman, Baker & Co. could do no less than close his eyes. This he did with such good effect that it was quite late in the morning before he opened them again.

"I reckon by this time all the chores have been done by Nellie or her mother," he said to Dick, "and instead of trying to work our way we are nothing more nor less than visitors."

"They'd stay in bed themselves if it had been two or three months since either of them saw such a thing," Master Dudley replied sleepily. "I could lie here till to-morrow noon, an' then feel bad about gettin' up."

"Then the sooner you are out the less sorrow you'll have," Nat said laughingly as he threw off the coverings. "I'm ashamed of remaining so long without any other excuse than that of pure laziness."

Dick yawned, rubbed his eyes, and would have closed them again but for his companion who shook him vigorously, and evidently intended to adopt more heroic measures, when an unnecessarily loud noise made in opening the door leading from the sitting-room attracted his attention.

At first he fancied this had been done as a gentle reminder that the breakfast was fast approaching, and he sprang from the bed; but in another instant he heard a stranger's voice saying:

"What I am tellin' you is true, for I heard all about it last night at the lock. There is a gang of counterfeitters close by, an' they've got three or four boys trained to pass the money. It stands you in hand, Mrs. Townsend, to look out for them. The detective there is ready to arrest every one he can find, an' it won't be a bad idea to refuse to take silver money from strangers. Besides, don't let any young fellers hang around here."

"I don't think harm could be done to the farm, however depraved they might be," Mrs. Townsend replied with a laugh

“Come out and listen,” Nat whispered hoarsely. “According to what the stranger says we stand a good chance of going to jail, and perhaps that’s where Phil and Harry are now.”

This was sufficient to dispel all Dick’s drowsiness, and as he reached Nat’s side the man said:

“Don’t harbor any boys till this thing blows over, for there’s no knowin’ how much difficulty you might get into. Counterfeitin’ is a mighty dangerous thing, even if you only look at a piece of bogus money, when these detectives are around.”

“Who is that talking?” Dick asked excitedly.

“A visitor, and I fancy Nellie or Mrs. Townsend opened the door so we could hear.”

“Well, that kinder puts a stop on our stayin’ very long. I wonder if the widow’ll fire us before breakfast?”

“There’s no question but we’ll have to go, and I wouldn’t think of taking another meal if Mrs. Townsend is frightened because we’re here.”

“Well I would,” Dick replied earnestly. “They couldn’t throw me off if I got a chance at the same kind of biscuits we had last night.”

“Keep quiet and listen.”

The visitor was answering some argument advanced by the widow.

“You would be foolish to harbor any stranger at this time. I came over on purpose to warn you, and by takin’ my advice there’ll be no trouble.”

“We thank you for the intent,” Mrs. Townsend replied, “and I promise not to aid others in breaking the law.”

“Why don’t you come an stop with us for a day or two? Since them tramps tried to burn the barn, both mother an’ me have said it was foolhardy for you to stay alone. We’ll be right glad to have both till things get kinder straightened out.”

“I can’t leave home just now,” the widow said, and I don’t anticipate another visit from such men as were her the other day; but if there should be any signs of trouble we would have no hesitation in accepting the kind invitation.”

At this point the sounds proclaimed that the visitor had arisen to depart, and the boys dressed themselves hurriedly, for there seemed every reason to believe they would be requested to leave the house.

“We have just said good-bye to a caller,” Nellie said, laughingly, “and I opened the stairway door for your benefit. It was fortunate you slept late, otherwise I’m afraid Mr. Franklin might have thought it his duty to cause your arrest, for he is terribly afraid of boys just now.”

“I heard what he said,” Nat replied, gravely, “and there is no question but that we are the ones to whom he referred. Our staying here may make matters disagreeable for your mother, consequently it will be better if we go at once.”

“You will do nothing of the kind with my consent,” Mrs. Townsend, who entered the room at this moment, replied. “Of course I understood that you and your friends are the ones supposed to have committed so many crimes; but, knowing the whole story, there is no such idea in my mind. I now realize how very important it is you should remain until your parents arrive, and it is not even safe to venture from the house”

“We must do that in order to send a letter home,” Nat said, surprised because she espoused his cause so warmly.

“Write one. I will see it is mailed, and if any of the neighbors call you must keep out of sight.”

“Isn’t there danger of your being arrested if it is learned we’ve been hidden here?”

“Not the slightest. When your father comes, everything will be explained, and those who are now so frightened shall be made to understand how little you had in common with the men.”

Quite naturally Nat felt relieved by these words; but the idea of hiding from the officers of the law was very unpleasant, and almost anything else seemed preferable. Then came another disagreeable thought. If he was in danger of being

arrested, Jim was necessarily in the same position, and should be warned to remain concealed.

“It would be foolish to expose yourselves by trying to communicate with him,” Mrs. Townsend said, when the matter was referred to her. “It is unfortunate he remained behind; but since it was his own desire you are not called upon to run any further risks. Write the letter, and I will post it.”

“But that necessitates your walking to the office, which is at the lock.”

“I would be willing to go very much further in order to extricate you from these troubles. Nellie will give you paper and envelopes, and while I am dressing the message must be prepared.”

Nat attempted to give his father a detailed account of all that had occurred, but soon realized that such a task would require several hours’ work with the pen, and he concluded the recital abruptly by writing:

Phil and Harry are probably under arrest, charged with passing counterfeit money, or of being concerned in its manufacture. There is a fellow with me who knows all about the gang on whose account we are in such trouble, and by coming at once you can easily get us out of what is now a pretty bad scrape.

Then followed directions for finding Mrs. Townsend’s home, and the information that he and Dick were to remain secreted until Mr. Hinkle should arrive.

The widow added two or three lines to the effect that no time was to be lost in obeying the summons, and explaining the general condition of affairs as related by Mr. Franklin, after which she was ready to set out on the long walk.

“It is not advisable even to stay on the lawn,” she said. “Keep a sharp watch, and if any visitors come, go directly to your room. I will endeavor to learn whether the detective is still at the lock, and it is just possible I may remain nearly all day in the hope of hearing something definite regarding Phil or Harry.”

With this caution she departed, Nellie accompanying her as far as the waterway, and when the boys were alone once more Nat said ruefully:

“According to appearances, we didn’t do much good by helping you away from

the pond. Things couldn't have been worse— perhaps not so bad— if the men had forced you to go with them.”

“But I'd have had a tough job to prove I knew nothin' of what was bein' done,” Dick replied. “I think it's mighty lucky you fellows pulled me out the snap. Now, your father will vouch for me, too, an' I'm goin' to do a good turn for Jim.”

“What do you mean?”

“He stands a big chance of being arrested by stayin' around the camp.”

“That is true, but it can't be helped now.”

“I believe it can, leastways I'm bound to try it”

“How?”

“By sneakin' down there, an' tellin' him just what we've found out.”

“And the result may be that you're caught before getting half way to the tent. Enough of the fellows have disappeared already without adding to the number.”

“I'll take care of that part of it,” Dick replied, confidently. “Now that we know just what's up there ain't any three men who can get hold of me.”

Nat was anxious Jim should be warned; but at the same time it seemed dangerous to let Dick go away alone.

“Why didn't you speak about this while Mrs. Townsend was here?” he asked.

“Because she'd raise a row. It don't make any difference if they do get hold of me for a little while I know your folks can straighten things out, an' there isn't anything square in leavin' a feller like Jim to be gobbled up without tellin' him what's goin' on. After you've helped me to get away from Small's gang I oughter be willin' to do something for our crowd.”

“Do you mean to walk straight down the canal?” Nat asked, as if beginning to look on the plan with favor.

“Not much. I’ll snoop through the woods, with my eyes peeled for detectives, an’ the feller who gets hold of me will be mighty sharp. Now don’t kick, for I’m bound to go.”

“Wait till Nellie comes back and see what she says about it.”

“No; she may try to make me hold on till her mother comes, an’ I’d rather go this minute. You see—”

“Here’s a woman coming down the road,” Nat interrupted, “and we’ll be in a nice box if she stops to make a call.”

“That’s jest what she is going to do,” Dick added as the stranger opened the gate. “We’d better get upstairs and hide for a while.”

“Come on, quick,” Nat whispered; and they barely succeeded in gaining the second story when the visitor knocked at the door.

Fortunately for the preservation of their secret, Nellie was already approaching from the canal, and reached the threshold before the woman had time to become impatient.

The boys heard the newcomer enter with their young hostess, and then, to their great dismay, distinguished the words:

“I am sorry your mother is not here, for I have come to spend a long day. The rest of the family have gone to town, and I had no idea of staying at home alone.”

“That’s goin’ to be mighty tough on you,” Dick whispered. “There’s nothing for it but to keep shady.”

“And it puts a stop to your hunting for Jim.”

“Deed it don’t. I’ll shin outer the winder, an’ be back again before anybody but you knows I’ve gone.”

“If the woman downstairs should hear you there’d be no end of a row,”

“I’ll see to it that even Nellie don’t suspect what’s goin’ on. Look for me toward

dark unless something serious happens. Now there's no use talkin' it over," he added as Nat attempted to speak, "'cause I've made up my mind."

Then, as if afraid his companion might try to detain him by force, Dick made his way to a window overlooking the woodshed, raised it softly, dropped to the flat roof and from there to the ground, when he started at full speed in the direction of the woods, leaving Nat almost bewildered by the sudden departure.

CHAPTER XXXV.

DICK'S JOURNEY.

WHEN Dick left the house through the chamber window he had an idea that the officers of the law were somewhere in the vicinity awaiting an opportunity to capture every one who was connected with the Restless, therefore his movements were made with the utmost caution.

After gaining the shelter of the outbuildings, he stopped a moment to decide upon the proper course of action. His departure followed so quickly the determination to warn Jim that as yet he hardly knew exactly what should be done. Believing the detectives already possessed some clew to their whereabouts, he feared the proposed journey would be interrupted by his own arrest.

"I don't jest know which way to go," he said to himself; "but I oughter be able to keep shady even if there's a dozen men in the woods. I'll travel a good distance from the canal, an' run the chances."

This was not much of a plan; but he could devise nothing better, and set out at once, after glancing back at the house to make sure the visitor had not observed his suspicious manner of leaving.

Nat was standing in the chamber window, and he waved his hand in adieu. No other living being could be seen, and with a parting salute to his friend, Dick started, running from one clump of bushes to the other on his way to the dense portion of the woods, as if fancying the entire detective force of the State was following.

Once under cover he darted from tree to tree in true "dime novel" style, stopping at the slightest sound, and peering through the foliage before taking a second

step.

One can well imagine that such a method of traveling was exceedingly slow, and when noon came he had traversed but about half the necessary distance.

Thus far his excessive precautions had been wasted, for a startled bird or nervous squirrel comprised the only form of life met with. Now, weary, and hungry, he pushed on at a quicker pace.

Even while thinking it was not possible any one could be on that side the canal because he had neither seen nor heard a single person, he stepped out in full view of the rude hut in which Small and his party were sheltered.

Fortunately neither of the men observed him. Summerfield and Small were lying on the ground half asleep, and the slight noise made by Dick as he sprang back quickly did not disturb them.

The momentary glimpse he got of the place was sufficient, however, to reveal the form of a boy, bound hand and foot, and there could be no mistake as to the face.

The prisoner was Jim, and so far as warning him against the officers was concerned, the journey had been a failure.

“I’ll bet the crowd have Phil and Harry, too,” Dick concluded, after hiding in a thicket of bushes where there would be no chance of discovery unless one of the men came in that direction. “The detectives may be around the lock; but they didn’t arrest the boys.”

Under this belief there was nothing to be done but try and effect the release of one or all, and Dick awaited a favorable opportunity, firmly convinced he had discovered the clew to what seemed so mysterious.

Of the occupants of the camp Jim was the only one who caught a glimpse of Dick, and hope, nearly fled, grew strong once more. It was impossible to make any signal, without attracting the attention of his captors, and he watched eagerly the point at which Dick disappeared, fearing each instant that some incautious movement on the part of his friend might result in a second prisoner for the counterfeiters.

Dick's acquaintance with the worthy Mr. Small and his associates had been so painful that there was no thought of making an open attack unarmed, and he waited patiently for an opportunity to communicate with the captive.

The hours went by until the sun hid his face behind the trees, and but little change had been made in the vicinity of the hut. Now and then Small or Summerfield arose from the ground, walked to and fro a few moments, then sank again into an attitude of indolent repose; but all the while they appeared to be expecting the arrival of some one.

The looked-for visitor proved to be Bristow, and was greeted by Small with a laugh, as he said:

"So you didn't think it best to start out on your own hook, eh?"

"That I have come back don't prove I intend to loaf around here as long as you see fit to stay," was the surly reply. "I count on gettin' a pretty fair lay of the land before making a break."

"What have you found out, so far?"

"That the detectives think we're still this side the lock."

"Then why ain't they after us?" Summerfield asked.

"I reckon they will be mighty soon. There's still time to give them the slip if you'll take my advice."

"When they've got through hunting we'll sneak off quietly," Small answered, as if fully determined on his course of action.

"You'd better stick by us, and I'll guarantee that we'll slide out of the scrape without turning a hair."

Bristow made no reply. Throwing himself on the ground he pulled vigorously at his pipe until nearly sunset, then he and Summerfield began to prepare supper.

Meanwhile Dick was in no enviable frame of mind. It seemed as if an entire day had passed since entering the hiding-place; and his limbs were numbed from remaining so long in one position.

Twice before night fully settled down over the earth did Bristow walk to the canal, and when he returned on each occasion his companions asked jeeringly if he had discovered the whereabouts of the officers.

“They’ll show up here soon enough to suit you,” he replied, and there could be no doubt but he meditated a speedy and final withdrawal from the firm of Small & Company.

Just as Dick began to think morning must surely be near, the men entered the hut evidently for the purpose of retiring, and half an hour later he cautiously approached on his hands and knees.

Having noted the place where Jim lay, he made this the objective point, and, although the gloom was bewildering, succeeded in reaching it without mistake.

The structure being only a temporary affair, built to protect the occupants simply from the sun and dew, the interstices on either side were sufficiently large to permit of an almost unobstructed view of the interior.

Owing to the darkness it was not possible to see the inmates; but the slightest noise could be heard distinctly, and by the heavy breathing of the men Dick felt confident they were asleep. He waited a long while, as it seemed, and then gently shaking the boughs which formed the side, whispered:

“Are you there, Jim?”

“Yes,” was the reply, “and I began to think you were never coming.”

“I didn’t dare to crawl up until everything was quiet. I’ve got my knife here, an’ will cut the ropes if you move a little closer.”

“Don’t try it. If I should succeed in getting away the whole crowd’ll run. The only chance of helping Phil and Harry is to have the officers catch these fellows. Can’t you walk to Schenectady?”

“Of course; but you mustn’t stay tied up like this.”

“I’ll agree to stand it if the thing works right. Start now, and immediately you arrive tell some judge the whole story—it won’t pay to trust anybody else.”

“But I’ll have to let Nat know what’s goin’ on.”

“No, no; don’t wait for anything. It makes very little difference for a few hours if he doesn’t know where you are, and this gang are sure to leave here soon. Now go, and remember I’ll be kept tied so’s I can’t even wiggle.”

“All right— I’m off,” Dick replied, and a second later the rustling of the foliage told he had begun the second journey.

The conversation, carried on in the most guarded tones, evidently did not disturb the sleepers. Jim listened intently for any suspicious movement on the part of the counterfeiters; but the moments passed and no one stirred.

“There’s no question but he’ll get away easily, with a whole night’s start, and it’s a case of waiting as patiently as a fellow can when it seems like he was in a vise,” Jim said to himself, the heavy breathing of his captors sounding not unlike music in his ears, since it told him they were in ignorance of Dick’s visit.

When the latter was so far from the camp that he dared to walk erect, without fear of his footsteps being overheard, he bent his course toward the bank of the canal to prevent any possibility of losing his way. The only anxiety was that the detectives might arrest him before the message had been delivered to one who could be trusted; but this danger did not appear to be so great as that he should arrive too late to cause the capture of the party, therefore he pushed swiftly and boldly on.

More than once he tripped and fell over a log, or floundered about in some marsh undiscernible in the darkness; but whatever mishaps befell, he ever kept his face in the right direction, and paid no more attention to the bruises than to the fatigue.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AT MRS. TOWNSEND’S.

HAD Nat been able to recall Dick after the latter started from the barn, he would most certainly have done so. Immediately the journey was begun it seemed in the highest degree unwise, if the stories regarding detectives at the lock were correct.

“We’d better have stayed here hidden and waited for father,” he said bitterly, as Dick waved his hand in adieu, “and the result of all this will be that both Jim and he are arrested.”

It was of little use to repent now, however, and when the traveler disappeared from view he tried in vain to find something with which to amuse himself until the visitor below should kindly take her departure.

Save the rather monotonous distraction of watching the chickens, there was absolutely nothing to do, and the hours passed until nightfall as if each had contained twice sixty minutes.

Just before noon Nellie succeeded in slipping away from the guest long enough to bring him a light lunch, and her surprise at not seeing Dick was very great.

When Nat told her of the self-appointed errand upon which the boy had gone, she displayed both vexation and fear.

“After what we heard this morning you should have forced him to stay,” she whispered.

“I’d been glad to do it; but with your visitor to hear every word I couldn’t start a regular fight, and he wouldn’t have stayed on any other terms.”

“Well,” she said with a sigh, “there’s only one of your party left now, and I’ll take good care he doesn’t start on any wild goose chases before his father arrives.”

To remain longer might arouse suspicion in the neighbor’s mind, and Nat was left alone again, this time until Mrs. Townsend returned.

It was near nightfall when Nellie called for him to come downstairs, and his first question was:

“Did you hear anything of Phil or Harry?”

“Not a word, and I am deeply perplexed,” Mrs. Townsend said. “If they had been arrested it seems as if the people at the lock would know something regarding the matter, for the presence of detectives there is no secret. A second man came yesterday, and in addition to the two at the village it is believed a large number

are on the canal.”

“Are they all out hunting for us?” Nat asked in dismay.

“I understand they wish to arrest every one who was on the Restless; but the chief aim is to get hold of the three men, because of their being noted counterfeiters.”

“Did you mail the letter?”

“Yes. It went on the forenoon train, no doubt, therefore your father should receive it in the morning.”

“Then it won’t be long before he gets here.”

“Probably on the day after to-morrow, and that is not such a great while to wait, now you know he will surely come.”

“If the other fellows were with me it would seem different; but I can’t help thinking how they must be suffering, and even Dick has gone to get himself into a scrape.”

It was a condition of affairs which could not be improved, and might be very much worse, as Mrs. Townsend pointed out to Nat with such good effect that he speedily recovered his composure.

The supper had hardly been eaten when Deacon Blake and another friend of Mrs. Townsend’s came from the opposite bank of the canal, and once more was Nat forced to take refuge in his room.

These last visitors were thoroughly alarmed because so many desperate characters were known to be in the neighborhood, and declared that the widow and Nellie ought not remain in the house alone.

“It is positively dangerous,” the deacon said emphatically. “The attack made by the tramps shows what might happen under ordinary circumstances, and when we have reliable information that six or eight desperate men and boys are close around, I feel it my duty to insist on your spending the nights at my house until the band has been captured.”

“I’m not at all afraid,” Mrs. Townsend replied quickly. “During the many years we have lived here nothing of the kind ever occurred before the other day, and there is little chance we shall be molested.”

“There has never been so much danger. You would be at the mercy of the wretches, if they came, for there are no neighbors near enough to render assistance.”

Mrs. Townsend protested, and the deacon was insisting, when the second visitor said in a peculiar tone:

“It seems strange you should show so little fear, more especially since you took the trouble to assure yourself this morning that the counterfeiters were in the neighborhood. Mr. Fernald says you didn’t buy anything; but simply wanted to know the particulars. I allowed you was feelin’ kinder anxious about the boat; she ain’t on the shore, nor hasn’t been for the last two days.”

“Yes,” the deacon added, “I noticed it was missing, and told the detectives the vicinity of this farm I thought was the best place to search for the villains.”

Both the widow and Nellie were now seriously disturbed. The manner in which their visitors spoke showed they would be open to grave suspicions of harboring criminals unless the invitation was accepted. To do this, however, it would be necessary to leave Nat alone, and at such a time that seemed cruel.

“My visit to the lock was for the purpose of mailing a letter,” Mrs. Townsend said, “and in view of the excitement there it was not strange if I asked for information. In regard to the boat, it disappeared several days ago, and very likely the tramps took it.”

“We didn’t intend to question your motives, or seek for any explanations,” the deacon replied quickly; “but all who know you are deeply concerned just at present, and to save them anxiety you should sleep at my house until the rascals have been apprehended.”

“Very well,” the widow said, after a moment’s hesitation, “we will do so, although I certainly believe there’s less danger of having the house burned if we remain.”

“I’ll send two or three of the boys over if you wish.”

“No, no; I wouldn’t wish to cause so much trouble. We will be ready in a few moments.”

Then Mrs. Townsend went upstairs, closing the sitting-room door carefully behind her, and in the upper hall she found Nat, who had been listening to the conversation.

“I don’t see how we can avoid leaving you alone,” she whispered, leading him into the room. “To insist on remaining will cause suspicion, and the officers may come here as the deacon suggested. Then not only you, but most likely Jim and Dick, would be found.”

“I heard all that was said, and there’s nothing else you can do,” Nat replied. “Don’t pay any attention to me— I shall be perfectly safe; and the sooner you get away the better, for Dick ought to be here pretty quick.”

“You’ll find plenty to eat in the pantry, and are to act exactly as if you were at home. We will return at the earliest possible moment.”

She had forgotten about Dick until Nat reminded her again; and now the preparations for departure were made more hurriedly.

After her mother reentered the sitting-room Nellie found an opportunity to run upstairs and whisper to Nat:

“Don’t get lonesome; we’ll soon be back.”

“Oh, I’ll be all right. You mustn’t bother about me.”

“Of course you can’t read, for it wouldn’t do to have a light burning while we are away, as some of our officious neighbors might happen to see it.”

“I’ve no idea of doing such a foolish thing. When Dick comes we’ll go to bed.”

Then Nellie joined her mother, and ten minutes later Nat heard the outer door close and the key turned in the lock.

He was alone, and far from feeling so comfortable in mind as he tried to make Mrs. Townsend and Nellie believe. Judging by what Deacon Blake said, it was not improbable the detectives might visit the farm at any moment, and this

thought, together with anxiety for Phil and Harry, caused him to be decidedly nervous and timid.

It was necessary to watch for Dick, and he stationed himself at the window by which the boy had left the house, with his eyes fixed upon the outbuildings, since from that quarter he would naturally arrive. Fortunately the moon was shining brightly, and he could see distinctly everything on this section of the farm.

It was a dreary vigil. Now and then some noise made by the cow, or the hooting of an owl, caused him to think the officers were coming to the house, and the fact that he could not watch all the approaches at the same time added to his fears. To go into another room for the purpose of looking toward the canal would be, perhaps, allowing an enemy to steal upon him from the direction of the barn, and thus he was forced to remain in ignorance whether any one had reached the farm by water.

At midnight Nat believed the morning must be near at hand, and the thought that Dick might have disappeared in the same mysterious manner as had the others now became almost a certainty.

There was something particularly terrifying in the fact that each member of the Restless's crew apparently vanished instantly he separated himself from the remainder of the party, and Nat said aloud, as if the sound of his own voice gave him courage:

"It's my turn next. I'm the only one left, and— There's Dick!" he cried joyfully. In another second he would have called to the boy; but even as he leaned from the window to speak, the moon, which had been partially veiled by a passing cloud, shone out bright and clear once more, bringing into bold relief the form of a person stealthily creeping toward the barn.

It was not Dick, as one glance sufficed to show.

"An officer!" Nat muttered, concealing himself behind the curtains, and an instant later he added: "By gracious! It's Bristow!"

There was no possibility he had made a mistake. The counterfeiter could now be plainly seen as he skulked around the barn, carrying on his shoulder what looked like a bag.

Bristow made his way to the door, evidently seeking to gain an entrance without leaving any trace behind, and failing in this, unfastened the hasp, disappearing from sight immediately.

“He can’t be intending to stay long,” Nat reasoned to himself, “for he must understand that Mrs. Townsend would know some one was inside when she finds the door open.”

An hour later the condition of affairs remained unchanged. Dick had not returned, and Bristow was still in the barn.

Nat no longer thought of the possibility of the detectives approaching from the other side. He even forgot Dick should have been back many hours ago. His one idea was to make sure Bristow did not depart without his knowledge.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

IN FOR A SIEGE.

HIGHER and higher the sun mounted, until a golden gleam appeared above the tree tops, and another day had dawned. One, two, three hours passed slowly; then the noise of a key turning in the lock of the door caused the weary watcher both joy and relief.

“Come down, there’s no one with us,” Nellie cried from below, and Nat thought he had never heard a sweeter sound. But yet he did not intend to relax his Vigilance.

“You and your mother run up here first,” he replied. “I can’t leave.”

“Has something more happened?” Nellie asked in dismay as both she and Mrs. Townsend ascended the stairs rapidly.

The curtains were nearly drawn, so the watcher might see all that took place outside and still remain concealed, and Nat did not turn his face from the window as he told his friends what had occurred.

“There is no question but that it was Bristow,” he said in conclusion; “and I have had a long time to study the thing over. Either Small and Summerfield went away and left him behind, or he has started off by himself. Perhaps he counts on

hiding here a while before striking across the country.”

“It is fortunate Deacon Blake insisted on our going to his house, otherwise we wouldn’t have known he was there,” Mrs. Townsend said, after a brief pause.

“Why not inform the officers at once?” Nellie asked.

“In which case they might search the house as well as the premises, and Nat also be carried off. If I could be sure of his remaining there twenty-four hours longer, we’d wait for Nat’s father.”

“But the cow must be cared for, and I fancy she’s trying to make out what has happened that we’ve not come to let her into the pasture before this.”

“I will attend to it now. You stay here.”

“But you are not going where that man is?” Nellie cried in alarm, and Nat added:

“It would be safe. I can do the work, and he’s got no reason for tackling me now he has evidently split with the others.”

“He isn’t up to mischief, otherwise there would be no reason to hide, especially since he could have accomplished it easily last night. It is best for me to go, and I will come back soon.”

Then she left the room, and the two watched from the window as she crossed the yard, entered the barn boldly, and reappeared a moment later with the cow. Milking the animal as leisurely as it there was nothing to disturb her, she let down the pasture bars and reentered the house.

“We can watch from the kitchen just as well, so let’s go,” and the two descended without delay.

“It is positive he proposes to hide until the officers leave the vicinity,” Mrs. Townsend said, “and I do not think we need fear him. If your father can bring about his arrest it will be a great deal in your favor, and we had better run the risk of letting him remain. Deacon Blake’s son insisted on loaning me a revolver, although I am quite sure it would be harmless in my hands, and with it you can readily defend the house against one person.”

Nat was not exactly certain whether the widow's plan should be adopted; but when Nellie decided in favor of it he could hardly object without exposing himself to the possibility of being considered a coward.

He ventured to suggest, however, that the man might leave his hiding-place through one of the rear windows, and Mrs. Townsend replied:

"If that is his purpose he can do it easily while one of us goes in search of the detectives, and then Nat's capture will be brought about in case the officers conclude to remain here a day or two hunting for the others. Besides, neither Nellie nor I could walk to the lock and back before dark, and your father should be not more than twelve hours later than that, consequently it would save very little time."

The idea of remaining in a house while a man who it was well known would hesitate at nothing to accomplish his ends had concealed himself near by was by no means pleasant, but could not be avoided. Mrs. Townsend prepared for a regular siege. The lower windows and doors were securely fastened, and in some cases barricaded. The borrowed revolver was given into Nat's keeping, and the three inmates stood alternate watches.

"Will Deacon Blake come for you to-night?" Nat asked.

"I think not. We persuaded Mrs. Blake that we should be just as safe here, especially after accepting her son's revolver, and she will probably prevent the deacon from dragging us away again."

The day passed without anything to cause alarm. If Bristow was still in the barn he took good care not to make a noise, and the household duties were attended to as usual.

To the satisfaction of all, none of the neighbors called, and when night came the little family took up a position where they could keep the approaches to the barn in view.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CHANGE OF BASE.

WHEN Dick left Jim a prisoner in the hut, the latter had every reason to believe

help in some form must soon arrive. Long though the distance was to Schenectady, it ought not to require more than five or six hours to traverse it, and he could return in half that time.

Understanding fully the exigencies of the case, Dick would make strenuous efforts to reach the city by sunrise, and be back with the officers before noon. Even this seemed to Jim like a very long while to remain tied in such an uncomfortable position, for he already suffered considerable pain; but the prospect was far more cheerful than it had been previous to his friend's appearance. Sleep was out of the question, and, keenly alive to the slightest sound from the forest, he tried to make the moments pass quickly by picturing mentally what he would do if by some peculiar combination of circumstances it were possible to capture his captors.

In this rather unsatisfactory employment Jim succeeded in partially banishing his own troubles, and believed the other inmates of the hut asleep until the noise as of a person rising softly caused him to listen intently.

He knew of course that a member of the party was feeling around the sides of the shanty as if searching for something; but nothing could be seen until the man stepped out into the moonlight, when he recognized Bristow.

"There's mischief up now, an' the others ain't in it," Jim thought as, by a painful effort, he managed to turn his body sufficiently to admit of looking through a crevice of the well ventilated structure.

The counterfeiter did not remain inactive; he started toward the bank of the canal, returning five minutes later with a bag on his shoulder, which Jim recognized as the receptacle used on the sloop for cooked food.

Bristow halted an instant, as if to assure himself no one was awake, and then plunged into the thicket.

Jim listened intently, expecting each instant to hear the man's footsteps returning, and wondering what motive he had in carrying away the food; but nothing save the usual night sounds of the forest broke the stillness.

When two hours had passed there was no question in the prisoner's mind but that Bristow had deliberately forsaken his companions, and this knowledge caused him great uneasiness.

“They’ll get frightened as soon as it is known he has skipped, and the chances are Small and Summerfield will leave before Dick can send the officers here, It begins to look as if I had got into a bad mess. So far as helping the others is concerned it would have been better if I had gone to the farm with Nat and Dick.”

Despite the pain caused by the ropes, and also his mental distress, Jim sank into an uneasy slumber just before daylight, from which he was awakened by Small’s voice.

“Where’s Bristow?” he asked loudly, and raising himself on his elbow Summerfield replied, sleepily:

“He was side of me when we turned in, and I reckon he’s out hunting for detectives.”

Small sank back upon his bed of boughs as if to indulge in another nap, but leaped to his feet a few minutes later as he said, with an imprecation:

“It’s our business to know what’s become of him. According to the way he’s been talking for the last day or two it wouldn’t surprise me much if he betrayed us to save himself.”

This was sufficient to thoroughly awaken Summerfield, and he ran from the hut with all speed, going, as Jim could see, down to the canal. The other man made a circuit around the shanty, and had just completed it when his friend shouted from the direction where the sloop lay:

“He’s skipped for certain, an’ taken pretty near the whole of the grub with him!”

“Is anything else missing?”

“I can’t tell yet; but we’ll have to make a break mighty soon or go hungry.”

“Search the craft thoroughly and then come back.”

The orders were obeyed quickly, and when Summerfield returned the two men looked at each other in dismay.

“Well, why don’t you speak?” Small asked, angrily.

“There’s nothing more to tell. All the cooked grub’s taken, and so’s the whisky he bought at the lock.”

“Then he has gone on his own hook. If the idea was to sell us out there would have been no reason for lugging such a load.”

“But he can’t get very far before being overhauled, and then the detectives’ll know where we are, for he isn’t the man to hold his tongue in a scrape.”

Small remained silent several moments, and then said, as if talking to himself:

“We mustn’t stay here much longer, that’s certain, and the question is which way is the best?”

“Why not straight across the country?”

“Because that fool’s probably done the same thing. Our safest plan is to take another direction. The officers are looking for us above the lock, if he told the truth, and it wouldn’t be a bad scheme to follow down the canal a piece, then strike off to cross the railroad somewhere near Athens. I know of a little town just below there where we could get needed supplies without much trouble.”

“Don’t you suppose word has been sent to every place within a circle of fifty miles or more?”

“Very likely. This is a small settlement beyond the line of travel, and I’m willing to risk it.”

“There doesn’t seem to be many chances in our favor.”

“Then propose something better an’ I’ll give in,” Small replied, irritably.

Summerfield walked again to the boat, then made a short detour through the woods, his friend meanwhile puffing vigorously at his pipe, and on coming back said moodily:

“You always did have a long head, Sam, and I reckon it’ll be wisest to let you run this affair. When are we to start?”

“As soon as things are in shape. We ought to have a clear half day before us, and

we'll try to put the sneaks who are after us off the scent."

"There isn't much can be done in that line."

"We'll sink the sloop, then they may think we've gone away in her, although I admit it isn't very likely."

"Are you intending to leave the boy here?"

"And let him tell exactly what we propose to do? That would be worse than foolish. It'll be a pile of trouble, but it can't be helped. He'll come in handy to carry the traps, and when we're so far away that he can't do any mischief, we'll set him adrift."

This was not a pleasant prospect for Jim. While the men were talking he hoped they would leave him, even though the bonds were not removed; and now there was no longer such chance all his courage fled.

"It serves me right for thinking I was so smart," he said to himself. "By going with the other fellows everything might have run along smooth till Phil's or Nat's father came. Now I'm in for mighty hard lines."

The prisoner was left alone for a long while, and, from the noise made, he could form a reasonably good idea of what was being done while the two men were near the bank of the canal.

He guessed the spars of the sloop were removed, after which she was sunk with everything on board save the small amount of eatables left by Bristow; and this task finished the men approached the hut once more, Small saying as they came near enough for Jim to hear:

"That's about all we can do, and now we must try our hand at throwing the officers off the scent. Get the stuff into shape, for carrying, and I'll start the boy out."

Suffering from the bonds as he was, almost anything would be a relief, and when Small entered he welcomed him very much as a friend.

"I'm going to take these ropes off," the man said; "and I want you to understand that at the first attempt to give us the slip, I shall kill you. There is no longer any

reason to disguise matters. We are trying to escape from the officers, and since you know what has been said, both before and after Bristow left, we must make sure the plans won't be given away. Go with us willingly and all will be well; otherwise we shall not hesitate to prevent an alarm from being given."

"It wouldn't be much use for me to kick," Jim said as Small began to loosen the bonds. "I don't say I'm hoping you'll get clear; but I promise to keep quiet for the rest of this day at least."

"And you'll do all that's possible to help us give the detectives the slip?"

"I won't try to give you away; but I'm not going to be carried very far without doing my best to get back."

"Will you do as I wish until to-morrow morning?"

Jim considered the matter for a moment, and then said:

"If there was any possibility of shaking you I wouldn't promise; but as things look now there's no chance."

"Then you give me your word?."

"For the next twenty-four hours, yes; but after that I'm bound to run if I can."

"Whether it's man or boy, I like to hear him say what he means," Small replied in an approving tone, "I believe you, and am going to take off these ropes."

"You can't be any too quick about it, for it seems as if I was doubled up into a regular bow knot."

Small untied the ropes, and Jim stood on his feet, experiencing a degree of pleasure which cannot be described. It was several moments before he could move, and, finally, when the circulation had been restored to his aching limbs, Small said:

"Now take hold with these packages. If you help me to the best of your ability to-day I'll set you free before noon to-morrow; but just remember what'll happen at the least show of kicking over the traces."

Jim nodded his head in token that he understood, and in a short time everything was in readiness for the flight, while the disheartened prisoner felt certain that Dick would not be able to bring the officers of the law in time to apprehend the prisoners.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ON THE MARCH.

THE counterfeiter had no idea of sparing their prisoner any labor. He was forced to carry a heavier weight than did either of the men, and the many packages were tied to his back in such a manner that he could not throw them out unaided. It was a very convenient way of shackling him, for, staggering under the burden, he would not be able to make an attempt toward regaining his liberty.

“You are to travel between us,” Small said, as if he thought the boy’s situation a comical one, “and I reckon we shall all stick together.”

Ill temper would be of no avail, and Jim determined to “put his best foot forward;” therefore he said, with a poor attempt at cheerfulness:

“I’m in the scrape, an’ ain’t fool enough to kick; but it seems kinder rough to make me do more than my share of the work.”

“The load will grow lighter as we use what grub that sneak of a Bristow left behind,” Summerfield replied with a laugh. “If you behave properly we’ll let up on you after a while.”

“You’ll have to, if you expect me to travel till sunset,” Jim said grimly; and then, the preparations completed, the journey was begun.

Small led the way, striking into the thicket at such an angle as would set the course full half a mile from the bank of the canal.

To keep pace with the leader, laden as he was, Jim found impossible, and when Summerfield urged him forward with several brutal kicks, the boy thought it high time to rebel.

“Look here,” he said addressing himself to Small, “if I’ve got to carry all the

baggage, there's no use trying to make me walk as fast as you. I'll do my best; but if your chum is goin' to kick me from here to where you're bound, I might as well stop now an' take all the thumpin' in a lump."

"He's got to move quicker than he's been doing, or we'll never be out of this neighborhood," Summerfield snarled, "an' what he's had isn't a circumstance to what I will do before noon."

"Go on, now," and Jim halted with his back against a tree. "When a fellow does all he can that settles it."

Small understood that it would be dangerous to waste time just then, and he said to his companion:

"You go ahead, and I'll see how the boy behaves."

When this change had been made the march was resumed, and now the party moved more slowly; but Jim toiled on as if his own safety depended upon the success of the flight. Half an hour later the tracks of the New York Central road were crossed, and the fields and pastures told they were approaching a more settled portion of the country.

At eleven o'clock a brief halt was made, a tin of boiled beef opened, and the long delayed breakfast eaten in silence. Small evidently felt disturbed because they were no longer within shelter of the trees, and Summerfield grew positively angry when the leader insisted upon a more equal division of the load.

"I ain't going to make a pack horse of myself when we've got a cub like him along."

"But that is exactly what you'll have to do, It was all right while we were in the woods; but now there'll a chance of meeting some one, we can't afford to raise suspicions. We won't pass for tramps with all this truck, and it looks queer to see him carrying everything."

"Then throw the stuff away, for I'm not going to lug it."

"So you're following Bristow's example, eh? Turn rusty when we get in a bit of troubles?"

“I don’t intend to make a fool of myself.”

“That’s exactly what you are doing,” Small replied angrily, and before Summerfield realized what he was about the ropes which held the load on Jim’s back were cut “Now, come on, and before night you’ll find out, perhaps, that it’s better to do a little work now and then.”

Both men were so angry that prudence was forgotten, and the party resumed the tramp, leaving the goods where they had fallen, much to the relief of Jim.

During the two hours which followed not a word was spoken, and then they came in sight of a farm house.

“Don’t you dare try to make a break now,” Small said, as he seized Jim by the arm. “We’ve got to circle around here, for it won’t pay to show ourselves yet awhile.”

The man bore to the right, keeping within the shelter of the fences as much as possible; but before walking a quarter of a mile two or three other dwellings were seen.

“I reckon we’ll have to work over to the left,” Summerfield said, speaking for the first time since the altercation. “It looks as if there was a regular settlement here.”

Small made no reply; but he acted immediately upon the suggestion since there was nothing else which could be done if they would avoid attracting attention, and before the detour had been made they were within sight of the railroad track again.

“We haven’t traveled very far, or else the road makes a pretty big curve here,” Small said, half to himself, and Summerfield added:

“It’s better to follow the track a while than go anywhere near the settlement, and now we’ll surely be taken for tramps.”

Small hesitated two or three minutes, and then replied:

“I don’t see any other way out of it. We shan’t have more than two miles to go before it will be possible to get back into the country.”

The three had hardly reached the rails when the rumble of an approaching train was heard. Now they would be exposed to the view of those on board; but that was certainly better than to risk meeting any of the farmers in the vicinity. There was not so much as a bush to screen them, and Small said, leading the way to a rail fence about ten yards from the track:

“Perhaps it’ll be best to sit here till the cars pass. If any one on them has heard of us, there will be little reason for thinking we are other than the occupants of the houses, out here for a loafing spell.”

Although Jim really had no idea of the passage of this train while they were all exposed to view could work any change in his condition, he watched for it as eagerly as if certain the iron horse was bringing those who would aid him.

CHAPTER XL.

AN INTERRUPTED JOURNEY.

THE long line of cars passed at an ordinary rate of speed, and when the last whirled by with the eddying curls of dust following like wreaths of smoke, Jim fancied he saw some one at a window wave his hand; but even as the thought came into his mind it was dismissed, for such a thing as having been recognized by an acquaintance seemed in the highest degree improbable.

Before the men had time to get down from the fence the whistle of the locomotive was heard, sharp and quick, as if sounding an alarm or command; but no attention was paid to it.

“We’d better get out of this as soon as possible,” Small said, clambering down from the fence with difficulty, for the long tramp had stiffened his limbs. “After getting well clear of these houses, we can afford to take a rest.”

“Why not work toward the canal again?” Summerfield asked. “My throat is as dry as if I hadn’t seen water for a week. We can’t walk very far without something to drink.”

“Of course you’ll do as you please; but I’d rather be thirsty a while longer than advertise the fact of our being here.”

Summerfield hesitated a moment, as if debating whether or no to set off by

himself, and before the question had been decided Jim cried warningly:

“There’s another train coming!”

There was no time now to leave the locality without causing it to appear as if they were running away, and with a muttered imprecation on the general system of railways, Small resumed his seat on the fence.

“It’s lucky we hadn’t started, for these are the same cars backing up,” Summerfield said. “There must be a station or a switch somewhere near.”

Small looked disturbed; but was apparently relieved at seeing no one on the rear platform.

The engineer leaning out of the cab to obtain the first view of expected signals, as Jim thought, brought the train nearly to a standstill when the hindermost car was directly opposite the party on the fence, and before either of the three could so much as guess the reason for this maneuver, two men leaped out with drawn revolvers.

“Throw up your hands or we’ll shoot!” one cried, and as he sullenly obeyed Small muttered:

“Trapped at last, and by that sneak of a Bristow.”

Stern and unfriendly though the command was, Jim never heard more pleasing words, and hardly were his hands in the required position when a cry of joy burst from his lips.

He saw Dick come from the car, followed by a well-dressed gentleman, and knew that the boy whom the counterfeiter held prisoner so long had finally been the instrument to effect their capture.

Even as he thus welcomed his friend the officers secured the two men; the train moved on, and the party, now increased to the number of seven, were alone by the side of the track.

“So this is Jim?” the strange gentleman asked, before Dick had time to speak, and the latter replied:

“That’s jest who it is, an’ I’ll bet he’s glad to see us. Say, who do you s’pose this is?”

As a matter of course Jim was unable to say, and Dick, who appeared almost delirious with joy, added:

“It’s Nat’s father! I went to the judge as you told me, and he called for the chief of police. While I was tellin’ the story over ag’in, he come in with a letter he’d got yesterday from the lock. Of course things was settled mighty quick, though Phil an’ Harry ain’t out of jail yet, for—”

“Were they arrested?”

“Yes, the detectives thought they was counterfeitters; but it’ll be all right now.”

“We had better be going on to the crossing where a train can be signalled,” one of the officers interrupted, “unless you are willing to walk with my partner to the camp where these men have been living. We shall have to overhaul it.”

“They had lots of stuff which I carried until there was a row,” Jim said, “and then we left it up here in a field.”

“Do you think you could find it?” the officer asked eagerly.

“I’m certain I could go straight back to the place where it’s lying.”

“Very well; if Mr. Hinkle doesn’t object to such a long walk my partner will go with the prisoners while I accompany you.”

Nat’s father did not object to doing anything which could serve to clear the boys from the grave charge against them, and the party separated, Small and Summerfield, looking thoroughly disheartened, being led in the direction of the crossing while the others started toward the north to strike the canal.

“I’ll be satisfied if you bring Bristow back with you,” the leader of the counterfeitters shouted as Jim left, and the latter replied:

“I’d like to do it if for no other reason than to pay off some old scores for Dick.”

The heavy burden which Jim had carried so long was found with little difficulty;

but the officer did not think it worth while to take from it anything save half a dozen moulds for counterfeit coins, after which the party set out on a direct course for the tent.

Both the boys were too well acquainted with the location of the encampment to make any mistake, and at a late hour in the afternoon they arrived at the place, Jim saying, as he lifted the canvas flap:

“Look out for the camera. The other fellows took pictures of the house at the pond, and they may come in handy to show the faces of Small’s gang before the shanty was burned.”

“It will be a neat piece of evidence for you boys,” the officer said as he took charge of the instrument, “and I’ll have the plates developed at once.”

All were eager to reach Mrs. Townsend’s farm, and only a brief halt was made. Then the party visited the hut where the counterfeiters had remained hidden; but at this last place nothing of value could be found, and after a stop of not more than ten minutes the tramp up the canal was resumed.

Not until nearly midnight did they arrive at the widow’s house, and when they came in sight Nat was still on duty at the window.

“Hi! Jim! Dick!” he cried, and when the boys replied with a cheery shout it seemed as if the house was suddenly illuminated from cellar to attic.

Never did any one receive a more hearty welcome than each individual member of the party, and the officer could hardly contain himself for joy on being told that the third counterfeiter was probably hidden in the barn.

“It’ll be a big thing for me,” he said, gleefully. “While the government detectives are fooling away their time arresting boys who have no connection with the work, my partner and I will bag the whole party. If you can help me I’ll make the arrest at once.”

“Why not wait till morning?” Mr. Hinkle asked.

“Because I’m afraid he has seen us, and will make a big effort to get away.”

The reason was a good one, and all hands prepared to assist in the capture.

CHAPTER XLI.

RAISING THE RESTLESS.

THE entire party, even including Mrs. Townsend and Nellie, were stationed around the barn before the officer entered, and all were in a high state of nervous excitement when they heard the man shout:

“I call upon you to give yourself up, Edward Bristow! The building is surrounded, it will be impossible to escape, and nothing can be accomplished by resistance.”

No reply was made to this demand, and the man cried, as if addressing a large body of subordinates.

“Keep your eyes open, and do not hesitate to fire the instant he makes his appearance!”

“You needn’t take so much trouble,” a voice from among the hay said. “I’ll come down and if anything is to be gained by telling where the other two are I’ll give the whole thing away.”

“Now you are talking sense,” the officer replied in the most friendly tone, and an instant later Bristow was on the barn floor patiently waiting to be shackled.

“Will you promise to let me turn State’s evidence if I give the others away?” Bristow asked, when he was securely manacled.

“I’m sorry you spoke too late; but both your chums are in Schenectady, where my partner carried them this afternoon.”

A muttered imprecation burst from the man’s lips, and after a short pause he asked:

“How did you know I was here?”

“One of the boys whom you held as prisoner was in the house when you stole into the barn, and he has stood watch over you all the time.”

Again did the worthy Mr. Bristow display anger; but he was powerless to work

any injury now, and little attention did his ravings receive. During the remainder of that night he stayed in the kitchen with the officer, and at an early hour next morning started for the city, Mr. Hinkle accompanying the two.

Arrangements had been made with Mrs. Townsend whereby the boys were to make her home their headquarters during such time as they should be in the vicinity, and Nat's father suggested the work to be performed.

"You will be obliged to appear at the trial," he said, "and if it is to come off soon it is just as well to stay in this locality. Later in the day you had better hire a boat at the lock for the purpose of raising the Restless, and it won't be a bad plan to have some one at the tent all the time. Phil and Harry will be here by night, and I expect you'll be able to have the yacht afloat when I return, which may be near the end of the week."

The boys would have accompanied the gentlemen but the officer thought it best everything should be explained to the detectives at the lock before they put in an appearance, and about ten o'clock Nat, Jim and Dick started.

On reaching the settlement they were received with the greatest hospitality by all, and especially Mr. Fernald, for everybody was particularly desirous of hearing their story.

It was impossible to avoid answering some of the questions without appearing rude; but no more time was thus spent than absolutely necessary, and early in the afternoon they started for the tent in a large flat boat, which was towed by one very long eared mule under the charge of a little colored boy who felt very proud at having been selected for the service by such noted adventurers.

At the Townsend farm a halt was made in order to explain that they would not return that night, and before sunset they were in full possession of the tent, impatiently awaiting the arrival of Phil and Harry.

Nor were they kept long in suspense. The evening shadows were just beginning to lengthen into gloom when a rowboat came in sight from the direction of the lock, and the hail of "Restless, ahoy!" caused a succession of cheers which awoke every echo within a radius of half a mile.

There was very much to talk about when the boys were together once more, and the camp fire was kept burning until a late hour in the night. Phil and Harry had

been released as prisoners; but Mr. Hinkle was forced to give bail that they would appear as witnesses when wanted.

“Did you see the men?” Nat asked.

“No, and we didn’t want to. Our experience has been such that we should feel perfectly well contented if we never get so much as another glimpse of their faces,” Phil replied, quickly. “The detective who arrested us was positive we were counterfeiters; but those in charge of the prison believed differently, and did all they could, except so far as allowing us to send letters home, to make things comfortable.”

“Weren’t you surprised to see Nat’s father?”

“No. We made sure you fellows would know where we were, and expected each day some one from home.”

“But what about the cruise?” Jim asked. “I reckon this puts an end to any more sailing, and that after the trial I shall have to walk the rest of the way.”

“Not a bit of it,” Harry replied. “If the steamer can be raised, Mr. Hinkle says he will go with us as far as your home, at least, and— but I won’t tell the rest of it, for that is to be a secret until we arrive there.”

That which Harry refused to tell was not withheld from Nat, and as Phil whispered it to him he displayed the most intense satisfaction.

The inmates of the camp did not arise very early next morning, and their toilets had just been made when Nellie and her mother arrived.

“We have come to help you keep house one day,” the latter said, gleefully; “and what is more, we’ve brought a host of good things to eat. Fancy that Deacon Blake, who yesterday considered it his duty to cause your arrest, rowed us down here.”

A very pleasant day did both the visitors and their young hosts spend, even though a great amount of work was performed. The arrangements for raising the Restless had all been made, and two heavy hawsers were passed around the hull of the little craft and made fast to the flat boat.

The entire party went to the Townsend farm to sleep, the widow and her daughter returning with them next morning; and this plan was continued until the yacht had been floated, which work was accomplished in three days.

When Mr. Hinkle arrived from Schenectady the Restless was anchored off the lane leading to Mrs. Townsend's home, and looking none the worse for her short sojourn at the bottom of the canal.

"It will be two weeks before the counterfeiters have their trial," Nat's father said; "and in the meantime I propose that we invite Mrs. Townsend and Nellie to go with us to Jim's home."

It would have been very strange if any one had objected to the plan, and Jim was in high glee at the prospect of being accompanied by so many who would unite with him in begging for forgiveness.

"I felt just a little shaky at the idea of going alone," he said confidentially to Phil; "but with Nellie and her mother to help, father must surely say it's all right."

The following day being Sunday was spent quietly at the farm house, and next morning at a very early hour the little craft continued the long interrupted journey up the canal.

It was not possible to run fast for every boatman they passed, and each dweller for fifty miles along the banks, insisted on hearing the story of the boys' adventures with the counterfeiters: but even with these delays Jim's home was reached Friday afternoon, and the welcome he received must have been extremely gratifying to him in view of what he had not long since expected it would be.

Mr. and Mrs. Powell exerted themselves to the utmost in order to make pleasant the stay of those who had brought back the prodigal, and on the evening before the Restless's bow was to be turned toward Albany, Jim met the boys, he having just come from a long interview with his father.

"Did you know that I could go back with you?" he asked excitedly.

"Of course we did," Phil replied laughingly. "Nat's father promised to take you in his store the first day he heard of what you had done. Are you going?"

“Mother thinks I had better accept the offer, for I’ll never get so good a one again. And only think, I’m to have three dollars a week besides my board!”

“You won’t get rich very soon at that rate; but it’s a great deal more than you have been earning, except while on board the yacht,” Nat said. “Is it settled that you are to come?”

“Yes, and knowing that mother and father are perfectly willing I should go, the trip back will be a mighty jolly one,” was Jim’s hearty rejoinder.

“Am I to be dropped at Albany?” Dick asked.

“Indeed you’re not. Father will give you the same chance Jim has, and next summer, when it’s vacation time again, we’ll make one more attempt to get the Restless into the St. Lawrence river, a task which I fancy we shall succeed in accomplishing providing all hands fight shy of making acquaintances from the moment we leave home.”

With the beginning of the homeward cruise it is proper this story should end; but it may be well to recount one or two incidents which occurred before the Restless was hauled up for the season.

As a matter of course Nellie and her mother left the yacht when they arrived at the farm; but it was with the promise to visit Philadelphia during the coming winter, and after arrangements had been made to add them to the passenger list when the second cruise is made next summer.

At Schenectady the party was delayed only two days, and in that time the counterfeiters were tried and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. The defense which they attempted to make was that neither had ever been in the house at the pond, and so cunningly was an alibi arranged by their lawyer that the boys’ evidence might have been discredited but for the pictures taken from the yacht. These, now developed, were conclusive testimony, and the reward of five hundred dollars which had been offered for the apprehension of the men, was paid to Dick, who had really caused the arrest.

With this amount of money, deposited with Mr. Hinkle for safe keeping, Master Dudley felt like a very rich boy, although it is extremely doubtful if he would care to go through the same experience for an equal amount.

It is now only three weeks since the Restless arrived in Philadelphia, consequently but little can be said regarding the future of the two who were added to the original party; but it is safe to assume they will work hard to show Mr. Hinkle that his confidence in them was not misplaced.

Ten days ago the express company carried to the lock a very small package addressed to Miss Nellie Townsend, and on opening it that young lady found a tiny gold watch, on the case of which was engraved her name together with the following:

“From the crew of the Restless”