

THE GO AHEAD BOYS ON SMUGGLERS' ISLAND



ROSS KAY

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THE GO AHEAD BOYS ON SMUGGLERS' ISLAND

BY
ROSS KAY

Author of "The Search for the Spy," "The Air Scout,"
"Dodging the North Sea Mines," "With Joffre
on the Battle Line," etc.

*ILLUSTRATED BY
R. EMMETT OWEN*

I leave this rule for others when I'm dead;
Be always sure you're right—THEN GO AHEAD.
—*Davy Crockett's Motto.*

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([Page 151.](#))

PREFACE

A basis of fact underlies many of the incidents incorporated in this story. Even the letters are very like those received by one of the official agents of the United States Treasury. Occasional use has been made of the work entitled, "Defrauding the Government." Out of his material the writer has tried to present a tale that should be stirring and yet wholesome, having plenty of action, but free from sensationalism.

Naturally, changes in characters and localities have been freely made. If his young readers shall be interested in the story and shall draw the conclusion that any attempt to defraud the Government reacts in harsher form upon the one who tried to evade the laws, a part at least of his purpose will have been accomplished.

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**THE GO AHEAD BOYS ON
SMUGGLERS' ISLAND**

CHAPTER I

AN EARLY MORNING PARTY

“I never saw such a morning!”

“I never did either. I am glad I am alive!”

“So am I. It is worth something to be up here where the air is so strong that you can almost bite it off. When we left Mackinac this morning one could hardly tell whether the island was upside down or not. He could see the reflections just as clearly in the water as he could see the island above.”

“I wonder what would happen if a fire should break out on the island?”

“Probably it would burn, just as it does everywhere else. They did have a fire over there once and they say the whole island burned down.”

“This is the place for the simple life!”

“Yes, it is a good place for the simple life, but to my mind there is a great difference between a simple life and an idiotic life.”

It was an hour before sunrise in a morning in July. The conversation which has been recorded occurred on board a beautiful little motor-boat named the *Gadabout*. Assisting the captain and owner in the management of the fleet little craft was a young man, whose name sounded to the boys very much like Eph, when they heard the owner of the boat address him.

On board the motor-boat were four boys among whom conversation did not lag.

The one who had perhaps the most to say was Fred Button. He was a tiny, little fellow, though his round face and rounder body gave him the appearance, as one of his friends described it, of a young bantam. He was familiarly known among his companions sometimes by the nick-name of Stub, or more often was called Peewee, or Pygmy, the last appellation sometimes being affectionately shortened into pyggie, or even pyg.

Seated next to him was John Clemens, a boy already six feet three inches tall, though he had not yet attained his eighteenth birthday. Familiarly he was known as String and frequently, when he and Fred Button, who were warm friends, were together they were referred to as the “long and short of it.”

On the opposite seat was Grant Jones, a clear headed, self-contained boy of the same age as his companions. A leader in his class in school and active on the athletic field, he had won for himself the nickname of Socrates, which frequently was shortened to Soc. The fourth member of the group was George Washington Sanders, a boy whose good-nature and witty remarks had made him a favorite among his friends. In honor of the name which he bore he sometimes had been referred to as the father of his country, which distinction was occasionally shortened to Papa, or even to Pop.

The owner and captain of the swift little craft was an elderly man, whose whiskers and hair formed an unbroken circle about his tanned face. Both he and Eph, when occasion required, served as oarsmen in the two skiffs which the swift *Gadabout* was towing. The light little boats were far astern, each being held in its place by a long rope made fast to the *Gadabout*.

“Whew!” said Fred Button, rising and stretching himself, “I hope we’ll get some fish to-day. How far do we have to go?” he added, addressing the captain as he spoke.

“It depends a little upon where you want to go to,” drawled the captain in response, without turning his head as he replied.

“I thought it was understood,” continued Fred, “that we were going to the channel between Drummond Island and Cockburn Island.”

“Ye’ll have to show your papers, if you fish over on the Canadian side,” growled the captain.

“We shan’t fish on the Canadian side,” spoke up Grant Jones. “We’ll leave it to you to keep us in American waters.”

“That’s right,” added John. “If we get caught on the Canadian side, Captain, we’ll hold you responsible for it.”

“Humph,” growled the captain, “we’ll see what we’ll see.”

Meanwhile the sun had risen and like a huge ball of fire was casting its beams across the smooth waters of Lake Huron. Scarcely a ripple was to be seen as the boat sped forward. The day promised to be unusually warm, but as yet the air was cool, and the spirits of the boys, after their early breakfast, were all high.

“We’ve got to get some of these fish to-day,” broke in George Sanders. “We didn’t get many the other day.”

“We weren’t far enough away from Mackinac,” said Fred.

“I’ve usually noticed,” suggested Grant, “that the best fishing grounds are always a good ways away from where you’re staying. The further away they are, the better they are.”

“I’ve noticed that too,” laughed George. “In fact there are a good many funny things in this world. I wonder what people speak of a family jar for.”

“What do you mean?” inquired Fred.

“I mean just what I say. I heard a family jar this morning.”

“I don’t understand you,” persisted Fred.

“Why, there was a family having a jar in the room next to mine. Only I think it was a little more than a family jar, it was more of a family churn, it was such a big one. There seemed to be such a very decided difference of opinion that the jar wouldn’t hold all that they were saying.”

“You shouldn’t listen to such things,” said Fred.

“‘Listen’! ‘Listen’! Why that was the very thing I was trying not to do, but I guess anybody on Mackinac Island could have heard them, if he had stopped.”

“Who were the people?” inquired George.

“I don’t know their names. The man is the one that wears that ice-cream suit when he goes fishing.”

“Oh, yes, I know him,” laughed Grant. “I have observed several times that the immaculateness of his manipulators has not been extremely noticeable.”

“That’s right,” laughed John. “There seems to be a superincrustation of unnecessary geological deposits that doubtless are due to his transcontinental pedestrianism.”

“Why, did he have to tramp across the continent to get here?” laughed George.

“I guess so. I know more about them than I wish I did, but I don’t know enough to know that.”

“I noticed,” said Fred, “yesterday afternoon when he came in that his lips looked like Alkali Pete’s.”

“What was the matter with Alkali Pete’s lips?” demanded George.

“They were seldom closed and there were great crevasses in them, cracked by the alkali.”

“I am taking your word for it,” said John, “but I confess I don’t know what you’re talking about. I’m a good deal more interested in the fish we’re going to get.”

“‘We’re going to get.’ I like that. Does String really think he is going to catch any fish?” said George, turning to his companions as he spoke. “His attenuated form doesn’t look to me as if it would be able to stand the strain of landing the fish some of us are going to catch to-day. About the only thing I think String will ever catch will be a crab.”

“String, how old are you?” demanded Grant abruptly.

“I’m eighteen in October.”

“When will you be ten?”

“I don’t understand your language,” replied John. “In your superlunary efforts to appear intellectual you sometimes state things that are incomprehensible, even to people of my limited intellectual parts.”

“Oh, quit!” broke in Fred, “don’t spoil the day and scare the fish away. I want to tell you about Professor Jackson. You know him, don’t you?”

“Yes,” replied Grant, “he’s the man who came on Monday, isn’t he? The man who is making investigations of the island, digging up all sorts of relics?”

“That’s the man,” acknowledged Fred. “Yesterday he dug up some cannon balls. He said they were relics of the French and Indian war.”

“They were all right,” said George. “I know, for one of the guides told me that they were the same balls that had been dug up by every old fellow for the last twenty-five years.”

“A new crop?” laughed Fred.

“Not at all. They are the same old cannon balls. They plant them every spring and give pleasure to some of these old fellows, who are traveling around the island in their gentle, antiquated gait looking for things that belonged to our grandfathers. They give them the childish pleasure of making ‘discoveries’ every year.”

“I should think they would take the balls away with them,” suggested John.

“No, they leave them for the historical interest they provide for the visitors. You go up to the reception room and you’ll find some there now in the glass case. They are a part of the same crop.”

“That’s all right,” laughed Grant. “It’s an easy way to keep the old people interested.”

By this time the *Gadabout* had gained the lower point of Drummond Island, thirty-five miles from the place from which they had started more than two hours before this time. Across the narrow channel they saw the shores of Cockburn Island. The latter was within the Canadian boundaries and as the captain of the *Gadabout* had explained, the boys would not be permitted to fish in the waters along its shore without a special permit from the Canadian officials.

The shore which they were approaching apparently had no buildings of any kind. There were high bluffs and rocky points, but no house was within sight.

“Captain,” called Fred, “why are you taking us to this island?”

“I’m not taking you to this island,” responded the captain. “I’m going to take you past it. I’m not fool enough to try to dodge the Canadian laws.”

Both the captain and his mate were watching the shore of the island, which every moment was becoming more distinct.

Unexpectedly on a bluff far to the left a man was seen standing and suddenly he appeared to become aware of the approaching *Gadabout*. Turning abruptly about he several times waved a white cloth, which he held in his hand, to parties that apparently were behind him. Then, once more facing the waters, he again waved the cloth. Instantly and with a grin of satisfaction appearing on his face the captain changed the course of his motor boat.

The four boys glanced blankly at one another and for a brief time no one spoke.

It was later when they learned that the signal which they had observed was to mean much, both in excitement and adventure, for all four of the boys on board the *Gadabout*.

CHAPTER II

THE LANDING ON THE CANADIAN SHORE

As the course of the *Gadabout* was sharply changed in response to the call of the captain, the attention of the four boys was quickly drawn in another direction. Not one of them was aware of anything unusual in what really was a signal on the shore of the Canadian island.

In a brief time the party was once more in American waters and as it was still early in the morning, preparations were soon made for the sport of the day.

The *Gadabout* was anchored in a little cove and the mate, with Fred and John, as the members of his party, took one of the skiffs, while Grant and George together with the captain departed in the other. It was agreed that they should meet at a certain place for luncheon and the rivalry was keen as to which boat should have the bigger catch of fish.

“Look out for us!” called Fred as his boat drew away from that in which his companions were being carried. “Look out for us! If you hear a whistle you’ll know we will need help.”

“To catch your fish?” laughed Grant.

“No, to bring them in. We’ll have a boat-load, anyway.”

In high spirits the boys soon were ready for the sport of the day, and it was not long before neither boat was within sight of the other.

When the noon hour arrived, still excited and hungry, the two boats were landed

at the place agreed upon and the captain at once displayed his skill as a cook.

“Isn’t it wonderful!” said George, not long after they were seated about the folding table which the captain had brought in the *Gadabout*. “Isn’t it wonderful the amount of food a fellow can put himself outside of?”

“It is that,” mumbled John, who was as busy as any of his comrades. “It pays for it all, now.”

“Of course it pays,” laughed Fred. “That’s what we’re here for. Honest, Grant, who caught that big pickerel?”

“I did,” responded Grant proudly. “I cannot tell a lie, I caught it with my little hook and line.”

“I’ll ask the captain about that later. I saw some other boats up there where you were and I am going to ask them how much they charged for the fish they sold you.”

“They didn’t sell us any fish!” retorted George indignantly.

“Another boy that cannot tell a lie. No wonder they call you the papa of your country. What do we do this afternoon?”

“I’m going to take you to another place,” explained the captain, who throughout the meal had been busied in attending to the numerous wants of the boys.

“Shall we get more fish than we did this morning?”

“That depends,” said the captain solemnly. “Some people do and some don’t. It mostly depends on whether they are any good with the rod.”

“Don’t you think we’re good?” demanded Fred.

“Huh!” retorted the captain. “Maybe you will be some day. Most of the fish you got this morning were hooked so that they couldn’t have got off the hook. There’s a big difference between catching a fish that way, and getting one with just a hook through his lip. It takes some skill then.”

“All right, captain, just as you say. You show us the right ground and we’ll do

the rest.”

“Maybe you will and maybe you won’t,” retorted the captain as he turned away to prepare dinner for himself and his mate.

When afternoon came, the *Gadabout* took the two skiffs once more in tow and swiftly carried them seven miles farther, where the wonderful ground described by the captain was located.

As soon as the anchor was dropped, the skiffs, arranged as in the morning, sought the place where the marvelous fishing was to be had.

Apparently the words of the captain were in a measure fulfilled for so busy were the four young fishermen that not one of them was aware of the increasing distance between the boat in which he was fishing and the one which carried his comrades.

It was late in the afternoon when Fred suddenly looked up and said, “It’s getting late, Jack. We ought to be going back to the boat. I don’t see it anywhere, do you?”

“You mean the skiff in which Grant and George are fishing?”

“Yes.”

“No, I don’t see them,” said John slowly, after he had glanced all about him. “I don’t see the *Gadabout* either.”

“Well, the mate knows where it is,” said Fred easily. “I hope the other fellows won’t get into any trouble, for there’s a storm coming up.”

As he spoke, Fred pointed to some clouds that rapidly were approaching in the sky directly overhead. They were black, angry clouds too, and the frequent flashes of lightning were followed by reports of thunder that at first had been so low as scarcely to be noticed. Now, however, the sounds were threatening and the oarsman, bidding the two boys reel in their lines at once, began to row swiftly toward the point behind which the *Gadabout* was anchored.

In a few moments, however, the calm waters had become rough. Whitecaps were to be seen all about them and the boys glanced anxiously at each other. The wind

too had risen now, but instead of blowing steadily across the waters, it was coming in puffs.

“We’re in for it, Jack,” said Fred anxiously.

His companion made no reply, though the frequent glances he cast at the sky indicated that he too was becoming anxious for their safety.

“Don’t you want me to help?” inquired John as he glanced at the oarsman.

The mate shook his head in response and it was plain that he was exerting all his strength in his efforts to keep the boat headed in the direction in which it had started.

“There comes the rain,” exclaimed John, as some heavy drops fell upon them and the nearby water was becoming more and more disturbed.

“Take one of these oars,” called the mate sharply, as he spoke rising with difficulty from his seat and placing one oar in another oarlock. “We’ll have all we can do to make the point.”

By this time both boys were thoroughly aroused. The rain was falling in torrents and both were drenched to their skins.

Such a plight, however, was hardly to be noticed in the presence of the danger that now beset them. In spite of their efforts the wind was driving them away from the point. More and more the boys did their utmost but their efforts were in vain. At last the mate shouted, “There’s nothing for it, boys, except to run for it. Sit down and we’ll let the gale drive us across to the other shore.”

The Canadian island was nearby and the shore could not be more than two miles distant, as both boys learned from their oarsman. However, it was with white and set faces that they followed his directions and each took his seat as he was bidden.

Swiftly the boat was driven before the wind, the mate exerting himself only to keep the light, little skiff headed in the right direction. So black were the clouds that already the boys were surrounded by darkness almost like that of night. Neither was able to see the shore toward which they were headed. The mate, however, appeared to be more confident than he had been while he was seeking

to drive the boat against the wind.

Swiftly and still more swiftly the frail little craft sped forward. No one spoke in the brief interval between the crashes of thunder. The streaks of the lightning seemed to fall directly into the waters of the lake and at times the boys believed themselves to be surrounded by fire. Never had either been in such peril before.

Fred had sunk into his seat so that only his head appeared above the gunwale. John, whose seat was in the stern of the skiff, was so tall that he was unable to follow the example of his friend and was clinging tenaciously to the sides of the boat. Meanwhile, the mate successfully keeping the skiff headed for the shore, was watchful of every movement of his passengers.

When ten minutes had elapsed it was manifest that the anxiety of the oarsman was increasing, as they drew near the shore. Without explaining his purpose he did his utmost to change the direction so that they would move in a course parallel to the shore, but, labor as he might, he was unable to accomplish his purpose. Directly upon the rocky border of Cockburn Island the gale was driving the little boat.

Once more the mate exerted his strength to his utmost as he strove to guide the little skiff toward a cove not far away. For a time it seemed as if his efforts were to succeed. But at that moment the wind became even stronger than before and the howling of the tempest increased.

The boys had a sudden vision of an opening in the rocky shore, then there was a crash and both found themselves struggling in the water.

When they arose to the surface they saw that before them the waters were still. The sheltered cove promised a degree of safety such as a moment before they had scarcely dared to hope for. Fishing rods, coats, cooking utensils, tackle, all things had been thrown into the water when the boat had struck the jutting rock. All these facts, however, were ignored in the efforts of both boys to gain the beach before them, for they now could see a sandy stretch not more than forty feet in length that marked the limit of the waters. And it was only twenty yards away.

“All right, Fred?” called John as he swam near his friend.

“All right,” sputtered Fred. “How is it with you?”

“I’m all right here. Have you seen the mate?”

“Yes, he’s ahead of us.”

Even as he spoke the mate could be seen rising to his feet in the shallower waters and a moment later he gained the refuge of the sandy beach.

It was not long before the boys also gained the same place of safety, although before their arrival the oarsman had disappeared from sight.

As soon as the boys stood on the shore they shook themselves much as dogs might do when they come out of the water and then in a moment the thought of the peril of their friends came back to their minds.

“What do you suppose has happened to Grant and George?” said Fred in a low voice.

“I think they must be all right,” replied John, although his expression of confidence was belied by the tones of his voice. “What shall we do?”

“Better go up on the bluff. Perhaps there we’ll see the *Gadabout* or the skiff. They must have been driven in the same direction that we were.”

“I don’t think so. You see the *Gadabout* was in the lee of that point. The last I saw of the skiff it was on the other side of the point too. I think that Grant and George probably have gone back to the *Gadabout* and are all right. Very likely they are talking about us at this very minute and are scared at what may have happened.”

“Can’t we signal them?” inquired Fred anxiously.

“Signal them? No. We haven’t anything to signal with in the first place and they can’t see us in the second.”

“The storm is going down,” suggested Fred. “They say the lake up here gets quiet almost as quickly as it gets stirred up.”

“It can’t get quiet any too soon to suit me,” said John dryly. “Where’s the mate?”

“I don’t know. I don’t see him anywhere.”

Both boys looked carefully along the shore, but no trace of the missing oarsmen was discovered.

The rain had ceased by this time and the sky was clearing. Not a sign of the presence of the *Gadabout* was to be seen on the waters before them. The oarsmen had disappeared and each boy for a moment gazed anxiously at his companion.

“Look yonder!” said John, suddenly pointing as he spoke to a spot in the direction of the interior of the island.

“What is it?” said Fred.

“Why, there’s a house up yonder. Don’t you see it?”

“You mean a shanty?”

“I don’t care what you call it, but I see smoke coming out of the chimney. We’ll go up there and get somebody to help us.”

Moved by a common impulse both boys started in the direction of the strange house. Neither was aware that they were entering upon an experience that was to be as mysterious as it was trying.

CHAPTER III

A MYSTERIOUS HOUSE

The sun was shining brightly as the boys moved across the island in the direction of the place they were seeking. As they stopped occasionally to look back over the waters of the lake, they saw that the waves still were tipped with white and the waters still were rough.

“I wish I knew where the other fellows are,” said Fred, once more stopping to look out over the waters that now were reflecting the light of the afternoon sun.

“They are all right,” said John, confidently. “I told you both the *Gadabout* and the other skiff are around the point.”

“I know you told me so, but that doesn’t make it so,” said Fred, still unconvinced by the confident manner of his companion.

“Look yonder, will you!” said John abruptly as he pointed toward the house they were seeking. “I’m sure there is somebody in there.”

“It doesn’t look as if it would hold together long enough to let any one stay very long inside,” laughed Fred.

“We’ll find out anyway pretty quick who it is.”

In a brief time the boys arrived at the rear of the little house, which was not much more than a shanty in its appearance. They found that their surmise that smoke was rising from the chimney was correct. There could be no doubt that some one was within the building.

Once more the boys turned and looked anxiously toward the lake, eager to discover if any trace of their missing friends could be seen. The waters already were becoming smoother and the rays of the sun were almost blinding as they were reflected by the shining waters.

“What shall we do?” said Fred in a low voice. “Shall we rap?”

“Of course we’ll rap,” retorted John. “You talk as if you didn’t know what the customs of civilized countries are.”

“Is knocking one of them?” inquired Fred demurely.

“It certainly is.”

“Well, then, I guess I don’t live in the place you are talking about, for nobody has rapped at our door at home for the last ten years. Not since we have put in electric bells.”

“It’s hard work to keep up with you,” said John, not strongly impressed by the attempt of his friend to be facetious. “But we’ll knock here anyway.”

Advancing to the kitchen door, John rapped loudly to proclaim the presence of visitors.

A silence followed the summons and when several seconds had elapsed John repeated his knocking. Still no one came to welcome them, and then, glancing behind him at his friend, John demurely raised the latch and opened the door.

Fred at once followed and the two boys found themselves in a low, rude kitchen. The stove was in one corner and it was plain now that the smoke they had discovered was rising from it through the chimney. Upon the stove several cooking utensils were to be seen, but as yet no person had announced his presence in the little building.

“There must be somebody here,” whispered Fred.

“Of course there is.”

“Well, why doesn’t he show up?”

“He will be here in a minute.”

But when several minutes passed and still no one made known his presence, John decided to announce their arrival in other ways.

“Hello!” he called, and then as his hail was not answered he repeated the summons in tones still louder. “Hello! Hello!” he shouted again.

While he was speaking both boys were glancing toward the rude stairway that led from the room to the small loft. They had surmised that the occupants of the house might have been caught in the storm as they themselves had been, and were in the upper room changing their clothing.

“Who are you?”

Startled by the unexpected sound both boys turned quickly about and saw standing in the doorway of the kitchen a man plainly puzzled by their unexpected appearance.

Neither of the boys ever had seen him before. He was apparently fifty years of age, strong, and his face bronzed by sun and wind. There was an expression in his face, however, that was puzzling to both boys. He glanced quickly from one to the other and for a moment the boys suspected that he was prepared either to leap upon them or precipitately flee from the spot, they could not decide which.

The man was well-dressed and it was plain that he was not an ordinary inhabitant.

“We got caught in the storm,” explained John hastily. “We landed down here and then we saw this little house and we thought perhaps we could come up here and dry out.”

“Anybody with you?” inquired the other man, still gazing keenly at both his young visitors.

“Nobody but the mate.”

“Mate of what?”

“The *Gadabout*.”

“Did you come over from Mackinac Island?” demanded the man quickly.

“Yes, sir,” said Fred. “We started this morning about four o’clock.”

“And you came over with Captain Hastings?”

“Yes, sir. We got caught in the storm out here around the point and we couldn’t get back to the *Gadabout*, so the mate just let our skiff drive before the wind and the boat was stove in when we finally landed in that little cove out yonder.”

“Where is the mate now?”

“We don’t know. He went ahead of us and the first thing we knew he disappeared from sight.”

“Was he on shore here?”

“Yes, sir, we landed, as I told you, in that little cove and while we were getting ashore we lost the mate. We don’t know where he went.”

“And you say there were others with you?”

“Yes, sir,” explained Fred, “there were two other boys and they went out with the captain.”

“What happened to them in the storm?”

“We don’t know. We wish we did,” said John soberly.

“Oh, they’re all right,” broke in Fred. “The *Gadabout* and the skiff were both beyond the point when the storm broke and they had no trouble in keeping to the lee of the point.”

“This fire feels good anyway,” said John, whose long, attenuated frame was trembling with cold, in spite of the warmth which had followed the shower.

“Sorry, boys, that I cannot give you a change,” said the man, smiling dryly as he spoke. As he was a man who weighed at least 190 pounds, while John’s form towered at least six inches higher and his weight was at least seventy pounds less, the idea of either wearing the clothing of the other was so ludicrous that

Fred laughed aloud at the suggestion.

“That’s all right,” said John quickly. “All we want is a chance to dry out before the mate gets back.”

“How are you going to get back to Mackinac?”

“I don’t know,” said John ruefully. “We thought that perhaps the mate could get word to the *Gadabout* and the motor-boat would stop for us.”

“How can he get word to the *Gadabout*?”

“I’m sure I don’t know,” said Fred. “We don’t know anything about this part of the country. It’s the first time we ever were here. We thought perhaps the captain might know some point where he could signal. It isn’t more than two or three miles across, is it?”

“Not here,” responded the man. “But you are cold and I shouldn’t be surprised if you were both hungry. I’ve seen fellows at your age who sometimes were afflicted in that manner. I’ll put some more wood on the fire and we’ll dry you out and then we’ll see what we can do.”

Placing his hands together in a peculiar manner the man whistled through them and in response, in an incredibly short time, a little Japanese serving man appeared.

“Mike,” said the man, “see if you can’t find something for these hungry young fellows to eat. They were caught in the storm and their boat was wrecked down here in the cove.”

The Japanese laughed loudly at the explanation and then quickly turning about departed from the house.

“What do you say his name is?” inquired Fred.

“We call him Mike.”

“I never heard of a Japanese with that name.”

“Well, I don’t suppose that is his full name. That’s a mouthful and I don’t often

“speak it. He has been with me for several years and when he first came some one named him Mikado, that was shortened to Mik, and of late that’s been gradually changing to Mike.”

“Then he wasn’t born in Ireland?” laughed John.

“No, he belongs to the Sunrise Kingdom. He will have something for you to eat very soon. I have been coming here for several years now every summer.”

“Where is your home?” inquired John.

“That’s hard to say. I was born on the ocean when my father and mother were coming from England. My father was French and my mother was Russian. We lived in the States two years after I was born and then we went to Bermuda a year or two and finally we wound up in Brazil. From Brazil we moved to Sweden and then went to Constantinople. After my father and mother died I came to England and then moved to Montreal. Now, if you can tell me where I belong and what I am you’ll do better than I have been able to do for myself.”

“I think you’re a first cousin of the Wandering Jew,” laughed Fred.

“Perhaps I am more like the Man Without a Country,” said the man soberly. “I have come up here from Montreal every summer for the last few years.”

“Why, how do you get here?” inquired Fred.

“I come up the Ottawa River from Montreal and then I leave the river at Mattawa. It is easy going then from Lake Nippising, across the Georgian Bay, and from Georgian Bay into Lake Huron doesn’t take very long. Have you ever been there, boys?”

“Where?” inquired Fred.

“Georgian Bay.”

“No, sir.”

“Then you have missed one of the prettiest spots in America. I never tire—”

The man stopped abruptly as the mate of the *Gadabout* suddenly appeared in the

doorway.

Without waiting for an invitation he at once entered the room and then to the surprise of the two boys extended his hand and received from his host a small package which he quickly thrust into the pocket of his coat.

The action although simple in itself nevertheless was surprising to the boys. It was manifest that the mate already was acquainted with the occupant of the house and also that he was having relations with him. Just what these were neither of the boys understood, but before many days elapsed they both were keenly excited by the recollection of the simple exchange which they had just seen in the kitchen of the old house on the shore of Cockburn Island.

CHAPTER IV

THE COMING OF THE GADABOUT

It was quickly manifest to the two interested boys that the mate and their host were well acquainted with each other. Puzzled as they were to account for the familiar greeting it was not long before John whispered to his companion, "I suppose that man has been coming here so many years that he knows all the men on the lake. That must be the reason why they know each other so well."

"I guess that's right," said Fred, who was watching the men with an interest which he was not entirely able to explain even to himself.

The mate was endeavoring to speak in whispers, but his voice was so penetrating that it carried into the remote corners of the house, although no one was able to distinguish the words which he spoke.

By this time the boys were dry once more and as they prepared to depart, the Japanese servant unexpectedly returned. In his hands he was carrying a tray on which there were numerous tempting viands. Both boys watched the lithe little man as he speedily cleared the table and then deposited upon it the plates and food which he had brought.

"You're not going now," said their host to the two boys. "You're just in time for afternoon tea."

"We didn't know that you served anything like that," laughed Fred. "I think we'll both be glad to stay and accept your invitation, shan't we?" he added as he turned to John.

“I’m sure we shall,” replied John, with a sigh which caused the others in the room to smile at his eagerness.

The movements of the little Japanese speedily convinced the boys that he had had long experience in the work he then was doing. Deftly and silently he attended to all the wants of the guests and not many minutes had elapsed before, responding to the influence, both Fred and John were in better spirits.

Turning to the mate, John said, “Don’t you think it is time for us to find out what has become of the other boys?”

“Don’t you worry none about them,” said the mate. “I guess the cap knows how to take care of them.”

“But we don’t know where they are,” suggested Fred. “We don’t know how we are going to get back to Mackinac. We’re sure they’ll be anxious about us and I know we are about them.”

“Don’t you worry none,” retorted the mate. “They’ll be coming this way pretty soon. I can tell the toot of the *Gadabout* if Gabriel was blowing the whistle. They’ll be here very soon, but I think by and by it may be a good thing for us to go down to the shore and watch a little if we don’t hear the whistle calling pretty soon.”

The entire party still was seated about the table. Relieved by the confidence of the mate in the safety of their friends and of the *Gadabout*, both John and Fred became more intent listeners to the conversation which was occurring between the men.

“That Mackinac Island,” suggested their host after a time, turning to the boys, “is one of the most beautiful spots in the world. Ever been there before?”

“No, sir,” replied Fred. “This is our first visit.”

“Don’t you like it?”

“Very much. There are no two days alike. We have been up the river, down the shore of Lake Michigan and to-day we came over here to Drummond Island to try the fishing.”

“And pretty nearly had a shipwreck, didn’t you?” asked the mate.

“Yes, if you can call a skiff that was smashed a shipwreck.”

“The skiff isn’t smashed,” drawled the sailor. “She’s just stove in. We’ll have her fixed up in no time and she’ll be as good as ever.”

“I’m fond myself of Mackinac Island,” continued the host. “I go over there some days and shut my eyes and try to imagine what it was like so many years ago when it was first discovered by the French.”

“They didn’t hold it very long,” suggested John.

“No, and we didn’t either.”

“Nor did the British in the War of 1812. They got it away from us just as they got it away from the French years ago. But after that war was ended it came back to us and nobody has been able to lay hands on it since.”

“You stay there all winter?” inquired the host, turning to the mate as he spoke.

“I do that.”

“I guess it’s pretty cold,” suggested Fred.

“You don’t need to ‘guess’ and you don’t need to say ‘pretty.’ It’s just cold. It’s so cold that when you toss an egg up into the air it just freezes and stays there.”

“It couldn’t stay there,” said John.

“Why couldn’t it?” declared the mate. “I guess I know what I am talking about.”

“Why, the attraction of gravitation would pull it to the ground.”

“That’s all right,” roared the mate, “but the attraction of gravitation is frozen too. Yes, I’ve seen with my own eyes eggs staying right up in the air and the air itself all froze up and the attraction of gravitation froze too.”

“That must be a great sight,” laughed Fred.

“It is, and you can’t see it anywhere except on Mackinac Island.”

“What do you do with yourself all winter?” demanded John.

“Get ready for summer.”

“And then when summer comes you work all the while getting ready for the winter, don’t you?”

“Yes, that’s just it,” acknowledged the sailor soberly. “It just seems as if all the time nobody had a chance to live, but he just plans to get ready for it.”

As the conversation continued John became more and more thoughtful and silent. Several times he had been startled by sounds which he had heard in the room directly above that in which they were assembled. Twice he suspected that some one had come to the head of the rude little stairway and was listening to the sounds of conversation below.

On each occasion it had seemed to him that he had heard the sound of a rustle of a woman’s dress. But of all this he could not be certain and even if his surmise had been correct he had no reason to be more suspicious of their host.

Indeed his suspicions might not have been aroused had not he intercepted a look which the man gave his Japanese servant, which caused the latter quickly to go to the head of the stairway.

John was deeply interested and striving to appear indifferent watched keenly the face of the Japanese when the latter returned to the room and was positive that he saw the little, brown man shake his head slightly in response to a question in the eyes of his employer.

Such actions might be entirely natural, and John tried to assure himself that there was no cause for his increasing suspicions that something was not right in the strange house on the shores of Cockburn Island.

He had no opportunity to explain his suspicions to Fred, however, for just then the sailor said, “It is time for us to go back and keep a lookout for the *Gadabout*.”

Acting at once upon his suggestions the two boys arose from their seats.

Cordially thanking their host for his kindness in receiving them into his house

and providing for their wants, they soon departed, following the mate as he led the way to one of the higher bluffs along the shore.

“I don’t know that man’s name yet,” said John to Fred.

“That’s so,” acknowledged Fred. “We don’t know who he is, do we? Well, it’s as broad as it is long, for he doesn’t know our names either.”

“Probably we never shall see him again anyway, so it won’t make any difference, but I should like to know more about him.”

“He seems to have been in several parts of the world, doesn’t he, Jack!”

“He surely does. I don’t wonder that he can’t tell what nationality he is.”

“Look out on the lake,” suggested Fred. “It’s as calm as a mill pond.”

“Yes,” acknowledged John. “It’s so smooth that if one didn’t know, he wouldn’t believe it possible for it to stir up such a gale as we saw there a couple of hours ago.”

“Well, there’s one comfort,” said Fred. “If it doesn’t take very long for a squall to come, it doesn’t take very long for it to go either. So we’re just about as well off as when we started.”

“Except our fish,” suggested John.

“Well, we’re carrying back some fish, though they don’t show. I don’t think I ever ate so much fish in my life as I did this noon. I think the pickerel will hold a revolutionary congress—”

“Look yonder!” interrupted John quickly. “Isn’t that the *Gadabout*?”

Fred instantly looked in the direction indicated by his companion and far away saw the faint outline of a small boat which plainly was headed in the direction of the bluff. “Yes,” he said after a brief silence. “I believe that’s the *Gadabout*.”

“Probably they are out looking for us. I hope the boys won’t be worried.”

“You needn’t be afraid of Papa Sanders being worried,” laughed Fred. “As long

as he and Grant are in some dry place and don't have to think of any work they won't trouble their heads about us, you may be sure about that."

"They ought to be ashamed of themselves if they are not," replied John half angrily. "But they certainly are coming this way," he added a moment later.

"Yes, and they see us, too," said Fred quickly, as he pointed to the mate, who, in advance of them, had arrived at the bluff and was waving a signal.

This signal consisted of a large piece of cloth that had at one time been white, attached to a long pole. The sailor was waving this back and forth in such a peculiar manner that the attention of the boys at once was drawn to his actions.

"What's he trying to do?" whispered John to Fred.

"Trying to signal the *Gadabout*."

"Yes, but what's he doing it in that way for?"

"Well, I don't know, Jack. You're always suspicious of somebody. Probably the captain doesn't know that he is doing anything out of the ordinary."

Whatever the explanation may have been, in a brief time the *Gadabout* was seen approaching the bluff on which the sailor and the two boys now were standing.

The skiff in which their friends had been seen was in tow and soon after it was discovered both Grant and George were seen in the bow of the swift little motor-boat.

"That's good. That's a relief," said John when he was convinced that his friends were on board.

"Probably they feel the same way now that they have seen us."

"We'll know about that very soon."

CHAPTER V

A PERPLEXING LETTER

It was decided to leave behind them the skiff that had been wrecked and as the boys ran down to the shore they saw that the beautiful little boat had been drawn up on the land.

“That can be fixed all right,” said the mate in response to the question of the boys. “The frame’s all good.”

Neither of the boys, however, heard his words as they both climbed into the skiff, which Grant had rowed ashore.

“Where were you, fellows?” he asked as he grasped the oars and headed the little boat once more for the *Gadabout*.

“We went ashore. The mate just let us drive before the wind. We couldn’t do anything against it.”

“Yes,” added Fred. “We stove in the boat when we tried to land. The waves were a million feet high.”

“How high?” laughed John.

“Well, they were pretty nearly ten feet anyway.”

“That’s about as near as you get to things, isn’t it?” remarked John.

“Well, you know what I mean.”

“I don’t care what you mean as long as you’re both safe. The captain was afraid you might capsize.”

“You mean he was afraid we would be capsized,” retorted Fred.

“May be that was it. At all events he was afraid you would go into the water and he knew you couldn’t take care of yourselves if you did.”

“Hello,” exclaimed John abruptly. “Here comes our recent host. I wonder what he wants now.”

As he spoke John pointed toward the shore from which the man in whose house they recently found refuge was seen approaching in a skiff. Just where his boat had been kept was not plain to either of the boys. There was no boathouse on the shore and few places where the craft might have been sheltered.

“I guess he has forgotten something,” laughed Fred, “or he’s after us. John, did you take anything from the table when you left the house?”

“Nothing except what I had already taken inside,” retorted John.

In response to the call of the man the departing *Gadabout* was delayed until he came alongside. There was a whispered conversation between him and the captain, which lasted only a few minutes. What was said could not be heard by the boys, although John was really trying to discover what the subject of the conversation was, at the same time doing his utmost to appear indifferent.

Fred, who understood the peculiarities of his companion, laughed silently as he saw John’s actions and shook his head warningly.

Quickly, however, the captain turning about gave the order to start and almost as if it had been hurled forward by some powerful and unseen hand the graceful little boat suddenly started swiftly on its return to Mackinac Island.

The speed of the motor-boat was much greater than in the morning. Indeed as the time passed and the graceful little craft darted over the surface of the water the boys looked at one another in amazement. The water seemed almost to rise and be parted by the bow. It rushed past them with a noise that was loud and almost confusing. Still the speed of the *Gadabout* increased. The roaring of the waters and the occasional call of the captain were all that could be heard and in a brief

time the boys abandoned all attempts to speak to one another.

Darkness had fallen when at last they arrived at their destination. The lights of the many windowed hotels and of the cottages along the road were shining in the evening darkness. There was yet time, however, for the boys to obtain dinner and in a brief time all four were seated about the table, which had been assigned them when first they had arrived.

Fred was the last to enter the dining-room and as he did so his companions saw that something had greatly amused or pleased him.

“Look here, fellows,” he said as he seated himself at the table. “See what I have got.”

Drawing from his pocket a letter, which he explained he had received from the clerk on his way to the dining-room, he placed the sheet of paper on the table and began to read,—

Sir,—I am one good american Citizen and I will do not the other Strangers peoples Cheat us My duty Me oblige to let you know which Cheater the U. S. Secret Contraband the man is it one British have one store in Chicago and one other store in Montreal Canada. This man make her Business in this Way. he order her goods to come from Paris france to Montreal Canada and ther he pay duty Very Cheap and then he express her goods to the boarderings of the untied States and then he took the Said goods and giving to the Cariage Man and the Cariag Man in the nighte time he Carry them With other different things eggs and other things lik that in many Barrel and the goods Mixed With Them So the goods entre in united States in the Way the dessert.

respectfully yours truly,
AMERICAN BROTHER.

“What do you think of that?” demanded John as he extended his hand and received the letter.

“I don’t know what to think of it,” laughed Fred. “What do you think of it?”

“It’s too much for me,” said Grant. “I don’t believe even papa here knows what it means.”

“But it was sent to me,” said Fred. “At least the directions are to Mr. F. Button, and that’s my name.”

The boys were still laughing and talking about the strange epistle which Fred had received when at last they withdrew from the dining-room and selected four chairs near together on the broad piazza.

They had not been seated very long before the clerk of the hotel approached the group and said to Fred, "I think I gave you a letter which belongs to some other man."

"I guess you did," laughed Fred. "I don't think it belongs to me anyway. Is this the letter?" he added, as he held forth the epistle which had been the cause of so much mirth among the boys.

"I don't know whether it is or not," replied the clerk. "All I know is that there is another man here, whose name is almost like yours. He is Mr. Ferdinand Button. That letter was directed to Mr. F. Button. As you had been here longer than he I thought it was for you."

"Well, it isn't," said Fred. "If it was my letter I would read it to you, but I guess it belongs to Ferdinand, so you had better take it and give it to him." Laughingly Fred held out the letter which the clerk took and at once withdrew from the place.

It was not long afterward before a stranger approached the boys who were still seated and said, "One of you, I am afraid had a letter to-night which belonged to me."

"Yes, I guess we did," said Fred quickly, rising as he spoke. "My name is Fred Button and the clerk said that this letter was meant for Mr. Ferdinand Button."

"That's my name," explained the stranger, "and the letter was for me. Did you read it?"

"I shall have to acknowledge that I did," answered Fred. "I didn't suspect until I had done that that it really belonged to any one else."

Somewhat confused by his confession Fred noted the bearing of the man before him more carefully.

It was plain to him now that the stranger was quiet in his manner, gentlemanly in his bearing and possessed of a quick intelligence that enabled him to perceive many a thing which his younger companions might have lost. The stranger was about thirty-five years of age and his bronzed face was nearly the color of that of the captain of the *Gadabout*.

“Have you been here long?” inquired John.

“I came this morning.”

“I thought perhaps you had been on the lake—”

“I have been on the lake,” interrupted the stranger. “Indeed, I spend much of my time on the lake. I am sorry you had the misfortune to receive this letter which apparently was meant for me.”

“What makes you so sure it was for you?” inquired Fred laughingly. “It was signed ‘American Brother’ and was simply addressed ‘Sir.’ Perhaps it was meant for me after all.”

“No, the letter is mine,” said the man quietly and as he spoke the four boys were aware that he intended to retain possession of the perplexing missive.

That he was able to do so was manifest in the breadth of his shoulders and the evidences of strength which were apparent as he turned and walked away.

“Whew!” whispered Grant. “I guess that man could tell some stories if he wanted to.”

“I hope he will want to,” said George. “I know I want to hear them.”

The conversation turned from the stranger who had claimed the letter to plans for the following day and then when two hours had elapsed all four boys, thoroughly tired by their experiences of the day, sought their rooms.

The following morning John was surprised when he first went down to the lobby to discover there his host of the preceding day.

At first John suspected that the man intended to ignore him, for he advanced toward him with outstretched hand to express his surprise at the unexpected meeting. The stranger, however, turned abruptly away. Abashed by the action John’s face flushed and he watched the man when he slowly walked out to the piazza and seated himself near the entrance.

Turning to the clerk John said, “Who is that man?”

“I do not know,” replied the clerk. “I have seen him here several times this summer.”

“How many years have you been coming here?” broke in John.

“Fourteen.”

“And you never saw this man until this summer?”

“No. Why?”

“Oh, nothing much. I just wanted to know. I had an idea somehow that he belonged to this part of the country and that perhaps he was here every summer.”

“No, sir,” answered the clerk. “This is the first summer he has shown up on Mackinac Island.”

“You mean it is the first time he has shown up at your hotel,” suggested John.

“No, I don’t mean anything of the kind. I mean just what I say, that this is the first summer he has been seen on the island.”

John said no more and turned away. He had decided that he would go out to the piazza and see if this mysterious man was still there. Was it possible that he had been mistaken? Was not this the man who had received them in his strange house on Cockburn Island the preceding day? If any questions concerning the identity of the man remained in John’s mind they were quickly dispelled when he glanced toward the dock and there saw the newcomer talking to the captain of the *Gadabout*.

At that moment the other three boys approached the place where John was standing and declaring that they were hungry demanded that he should at once go with them to the dining-room.

CHAPTER VI

AN ADDITION TO THE PARTY

While the boys were seated in the dining-room they found Fred's namesake, as they now called Mr. Button, seated near them at a small table. Apparently, however, he ignored their presence and paid no attention to what they were saying.

Convinced, that peculiar as the man's actions were they had nothing to fear from him, the boys soon gave their undivided attention to their breakfast and to discussing their plans for the coming day.

"It is agreed," said Fred, "that we are to go back to Drummond Island, isn't it?"

"That's right," said George. "We shan't get as early a start this morning but we ought to do as much as we did yesterday."

"I hope," said Grant, "that we shan't have any such storm."

"And I hope," joined in John, "that we don't have any more of these mysterious events that took us over to Canada and made us afraid there is somebody watching us."

"It's only a guilty conscience that is afraid," retorted Fred, "but we'll go to Drummond Island and the sooner we can get started the better it will be. We're late as it is."

When the boys departed from the dining-room they stopped together on the piazza to discuss one or two further details in connection with their proposed

trip.

To their surprise Mr. Ferdinand Button approached the group and said, "Pardon me, but did I understand you to say that you were going to Drummond Island?"

"Yes, sir," said Fred promptly.

"I chanced to overhear your remarks while I was at breakfast and I thought perhaps you might be willing to give me a lift."

"Do you want to go there?" asked John.

"Near there," said the stranger quietly. "I find there isn't another motor-boat to be had. I am going to take a skiff and my man and if you can find a place for us on board your motor-boat I shall gladly bear my part of the expense and also appreciate your courtesy very much."

"Of course you can come," said Fred quickly.

"I shall not trouble you about coming back. I may not be ready to come when you are, or I may want to come before you do. In either event, I want to pay for my share of the *Gadabout* for the day."

"We'll talk about that later," said Fred. "Are you ready to start?"

"Yes, my man is at the dock with his skiff."

"All right," said Fred. "Go right down there and we'll all be down in a minute."

"Well, Captain," said John, when the boys approached the dock and found their boat already at hand. "We're going to take a couple more passengers."

"Who are they?" growled the captain.

"Why, this man, Mr. Button. He wants us to take him over to Drummond Island. He doesn't know whether he will come back again with us or not."

"My guide says he will ride in the skiff," suggested Mr. Button.

"That won't be necessary, unless he wants to," said Fred.

“That’s the way we’ll go,” said Mr. Button quietly, and at once the five passengers took their places on board the swift, little *Gadabout*.

“What’s the matter with the captain?” whispered Grant in a low voice to Fred as soon as the motor-boat had put out from the dock.

“I don’t know. Why?”

“Look at him, that’s all. He’s grouchy or else he’s afraid. He looks to me as if he wasn’t very enthusiastic over the addition to the list of passengers.”

“It doesn’t make any difference whether he is or not. We chartered the boat and can do what we please with it.”

Whether or not the captain was suspicious of the newcomer, the boys gave no further attention to him. In a brief time they were drawn to the newcomer, whose knowledge of the region and whose stories of the early days at once appealed strongly to his young listeners.

“Yes, sir,” said Mr. Button. “There have been some stirring scenes up around Mackinac Island. To my mind it is one of the most beautiful spots in the United States, and, standing just as it does where the lakes join, I do not wonder that the Indians did not want to give it up and that the French and English fought over it the way they did. There’s a very interesting story of the defense of the old fort. It is published I believe, in a little pamphlet and my advice to you is to get a copy and read it before you go home.”

“We’ll do that,” said Grant enthusiastically.

“When we get back,” laughed George, “Grant’s head is going to be so full of the information that he has picked up about the lakes and Mackinac Island, that the rest of us won’t have to do any work, except to keep him quiet.”

“By the way, Mr. Button,” said Fred, “did you find out anything more about that letter?”

To the surprise of the boys the captain appeared at that moment, glaring angrily at Fred and turning about several times after he had started back to his place at the wheel.

“It was a strange letter,” said Mr. Button, “but I am accustomed to such things. It is a part of my business.”

All four boys looked at him questioningly, but he smiled slightly without satisfying their curiosity at the time.

“As I was saying,” he continued, “there have been some very exciting adventures around Mackinac Island. Perhaps I will tell you something about them before long. Just now I should like to have you tell me about your trip yesterday. Did you have good luck?”

“It depends upon how you look at it,” said John with a laugh. “We caught all the fish we wanted for our luncheon, but we had a terrific thunder storm out there that drove us ashore in the afternoon. At least Fred and I were driven ashore.”

“You were wise lads to run before the gale.”

“You needn’t charge us with the wisdom,” laughed Fred. “It was the mate that had it. We were lucky enough to have him with us and he took us ashore over at Cockburn Island. We weren’t so lucky when we landed, though, because our skiff was all stove in and we had to leave it when we came away.”

“How did you get away?”

“Why, the other fellows took the Gadabout and began to look for us after the storm died out and then they came ashore for us in their skiff.”

“How far is it between Drummond Island and Cockburn?”

“Two or three miles. That’s about all, isn’t it, Captain?” said John turning abruptly about as the captain’s face once more was seen peering eagerly at the company seated in the stern.

“That’s about it,” drawled the captain. “Have you never been there?” he added, looking directly at Mr. Button as he spoke.

“I’m looking forward with great pleasure to the trip,” replied Mr. Button, quietly, apparently ignoring the question that had been asked. “You don’t think we are likely to have another storm, to-day, do you?”

“No,” said the captain abruptly, as once more he turned to his work.

“Tell me about Cockburn Island,” said Mr. Button, speaking to the boys. “Is it inhabited? Are there many people living there?”

“I don’t know,” said John. “We didn’t see very much of it. We found a little shanty, or shack, not far from the shore and when we saw smoke coming out of the chimney we went up there thinking that we might dry our clothes, for we were wet through.”

“Did you find anybody there?”

“Yes, that’s the strange part of it,” explained John. “The old shanty, that looked almost as if it would fall to pieces, was pretty well fixed up inside. There was a man there and he had a Japanese servant. Indeed, I am sure I saw the man at the harbor this morning. At least I thought it was the same man, but he didn’t speak to me, so I couldn’t be sure after all.”

Conversation ceased for a time and it was not until they had arrived off the shore of Drummond Island that Mr. Button said, “I think I will leave you here. I want to thank you again for your kindness in bringing me.”

“Where are you going?” demanded the captain, who again approached the group.

“I’m going to leave the *Gadabout* here,” explained Mr. Button.

“Where you going? There’s no good fishing here.”

“I’m going to trust my guide for that,” explained Mr. Button, pointing as he spoke to the man in whose skiff he was to depart. This man was now seated in his little skiff about one hundred feet astern of the *Gadabout*.

“Fetch him up then,” said the captain. “I’ll stop the *Gadabout* and let you off.”

In spite of the captain’s manifest effort to appear at ease it was plain to his young passengers that he still was angry or alarmed over the presence of Mr. Ferdinand Button. What the connection was between the two not one of the boys was able to conjecture.

Their attention, however, was speedily drawn to the skiff which Mr. Button now hauled in and as soon as it was drawn alongside he stepped lightly on board.

It was impossible for any of the boys to see the face of the guide, who at the time was bending low over a box which contained the fishing tackle. It was only later when John reminded the other boys of the strange coincidence between the excitement of the captain and the inability of all to see the face of the guide in Mr. Button's boat, that they recalled it.

"There isn't any fishing here," again shouted the captain.

Apparently Mr. Button was not greatly impressed by the knowledge of the captain, for ignoring his words, he seated himself in the stern of the skiff and prepared to begin his trolling.

Meanwhile the *Gadabout* was belying her name, as now she was only drifting slowly with the current.

"Come on, Captain," called Fred at last. "We're ready to start."

"Better start," retorted the commander of the motor-boat. "There's no fishing here and I told that man there wasn't, but he doesn't seem to pay no attention."

"That's his own fault," laughed Grant. "Go on with us."

Still manifestly reluctant the captain at last started the engine but the *Gadabout* had not gone more than a few yards before he again stopped the boat and said, "We might as well try it here as anywhere."

"But you said the fishing here wasn't any good," protested Fred.

"It'll do no harm to try it."

In accordance with the captain's words the *Gadabout* was anchored, and as soon as the young fishermen were separated into two parties as they had been the preceding day, the two skiffs were soon prepared for the sport of the morning.

The captain, who now was rowing the boat in which John and Fred were seated, had rowed one hundred yards from the *Gadabout* and the boys both were trolling. Still the captain watched the skiff in which Mr. Button had departed as

long as the little boat could be seen. Even the *Gadabout* now was soon lost to sight.

“I’ll have to have a fresh bait,” said Fred, who had been the first to have a strike. He reeled in his line and swung the hook around for the captain to bait it. A moment later the captain abruptly changing his position dropped overboard the box which contained the leaders.

“There I’ve gone and done it!” he said. “Lost every leader! There is nothing to do, boys, except to go back to the *Gadabout* and get some more. I’m sorry, but it won’t take long.”

“Nothing else to be done,” said John, “so the sooner we get back the better.”

No one in the little boat spoke while the captain rowed swiftly back to the motor-boat.

The surprise of the boys was great when they drew near the little *Gadabout* to discover that a skiff had been made fast alongside the boat.

“Whose skiff is that?” demanded John abruptly. “We didn’t leave any boat here.”

The captain without replying increased the speed at which he was rowing and as he drew near the *Gadabout* the boys were startled when they saw peering from the companionway the face of Mr. Ferdinand Button.

CHAPTER VII

ONCE MORE ON COCKBURN ISLAND

“Who’s that on board the *Gadabout*?” roared the captain. “What are you doing there, you lubber?”

“I guess you know who I am,” replied the man on deck, who now the boys were convinced was indeed the mysterious stranger.

Both boys were startled, as they looked into the face of the captain, who was now rowing swiftly toward the little motor-boat. Whether the expression on his face was one of anger or of fear was not known by either. The man, however, was keenly excited and his anxiety to gain his boat became apparent with every stroke of his oars.

In a brief time he swung the skiff alongside the *Gadabout* and without making any effort to board the boat the captain roared, “What are you doing on board there?”

“I came back to get something that I thought might be here, which I didn’t take with me,” said Mr. Button quietly. It was manifest from his appearance that he was in nowise alarmed by the noisy questions of the captain of the *Gadabout*.

“Well, did you find it?” demanded the captain.

“I cannot say that I have—as yet.”

“I guess that depends on what you’re looking for,” said the captain, his voice becoming lower, although his excitement was still manifest.

“I didn’t suppose there would be any such feeling over my coming back to your boat. I have known of other men who neglected to take some things with them when they left home, to say nothing about a motor-boat.”

“Did you say you found it?” again demanded the captain.

“I found something that will do me just as well.”

For a moment the two men stared at each other, the captain still keenly suspicious or angry, while the expression on the face of Mr. Button was one which the boys were not able to understand. To all appearances he was unruffled by the noisy queries of the captain, and yet what was behind it all no one could say.

There was nothing, however, more to be done and in a brief time Mr. Button stepped into his skiff in which the man, who was to be his guide, was still seated. Without any delay the guide picked up his oars and resumed his rowing.

Meanwhile the captain remained standing on the deck of the *Gadabout*, glaring at the departing skiff, although he did not utter any sound until the man of whom he was suspicious or afraid had rounded the nearest point.

“Better get your leaders, captain, because we want to start,” suggested Fred impatient over the long delay.

“Humph,” grunted the captain. Nevertheless he disappeared below and in a brief time came back to the deck with a box in his hands.

“That’s the same box you took out this morning, isn’t it, Captain?” laughed John.

“What’s that you say?” roared the sailor.

“I said, isn’t that the same box of leaders that you took out this morning?”

“Well I’ll have to own up that it is,” said the captain. “I had it in my pocket all the while and I thought I dropped it overboard. We’ll make up for lost time now, so get aboard, both of you.”

To the surprise of the young fishermen, however, the captain did not return to the ground over which he had been fishing at the time of his unexpected return to

the *Gadabout*. Instead, he followed swiftly in the direction in which Mr. Button had disappeared. Both boys questioned him sharply concerning the change in their plans, but the only reply their guide made was to explain that he thought the fishing was likely to be better in the direction in which he was going than where they had been before.

Fred winked slyly at his companion when several times the captain ceasing his efforts took a glass and drank of the waters of the lake and then taking from his pocket a jointed telescope gazed long and earnestly in the direction in which they were moving.

“What’s the trouble, Captain? What are you looking for?” demanded Fred.

“I wanted to see if that man’s got on my ground.”

“Do you see him anywhere?”

“No, I don’t. I wish I did.”

“Who is he, anyway?” inquired John. “You seem to have a pretty wholesome respect for him.”

“What’s that you say? What’s that you say?” demanded the captain sharply, as he glared at John.

“Why, what I said,” explained John, “was that you seem to be very much impressed by him. Do you know who he is?”

“I don’t know nothin’ about him,” retorted the captain, resuming his occupation once more.

When at last the captain declared that they had arrived at the grounds he was seeking the boys renewed their attempts of the morning. For some reason, however, all their efforts were unavailing. Either the fish were not there, or they were not biting.

“I believe, Captain,” said John, at last, “that you were more interested in following that man than you are in getting a good shoal for us to fish over.”

“What’s that you say?” retorted the captain. “It’s no such thing. It’s no such

thing. I don't care about that man any more than I do about—you."

"You have a strange way of showing it, then," suggested Fred with a laugh.

"I tell you what I'll do, boys," said the captain at last. "If we don't have any luck here by noon I'll take you across the channel and we'll try it 'long Cockburn Island."

"But we haven't any right to fish there. That's in Canadian waters," said John quickly.

"Well, I have a permit," explained the captain.

"Good for us, too?" inquired Fred.

"Yes, good for you, too."

Both boys were somewhat dubious as to the extent of the permission secured by the captain, but they made no protest. Swiftly the little boat was rowed across the intervening waters and in a brief time, under the shelter of the bluffs of the island they were seeking, preparations were made for resuming their sport.

"We don't want many fish just now," said the captain.

"That's lucky for us," laughed Fred.

"What I mean is, that we want something for dinner, but that's about all. After dinner we'll see what we can do with our luck."

When the time came for landing, the captain turned to the boys and said, "Before I start a fire I want to go up to that house yonder for a minute."

"We'll go with you," suggested Fred, winking at John as he spoke.

"No, no," said the captain sharply. "You stay right here on the shore. If you want to you can start a fire and have things goin' so that when I come back everything will be ready."

"What do you suppose is the matter with the captain?" inquired John after the departure of their guide.

“Why he’s either afraid of or he doesn’t like that Mr. Button. Maybe he’s the man that wrote that letter.”

“More likely he’s the man that the other fellow wrote the letter about,” laughed John. “I think myself that the old fellow will bear watching.”

“I haven’t seen anything in him that I thought was wrong,” said Fred. “Naturally he doesn’t waste very much affection on the officials of the law.”

“I don’t see why he shouldn’t,” broke in John. “Unless there’s something wrong with him.”

“There may be something wrong as far as the law is concerned, but I guess the old fellow himself thinks he’s right. You know there are a good many people that do that.”

“What do you suppose he’s up to?”

“I don’t believe anybody knows, not even the captain himself. I guess it’s his general principles. He’s opposed to everything.”

“Do you think this Mr. Button is anything more than he appears to be?”

“I’m not sure,” said Fred thoughtfully. “It may be that he knows a good deal more than he explains and it may be that letter he got, which was sent to me first, has made him suspicious of the captain. I don’t myself believe there’s anything the matter with the captain anyway.”

“Look yonder!” said John quickly, dropping the fish, which he was cleaning, as he spoke. “Isn’t that Mr. Button himself?”

Hastily looking in the direction indicated by his friend Fred was silent for a moment and then said, “That’s just who it is. What do you suppose he’s doing here on this island?”

“He isn’t on the island yet. I’ll tell you later what he does, that is, if he lands. Don’t let him see us.”

Hastily moving behind the high bushes, though neither boy could explain just why he did so, they watched their fellow-guest, as his skiff was swiftly sent

ashore and Mr. Button himself stepped out upon the land.

It was plain that he was not aware of the presence of the boys and that all his movements were being keenly watched.

The interest of the boys, however, was speedily increased and in a brief time both were highly excited when they saw Mr. Button take from his pocket a revolver, which he inspected carefully and after he had returned it to its place he at once started toward the house in the distance.

It was the same rude, little shanty in which the boys had found refuge the preceding day. Now, however the sun was shining brightly and the clear waters of the lake were reflecting its beams. There were no signs of life about the house on the shore, but both boys excitedly watched Mr. Button as he made his way across the fields and after a brief time approached the side door of the house and then entered the little building.

“Let’s go up to the house, too,” suggested Fred quickly.

“What for?”

“Why, there’s no reason why we shouldn’t go and if there’s any fun going on we want to be on hand.”

“I’m with you,” said John cordially, and as soon as they had banked their fire both boys started across the open field toward the house in the distance.

“I’m telling you,” said Fred in a low voice, “there’s something going on up in that house.”

“You always make a mountain out of a mole hill.”

“Well, perhaps I do, but I’m sure there’s something doing and they may need us before long.”

“Yes, probably they are wondering now why we don’t come,” laughed John.

“Just you wait,” retorted Fred. “You’ll see I’m right.”

“If I thought you were, I know of one fellow who wouldn’t go near that house.”

“But you’re going just the same,” said Fred positively.

There was no delay and after the boys had crossed the field they approached the kitchen-door of the rude, little house where Fred made known their presence by his noisy summons.

CHAPTER VIII

LEFT BEHIND

In response to Fred's knock the door was opened by the little Japanese servant. He stared blankly at the boys and then broke into another of his loud laughs.

"Is there any one here?" inquired Fred.

The response of the Japanese was another boisterous laugh.

"Why don't you tell us?" demanded John, irritated by the manner of the little man; but the sole response of the Japanese was a loud burst of laughter after each inquiry.

"Let's go in anyway," suggested Fred.

The Japanese offered no opposition to their entrance and when they were within the familiar room they glanced hastily about them, but there were no signs of the man they were seeking.

Abruptly, however, Fred said, "Hush! Listen, Jack! That's the captain's voice upstairs."

Both boys were silent as they listened attentively to the sound of voices which now could be heard from the upper room. Gradually the captain's voice became louder and it was manifest that he was either in trouble or angry.

To the astonishment of the boys the interview suddenly ended and the captain, rushing down the stairway, abruptly departed from the house. Apparently he had

been unaware of the presence of either of the boys. He had glanced neither to the right nor to the left and as the boys looked out of the window they saw that he was walking rapidly toward the shore.

“Let him go,” said John, “he’ll have to wait for us anyway.”

“I wish I was sure that he would wait,” said Fred doubtfully.

“Wait? Of course he’ll wait,” retorted John. “That’s what he’s paid for.”

“I’m not so sure,” said Fred once more. “I think the best thing to do would be for one of us to go back and see that everything is all right.”

“All right,” responded John quickly. “You stay here if you want to and I’ll go down to the shore and see if anything happens there.”

Meanwhile Fred seated himself in the room and watched the Japanese servant, who apparently ignored his presence save occasionally when he stopped and stared blankly at him for a moment and then broke into a noisy laugh.

Not many minutes had elapsed, however, before John came running back to the house.

“The captain has taken the skiff and left the island!” he said excitedly when he burst into the room.

“Oh, I guess not,” said Fred.

“But he has, I tell you. He was rowing like mad. He has taken the skiff and left us here.”

“We’ll go down to see about it,” said Fred, abruptly rising and accompanying his friend as together they ran back to the shore.

“There it is, just as I told you!” said John, when they arrived on the bluff. “The boat has gone and the captain has gone with it.”

For a moment Fred made no reply. He glanced in either direction along the shore, and then peered intently out over the water, but neither the boat nor the captain was to be seen.

“What shall we do?” demanded John. “That’s strange and I told you there’s something wrong.”

“He’ll come back again,” said Fred confidently.

“I’m glad you think so,” responded John. “I’m not so sure of it myself.”

“It’ll come out all right,” persisted Fred. “Come on now, we’ll go up to the house again.”

When the boys returned to the house and once more entered the kitchen, the little Japanese servant, who met them at the door, made no protest when they entered.

Once more the boys seated themselves in chairs near the window. They occasionally glanced blankly at each other for there was really no explanation for their presence in the house. At the same time they were both watching the waters of the lake not far away, but their watching was vain, for when an hour had passed no signs of the captain had been seen.

“Where is the man that lives here?” finally Fred inquired of the Japanese.

The servant laughed loudly, but shook his head to imply that he did not understand.

“He knows English, all right, I’m telling you,” said John in a low voice to Fred. “This is getting all mixed up. I wish we were back in Mackinac.”

“You are finding trouble everywhere, Jack,” said Fred, although he too was at pains to speak in subdued tones. Turning once more to the Japanese he continued, “Can you get us some supper? We’ll pay you for it.”

The sole reply of the servant was another of his unmusical bursts of laughter. Either he did not understand what was said, or he took this method of ignoring the requests of his uninvited visitors.

“Let’s go back to the shore,” suggested John.

“All right,” responded Fred, and together the two boys at once departed from the little house.

When they arrived at the shore not only was their own boat gone, but the boat in which Mr. Button had come had also disappeared.

“What do you make of that?” demanded John in astonishment.

“I’m sure I don’t know,” answered Fred, genuinely surprised by the double disappearance.

“Maybe I’m not Calamity Jane’s brother after all,” said John. “There’s more in this than you think.”

Fred was silent, though it was plain that he was puzzled by the failure to discover any of the boats. The *Gadabout* also was nowhere within sight.

“Nothing for us to do,” said Fred at last, “except to wait. They must know we’re here and there’s no way for us to get away unless the *Gadabout* comes for us.”

“Then we’ll have to wait,” said John, “and that’s all there is to it.”

Together the boys remained on the shore until at last the sun sank below the western horizon. Darkness would soon be creeping over the land and both boys now were more serious.

“It’s plain the boys are gone,” said Fred soberly. “I thought surely one of them would be back here.”

“Well, I didn’t,” said John. “The captain was in such a hurry when he started that I didn’t believe he would come back. I don’t half believe we will ever see him again anyway. I tell you there’s something wrong here.”

Fred’s expression was serious as without making any reply he looked out over the waters of the lake.

The darkness deepened and night would soon be at hand. “There’s nothing for it,” said Fred at last, “except to go back to the house.”

“I don’t know what good that will do,” said John, “but I’m ready to go if you want to. This is the strangest thing I have ever been mixed up in in my life. For my part I wish I was out of it.”

“Don’t cry, John,” said Fred, striving to speak cheerfully.

“I’m not crying,” retorted John, “but I don’t like the look of the whole thing. I tell you there’s something serious in it.”

Fred said no more and in a brief time the boys were standing once more at the kitchen door.

Again the little Japanese, who had the faculty of apparently being in different places at the same time, faced them as they entered. This time he did not greet their coming with his usual loud laughter, but as he made no protest the boys entered and Fred said to him, “Did you get some supper for us?”

Either the Japanese did not understand, or he continued his pretense, for he shook his head, though his expression was not unfriendly.

Both boys had suspected when they returned that the Japanese was about to bar their entrance. Either they were mistaken, or he had changed his plan for now he busied himself in his duties about the kitchen, apparently ignoring the presence of the two uninvited guests.

A few minutes later both boys were startled by what they were certain was the voice of a woman calling from the head of the stairway.

“Mikado,” called the woman, “did you let those boys in again?”

Whether the Japanese understood or not he ran to the foot of the stairway and a low conversation between him and the woman who had called him followed, of which neither Fred nor John was able to distinguish any word.

“You better give them some supper,” at last she said in tones that the boys plainly heard. “Tell them to go away then. We haven’t any place for them to sleep.”

A candle was burning on a little side table in the kitchen and in its dim light each boy was able to see the face of his companion. It was plain to each that the other was now seriously perplexed. However, a few minutes later, the Japanese entered the room with a tray on which he had a simple supper to which by a motion of his head he invited the boys.

“Do you see how dark it is?” whispered John to Fred.

“Yes,” replied Fred as he glanced out of the window. There were no stars to be seen in the sky and the wind as it whistled about the corner of the little building gave forth sounds that were weird and strange.

The boys seldom spoke throughout the meal and when at last they arose, one of them took some money from his pocket and handed it to the Japanese, who served them.

Quickly the little man took the money and thrust it into his pocket. No language was required for the transaction and it was clearly manifest that he understood the action of his guest.

“Let’s go down to the shore again,” suggested Fred. “Perhaps one of the boats has come in and the fellows are looking for us now.”

Both boys ran swiftly on their return but when they arrived on the bluff once more they were doomed to disappointment. Not a boat was to be seen in the dim light. Nor was any light to be seen as they looked out over the waters. Somehow the darkness itself seemed to be startling.

“There isn’t any boat here and there isn’t any boat coming,” said Fred at last.

“What shall we do?” inquired John.

“There’s only one thing for us to do,” said Fred, “and that’s to go back to the house. We’ll have to explain to them why we haven’t left, and I don’t believe that woman, even if she didn’t want us to see her, will turn us out on a night like this. We’ll tell her that we’ll pay for our lodging and I guess she’ll let us in.”

Neither boy, however, was confident of his welcome when they once more retraced their way and started back toward the little house which now itself was wrapped in darkness. Not even the beams of the candle now could be seen shining through the kitchen windows.

CHAPTER IX

THE LOST SKIFF

Slowly the boys again crossed the familiar field. In their distraction the various objects assumed grotesque forms in the dim light. The swaying branch of a low tree seemed almost like the extended arm of a waiting man. Every sound that came from the waters startled them. The cry of the night birds was unusually weird and penetrating.

Neither of the boys was willing to acknowledge that he was afraid, but nevertheless they kept closely together and did not speak until once more they were standing before the kitchen door.

Both were startled when not far away they heard the sound of a deep growl. They had not seen any dogs about the premises in their previous visits and both were startled by the unexpected sound.

In their haste and alarm they both began to rap upon the door. The dog, still growling, did not advance upon them, but they could see the dim outline of his form as he stood near the corner of the house.

There was no sound within and no response was given to their summons. Nor when they repeated their knocking, as they did several times, was any heed paid them.

“What shall we do?” whispered Fred, looking up into the face of his companion. “There must be somebody in here.”

“Open the door,” suggested John.

Fred reached for the latch, and, doing his utmost to be quiet in his action in order to avoid undue attention on the part of the dog, tried to open the door.

The door, however, was locked or bolted and although both boys pushed against it with their shoulders they were unable to move it. For the first time they were aware now how massive and strong the door was.

“It isn’t much like an ordinary kitchen door,” whispered Fred as they abandoned their effort.

“I should say not,” responded John. “We can’t get in and that’s the only thing I can see plainly around here.”

“I wish George and Grant were here.”

“So do I, but if wishes were horses, beggars might ride. Is that dog creeping any nearer to us?”

“I don’t see that it is. I guess all there is left for us is to go back to the shore and wait.”

“We seem to be left on all sides, don’t we?”

“Pretty much, and I hope that dog thinks so too.”

Cautiously withdrawing from the kitchen door the boys slowly moved toward the corner of the house. Not far before them was a pile of wood and in case they should be attacked by the growling brute, they were hopeful that there they might find some weapon of defense.

Suddenly both boys found themselves in need. With another growl the dog advanced upon the boys as soon as they had passed the corner.

Leaping to the wood-pile John drew forth a stick three or four feet in length and only about two inches in diameter. Fred was less fortunate and unable to secure a weapon he darted toward the opposite side of the pile.

Meanwhile John was compelled to face the dog. As the savage animal leaped forward John struck at it, but either his blow was too slow, or he did not see plainly in the dim light, for he failed to stop its progress. He had, however,

almost succeeded in dodging the brute, which fastened its teeth in his trousers and steadily held John in his grip.

“Hit him! Hit him!” said John excitedly. “He’s got me and I can’t get away!”

In response to the appeal of his comrade Fred hastily took a stick from the woodpile and advanced upon their common enemy. The dog, however, still clung to John in spite of the boy’s desperate attempts to use his club.

Lifting the stick which he carried Fred brought it down with all his force upon the back of the dog, which still was growling and clinging to its prisoner. There was a loud yelp of pain and relinquishing its hold the dog fled howling back to the house.

Without waiting to discover the reception which awaited the animal, both Fred and John started swiftly across the field toward the shore.

Frequently they glanced behind them, but it was manifest that the dog was not pursuing them.

“He’s got a backache,” suggested Fred, “or else he’s homesick. He doesn’t want to leave the house.”

“I hope he doesn’t,” said John heartily. “I didn’t know there was any dog around there.”

“Nor I. I don’t know where they kept him.”

“If they will only keep him now that’s all I want.”

Nothing more was said until at last the boys arrived at the shore. Both looked keenly out over the waters hoping to discover some trace of their friends. In the dim light, however, they were unable to discover the presence of any boat on the waters or of any parties on the bluff. The night air was becoming cooler, although the breeze which had arisen at sunset had now died away.

For several minutes the boys stood waiting and listening upon the shore and then Fred in a loud whisper said hastily, “Listen, Jack. Do you hear anything?”

“On the water?” inquired John.

“Yes.”

Both boys listened intently and in a brief time John said eagerly, “I do hear something. To me it is like the sound of oars in oarlocks.”

“That’s it. That’s it exactly,” said Fred. “There’s a boat out there somewhere, only we can’t see it. Let’s get behind these bushes and wait until it comes nearer.”

Acting upon Fred’s suggestion they quickly took their places behind a low growth of bushes only a few feet back from the water. There they were still able to see what occurred on the lake, and at the same time in the dim light would not be readily discovered by any parties that were approaching.

Not many minutes elapsed before the dim outlines of the skiff were discerned. There was only one occupant and he was rowing toward the shore, apparently unconcerned whether or not his presence was known.

“Ahoy, there!” called John abruptly.

The sound of the oars abruptly ceased and a brief period of tense silence followed.

“Who’s in the skiff?” called John.

“Wait until I come ashore and I’ll tell you,” came the reply. With a few sturdy strokes the oarsman sent the light little skiff ashore and as he stepped out on the ground both boys were startled when they discovered the newcomer to be Mr. Button. Why he should be coming from the lake was something they could not explain.

“Where’s the *Gadabout*?” demanded Fred eagerly.

“I haven’t seen it.”

“Haven’t you seen anything of the other boys?”

“Not a trace of them.”

“What do you suppose has become of them?” demanded John, who was

beginning to be seriously troubled by the failure of his friends to appear.

“I cannot say,” replied Mr. Button. “What are you doing here?”

“That’s what we should like to know ourselves,” replied Fred ruefully. “We can’t get into the house and we haven’t any boat so it looks very much as if we would have to stay here on the shore all night.”

“Can’t you get into the house?” inquired Mr. Button.

“No, sir. We have been up there two or three times. The doors are locked and no one pays any attention to us when we rap. Besides they have got a dog there and he’s a savage brute. He got John by the trousers and wouldn’t let go until I hit him on the back with a stick of wood.”

“Was it John or the dog you hit?” inquired Mr. Button dryly.

“The dog, of course. What are we going to do now, Mr. Button?”

“I think I can get you over to the shore of Drummond Island, but I should like very much to have you wait a little while before we start.”

“All right,” replied both boys together.

“Meanwhile,” suggested Mr. Button, “I would like to have you come with me up the shore as far as that cove where the mate left his skiff after it was stove in. It isn’t more than one hundred yards or so from here.”

The boys readily consented after they had assisted Mr. Button to haul his boat farther up on the beach.

Whatever the purpose in the mind of the man was he did not explain, nor were the boys able to conjecture what it was after they had walked along the shore as far as the cove and then had returned to the spot where the skiff in which Mr. Button had come had been left.

Their consternation, however, was great when after a vain search they were convinced that the skiff was gone. That it could have drifted away was impossible. All three were alike convinced of that fact. There was not much wind now and the little boat had been hauled so far from the water that it was

impossible for it to drift away. There was only one conclusion and that was that some one had taken it.

For a moment they stood in silence after they were convinced that the boat indeed was gone, and then the boys, keenly excited, turned to their companion demanding what he would suggest as the next thing to be done.

CHAPTER X

THE FLIGHT OF THE GADABOUT

For several minutes the boys ran up and down the shore vainly searching for the missing boat. They were convinced that some one had taken the skiff and probably was not far away, as it would be impossible for any one to go far during the short time that had elapsed since they had left the spot where Mr. Button had landed.

At last the search was abandoned and when the boys returned they discovered Mr. Button awaiting their coming.

“Listen, boys,” he said in a low voice. “Do you hear any sound?”

The boys were silent, but in a brief time Fred said quickly, “Yes, sir, I think I hear a motor-boat.”

“You are correct,” said Mr. Button. “There’s a boat coming this way. I have been sure of it for two or three minutes, but I have not been able to make out its outlines, as yet. Can either of you boys see it?”

Neither Fred nor John was able to discern the outlines of the boat, which steadily sounded nearer. A few minutes only had passed before Fred gleefully announced his discovery of the approaching motor-boat.

“I think it must be the *Gadabout*,” he said eagerly. “Probably George and Grant are on board and they are looking for us. Shall I hail them?”

“No, no,” said Mr. Button quickly. “At least not yet. We had better wait here

until we are sure who is on board.”

Obediently the boys followed the instructions and waited until the motor-boat had come within twenty feet of the shore. There the power was shut off and the course slightly reversed, so that the *Gadabout*, for it was indeed the missing boat, came slowly about, broadside to the island.

Although the boat was so near, it was impossible for John or Fred to see who was steering. They were aware that at least three were on board for they saw plainly the forms of the men as they let go the anchor and the boat became stationary.

“I guess it’s George and Grant—” began Fred, at the same time preparing to advance near the water. He was sharply recalled, however, by Mr. Button, who once more urged the boys to remain behind the bushes where they had taken their stand until they had seen who made up the party on the *Gadabout*.

Only a brief time elapsed before a man stepped on board a skiff and pushed out from the motor-boat to the shore. Without using his oars the boat soon ground on the beach and when the occupant stepped forth both of the watching boys were aware that it was the mate of the *Gadabout*.

He pulled his skiff up on the shore, and then, scarcely glancing behind him, at once passed swiftly into the field and soon disappeared from sight.

“He’s going up to the house,” said Fred in his excitement.

“It looks like it,” said John. “Shall we follow him?” He had turned to Mr. Button as he spoke.

“No,” said the man quickly. “The thing for us to do is to take this skiff and board the *Gadabout*.”

“All right,” said John eagerly. “Hadn’t we better hail the other fellows before we do that though? We are not sure that Grant and George are on board.”

“Yes, hail them,” said Mr. Button, “but don’t make much noise about it.”

John stepped forth from behind the bushes and taking his stand on the shore called, “Ahoy there! George, is that you?”

“Who’s that?” came the response from the motor-boat.

“Fred and I are here,” responded John.

“Who are ‘I’?” laughingly came from some one on board the *Gadabout*.

“I guess you know who we are. That’s you, isn’t it, George?”

“It’s Grant and I.”

“That’s all I wanted to know,” responded John. “Wait a minute and we’ll be with you.”

John and Fred quickly hauled the skiff into the water but before they had taken their seats Mr. Button approached and said, “Don’t leave me behind, boys.”

“We aren’t going to stay very long,” suggested Fred.

“That will be all right,” said Mr. Button, “but take me with you.”

The boys delayed a moment while Mr. Button stepped on board and seated himself in the stern of the little skiff. A moment later the little boat was alongside the *Gadabout* and all three stepped on board, Fred still holding the painter in his hand.

Before them sat George and Grant peering eagerly into their faces and plainly surprised by the unexpected action of their companions.

“We must leave right away,” said Mr. Button.

“What for?” demanded Fred.

“I haven’t time to explain to you,” said Mr. Button, “but the only thing for us to do is to get away from this island, and the *Gadabout* is the best means for us to use.”

“But the boat doesn’t belong to us,” protested John.

“Doesn’t it?” laughed Mr. Button. “Didn’t you hire it for the day? Didn’t you pay the man to bring you out to Drummond Island and then carry you back to Mackinac?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, he hasn’t done all he agreed to, has he?”

“No, sir, but—”

“Then there’s no reason in the world why we shouldn’t start out. It must be between nine and ten o’clock at night. We have been cheated out of a good deal of our day by the captain and we have a right to take his boat and go on back to Mackinac if we want to.”

The boys still hesitated to adopt the unusual suggestion and after a brief silence, John said, “I don’t believe any of us knows very much about running a motor-boat.”

“That isn’t necessary,” said Mr. Button. “I know all about it.”

Meanwhile, although he continued his conversation with the boys, Mr. Button had hauled in the anchor and then made fast the skiff to the stern.

Without waiting for any further words he at once advanced to the wheel and as soon as the power was turned on the speedy, little craft began to draw away from the dim shores of Cockburn Island.

They had not gone far, however, before they heard a loud hail from the shore.

“Hi, there!” called some one. “What are you doing with that motor-boat? Come back here! Come back here with it!”

A low suggestion from Mr. Button caused all the boys to remain silent.

Again the hail came from the shore, louder than before and in tones of one who evidently was angry or alarmed.

“Come back with that boat! You’ll run her aground! I’ll have you arrested for piracy! Bring that boat back here!”

All four boys were decidedly uneasy over the situation in which they now found themselves. They had recognized the voice of the mate as the one which had ordered them to return with the boat. They were aware also that the charge he

had made, that they were stealing or running away with a chartered boat, might become a serious matter for all concerned.

Almost as if he was aware of the thoughts in the minds of his companions, Mr. Button said quietly, "Don't be afraid, boys. I'll see you out of this trouble, but just now there's nothing else to be done. You can put the whole blame on me, for I'm the one that took the *Gadabout*. I'm steering her and I am taking her against your protests. You see you cannot help yourselves because we're too far from the shore now for you to try to get back."

At that moment again there came a loud call from the shore, but it was evident from the tones of the voice that the *Gadabout* was rapidly leaving Cockburn Island behind her.

"Bring back the boat! I'll give you ten dollars to bring her back!"

Silence still followed the noisy offer, however, and only a few minutes had elapsed before the *Gadabout* had passed beyond the sight of any one who might be standing on the shore.

Apparently Mr. Button was not in any confusion as to the course he was to follow. Directly across the narrow waters he steered until in a brief time the shore of Drummond Island loomed before them. Then changing his course he guided the swift, little craft on a line parallel with the shore. The boat was moving southward and all four of the unwilling passengers expected that in a brief time they would pass the point of Drummond Island and then would turn westward and seek the harbor at Mackinac.

The speed of the *Gadabout* was increasing now and in the dim light the waters near the stern seemed almost to glow with light. There was excitement for the boys in the midst of the mystery, but all had become silent and watchful of the man at the wheel.

Swiftly the little *Gadabout* plowed its way across the smooth waters. The point of Drummond Island was passed and then to the amazement of the boys the course was not changed. The *Gadabout* now was headed for the open waters of Lake Huron. Mackinac Island lay far to their right.

"You have made a mistake, Mr. Button," called George anxiously. "This isn't the way back to Mackinac Island."

“Don’t be alarmed, boys,” replied Mr. Button, without glancing behind him. “I’ll bring you out all right.”

“But you are headed in the wrong direction,” protested Fred.

“Don’t be afraid,” said Mr. Button once more. “I know what I am doing and so will you all pretty soon.”

It was too dark to enable any of the boys to perceive the expression on the faces of his comrades. That they all were aghast at the unexpected turn of events, however, was manifest to all, but the little *Gadabout*, as if the anxiety of its passengers was of no concern, kept steadily on its way toward the open waters of Lake Huron.

CHAPTER XI

ALONE ON THE LAKE

The four boys huddled together near the stern of the swiftly moving motor-boat. For a few minutes silence rested over the group. They were aghast at the turn of events and all were alike fearful of the consequences of their appropriation of the *Gadabout*, although no one acknowledged his fears.

George was the first to break the silence, when, leaning toward his friends he said in a whisper, "He's veering off to the left now. Do you see what he's doing?"

"So we are," replied John after the boys had carefully looked ahead. "That must mean that we are headed for the Canadian shore somewhere."

"I don't know where we are headed," said Grant, "but we're going to get there pretty soon. I wish I knew what the trouble is."

"You don't suppose Mr. Button is crazy, do you?" suggested Fred.

"I don't know," replied Grant soberly. "Most of the people that have his name are candidates for insane asylums."

"You are safe in making that remark now," retorted Fred. "I shan't forget it, however. You wait until we go back to Mackinac—"

"I'm afraid if you wait until then," broke in George, "you'll forget all about his kind words. You don't suppose this fellow is really crazy, do you? He acts like a man beside himself."

“That’s as true as you live,” said John in a whisper. “I’m wondering if we ought not to jump on him all together and take the wheel away from him.”

“They say a crazy man is ten times as strong as a man who isn’t crazy,” suggested Fred. “I don’t believe we had better attempt that, yet awhile, anyway.”

“What’s become of his man?” inquired Grant abruptly. “He isn’t on the boat.”

“That’s right,” responded the boys all together, after they had glanced all about the boat, as if they were expecting to discover the guide whom Mr. Ferdinand Button had taken with him when the party had set out from Mackinac Island.

“We’re four to one anyway,” said John. “I’m not in any hurry yet to try to do anything violent, but if the worst comes we ought to be able to handle him. There’s a fellow for each foot and each hand and between us we ought to be able to take care of him.”

Meanwhile the swift little *Gadabout* was speeding forward, as if it was governed by a spirit of its own. The water rushed past the stern, boiling and singing on its way. The eyes of the boys, more accustomed now to the dimness of the light, saw no objects in whichever direction they glanced over the dark waters. And the speed of the motor-boat was unchecked.

Still the *Gadabout* swept forward in its course. Not once did Mr. Ferdinand Button give any token to indicate that he was even aware of the presence of the boys on board the boat. He had not once glanced behind him and if he was looking steadily ahead, the boys, who frequently glanced in that direction, were unable to discover any object toward which he was guiding his course.

Silence fell upon the little group seated in the stern of the motor-boat, and the depression which rested upon all alike seemed to deepen with the passing moments.

Suddenly the speed of the *Gadabout* slackened. A moment later the engine ceased to go and although the motor-boat was still moving swiftly forward it was doing so because of the headway under which it had been speeding.

Instantly every boy leaped to his feet and stared blankly into the faces of his companions. In spite of the dimness of the light the alarm which every one felt was manifest and for a moment there was silence deep and intense.

“What’s that?” demanded Fred, who was the first to speak.

“I give it up,” replied John. “There’s something happened.”

“You talk like a philosopher,” said George impatiently. “As if we didn’t know that! What’s wrong, Mr. Button?” he added in louder tones.

“I’m not sure,” replied Mr. Button, who now turned and joined the boys. “I cannot quite make out whether our gasoline has given out or whether a blade in our propeller is broken.”

“If our gasoline is gone,” said Grant, “we’re likely to be out here on the lake for some time.”

“Yes, and if a storm comes up,” added Fred, “we’re going to have troubles of our own.”

“Don’t begin to borrow troubles,” said Mr. Button in a tone of irritation. “They may come, but it will be time enough to face them when we have to.”

“But what are we going to do?” demanded Fred.

“I’m going to have one of you boys get into the skiff with me and I’m going to try to find out if anything is the matter with the blades.”

“I’ll find out,” said George, “what the supply of gasoline is.”

Taking his place on board the skiff, which was in tow, John seized the oars while Mr. Button seated himself in the bow.

In a brief time the motor-boat was motionless and then pushing the bow of the skiff against the stern of the *Gadabout*, Mr. Button, who had taken off his coat, rolled back his sleeves and began to investigate the condition of the blades.

“There,” he said abruptly, “it is what I feared. There’s something wrong there.”

“What can we do?” inquired John.

“I don’t think we can do anything until it is light.”

“Then we’ll just drift about over the lake.”

“That’s it exactly.”

“But suppose a storm comes up?”

“But suppose it doesn’t? There isn’t anything we can do to bring it on or to keep it away. We’ll have to take things as they come.”

“It will be a hard job for the Go Ahead Boys to hang out here all night. We aren’t used to that.”

“It will be a good time to learn it,” replied Mr. Button dryly, as pulling himself alongside the motor-boat he directed his companion to step on board, an example which he himself followed a moment later.

“The gasoline is out,” said George.

“Are you sure?” inquired Mr. Button quickly.

“Yes, sir. I am sure.”

“Then we’re in a worse plight than I thought we were,” said Mr. Button, “for there’s something wrong with the blades.”

“I guess it won’t make any difference whether the blades are right or wrong, if there’s no gasoline to drive the engine,” said Fred disconsolately.

“We cannot do anything but wait,” said Mr. Button. “The morning will be here before long.”

“And so won’t breakfast,” said Grant dolefully.

“We’ll have no trouble,” explained Mr. Button, “just as soon as it is light. Somebody will be out here fishing and we’ll get help.”

“But we don’t want to wait until morning,” protested Fred.

“If you really don’t want to wait,” said Mr. Button, “then the only thing you can do is for two of you to take the skiff and row ashore.”

“We might get lost,” suggested Fred.

“Yes, so you might,” acknowledged Mr. Button. “I was following a suggestion, that’s all. It’s the only thing which can be done that occurs to me.”

“I don’t think the suggestion is so bad,” said Fred. “We can keep within hailing distance of the *Gadabout* and it may be that we shall find some other boat nearby, or it may be that we are not very far from the shore.”

“I know we are not very far from the shore,” declared Mr. Button, “but it isn’t the shore of the mainland.”

“What is it?” demanded George.

“Western Duck Island. I’m sure we cannot be far away from it. Now, if two of you boys want to take the skiff and make some investigations I don’t think there will be any special danger. Don’t go too far away, though your whistle or your voices will carry a long distance over the water.”

“I’m one of the Go Ahead Boys, and I’m for trying it,” said Fred sturdily.

“And I’m with you,” said John.

A moment afterward both boys stepped on board the skiff and with John at the oars and Fred seated in the stern, they speedily left the *Gadabout* behind them.

“Don’t go very far away,” called George warningly.

“You’re right, we won’t,” called back John, and then silence rested over the waters of Lake Huron.

“We had better row in a circle,” suggested Fred. “I’m the captain of this expedition and I want you to follow my directions.”

“All right, sir,” responded John glibly, “but the main thing is to keep a sharp outlook for a boat coming or going, or for any light that we may see on the shore.”

For a time John rowed forward in silence. Both boys were keenly observant, but they were unable to discover any trace of the shore, nor were any lights of passing vessels seen on the water.

“I think we have gone about far enough,” suggested Fred, when a half-hour or more had elapsed.

“So do I,” answered John.

“Better let me row back,” said Fred.

“That’s all right, too,” responded John.

The boys exchanged places and Fred rowed more rapidly on their return than his companion had done on their advance.

Several minutes elapsed and then John said in a low voice, “It’s strange we don’t see anything of the *Gadabout*. I thought that we were headed right for it.”

“So did I,” answered Fred. “We had better call.”

John placed his hands about his mouth and shouted: “Ahoy, there! Is this the *Gadabout*?”

He repeated his hail several times, but as no answering shout was heard, he again hailed the invisible motor-boat.

Still no response was given to his call.

“Maybe we had better shout together. Two can make more noise than one,” suggested Fred, rising from his seat as he spoke. “Now, then,” he added, “when I say three, let’s yell together.”

But though the boys united a half-dozen times in their shouts, the silence of the night was still unbroken and no signs of the presence of the *Gadabout* were seen.

CHAPTER XII

THE SEARCH IN THE NIGHT

“This is becoming pretty serious,” said Fred in a low voice when both he and John were convinced that they were not near the missing *Gadabout*.

“You went too far to the right,” retorted John. “I thought you were going in the wrong direction.”

“Well, why didn’t you say so, then?”

“If I had, I would have been told my advice was good when it was asked for.”

“Never mind, Jack,” said Fred, his friendliness returning and manifesting itself in the tones of his voice. “Things aren’t so bad, and they might be a good deal worse. I guess the *Gadabout* is off yonder,” he added, pointing to the East as he spoke. “I’ll row a while in that direction and we’ll try it again.”

Seating himself at the oars Fred pulled in the direction he had suggested. When several minutes had elapsed, once more he ceased rowing and both boys united in a hail. Still there was no response made to their calls and the spirits of the boys drooped accordingly.

“I tell you this is getting serious,” said Fred.

“Are you afraid?” demanded John.

“Some, and I don’t mind saying so. We never ought to have left the *Gadabout*.”

“That may all be true,” responded John, “but we did leave the *Gadabout* and we are here on the lake. The only thing for us to do is to go ahead.”

“That’s all right,” said Fred more cheerfully. “I haven’t forgotten our name, but I’m wondering whether we really are going ahead or not.”

“What do you mean?”

“Why, we may be rowing around in a circle, the way a man travels when he is lost in a woods.”

“I guess it is not quite as bad as that,” responded John. “Want me to take the oars?”

“Not yet,” said Fred sturdily, once more seating himself and resuming his task.

A half-dozen times the boys rowed ahead and then stopping, united in a call to their friends.

Their call, however, was unanswered and at last both boys were convinced that they had lost the location of the motor-boat.

“There isn’t anything for us to do except to wait until morning,” said Fred at last.

“Yes, there is, too,” said John. “You let me take those oars. I’m not going to stay here. I’m sure we’ll find the *Gadabout* or something just as good.”

“That doesn’t trouble me as much as somebody finding us.”

“What do you mean?”

“Why, suppose some boat runs us down in the dark?”

“We can hear a boat two miles away.”

“If we are awake,” suggested Fred.

“We’ll be awake all right, at least I shall, for I’m going to keep rowing.”

“That wouldn’t be my plan,” said Fred, nevertheless relinquishing his position to his friend. “I think we are just as well off to wait where we are and when the sun

risers we'll know better what to do.”

“I’m not much for waiting,” said John. “I’m going to see if I can’t find that boat.”

Several times John ceased rowing and the boys united in calls and shouts and finally joined in a shrill whistle.

Their efforts, however, were still unavailing and the conviction steadily deepened in their minds that they were lost on Lake Huron.

“If we stay where we are,” suggested Fred at last, “we can get back to Mackinac Island in the morning.”

“In which direction do you think Mackinac Island is?” demanded John.

“It’s off yonder,” said Fred, pointing to his right.

“You’re dead wrong, Fred. It’s right off here,” affirmed John, pointing as he spoke in the direction opposite to that which Fred had selected.

“You’ll have to go around the world,” declared Fred, “before you get to Mackinac Island, if you follow the direction you suggest.”

“Maybe we will, but I have got these oars and I’m going to try it,” declared John.

Fred laughed derisively and did not make any offer to relieve his friend.

John, however, apparently was determined to follow his plan and for a long time rowed steadily forward.

At last Fred broke in upon the silence, saying, “I tell you, John, you’re simply taking us farther away from Mackinac Island all the time. Can’t you see that you are?”

“I can’t see much of anything,” replied John, disconsolately. “I guess maybe I am wrong after all.”

“Of course you’re wrong.”

“But that doesn’t mean that you’re right,” retorted John. “If we go in the direction you suggest we may be as far as ever from the *Gadabout*.”

“Not at all,” said Fred confidently. “You let me take those oars and you’ll soon see for yourself that I am right.”

The exchange of places was made, but after Fred had rowed for an hour or more his confidence also began to wane. “I’m not as sure as I was,” he said.

“Well, I’m just sure of one thing,” responded John.

“What’s that?”

“That we are lost and that neither one of us knows where he is. And what’s more,” he added, “the only thing for us to do is to stay right where we are and wait until the sun rises.”

“How long will that be?”

“I haven’t any idea. I haven’t any matches and I can’t see the face of my watch. If I can judge by my feelings it ought to be about the week after next. It seems to me we have been out here forever.”

Fred did not respond, however, and for a time the boat drifted on in silence.

“What’s that ahead?” demanded John, abruptly pointing as he spoke toward the bow.

Instantly both boys were peering eagerly in the direction indicated by John, and, after a brief silence, Fred said, “That’s land ahead.”

“That’s what I think,” said John. “What do you suppose it is? Do you think it is Mackinac Island?”

“More likely it is Paris, France,” retorted Fred scornfully. “You don’t suppose we’re anywhere near Mackinac Island, do you?”

“I don’t know. I know I wish we were.”

“So do I, but we’re not. Now what shall we do? Shall we go ashore, or shall we

keep out here on the lake?”

“We had better go ashore,” said John. “At least we can row in near enough to see what it’s like, anyway.”

Fred required no urging as he renewed his labors and not many minutes had passed before both boys were convinced that they were steadily drawing nearer to land. Whether it was the mainland or an island they were unable to determine at the time.

“It’s all marsh along here,” declared John at last when the boat was not many yards distant from the shore. “I can see the rushes.”

“That’s right, Jack,” acknowledged Fred a moment later after he too had peered intently at the nearby shore. “What shall we do?”

“Why, keep on, and we’ll watch for lights too.”

“You won’t see any lights this time of night,” retorted Fred. “If there is anybody willing to live in this forlorn spot he’s probably in bed four or five hours ago.”

“Well, go ahead anyway,” said John.

Accordingly Fred again grasped the oars and slowly rowed forward. For a long distance they were unable to discern anything but the marsh on their right. There was no place seen where they might make a landing nor was an attempt considered worth while.

“I don’t see any use in this,” said Fred at last. “We aren’t getting anywhere.”

“Try a little longer,” said John. “Maybe we’ll come to something different. There you have it!” he added a few minutes later when apparently they came to the end of the marsh and saw before them the dim outlines of a sloping bank. “We can land here, I guess.”

“Land!” retorted Fred. “What do you want to land for?”

“Why, maybe we can find a house or some place where we can get some gasoline.”

“Gasoline will be a fine thing for us,” laughed Fred, his courage having returned with the knowledge that they were no longer on the open waters of the lake. “You’d better take the oars, Jack, and we’ll row on a little further. Even if we can see no light perhaps we can find a house.”

Once more the boys exchanged places and John rowed slowly along the shore.

Neither of the boys discovered any house, however, nor did they see any indications that the region was inhabited.

“We’re having a fine time here,” Fred said at last. “There doesn’t seem to be anybody living here. We haven’t anything to eat and we haven’t even a gun or a fishing-rod in our skiff.”

“We shan’t need any of them,” said John, “when the sun rises. We’ll be sure to find somebody who will take us back to Mackinac Island, or maybe the *Gadabout* will be looking for us.”

“My namesake acted as if he liked to spend a good deal of time searching for us,” said Fred scornfully. “I tell you, Jack, he has other business on hand.”

“Maybe we can take him back to the insane asylum and claim the reward,” suggested John.

“Or to state prison.”

“Yes, or he may be something else.”

“What do you mean?”

“It doesn’t make any difference what I mean. I have my own ideas and I’m not going to cast any pearls before swine. What I’m going to do now is to go ashore. The sun will be up in a half an hour. It’s beginning to be light in the east now.”

“You’re right, John,” acknowledged Fred. “It surely is getting light over yonder. I don’t know what you’re going to gain by landing, but I’m willing to try it, if you want to. Be careful that you don’t strike a rock.”

Hardly had Fred spoken before there was a dull thud and a moment later it was evident that the frail little skiff had struck the jagged point of a hidden rock.

CHAPTER XIII

A FRESH ARRIVAL

Water at once began to pour into the skiff but the boys were so near the land that neither was greatly alarmed. By a few vigorous strokes the little boat was quickly sent ashore. Leaping out upon the dry land both Fred and John seized the gunwale and together brought the skiff far up from the water.

“That’s a pretty kettle of fish,” said Fred. “Just look at it! There is a big leak. You must have stove a hole in the bottom.”

“Turn it over and let’s see,” suggested John.

In a moment the boat was overturned and the fears of the boys were confirmed when they discovered that the blow against the jagged rock, although it had not torn a hole in the bottom of the skiff, had nevertheless sprung it in such a manner that it was leaking badly.

“How are we ever going to get back to Mackinac Island?” said Fred.

“I guess we won’t have to go in this boat,” answered John. “Just now, the thing for us to do is to look around here and find out whether we are really Robinson Crusoes or there are some people living here who can give us some breakfast.”

“That’s all right,” said Fred, more cheerfully at the mention of the possibility of a morning meal. “You run up the shore in one direction and I will go down the other way. We’ll come back in about five or ten minutes and we’ll report.”

Fred’s suggestion was agreed to by his friend and the boys at once started along

the banks which were only a few yards back from the shore.

More than the allotted time had passed when the two boys returned. Neither had been able to discover any tokens of the presence of people dwelling or camping on the island.

“It looks pretty dark,” said Fred more disconsolately.

“It’s easy to go back,” said John solemnly, “but it takes some nerve and grit to go ahead. I never yet knew a boat that drifted up the stream. If you leave it alone and don’t do anything it will go down stream every time.”

“You speak like a philosopher, as I told you,” said Fred. “I wonder sometimes how one small head can carry all you know.”

“And that’s not original either, I have heard that before. What’s that yonder?” he suddenly added.

At the question both boys turned and looked out over the waters of the lake. In the distance a tiny speck could be seen, but it was plainly moving toward the place where they were standing. The sun had risen by this time and the quiet waters of the lake were flooded with its beams.

“It’s a a motor-boat,” declared John after a brief silence.

“You’re right once in your life, Jack,” acknowledged Fred. “That’s just what it is and it’s coming straight toward the place where we are.”

“So you had all your crying for nothing. It doesn’t pay to give up when there’s still any chance to go ahead.”

“We’ll wait and see. Perhaps we’ll know more an hour from now than we do just at this minute.”

Eagerly the boys watched the coming of the motor-boat. It steadily became more distinct and not many minutes had elapsed before both boys were convinced that the little boat was nearly of the size of the *Gadabout*. Then they were able to distinguish two men on board, one at the wheel and one seated in the stern.

“I thought at first it might be the *Gadabout*,” said Fred in a low voice.

“So did I,” joined in John. “I can see now that it isn’t.”

“So can I. What do you suppose it is?”

“I haven’t the remotest idea. If we wait long enough we’ll find out.”

“What do you suppose that boat is coming here for?” inquired Fred.

“That’s another thing you’ll have to wait to find out. You’re a great lad. You make me think of what the headmaster said the other day.”

“What did he say?” inquired Fred. “He often makes remarks to you that I don’t hear, and some of them I am very glad I don’t.”

“That’s all right, too,” said John. “What he told us the other day was that children and savages are the people that are the most likely to give way to their feelings. They laugh and cry when strong people keep quiet.”

“What do you mean by that?” demanded Fred sharply.

“I don’t mean anything. I’m just telling you what the headmaster said.”

“They are going to land right in here,” said Fred abruptly, as the motor-boat slightly changed its course and apparently was approaching the very place where the boys had made their unfortunate landing.

“Let’s go farther back,” suggested John. “Maybe it is some more of this strange business. It won’t do any harm if they don’t see us and I don’t believe they have yet because they wouldn’t be looking for anybody where we are.”

“Come ahead,” suggested Fred, quickly acting upon the advice of his companion.

Drawing farther back and yet still remaining in a position from which they were able to see the approaching boat, the boys were confident that they would not be seen. Both excitedly were watching the coming boat.

In a brief time the power was shut off and the anchor was cast overboard. Then in a small skiff, which the motor-boat had in tow, the man who had been at the wheel quickly rowed toward the shore.

“Do you see who that is?” whispered Fred in great excitement.

“I do,” replied John quickly. “It is that man that we saw on Cockburn Island. It is the same one that came over to Mackinac. What do you suppose he’s coming here for?”

“You know just as much about it as I do. If we keep still we may be able to learn more in a little while.”

The excitement of the watching boys did not decrease when they saw the man, who now they were convinced was indeed their recent reluctant host on Cockburn Island, step quickly ashore and then draw his boat up on the beach.

Apparently the presence of the other skiff had not yet been noted. Indeed, the boys were quite confident it had not been discovered, as the place where they had landed was around a little bend in a small cove.

The actions of the man, however, soon became more mysterious and puzzling. Out of his pocket he took a small package and seating himself upon a rock he proceeded to open it.

There were occasional flashes of light that were reflected in the eyes of the boys, although neither were able to discover the contents.

After carefully refolding the package the man restored it to his pocket and then advancing toward the higher bank stopped for a moment there and peered intently all about him.

Apparently satisfied that he was unobserved the mysterious stranger then advanced rapidly toward some woods in the distance. He had, however, gone only a part of the intervening distance when another man was seen approaching from the midst of the trees and in a brief time the two men met.

There was a hasty consultation which greatly interested the boys, although they were unable to discover its purpose. They were convinced, however, or at least Fred was positive, that there had been an exchange of packages made by the two men and then instead of returning to the shore the man whom they had been watching advanced beside the stranger and soon both were lost to sight within the borders of the woods.

Meanwhile the motor-boat had been left in charge of the man who had come to the island with the mysterious visitor.

Neither of the boys had obtained a clear look at him until Fred suggested, "What's the use? We're making a mountain out of a molehill. Come on, let's go and speak to the man on board the motor-boat."

John hesitated a moment and then quickly followed his friend, as they advanced openly along the shore.

"Do you see who that is?" whispered Fred, clutching John by the arm.

"Yes, I do," answered John. "It's that little Jap that we saw on Cockburn Island."

"That's exactly who it is. What do you suppose he's doing here?"

"He's not doing much of anything just now. I should guess that he is in charge of the boat until his boss comes back. I'm going to hail him."

In response to John's hail the little Japanese quickly turned and glanced in the direction from which the unexpected call had come.

"He doesn't understand English, don't you remember?" said Fred.

"I know he pretended that he didn't, but we'll see how much he knows now. Got anything to eat on board?" called John, turning once more toward the motor-boat.

The first feeling of alarm or surprise had passed and the little manservant now broke into another of his loud and unmusical laughs.

"Got any breakfast? Got anything on board to eat?" again called John.

It was plain now that the Japanese understood what was said, for in broken English he explained that he had some articles of food on the motor-boat.

"I wonder if you'll sell us some?" inquired Fred eagerly. "We'll come aboard and see what you have got."

Quickly taking the stranger's skiff the boys rowed out to the motor-boat and

after they had made it fast, stepped on board.

The Japanese seldom spoke, but in a brief time he handed each of the boys two sandwiches, which they eagerly took and quickly ate.

“How much do we owe you?” asked John.

Again laughing loudly the Japanese shook his head and it was manifest that they would be unable to pay for the slight repast they had received.

“When did you come from Cockburn Island?” inquired Fred.

The question was not answered and John quickly broke in, “When are you going back? That’s a good deal more to the purpose. Do you suppose your boss would be willing to take us over to Mackinac?”

The Japanese laughed, but still did not answer.

“We’ll pay him well for it,” said John. “How far is this place from Mackinac anyway?”

“’Bout forty mile,” answered the Japanese.

“Whew!” said Fred. “We’re a good ways out of our course, aren’t we?”

CHAPTER XIV

ANOTHER MYSTERIOUS LETTER

“I don’t care much how far we are away if we can only get back,” said John thoughtfully.

It was apparent, however, that extended conversation with the little Japanese would be impossible. He had made no inquiries as to why the boys were on the island and except for his first expression of surprise when he had heard their hail, he did not give any sign of special interest either in them or in their doings.

“We stove a hole in the bottom of our skiff,” explained John. “Have you got a piece of tin and some tacks or something we can mend it with?”

“You no feex it?” inquired the Japanese.

“We haven’t anything to fix it with,” explained John.

“I go see,” volunteered the little man.

In accordance with his suggestion the boys speedily rowed ashore, the little Japanese accompanying them, and led the way to the cove where their skiff was resting on the beach.

The Japanese made a careful investigation of the injury to the skiff and then said, after he had once more laughed loudly, “I feex her.” Quickly turning he ran back to the skiff and returned to the motor-boat. Only a few minutes elapsed before once more he came back and the very implements John had sought with which to repair the boat were now in his hands.

Deftly he drove caulking into the seams and the cracks and then taking a piece of tin tacked it on the bottom of the skiff over the spot where the break had occurred. Then once more he used the caulking, driving it in all about the place where the skiff had been struck.

“He no sink now,” said the Japanese, at last standing back and with pride viewing his workmanship. “He no sink now. She just as good as new.”

Declining the offer of the boys to pay him for his labor the Japanese seated himself upon a rock and looked steadily at them.

“What for have you come here?” he inquired.

“We had bad luck last evening,” explained John. “We started from Cockburn Island in the *Gadabout* but we got out of our course. Then the first thing we knew our gasoline was gone and we had an accident in the shaft or the blades of the propeller. We thought that we might be able to get some help, so two of us left the boat and started ashore in our skiff. But we lost our way and that’s why we’re here and not where we want to be.”

“Where other man?” inquired the Japanese.

“What other man? Do you mean Mr. Ferdinand Button?”

“Yah. Where Mr. Button now?”

“That’s the very question that we would like to have you answer for us,” said Fred. “We don’t know whether the *Gadabout* is lost somewhere or the other fellows think we are lost and have gone back to Mackinac. That’s why we want to go back there ourselves and we’ll pay well if you’ll take us there on board your boat.”

This time the Japanese did not laugh, but there was a peculiar expression that appeared for an instant in his eyes and that alarmed John, although Fred had not seen that which so greatly troubled his companion.

“When are you going back?” demanded John.

“Two hour.”

“Have you got anything more to eat on board your boat?”

Once more the strange laughter was heard but the Japanese did not reply to the question.

“It will be two hours before they start, the Jap says,” said Fred, turning to John as he spoke.

“Well, there isn’t anything to do except to wait for the time to come, is there?”

“I don’t know what to do.”

“I do,” observed John. “We’ll wait until that man comes back here and then we’ll tell him of our troubles and I’m sure he will take us on board. If he won’t take us to Mackinac at least he will take us back to his house.”

“Maybe he will,” responded Fred somewhat dubiously.

“Here he comes, anyway,” said John quickly, as glancing toward the woods he discovered the man approaching, who was the subject of their conversation.

The boys waited until the man drew near and when he discovered their presence his remarks were not complimentary to either of his would-be passengers.

“No, sir, I cannot take either one of you,” he said positively. “I have something else to do. In fact I have got to do it. I cannot go to Mackinac to-day under any circumstances. But what are you two boys doing here? You haven’t explained that yet.”

“We don’t know,” said John, “just why we’re here. About all that we know is that we are here and we want to get away.”

“How do you propose to leave?”

“We want you to take us on your motor-boat.”

“And I have already explained to you,” said the stranger, “why I cannot do that.”

“We’ll pay you well for it,” suggested Fred.

“It isn’t a question of pay,” said the man. “It’s simply a question of my not being

able to do what you want.”

“But how are we going to get away from this place? Is this the mainland?”

“No, it’s an island. It is commonly called Western Duck Island.”

“Which means that there are other duck islands farther to the east and that we’re not on the mainland shore at all?” said Fred.

“Oh, no. You are several miles from shore. About all the island is good for is for hunting. A little later you might find a good many ducks here.”

“But we don’t want to be here until ‘a little later,’” protested Fred. “We want to leave right away.”

“Then I don’t see anything for you to do except to try to cross in your skiff.”

“Your Jap says it’s about forty miles from here to Mackinac.”

“If he says so then he probably is correct. I haven’t known Mike to be wrong many times.”

“We cannot sail back in our skiff,” explained John.

“Then I don’t see anything for you to do except to stay here and wait until you hail some boat that is passing.”

“How long will that be?” inquired Fred.

“Not knowing, I cannot say. But on a day like this, which promises to be very clear and pleasant, there ought to be a good many boats passing.”

“I hope we’ll have better luck with them than we had with you,” said John.

“So do I,” responded the man, “and with all my heart. All I can say is this, that if you don’t get any one to take you away before six o’clock this afternoon I will stop here on my way back and take you aboard.”

“How are we going to get anything to eat?” asked John.

“I’m sure I don’t know,” said the man. “I will tell Mike to give you some

sandwiches.”

“He has done that already,” said John. “Isn’t there some place where we can get something to eat?”

“I don’t know of any.”

“We thought perhaps that man you met out here might be living here and he or his wife would be willing to sell us some food.”

“What man are you talking about?” demanded the stranger, quickly turning to the boys as he spoke.

“Why, the one that met you out here between the shore and the woods yonder,” explained John.

“Did you see any one?”

“We certainly did,” said John. “We saw you meet a man out here and hand him something.”

Fred was convinced that there was a momentary gleam of anger or alarm in the expression of the stranger’s face, but if so the feeling quickly departed. In a low voice the man said, “There are some great stories told about this island. My advice to you is not to stay any longer than you are compelled to.”

“And our feeling is,” laughed Fred somewhat ruefully, “that any time we spend here is wasted.”

“I think you’ll have to stay,” said the man as he went back and stepped on board his skiff. He then pushed out from the shore and speedily resumed his place on board the motor-boat.

The anchor was hauled in and in a brief time the fleet little craft had resumed its voyage, headed now for the southern point of Western Duck Island.

“That beats anything I have ever seen. I tell you, Fred, there’s something wrong here. Don’t you think we had better go back in the woods and see if we cannot find that man who came out of there a little while ago?”

“We might as well do that as anything,” assented Fred, and quickly climbing the bank once more, they started across the field which intervened between them and the woods. As nearly as possible they were following the path taken by the others some time before.

They had not gone far, however, before John suddenly stopped and picked up an envelope which he saw lying on the ground.

“Of all things in the world!” he exclaimed. “What do you think of this?”

Handing the envelope to Fred he called his attention to the name typewritten on the outside: “Mr. Button.”

“That’s for you, Fred,” laughed John.

“If it is,” said Fred, “then somebody had the pleasure of reading my letter before I did.”

“The envelope has been opened,” suggested John; “suppose you read the letter. It may be for you. Very likely some of the people here heard you were coming and they are getting ready to welcome us. This is the royal proclamation for you. That man told us we’re on an island and if we are I guess Robinson Crusoe didn’t have very much on us.”

Fred meanwhile was reading the letter and it was manifest from his expression that he was startled or puzzled by what he read. At last he handed the letter to John, simply saying, “Our patriotic and mysterious friend has made another mistake. This letter is not for me but for Mr. Ferdinand Button.”

“What do you suppose it is doing here?”

“I don’t know,” replied Fred, “unless the man dropped it.”

“But he’s not Mr. Ferdinand Button,” protested John.

“No more he isn’t,” acknowledged Fred, “but that isn’t the only strange thing about it. Read the letter, John, anyway.”

Thus bidden, John read the following letter,—

Dear Sir:

I enclose you an envelope with my address. Send my your answer as soon as you possible this afternoon. I will get it in Macinac tonight or tomorrow morning and will immediately come to see you.

To deliver you this gang which rob United States of thousands of dollars each year. I only want two things. 1st. My ticket to Montreal and back. 2nd. My passage to Europe by way of the Azores Isles. I do not want money. You will pay me *when the gang is in your hands*. You will get it this afternoonday. Do not fail to send me your answer quick. If you do so I will have the gang in your lands in 2 weeks. They are 2 men and 1 woman and they smuggle by ways you are not at all suspicious.

Truly yours,

“Mr. Button certainly has a good many friends and they are trying to keep him well informed. What do you make of this anyway, Fred?”

“I don’t make much of anything,” said Fred thoughtfully. “What’s the use of going any farther? Let’s go back and take our skiff and see if we can’t get somewhere. The lake is smooth this morning and we may be able to get back as far as Drummond or Cockburn Island.”

When the boys returned to the shore the motor-boat had disappeared from sight. This strange disappearance, however, was not so confusing to the boys as the discovery they speedily made concerning the skiff which they themselves had left on the shore of the cove.

CHAPTER XV

A SIGNAL OF DISTRESS

“Where did that sail come from?” demanded John, as he stopped abruptly and looked in astonishment at the little skiff. Thrown carelessly across it was a sail and small mast.

“Where did they come from?” he repeated.

“I didn’t put them there,” replied Fred.

“Who did then?”

“I don’t know any more about it than you do.”

“Well, somebody has been good to us and tried to help us get away from this deserted island. What did that man say the name of it is?”

“Western Duck Island. There are a half-dozen of these islands, I remember now.”

“I shan’t feel very badly if I never see nor hear of them again.”

“We’re all right now. We have a sail.”

“Perhaps we are, though I haven’t forgotten that that little Jap said we are forty miles from Mackinac.”

“What is forty miles to fellows who have got a boat and a sail?”

While the two boys were talking they had adjusted the mast and rigged the little

leg-of-mutton sail. It was plain to both boys that if conditions continued favorable they had found an easier way by which they could return to their hotel than by trying to row.

“Come on,” called Fred cheerily, his courage now having returned in full measure. “Come on. Don’t let’s stay here any longer than we have to.”

“I’m with you,” responded John. “Now who’s going to sail this boat first?”

“You are, by unanimous consent; I think it will be safer for the crew to have you sitting in the stern than it will be to have you crawling around the bow.”

The mystery of the sail had not been explained, but whoever had left it plainly had intended that it should be used.

The wind was light but the little skiff drew rapidly away from the shore of Western Duck Island, and as he glanced behind him Fred said, “I feel almost as Columbus must have felt when he set forth in his three tubs to find a new world.”

“I never knew that Columbus sailed in three boats before,” laughed John.

“I didn’t mean that Columbus himself sailed in three boats, at least at the same time. I used his name as the name of his whole party. I forgot for the minute what kind of material I was dealing with.”

“Never you mind that,” retorted John. “You just watch me while I sail this boat. I’m going to head her up the shore toward Drummond Island. If we can make that I think we’ll be all right for the rest of the way.”

“And if we don’t make it what are you going to do?” said Fred more seriously.

“It’ll be time enough for me to explain to you, my friend, when the occasion arrives. Meanwhile just see how smoothly we are speeding on our way.”

“You’re almost a poet,” laughed Fred, “and there isn’t wind enough to lift a feather. I think I’ll take the oars and row.”

John offered no objection and Fred accordingly seated himself and began to row.

The day was warm and the beams of the sun, which now was high in the eastern sky, were strongly reflected from the smooth waters of Lake Huron. Indeed, it was not long before the wind died away and the boys were nearly becalmed.

“We’re almost as idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean, aren’t we, Jack?” demanded Fred.

“No, we are not,” said John. “Not at all, thank you. We’re not idle and we’re not going to be. I’m going to have my crew keep on rowing.”

“I hope you’ll set a good example.”

“That’s just what I intend to do,” said John. “You change places with me and I’ll show you how the thing ought to be done.”

Without expressing the thought in his mind each boy was keeping a sharp outlook over the waters for the swift little *Gadabout*. Both somehow were expecting that the motor-boat either had not departed from the region or would surely return when morning came.

An hour or more had elapsed, however, and no trace of the *Gadabout* had been discovered. Far away over the waters the faint trace of smoke left by the passing lake steamers could be seen.

“This is a great job we have been thrown into, isn’t it, Jack?” demanded Fred at last.

“Yes, I think it is,” acknowledged John. “That letter of yours seems to make it worse, though. For the life of me I cannot understand how it came to Western Duck Island.”

“Maybe that man dropped it,” suggested Fred.

“Do you mean the smuggler?”

“I guess that’s what he is all right. I don’t know what his name is yet, but I mean the man that has a house over there on Cockburn Island.”

“That’s the man I mean,” said John. “I think he’s a smuggler. He may be, but the thing that puzzles me most is how he got your letter, if he was the one that

dropped it over here on Western Duck Island.”

“Yes, that’s hard to explain,” assented Fred, “but I guess if we knew more about it we wouldn’t find it quite so hard.”

“What do you mean? Do you think that man wrote the letter?”

“No, I don’t.”

“Well, then what do you mean?”

“I guess I don’t mean very much of anything. Fred, do you see how this boat is leaking?”

Startled by the abrupt question, Fred glanced quickly at the spot in the bottom of the boat which the little Japanese had repaired. The water certainly was coming into the boat.

“What do you think, Jack?” demanded Fred quickly. “Shall we try to go back?”

“Is that the direction in which we usually go?” retorted John.

“I would rather go back than go down.”

“But I would rather go ahead than either.”

“But the boat is certainly leaking. We have seen one storm on the lake and we don’t want to be caught in another, especially with a leaking old tub like this.”

“There isn’t any storm and we aren’t caught yet. Besides, I feel a little puff of wind,” John added, as he turned his face in the direction from which the wind appeared to be coming.

John had been rowing for a half-hour or longer, and perspiration was streaming down his face. Close to the water the air was cool, but as there was no breeze it was well-nigh impossible for any one working as hard as John had been to cool himself quickly.

“There’s a little puff,” he added, and once more the sail was hoisted and for a little while the skiff moved steadily forward.

“John,” suggested Fred a little later, “I think the best thing for us to do is to try to get in the course of those lake boats. We can’t see the shore of Duck Island any longer and if we go far enough over to the west and our skiff sinks, it may be that some one of those boats will pick us up.”

Whether or not it was the swifter action of the skiff the leak steadily was becoming more apparent. Indeed, after a brief time Fred said, “Is there anything on board we can use to bail this boat?”

“I haven’t seen anything,” answered John, and a hasty search quickly revealed the fact that there was no implement on board which could be used in the manner indicated by Fred.

The latter, however, taking his cap did his utmost to dip out the water, which was steadily increasing in the bottom of the skiff, into the lake. His efforts were unavailing, however, and in a brief time the boy, now thoroughly alarmed, arose and said, “I tell you, Jack, this boat isn’t going to stay afloat very long.”

John made no reply, but as he turned to look behind him Fred also glanced in that direction, but the island from which they had departed had long since disappeared from sight.

Far away in the west occasional trails of smoke could be seen, although both boys were aware that doubtless such indications of the passing of the steamers came within their vision long after the vessels themselves had disappeared from the region.

It was speedily becoming manifest that the boys would be compelled to struggle desperately in order to keep their sinking craft afloat. They both clearly understood that they were Go Ahead Boys and were not to give up easily, but the water was entering faster now and the peril consequently became more threatening with every passing moment.

Almost in despair John looked toward the low lying streak of dark cloud in the west which he clearly understood indicated the course of a passing lake-boat. The mast meanwhile had been taken down and no attempt was made to sail.

“Let’s throw that thing overboard,” suggested Fred in a voice sounding strangely, even in his own ears.

“What thing?”

“Why, the mast and sail.”

“Cut the sail and throw it overboard,” ordered John, “but save the mast as long as you can.”

“What for?” demanded Fred.

“Hand me your handkerchief and I’ll show you,” answered John. Speedily tying his own handkerchief to Fred’s he then fastened both to the top of the mast. “Somebody may see our signal of distress,” he explained.

“Pull, Fred! Pull for all you’re worth!” he hastily added. “We’ve got to get nearer the boats if we ever make shore.”

While Fred rowed, John was doing his utmost to bail the boat. He was using his hands and his cap, but even with his utmost endeavors the depth of the water in the slowly moving skiff did not decrease. Both boys were toiling desperately now. Their faces were red and streaked with perspiration. There was no evading the fact, however, that in spite of all their efforts their progress still was slow and the peril of sinking was steadily increasing.

At the mast-head floated the signal of distress. Neither of the boys was speaking now and the silence that rested on the great stretch of waters was unbroken.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SINKING SKIFF

“We shan’t be able to stay on board much longer,” said Fred in a low voice.

John made no reply, but his colorless face was clearly seen by his companion, who was fully aware of the anxiety in the heart of his friend.

Steadily the little boat was sinking into the waters of Lake Huron. The boys now were wet to their waists and it was manifest that they would not much longer be able to remain in the little skiff.

“Maybe she won’t sink,” called Fred. “Perhaps we can keep afloat if we hang to her after she settles down.”

Still John made no response. Not very long before he had been the one to try to cheer his companion. He it was who had declared that they had never learned to go backward and that they must be Go Ahead Boys to the end.

“There’s no use, Jack,” called Fred. “We can’t stay here any longer. Get your shoes off, if you can.”

With difficulty each boy removed his shoes and unmindful of his sweater and their other belongings prepared to leap into the lake.

“You take the bow, Jack, and I’ll hang to the stern,” called Fred. “If we each put only one hand on the boat, she may stay afloat long enough to keep us from sinking. Don’t lose your head. Just remember that we aren’t through this fight yet.”

Both boys were expert swimmers, although their skill now was of slight avail. It was impossible for them to see the shore of the island from which they had departed and only the low-lying trails of dark smoke indicated what might be on the water far to the west.

Together the boys leaped into the water. The boat partly righted itself when it was relieved of its burden, but it was so full of water that only a few inches below the gunwale appeared above the surface.

“Come on, Jack,” called Fred as the boys arose to the surface, “let’s turn this tub over so that it will be bottom upward. Maybe it will stay afloat then.”

Fred was peering anxiously at his friend, fearful that his courage had gone and that he would be compelled to exert himself to his utmost in order to force John to any action.

Whether or not it was the effect of the cool water, John’s courage apparently had returned. At all events in response to the call of his friend he swam quickly toward the boat. Acting upon the directions of Fred he placed one hand on the bow while Fred seized the stern.

“Now turn her over,” called Fred and under the united action of the boys the leaking boat speedily reversed its position and lay upon the water, keel upward.

“We can keep afloat here all day,” said Fred, speaking with a confidence he was far from feeling. “We’ll have to be careful, but if we rest only one hand on the boat that will keep us afloat and I don’t believe she’ll sink.”

Both were aware now of the desperate plight in which they found themselves. There were no indications of help within sight and each understood that unless help came before sunset they were likely to become so chilled by their long stay in the cool waters that they would be unable longer to retain their hold. Before the mind of Fred there came a momentary vision of his far away home. For an instant he fancied he could imagine the scene when the report was received there of the loss of their boy. “Jack,” he called, his voice breaking in spite of his efforts at self-control, “if anything happens to either of us it is understood, isn’t it, that the other fellow will send word?”

It was John’s turn now to manifest a strong determination and facing his friend he said, “Don’t give up the ship yet! We have most of the day before us and

something will happen.”

“I wish we could get that mast over yonder and rig it on the bottom of the skiff. Perhaps some one might see that when they couldn’t see us. We are so close to the water.”

“That’s a good suggestion,” said John. “We’re going ahead yet.”

Quickly releasing his grasp John swam toward the floating mast, which had been lost when the skiff was overturned.

He easily secured it and swam back to the overturned skiff.

“Can you break a hole in the bottom, Jack?” asked Fred.

“I don’t know; I’ll try it,” responded John. Pounding upon the bottom of the skiff where it had been broken when the boat had struck the rock, he succeeded in making a hole big enough to enable him to thrust the mast into the place.

“Never mind the handkerchiefs,” called Fred; “they will dry out and will be floating in the breeze pretty soon. Now the main thing for us to do is simply to hang on and wait until somebody sees that signal of distress.”

The moments passed slowly and to both boys there came an increasing fear that their plight was not likely to attract the attention of passing boats. Indeed, apparently there were no boats passing nearby. The low clouds of smoke in the distance were tantalizing in their effect upon the minds of the watching boys.

They had no means of estimating the passing of the time. Occasionally they glanced toward the sky into which the sun was steadily mounting, but they were neither in a condition to reflect calmly and so were unable to decide whether they had been in the water an hour or longer.

To their delight the skiff seemed to be easily able to hold them up in the water. Occasionally Fred let go his hold and swam about in the water to ‘start his circulation once more.’ Both were becoming chilled, although it was not yet midday.

At last the sun reached the zenith and slowly began its descent. The boys now were silent, for conversation had ceased long before this time. Each was

watching the other, fearful that the strength of his friend was giving out. In such an event he was aware that he would be unable to render any positive assistance, as his own strength was steadily departing.

“Look yonder,” said Fred in a low voice when another hour had elapsed. As he spoke he glanced behind him and John quickly looked in the direction he indicated.

Not very far distant was a lake boat which apparently was passing far out of the usual course of the steamers.

“Do you suppose,” inquired Fred, “if we should shout together we might make them hear?”

“We can try it,” answered John.

Accordingly both boys united in a loud and prolonged call. For a time it seemed to both of them that their efforts were unavailing. The ungainly boat was so far away that it was well-nigh impossible for either to determine whether or not it had veered slightly in its course.

Convinced that their cry had not been heard both again lapsed into silence though each was still eagerly watching the movements of the distant vessel.

Several minutes had passed when John said eagerly, “Fred, I believe that boat is coming this way.”

For a moment Fred was silent as he peered still more eagerly at the lake boat. “I don’t see it,” he said disconsolately. “I cannot find that she’s any nearer than she was.”

“Well, I think it is,” affirmed John sturdily. “Hang on and we’ll see if she doesn’t come to us.”

John’s confident statement, however, was not fulfilled. As if it was unmindful of the peril or the presence of the two boys in their plight, the boat continued steadily on its way until it disappeared from sight.

Neither of the boys spoke, but their feeling of depression was steadily deepening.

“There’s a loaded boat coming from the other direction,” said John after another hour had elapsed. “That’s out of its course, too. Let’s try it again.”

As soon as Fred had looked eagerly in the direction indicated by John he saw another lake boat standing high in the water and evidently bound northward. It was plain that it was not loaded as heavily as the boat which had disappeared in the opposite direction and it also was moving much more rapidly.

“Let’s try another yell,” suggested John when at last the boat was on a line parallel with their own.

The call of the boys was hoarse and not so loud as the one in which they had united in their former effort.

After several attempts the boys waited breathlessly, while in an anxiety they could not express they watched the ungainly craft as it sped over the lake.

“John,” called Fred suddenly, “I believe that tub is changing its course and is coming in our direction.”

John made no response, but when a few moments had elapsed it was plain that for some reason the boat had veered in its course and swinging to the right was plainly coming nearer to the place where the boys were clinging to the skiff.

On and still on came the noisy steamer until the strokes of its blades in the water could be distinctly heard.

Several times the boys united in shouts, but at last it was plainly manifest that their signal of distress had been discovered and that the lake boat had turned to rescue the victims of the sinking skiff. [Not long afterward a yawl was lowered from the boat and two men took their places at the oars.](#) With strong and steady sweeps they drew near the boys and not many minutes afterward quickly dragged both on board the yawl.

The reaction had come to both John and Fred and neither was able to sit erect. Their teeth were chattering as if both were suffering from an ague. Indeed, neither boy was fully aware of the events which were occurring until at last they were somehow brought on board the lake boat. There were willing hands to assist them there and speedily they were taken below, where their wet clothing was removed and after a thorough rub-down by rough but friendly hands they

were placed in bunks and covered with blankets.

CHAPTER XVII

THE RESCUE OF THE GADABOUT

Meanwhile on the *Gadabout* George and Grant were having experiences that by no means added to their peace of mind.

For a time they had waited with such patience as they could command for the return of their friends. But when the minutes became hours and there still was no sign of the coming of Fred and John both boys began to be anxious.

The little *Gadabout* had been steadily drifting with the slowly moving current and in the dim light it was no longer possible to discern the outline of the shore which Fred and John had been seeking.

The feeling of uneasiness steadily increased.

“What do you suppose has happened to those boys?” inquired Grant of his friend.

“I don’t believe anything has happened to them,” replied George. “I think that’s just the trouble. They haven’t found the shore, or any one to help.”

“Well, then why don’t they come back?”

“I can’t tell you. You know as much about that as I do.”

“Well, I’m afraid they’re lost,” said Grant disconsolately.

“I don’t believe anything very serious can happen to them even if they have lost

their way,” said George, striving to speak with an assurance he did not fully share. “Even if they stay out there until morning,” he continued, “they wouldn’t have anything to be afraid of. And then they would be able to find somebody that would pick them up and take them back to Mackinac. Very likely we’ll find them there when we get back ourselves.”

“But suppose a storm comes up,” suggested Grant.

“Well, don’t begin to worry until the wind begins to blow,” said George testily. The fear of the same event was in his own mind, but he resented the suggestion of his companion.

“I think it is about time for us to be getting worried about ourselves,” said George at last, when the first faint streaks of the dawn were seen in the eastern sky. “Fred and John at least can be moving while we are here as helpless as a rat in a trap.”

“What do you make of him?” inquired Grant in a whisper, nodding toward Mr. Button as he spoke.

He was still seated near the wheel and had given but slight attention to his companions. Evidently he was anxious concerning something, though what it was that disturbed him was still not clear to his two young companions.

“What do you think, Mr. Button?” called George. “What’s become of the boys?”

“Huh! What’s that you say?” inquired Mr. Button, sitting quickly erect.

“What do you think has become of Jack and Fred?”

“I don’t know,” replied Mr. Button vaguely. “Where did they go?”

“Why, they left in the skiff,” explained Grant. “They have been gone three or four hours anyway.”

“Why don’t they come back?” inquired Mr. Button.

“That’s what we want to know. We’re afraid they are lost.”

“Well, they won’t be lost very long,” said Mr. Button. “Somebody will pick them

up and take them back to Mackinac Island. That isn't more than forty miles away anyhow."

"Well, we're afraid somebody may not find them," said Grant. "We don't see any boats anywhere around here."

As he spoke the boy stood erect and looked in all directions over the smooth waters of Lake Huron. As was the case with Fred and John the only indications of boats anywhere in the vicinity were the long low trails of smoke that could be seen far in the west.

"How are we going to get back, Mr. Button?" inquired George.

"I don't know," replied Mr. Button. "I think we'll have to wait for somebody to pick us up."

"But there isn't any boat anywhere around here," protested Grant.

"There may be before night," said Mr. Button quietly. "And besides we cannot do anything to call any one."

"We might try yelling together," suggested George.

Mr. Button smiled, but made no response.

"If we had some oars or a little sail we might do something," suggested Grant. "I'm going to look around and see if there isn't a sail on board anywhere."

His search was unrewarded, however, and at last when Grant returned it was agreed that their only hope was in being recognized by some passing vessel.

The anxiety of the two boys for the safety of their missing comrades was not relieved when later in the afternoon a lake boat changing its course approached the place where they were lying.

Evidently they had been discovered by the captain, who was still holding his glasses in his hand as the boat drew near.

"I found a megaphone under the seat," suggested Grant.

“Where is it? Go get it,” suggested George.

In a moment Grant was again on deck and handed the megaphone to Mr. Button.

“Ahoy, there!” he called. “Will you give us a tow?”

“Who are you?” came back the answer from the deck of the huge boat.

“There are three of us and our motor-boat broke down last night.”

“How long have you been here?”

“Why, since midnight anyway. You are the first boat that has come anywhere near us.”

“And it’s just by luck that we saw you. What will you do, come aboard?”

“No,” answered Mr. Button, “if you’ll give us a line we would rather have you tow us. Are you going anywhere near Mackinac Island?”

“Yes,” answered the captain. “We’re bound straight for there. I don’t know that we shall stop, but we’ll fix it so that you can get ashore if you want to.”

“That will do splendidly,” called Mr. Button.

In a brief time the two boats were near enough to enable a sailor to cast a rope to the *Gadabout*. After one or two attempts this was successfully seized and then made fast. As the lake boat swung around to resume its course, the *Gadabout*, one hundred feet or more astern, followed.

“I hate to go back and leave the other fellows out here,” said George when they began to move swiftly over the waters.

“You don’t need to worry about them,” said Mr. Button. “If we could see them anywhere that would be one thing, but they have disappeared from sight. They have a good skiff and I think I heard you say that they both were Go Ahead Boys. If they are, they will get out of their trouble all right.”

“I’m sure I hope so,” said George dubiously.

The conversation, however, ceased, and for a time all three were silent. The clear

waters of Lake Huron bubbled and seethed as they were cut by the bow of the swift little motor-boat.

The huge lake boat evidently was not carrying a load and its speed accordingly was unhampered. Doubtless the giant boat was returning to Duluth for another cargo of wheat or iron.

The progress was uninterrupted so that by the middle of the afternoon the high, rocky shores of Mackinac Island became visible in the distance.

At that moment the captain appeared at the stern of the lake boat and raising his megaphone to his mouth, called, "Do you want us to land you?"

"No," replied Mr. Button also speaking through a megaphone, "we'll find somebody that will take us in. If you're not going to land there you needn't stop on our account. How much do we owe you?"

"You don't owe us anything," called the captain. "We're glad to lend a hand. Whenever you say the word you can cast off and we'll haul in."

A half-hour later Mr. Button announced through his megaphone that the time had arrived when there was no longer need for them to be towed. They could plainly see the yachts in the harbor and the people moving along the streets. To enter the harbor would compel the huge boat to change its course, an act which no one desired.

Accordingly after hailing the crew and expressing the thanks of himself and his companions for the aid they had received, Mr. Button gave the word and the little *Gadabout* was set free from the great steamer.

Another motor-boat near by, the occupants of which were deeply interested spectators of what was occurring, at once took the *Gadabout* in tow and noisily proceeded toward the wharf which was not more than two hundred yards away.

There were many questions asked of the rescued party, all of which were promptly answered, but as soon as the boys landed they at once began to make inquiries for a boat which could be chartered for a search for their missing friends.

At last, however, they listened to the persuasions of Mr. Button and went up to

the hotel where they obtained a dinner, which satisfied them after their long fast.

Then, quickly returning to the dock they found their boat awaiting them and at once stepped on board.

Already they had explained to the owner the peril of the friends and the reason why they had chartered the swiftest boat which could be obtained.

“We’ll be there before long,” said the captain confidently. “Have you brought anything for your friends to eat?”

“Yes, we have a basket full here,” explained George, pointing to a hamper which one of the waiters from the hotel had placed on board. “We thought they would be hungry so we got it ready.”

“That’s all right, they will be,” said the captain.

“You don’t suppose anything has happened to them, do you?” inquired George anxiously.

“That’s something no man knows,” replied the captain not unkindly, “but we’ll soon find out.”

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SEARCH FOR THE LOST BOYS

The impatience of the boys was manifest when the swift little boat set forth on its voyage. Already they had made thorough investigations about the island, but not a word concerning their missing friends had been heard.

The anxiety of both George and Grant was well-nigh overpowering, although both did their utmost to heed the comforting words of the captain of the little yacht.

“Don’t you worry none,” he said cheerily. “Them boys will take care of themselves. It was a ca’m night and the only way those fellows could git into trouble would be by trying to run into it.”

“That’s what Fred may have done,” said George dryly. “If there’s anything of that kind around he usually finds it.”

“I guess you’ll find the boys all right,” affirmed the captain.

Striving to calm their fears the boys gazed out over the smooth waters. For two days now the surface of Lake Huron had been almost unruffled. Such gentle breezes as were blowing produced only the slightest ripple on the surface. In the clear waters, objects on the shore were reflected almost as in a mirror.

None of these things, however, was in the thoughts of the two boys as they watched the bluffs of Mackinac Island fade away in the distance.

They had done their utmost to describe to their captain the location in which they

had left their friends the preceding night. That bluff individual had heartily declared that he understood just where the accident had occurred, but somehow his confidence was not fully shared by either of his passengers.

“He tries to make up for what he doesn’t know by stating with all his might the things he does know,” said George in a low voice to Grant when the boys had taken their seats near the stern of the boat.

“That’s what some people say,” answered Grant. “A lie well stuck to is as good as the truth.”

“I don’t believe that,” said George.

“Don’t believe what?”

“That a lie ever is as good as the truth.”

“I didn’t say that. I said a lie well stuck to was as good as the truth.”

“I don’t believe it is ever right to lie.”

“Well, I do,” said Grant positively.

“When?”

“Why, if you were dreadfully sick and it would be a shock to you to know that you were likely to die I think it would be all right to lie and tell you that you looked well.”

“I would know that was a lie just as soon as you said it,” laughed George, “but I wouldn’t lie even then.”

“What would you do?”

“I would do nothing.”

“Well, suppose you had to say something.”

“I would say what I thought was true.”

“Wouldn’t you lie if the doctor told you to?”

“No. I tell you I don’t believe a lie is ever right.”

“I don’t believe in lying in general, but I can see times when I think it might be all right.”

“The trouble is, when a fellow begins he goes ahead. He doesn’t stop with lies that may not be so bad, but he keeps on and tries it in a good many other ways. No, sir, I haven’t any use for a liar. If I give my word I intend to keep it.”

Conversation ceased and both boys anxiously were peering before them. The captain already had explained that they were doubtless near the shore of Western Duck Island where their accident had occurred and their companions had been lost. He had explained also that in his judgment it was wisest to go again to the same spot as nearly as possible and there begin their search for the missing boys. He sturdily maintained his feeling that the boys were not “lost,” a confidence, however, that was not shared by his passengers as the boat swiftly sped across the surface of the shining waters.

“I sometimes think the captain is right,” said George thoughtfully. “Last night was as calm as a night could well be and, as he said, if the fellows got into trouble they must have tried to look it up.”

“I agree with you,” said Grant, although the tones of his voice failed to show any strong conviction.

“Don’t you worry none about them boys,” called the captain again as he saw George and Grant anxiously conferring. “If they are any kind of boys they will take care of themselves. Why, I wouldn’t give much for a lad that couldn’t protect himself in such a night as last night was. Up on Mackinac Island I have known people who lived for months on fried snowballs. They are not very good as a diet, but they help to keep people from thinking too much about their troubles.”

Neither of the boys responded to the flippant words of their captain, although both were aware that he was speaking out of the kindness of his heart.

When nearly three hours had elapsed after they had departed from Mackinac the captain, once more turning to his passengers, said, “Yonder lie the shores of Western Duck Island.” As he spoke he pointed to a low lying strip of land that could be seen far in advance of them. “My opinion is,” he continued, “that those

boys didn't stay out in their boat all night. Maybe they landed."

"Is anybody living on the island?" said George quickly.

"Not regular. This time of the year though there may be parties camping out. A bit later in the fall there are plenty of people there shooting ducks."

"That doesn't do us any good," retorted George. "What we want is to find out where those fellows are now and if they got any help on the island."

"You wait a bit," rejoined the captain, "and we'll find out."

Swiftly the little motor-boat approached the shores of the island they were seeking. It too passed the long strip of rushes which had been seen the preceding night by John and Fred in their attempts to find a landing place.

The motor-boat at last came to anchor off a rocky shore and at the suggestion of the captain George and Grant climbed into the skiff and hastily casting off at once rowed ashore.

"I'll wait for you here," called the captain as the boys clambered up on the bank. "I shouldn't be gone more than an hour. Come back and we'll try it farther down the shore."

The boys agreed to return within the specified time and then after peering eagerly all about them together started toward the woods they could see in the distance.

Just why they walked in this direction neither could explain, but there was somehow a thought in the mind of each that possibly within its shelter a camp or a house might be found.

The hour passed and all the efforts of the searching boys were unrewarded. Not a trace of their missing friends had they discovered. "It's plain enough they aren't here," said George dejectedly.

"That's right," answered Grant, "we've called and shouted and whistled and looked and walked and waited, but we haven't anything for all our pains. I'm beginning to believe the boys aren't here."

“I agree with you as far as this spot is concerned,” said George, “but we ought to go on farther down the island before we go back to Mackinac.”

“That’s right,” agreed Grant. “Let’s go back to the motor-boat now.”

Quickly the two boys started to return to the place where the captain was awaiting their coming. They had gone but a short distance, however, before at George’s suggestion they turned to their left and moved toward a sandy stretch of shore which they saw in the distance. “Maybe we’ll find a footprint the same as Robinson Crusoe found on his island,” suggested George striving to speak lightly.

The suggestion was followed and great was the surprise of both boys when they drew near the winding sandy shore of a large cove to see swiftly approaching from the south a motor-boat in the distance.

“Look yonder!” said Grant excitedly seizing his friend by his shoulder as he spoke, and pointing in the direction in which he had discovered the approaching boat. “That isn’t our boat, is it?”

“No,” answered George positively after a brief silence. “Our boat is up the shore farther.”

“Maybe Fred and John are on board.”

“That’s something nobody knows. We’ll soon find out.”

Quickening the pace at which they were walking the two boys soon arrived at the place they were seeking. Save for an occasional comment the silence was unbroken while they both anxiously watched the motor-boat which could be seen swiftly approaching. Indeed the little boat was marvelously swift and in a brief time the boys were aware that there was only one person on board.

“The fellow is in a hurry anyway,” suggested Grant. “Even if he doesn’t know what he wants he wants it right away.”

At that moment the sound of the footsteps of some one in their rear startled both the young watchers and as they glanced behind them they discovered a man approaching. Apparently he had come from the woods where they had begun their search for their missing friends, but it was quickly manifest that he was as

startled by his discovery of the presence of the boys as they had been at his coming.

For a moment it seemed to both George and Grant that the man was about to turn and flee from the spot. However, apparently he thought better and at once advanced toward the place where the boys were standing.

At the same moment the boys looked again at the approaching boat and to the surprise of both of them they recognized the man at the wheel as the one in whose house they had been received on Cockburn Island several days before.

What the coming of the man implied neither of the boys understood, but at that moment, however, the man who had approached from the woods shouted in his loudest tones to George and Grant. Startled by the unexpected sound the two boys instantly turned and fled quickly from the spot.

CHAPTER XIX

SUSPICIOUS CHARACTERS

So wearied were Fred and John by the exciting experiences of the day that as soon as they were left to themselves they were sound asleep.

How long they had slept neither was aware when at last both awoke. The little cabin was dark except for a faint light streaming in through the open porthole.

“Where are we, Jack?” called Fred in a low voice.

“Why, don’t you know?” replied John. “We’re on board that boat that picked us up.”

“Oh, yes, I remember now. How are you?”

“All right I guess, though I feel as if I had been breaking stones or lifting weights all my life.”

“I guess you wouldn’t feel that way if you really had,” responded Fred lightly. “A fellow’s muscles would get used to the work if he had to do it all the time. Where do you suppose we are?”

“I haven’t any idea. We’re moving, though, all the time, that’s plain.”

“Yes, I can hear the swash of the water. I wonder if we are anywhere near Mackinac Island.”

“Let’s go up and find out,” suggested John and hastily the boys left their bunk

and made their way to the deck.

The stars were shining and it was manifest to the boys that the morning light had not yet appeared.

Perceiving a man near the stern of the boat they at once approached him and made known their presence.

“Where are we?” inquired Fred.

“We’ll be in Sault Ste. Marie in about a half an hour.”

“What!” exclaimed Fred.

“That’s right, lad,” said the sailor.

“When did we pass Mackinac Island?”

“Mackinac Island! Why we left that a good many hours ago.”

“Why didn’t you stop and put us off?”

“We don’t make any stop anywhere. I guess the captain told you that we couldn’t stop there. That doesn’t make any difference, however, we’ll be in Sault Ste. Marie pretty soon and then you boys can stop all you want to.”

“How shall we get back to Mackinac?” inquired John.

“I can’t say,” laughed the sailor, who appeared to regard the plight of the boys more or less as a joke. “My suggestion would be to wait there and when one of the line boats come through go back on that. There will be one out somewhere about noon.”

“Probably that’s the best we can do,” said Fred meekly. “You say we’ll be there in about a half an hour?”

“Yes.”

The boys at once returned to their cabin, but to their dismay they discovered that the clothes in which they had been rescued were still too wet to be donned.

“There’s no help for it,” said John disconsolately. “If this old tub stops long enough at Sault Ste. Marie we can go ashore even in these togs we have on. Come on back on deck and we’ll find out how long the stop is.”

Returning to the deck the boys learned that the boat on which they were sailing was to remain six hours at Sault Ste. Marie.

“That’s all right,” said Fred as he and John withdrew to another part of the deck. “We’ll go ashore just as we are and before the boat sails we’ll have a chance to change our clothes.”

The boys were interested in spite of their predicament in the low lying shores past which they were steadily moving. It was sufficiently light to enable them to mark several parks, evidently playgrounds of the people of the little city which they were approaching.

True to the prophecy of the sailor the boat drew alongside a dock within the half-hour. Again assuring themselves that the vessel would not depart within six hours, the boys at once leaped ashore and started together up the wide street upon which they now found themselves.

There were low buildings on each side and to their surprise the boys were soon aware that many people were moving about the street although it was not yet three o’clock in the morning. Among these strangers they noticed numbers of Indians. This fact, together with the decorations of many of the buildings which were to be seen, indicated that either a festival or a holiday of some kind had been celebrated the preceding day, or that the city was preparing for some event of importance.

“We didn’t pay the captain anything for bringing us up here,” suggested John, as he and his companion slowly walked up the street.

“That’s right,” said Fred. “Besides,” he added hastily, “I haven’t a cent of money in my pocket, have you?”

“Not in these pockets,” laughed John, whose spirits now had returned. “We’ll have to go back and get some money if we are going to get any breakfast.”

“But I haven’t any money in my other pockets,” said Fred ruefully.

“And I haven’t either,” added John laughing as he spoke. “I didn’t think we would want any money yesterday so I didn’t take any with me.”

“My mother would say that this is another good lesson. She says I am all the while out of money and I ought to have enough with me to provide for what I want.”

“That’s the difficulty,” said John. “It isn’t so much getting the money as it is keeping it. But this is no joke, Fred. Neither of us has any money and I don’t believe up here even at Sault Ste. Marie they will give us something to eat unless we pay for it.”

“I put my watch in my pocket,” said Fred. “I don’t see anything for us to do except to hock that.”

“Maybe some fellow that keeps a restaurant will take it as security and hold it until we can redeem it.”

“We’ll try that,” said Fred quickly. “I wish we could find some place open now.”

“Perhaps we can, there are so many people on the street,” said John. “Come on let’s go further on and try it.”

In accordance with John’s suggestion the boys walked rapidly up the street and soon to their delight they discovered a restaurant which evidently was being patronized at that early hour. Several people could be seen seated at the small tables within the room, and, encouraged by the sight, the boys at once entered.

At the cashier’s desk a woman was seated, but evidently she had been there throughout the night. There were moments when her head nodded and she plainly was greatly in need of sleep.

At once approaching her Fred said, “We have been unfortunate.”

“I’m afraid you’re not the only ones,” said the woman sitting quickly erect as she heard the unexpected statement.

“I guess that’s right,” laughed Fred, “but we fell into the lake and were picked up by a boat that did not stop until it got to Sault Ste. Marie.”

“Where did you want it to stop?” inquired the woman.

“Mackinac Island.”

“Where were you working there?” she inquired.

“Working?” laughed Fred. “We weren’t working at all. We were staying at one of the hotels.”

For a moment the woman glanced quickly at the young spokesman and then shaking her head began to laugh.

“What are you laughing at?” demanded Fred irritated by her manner.

“I guess you had the parlor suit,” said the woman still laughing at the boys before her. “You look as if you belong to John Jacob Astor’s family. It may be that you look better than he did when he used to come there, but I guess you wouldn’t pass for much more.”

For the first time the boys were aware that the strange garb in which they were clad certainly did not imply that they had been guests at any prominent summer hotel. Both suits were ill-fitting and worn, and if either had been plunged in soap and water within a year there was nothing in the garments to imply such action.

For a moment Fred was nonplussed and then hastily thrusting his hand into his pocket he drew forth his watch.

“How will that do?” he said as he placed the gold watch on the desk. It was a beautiful little time-piece, a present he had received on his sixteenth birthday from his father. “You’ll take that as security, I guess,” he said lightly, “and when we get back to Mackinac Island we’ll send you the money or come with it and get the watch.”

Picking up the time-piece the woman gazed curiously at it and then again looking sharply at the boys she said, “Where did you get that?”

“It was a present,” said Fred.

“Who gave it to you?”

“My father.”

“Does he live on Fifth Avenue, New York?”

“He does not,” said Fred slowly.

“Oh, I thought maybe he did,” sniffed the woman. “That’s the kind of watches they have in New York City. It isn’t the kind that most of the roustabouts carry on the lakes.”

“But I’m not a roustabout,” said Fred.

“You don’t need to say what you are,” said the woman. “All I can say is that I shan’t take that watch. I don’t want the police in here.”

“Police!” exclaimed Fred. “What do you mean? What would the police come for?”

“For one thing they would come for the watch and another thing they would want would be the fellow that took it.”

“Did you think I stole that watch?” demanded Fred.

“I’m not saying nothing,” said the woman. “All I say is that if any boys on the lake are seen carrying watches like that it is most generally known how they got them. My advice to you is to stick that watch in your pocket again and don’t let anybody see it while you’re in Sault Ste. Marie.”

“You needn’t trouble yourself any more,” said Fred as he took the watch and thrust it again into his pocket. Then turning to John he said, “Come on, Jack, we won’t stay here another minute.”

When the boys were once more on the street Fred’s indignation soon gave way to a feeling of alarm. Not only were they without any means of securing breakfast, to say nothing of their passage back to Mackinac Island, but also they might be regarded as suspicious characters. Evidently the woman keeper of the restaurant had believed they had stolen the watch.

“Never mind, Fred,” suggested John. “It will all come out right. We’ll try it again.”

“We might pawn the watch,” said Fred thoughtfully.

“But there’s no pawn shop open.”

“Well, there probably will be a little later. There must be a good many such shops in a place like this. I’m getting hungry.”

“So am I,” said John fervently, “but that doesn’t do me any good. There’s another restaurant down yonder,” he added quickly, pointing down the street as he spoke. “It’s almost light now and we might try it there.”

“All right,” said Fred. “I’m not very hopeful, but they can’t do any more than throw us out.”

“Unless they arrest us as suspicious characters,” suggested John somewhat ruefully.

“We’ll never know until we try anyway,” said Fred resolutely. “Come on, Jack, we’ll soon know what is going to happen to us. If we get into jail we’ll have to telegraph the boys to bail us out.”

“But we don’t know where the fellows are,” declared John.

“That’s as sure as you live. I had almost forgotten about that. We certainly are having our troubles on this trip, aren’t we?”

By this time the boys had stopped in front of the restaurant they were seeking and at once entering they looked quickly about the room for the proprietor.

CHAPTER XX

PENNILESS

At once advancing toward the man whom they discovered walking about the room Fred said quietly, "My friend and I are in trouble. We were out in a skiff yesterday and the little boat got to leaking so badly that we both of us had to stay in the water. We were there a half-day, and then we were picked up by a boat which did not stop at Mackinac Island and brought us straight through to Sault Ste. Marie."

"Where were you?" inquired the man suspiciously as he glanced keenly at Fred.

"We were staying at Mackinac Island, but had gone over across to one of the islands on the Canadian shore."

"What were you doing there?"

"Looking for our friends."

"Where were they?"

"That's what we were trying to find out," said Fred ruefully. "There were two other fellows with us and they got lost."

"And you want me to give you some breakfast, is that it?" said the proprietor abruptly.

"No, we don't want you to 'give' us anything," retorted Fred. "I have got my watch here and I thought perhaps if I left it as security you would let us have

some breakfast. We'll send you the money just as soon as we can go back to Mackinac. These clothes we have on," he added as he perceived that the man was closely regarding their outfit, "were given us by the sailors that rescued us. We have got some different clothes down at the dock, but they were soaked through and so some of the crew fixed us up as well as they could."

"What boat did you come on?"

"I don't know," said Fred, "it was almost dark and we weren't thinking about the name, we were so anxious to be taken on board. After we had been in the water as long as we were we didn't stop for little things like that. Will you take the watch and let us have some breakfast?"

Extending his hand the man took the watch and then examined it with interest.

"That's a good watch," he said after a brief silence.

"Of course it is," said Fred. "My father gave it to me."

"You are sure that's the way you got it?"

"I'm telling you the truth," said Fred seriously. He was in no mood now to resent any implications as to the method by which the watch had come into his possession. The odor of breakfast was strong in the room and the appetites of both boys were so keen that other things were ignored.

"Yes, I'll take your watch," said the man. "You give me your name and address."

As soon as these had been given the boys seated themselves at one of the tables and in a brief time were served with a simple breakfast. It was marvelous, however, the amount of food which was eaten by the hungry lads. It had been a long time since they had tasted anything of the kind and even the proprietor laughed as he saw the simple breakfast disappear.

At last, when the boys could eat no more and they were preparing to depart, the proprietor said, "Did you tell me that you were staying at Mackinac Island?"

"Yes, sir," answered Fred.

"At one of the hotels?"

“Yes, sir.”

“Then my advice to you is to telegraph there for money.”

“I hadn’t thought of that,” said Fred quickly. “That’s the very thing we’ll do. Come on, Jack,” he added, turning to his companion. “We’ll go to the telegraph office right away. Will you tell us where it is, please?” he asked of the restaurant keeper.

Stepping outside his door the proprietor pointed to the office and after they had thanked him for his kindness John and Fred at once started for the place.

Their troubles, however, were not ended, for again they found their appearance decidedly against them. The telegraph operator refused to take any message that should be paid for at Mackinac. He also refused to listen to any of their explanations and in response to the appeals of the boys explained that he had to be governed by the rules of the office.

Even with all their protests and pleadings the boys were unable to induce the operator to change his decision. He still refused to accept the message and as the boys were without money it was impossible for them to prepay it.

Fred and John when they withdrew from the telegraph office were not so disconsolate as they had been when they had met their first rebuff. The ample breakfast they had secured had done much to bring back their courage and again they were Go Ahead Boys in earnest.

On the sidewalk the two boys stopped once more to think over their difficult condition.

“What shall we do now?” asked John.

“Anybody can ask questions,” laughed Fred. “If I could answer it I would be very glad to.”

“Have you anything to suggest?”

“Yes,” replied Fred quickly as a sudden inspiration came to him, “it can’t be very far from here to Mackinac Island. Suppose we go back to the dock and see if we can’t arrange for our passage.”

“They will meet us with great enthusiasm,” said John laughing slightly as he spoke. “Probably they’ll hail us as the very fellows they have been waiting for.”

“But we won’t look so much like tramps when we get our other clothes on.”

“Maybe not,” assented John, “but we’ll have to find that out later. Come on back and we’ll see what we can do now.”

When the boys returned to the dock their anger was almost as great as their surprise when they discovered that the boat in which they had come had resumed its voyage.

“And they said,” declared Fred bitterly, “that they were going to hang up here six hours. They have gone in less than three.”

“Well, they are paid for our passage anyway. They have got two suits of clothes and that’s something.”

“It is that,” said Fred smiling ruefully as he spoke. “Just now I think it’s a good deal. When I look at the things you have on, Jack, and then think of that beautiful suit sailing away over Lake Superior, I’m almost ready to weep!”

“Don’t! Don’t!” said John. “It doesn’t affect me that way. When I see you as you are now and then think of you as I have seen you all dolled up and even your shoes polished, to say nothing of that red necktie you wear so frequently, I don’t feel like weeping, I feel like yelling.”

“It doesn’t make any difference,” said Fred. “Our boat’s gone. Now what is the best thing for us to do?”

“To go ahead,” said John.

“Come on then,” said Fred briskly.

Together the two boys made inquiries at various places, but did not discover any boats leaving in the near future that would land them at the place they were seeking. After several inquiries they were directed to the office of the great steamboats, which made the long voyage from Buffalo to Duluth and return. The appearance of the boys, however, was so markedly against them that they were unsuccessful in arranging for their passage.

“It looks as if the Go Ahead Boys had gotten to the end of their journey,” said John when the boys once more were on the street.

“Don’t you believe that for a minute,” said Fred. “The only time it is necessary for a man to show that he has any grit is when he is in trouble. If there weren’t any hard things to be done there wouldn’t be any need of a fellow bracing up to do them. If everything was smooth and easy all the time everybody would get along. It’s just because the way is a little hard that there’s need for us to go ahead. We’ll find a way yet, Jack. Come on back to the dock.”

Neither boy was disheartened when after three or four more attempts to arrange for a passage they found even their strongest pleadings without avail.

“We’re simply up against it,” said John.

“And that’s the time to go ahead,” declared Fred. “Come on and we’ll try that fellow yonder.” As he spoke he pointed toward a motor-boat at the lower end of the dock on which the boys were standing. The boat was old and greatly in need of paint. A disconsolate appearing individual whom the boys suspected to be the owner, manager, chief stockholder and captain of the little craft sat on the dock swinging his long legs over the water.

The boys were able to see that the man had bright red hair and that his face was covered with huge freckles or splotches of a dark, reddish brown hue. He was apparently about thirty years of age, long, ungainly and awkward in his every action.

“Let’s go see him,” suggested Fred.

“He doesn’t look as if he knew enough to run a boat even to the bottom,” responded John, nevertheless joining his friend as they advanced toward the man.

“You didn’t expect the most intellectual individual in the world to be running a tub like that, did you?” demanded Fred, as they came nearer and obtained a closer view of the peculiar individual. “If he knew more he wouldn’t be around here in a worn-out old tub.”

“Go ahead,” laughed John, “I’ll leave the interview to you.”

“I’m glad to see that you have come to your senses at last,” declared Fred soberly. “It’s a good thing sometimes to know that you don’t know.”

“That’s right,” retorted John, “and it’s better yet not to know so many things that aren’t so.”

“You just listen,” said Fred, as he turned toward the stranger who had glanced at the approaching boys and then resumed his former position.

“Good morning,” called Fred cheerily.

“Hey?” answered the man.

“I said good morning,” repeated Fred striving to speak cheerfully.

“I hadn’t noticed. Is it?” said the man glancing toward the sky as he spoke. “Most of these mornings up here have been foggy. We have had the worst weather this summer I ever see. Seems to get worse all the time.”

“Don’t you know that Ruskin says there isn’t any bad weather? There are just different kinds of good weather.”

“Ruskin, who’s he? I never heard tell o’ him.”

“He doesn’t live here at the Sault,” acknowledged Fred. “Never mind the weather. What I want to know is can you take us in your motor-boat to Mackinac Island?”

“I guess I can,” said the man whose little reddish brown eyes narrowed as he gazed shrewdly at the boys as he spoke. “Depends on whether you got the price or not.”

“How much will you charge to take us?”

“Both of you?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll charge ten dollars.”

“All right, we’ll pay it.”

“Will you pay it now?”

“No,” said Fred. “We’ll pay you just as soon as you land us at Mackinac.”

“How do I know you will?”

“You have our word for it.”

“You don’t look neither one of you as if that was too much of a load for you to carry alone.” The man’s voice was nasal and high, and he did not smile while he was speaking. The boys were unable to decide whether he was serious or was speaking lightly.

“If it’s clothes you want,” said Fred, “we’ll show you some better ones just as soon as we get up to the hotel.”

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do,” said the man. “I guess I’m a fool for my pains, but I got to go around by Cockburn Island. If you want to go aboard and go with me I’ll fetch you around to Mackinac for ten dollars. I know I’m taking a big chance, but maybe you be too. What do you say?”

“I say go ahead,” answered Fred quickly.

CHAPTER XXI

A VAGUE HINT

“Go ahead it is,” responded the skipper. “I can be ready in five minutes. Can you?”

“We’re ready now,” said John quickly.

“You know how it is,” said the captain. “Most always the passengers, if they want anything to eat on the way, put it on board before we start.”

“Well, we cannot get anything to eat,” said Fred. “We told you why.”

“So you did. So you did,” said the captain again speaking in his high nasal tones. “Still I guess we’ll be hungry before night. Maybe I can find something. You boys wait here until I go up the street and I’ll be back in a few minutes.” When he had thus spoken the ungainly man took a basket on his arm and at once set forth on his errand.

Left to themselves the boys went on board the strange craft and the hasty inspection they made did not increase their confidence either in the boat or in its owner.

“It’s about the only way there is,” said John at last, “and we’ve got to take it. It’s Hobson’s choice. We can’t stay here and we can’t get passage on the big boats so we’ll have to put up with what we can get.”

“Next week,” said Fred lightly, “we’ll all be laughing about it. I wouldn’t mind this adventure at all if I was sure Grant and George are all right. Every time I

think of them I'm worried when I remember what you and I went through. If that boat hadn't come along just as it did we might be at the bottom of Lake Huron."

"Well, we are not there," said John quickly. "The fact is we are here and we wish we weren't. If the other fellows were along with us I would like to go out yonder and shoot those rapids," he said pointing toward the swift rapids that were not far away. Even while he was speaking a skiff, guided by an Indian, came swiftly through the tossing waters and approached the shore not far from the place where the boys were seated.

"That's right," joined in Fred heartily. "I have a good mind to try it as it is."

"I guess you'll have to wait until you get your fortune changed so that you can pay a man a half-dollar for letting you shoot the rapids in his skiff."

"You're right, of course," said Fred. "I never realized before what a convenience it is to have some change in your pocket. Never again will I go out for a day's trip, no matter where it is, without having something in my purse."

"You mean as long as your father or some one else puts it in your purse."

"No, I don't mean anything of the kind," retorted Fred. "You don't suppose I am always going to be dependent, do you?"

"I hadn't thought very much about it," laughed John. "If you want my opinion, it is that—"

Whatever John's judgment might be it was not expressed at the time for at that moment the tall skipper was seen returning to the dock.

"Well, I got enough to stay our stomachs a little while," said the captain as he swung the basket from his arm and deposited it under one of the seats in the motor-boat. "It isn't the best kind and what such stylish young gentlemen as you be are used to."

It was plain to both boys that the skipper had not taken their explanations seriously and that he still was doubtful as to their real purpose. However, he did not refer to his suspicions and in a brief time he had the motor-boat ready to set forth on its long voyage.

For a brief time after the boys departed from Sault Ste. Marie their interest in the sights along the nearby shores was so keen that their own plight in a measure was forgotten. Several times the little boat was tossed by the waves that were upturned by the passage of some large freight boat. Occasionally they were hailed by people on board, for in the summer-time many of these freight boats carried a few passengers, making a delightful trip through the great lakes.

“I guess,” said the skipper, at last turning to the boys, “that the best way for me to do will be to go down through St. Mary’s River and then strike into the North Channel. I’ll keep close to the shore of Drummond Island and then I’ll come around to Cockburn Island that way.”

“Your tub,—I mean your motor-boat,” said Fred correcting himself quickly, “doesn’t seem to be making very fast time.”

“It’s fast enough,” said the skipper quietly. “Time ain’t much use to me. Some folks say time is money. If I had as much money as I had time I wouldn’t be carrying two young sprints like you down through Mud Lake.”

“How long do you think you’ll be before we land at Mackinac Island?” inquired Fred.

“Not knowing, I can’t say,” replied the captain. “My general feeling is that if we make it by day after to-morrow we’ll be doing mighty well.”

“What do you mean?” demanded John blankly.

“I mean just what I say. I’m not going to drive my boat very hard and by the time we have gone down St. Mary’s River and into the North Channel and then around to Cockburn Island it will be some time before we can start for Mackinac.”

“But where will we stay nights?” inquired Fred.

“We’ll pick out a good place somewhere. I have got a canvas that stretches over the boat and will keep out the wind and we can crawl under that when it gets dark.”

“But you haven’t enough for us to eat.”

“Haven’t I?” said the skipper dryly. “That depends I guess a little on how much you want to eat. I have got some salt pork and potatoes and if you don’t like that diet all I can say is that you might have brought your own stuff.”

The boys were silent as the reference to their poverty caused them both to realize how impossible it was for them to obtain even the common necessities of life, if they had no money with which to make their purchases.

“Ever been over to Cockburn Island?” inquired the captain after a long silence.

“Yes,” said John. “It’s a funny island.”

“It isn’t so funny as the people on it.”

“That’s what I thought,” laughed Fred.

“Well, you weren’t thinking far wrong. I’ve been over to Cockburn Island every month ever since the ice went out of the lakes.”

“What do you go for?” asked John.

“If I don’t tell you then you won’t know, will you?” said the captain glancing shrewdly at the boys as he spoke.

“I don’t suppose we shall,” acknowledged John.

“I don’t mind tellin’ you that I don’t expect to go there many times more. I’m going to get even with that man.”

“What man?”

“Why, Mr. Halsey.”

“Who is he?”

“He’s the man that stays summers on Cockburn Island. Leastwise he stays there part of the time.”

“Is he the man that has the little house that looks like an old shanty about a quarter of a mile back from the shore? Does he have a Japanese servant and is there a little barn back of the shanty?”

“What do you know about that barn?” demanded the skipper turning abruptly about and staring at the boys.

“We don’t know anything about it. I’m just telling you about the place and asking you if Mr. Halsey is the name of the man who lives there.”

“I guess you’re all correct,” said the captain. “That’s his name and I guess that’s the place where he lives. He’s the man I was tellin’ you about.”

“The one who employs you?” inquired John.

“I don’t know whether he employs me or not. I work for him. He has got to live up to his promises better than he has though, or I’ll put him where he won’t do quite so much business as he has been doin’ this summer.”

“What is his business?”

“Don’t you wish you knew?” said the skipper. There was an expression in his eyes that indicated that the man was deficient. Indeed, Fred whispered to John, “I don’t believe the fellow is all there. I guess if you knocked on his head you’d find nobody home.”

“He certainly looks the part,” agreed John, “but I want to find out more about Mr. Halsey, as he calls him.”

“You didn’t tell us what business Mr. Halsey is engaged in,” added John as he turned once more to the skipper.

“Of course I didn’t. That’s the question a good many folks would like to have answered.”

“Does he have any business?”

“Business! Business!” exclaimed the skipper. He had previously explained that his name was Rufus Blodgett and that he was commonly called Rufe by his passengers and friends. “He doesn’t work more than twelve hours a day, let me tell you, and he gets better pay than anybody around these diggins.”

“And nobody knows what his business is?”

“I know,” said Rufe, slyly winking as he spoke.

“What is it?”

“That’s tellin’. Maybe somebody will know pretty soon. At least I have wrote some letters that will be likely to put somebody on his track that he won’t like very much.”

“Did you write those letters to Mr. Button?” demanded Fred.

“What do you know about any letters?” said Rufe, his voice becoming very low as he spoke and the glitter again appearing in his narrow little eyes.

“We saw them,” said Fred more boldly. “We mean the one that you signed ‘American Brother.’”

“Who showed it to you?” said Rufe. “Beats all, I never supposed two such youngsters as you knew anything about them letters.”

“What did you write them for?” asked John.

“Didn’t I tell you this Mr. Halsey is makin’ all kinds of money? He agreed to divide with me and he hasn’t done it. I told him I would get even with him and you see if I don’t!”

“Then he is a smuggler, is he?” inquired John.

“You had better take my advice and not say that word very often around in these parts. I guess there ain’t any harm in a man buying somethin’ on one side o’ the lake and sellin’ it on the other.”

“But there’s a law against it,” suggested Fred.

“Nothin’ but a man-made law.”

“What has that got to do with it?” asked John.

“I don’t care nothin’ about man-made laws. I don’t find nothin’ in the Bible that says I mustn’t smuggle, as you call it. Mind you, I ain’t sayin’ I’m no smuggler, I’m just talkin’ on general principles.”

“But you have not told us what Mr. Halsey smuggles.”

“No, and I ain’t goin’ t’ tell you.”

“Is that what you’re going to Cockburn Island now for?”

“Don’t you wish you knew?” said Rufe, laughing as if he considered his question to be a good joke. “Did you say,” he continued, “that you had ever been out in the barn?”

“We said we hadn’t been there,” replied Fred.

“There’s a mighty good reason why you didn’t go, I guess.”

“What’s that?”

“That there watch dog o’ the Halseys. There was a fellow here once what was tellin’ about some dog that a man named Pluto kept. He said that dog had three heads and they all barked at the same time and all bit together.”

“Did he tell you where Mr. Pluto lived?” asked Fred soberly.

“No, he didn’t,” said Rufe. “Where does he live?”

“Not very far from Cockburn Island, you’ll find if you don’t quit breaking the laws.”

There were many conversations during the voyage similar to those which have been recorded, and the boys became more convinced that the strange skipper undoubtedly in some way was sharing in the experiences of the man whom they had met on Cockburn Island and whose name Rufe declared to be Halsey.

The little motor-boat stopped for a time on the shore of Mud Lake.

There the skipper cooked some of the potatoes and salt pork he had brought with him and the boys declared that never had they tasted food more delicious.

CHAPTER XXII

A PASSENGER FOR COCKBURN ISLAND

Neither George nor Grant was aware of the reason for their abrupt flight when the shout of the approaching man was heard.

“Hold on!” called George to Grant after the boys had gone a hundred yards or more. “What fools we are. What are we running for anyway?”

“Because we want to get somewhere. We don’t know just where it is but we’re in a hurry to get there, I guess.”

As he spoke Grant glanced toward the woods in the distance from which the man that had hailed them had unexpectedly come. “I’m not afraid. Come on, let’s go back to the motor-boat.”

“Did you find them?” inquired the captain when the boys approached the boat.

“No.”

“You look so tuckered out, both of you, that I thought maybe you saw them somewhere.”

“No, we didn’t find them,” said Grant, “but we saw—”

The boy stopped as if he hesitated to refer to the fact that they had fled from a man who had unexpectedly hailed them.

“Saw what?” said the captain.

“Do you know who lives on Cockburn Island?” abruptly asked George.

For a moment the captain made no reply as he looked keenly at the boys. At last he said, “I have sailed over to Cockburn Island a good many times. Why do you want to know who lives there?”

“We had some strange experiences on that island,” explained Grant.

“I don’t doubt you,” said the captain. “I don’t doubt your word a bit. What did you see there?”

“Why, it wasn’t so much what we saw as the fact that there seemed to be something very mysterious about the island and the people who live there. We went into a little shanty one day. At least it looked like a little shanty, not very far back from the shore and we found it all fitted up like a city house. There were rugs on the floors, and chairs and tables just such as you might see in town. The man had a Japanese servant, but there was something so strange about the whole thing that we didn’t know just what to make of it. Do you know the man who lives there?”

“I have seen him,” said the captain simply.

“Is there anything queer about him?”

The captain whistled as he looked up into the sky as if he was searching the clouds for an answer. “I know him when I see him,” he said at last. A moment later he added, “I guess I see him now.”

Startled by his words the boys looked quickly in the direction indicated, and across the field saw two men approaching the shore. One plainly was the man whom they had seen on Cockburn Island and his companion was the one who had approached from the woods and at his unexpected and startling hail the boys had fled up the shore.

“What do you suppose they want?” said George in a low voice to Grant.

“I haven’t the remotest idea. If we stay here a little while we may know more about it.”

Not a word was spoken while the boys and the captain waited for the two men to

approach. It was plain that they were walking toward the place where the motor-boat was anchored, although what their errand was neither of the boys understood.

At the same time George felt of the letter in his pocket. The strange epistle had not only puzzled the boys but somehow they were unable to free themselves from the thought that it was directly connected in some way with the approaching man.

At that moment George pulled the sleeve of his friend and excitedly pointed toward the lake. Not far from the shore a swift little motor-boat was passing and when George whispered, "That's the little Jap at the wheel, I'm sure it is," the excitement of both boys became more intense.

Abruptly the two men who had been approaching when they discovered that the boys were not alone, turned and walked along the shore in the direction in which the motor-boat, driven by the Japanese, was moving.

"There!" exclaimed Grant "We had our run for nothing. Those men didn't want us."

"I'm glad you are so well informed," said George, still watching the departing men as long as they could be seen.

"Well, boys," said their captain, "it's about time for us to start on. If we are going to find your friends we have got to get busy or we shan't get back to Mackinac Island to-night."

His words at once were heeded and the search for the missing boys was quickly renewed.

George and Grant walked along the shore maintaining a careful outlook for their friends, or for any signs that would indicate that they had been there not long before. Occasionally the boys advanced into the island, but in every case they returned without having discovered any traces of their missing companions. In this way much of the afternoon passed and the sun was sinking lower in the western sky when the captain said, "There isn't much use in trying any longer, boys. We must be starting back."

Both George and Grant were depressed now for they had been working busily

throughout most of the day and all their efforts had been unavailing. The missing boys had not been found nor had anything been discovered to indicate that their friends had even landed on Western Duck Island.

“They will be all right,” said the captain, striving to cheer up his downhearted young companions. “They’ll take care of themselves. There hasn’t been any storm and two boys in such weather can’t get into trouble on Lake Huron unless they try to and you say they aren’t that kind.”

“No,” said George quickly. “They wouldn’t be looking for trouble, but trouble may have been looking for them.”

“I guess not,” laughed the captain. “Most likely when we get back to Mackinac you’ll find they are already there or else have chartered another motor-boat to go out and look for you.”

As the boys were about to take their places on board the little craft they were surprised when they heard a hail from some one who was approaching from the woods.

In a brief time it was manifest that the man whom they had seen on Cockburn Island was the one who was now before them and that he was earnest in his request for them not to depart before he joined them.

“Are you going to leave now?” inquired the man when at last he stood beside the boys who were ready to embark on the little skiff and row out to the motor-boat.

“Yes, sir,” said Grant quickly.

“I am wondering if you’ll be willing to take me on board.”

“As far as I’m concerned, I’m willing.”

“I guess the captain wouldn’t object if I agreed to pay him. How about it?” added the new passenger, turning to the captain as he spoke.

“The boys have chartered the boat,” said the captain, “and I haven’t anything to say about it. They’ll have to decide.”

“Do you want to go to Mackinac?” inquired Grant.

“No,” replied the man. “I want to stop at Cockburn Island.”

“That’s out of our course,” said the captain quickly. “We shall cut right across to Mackinac. In weather like this we’re as safe as we would be on a mill-pond.”

“I’ll pay you well for my passage.”

“How much longer will it take?” inquired George turning to the captain as he spoke.

“We shan’t get back to Mackinac before eleven o’clock if you go by Cockburn Island.”

“It’s very important,” broke in the man. “I ought to be there now. I’ll pay you ten dollars if you’ll take me.”

“All right,” said George, after he glanced questioningly at his companion.

Without delaying, the man at once stepped on board the skiff and in a few minutes all three were on board of the motor-boat.

There was no delay now and the swift little boat was soon leaving Western Duck Island behind it.

Somehow the mystery in which the boys had found themselves involved during the past few days instead of becoming clearer was darker than before. Who was their passenger? Why was he so desirous of being carried to Cockburn Island? These questions and many others were discussed in low tones by George and Grant while their passenger remained seated in the bow of the swiftly moving little motor-boat.

“Speaking of calm,” said the captain breaking in upon the prolonged silence on board, “I knew a man once that was held up three days on one of these islands by a storm. ’Twas a regular no’-easter and blew a gale without stopping. This man I’m telling you about managed to get ashore on one of the islands and couldn’t leave until the storm passed and he was picked up by some boat. So you see you needn’t get so down-hearted about your friends. Something may have happened to their boat or they may have landed somewhere and maybe they didn’t pull their skiff far enough up on the shore. There’s a hundred things I can think of to comfort your hearts.”

“That’s good of you,” said Grant “I wish I felt about it the way you do.”

It was dusk when at last the motor-boat drew near the familiar shores of Cockburn Island.

“Some boat’s ahead of you,” called the captain. “See, there’s a motor-boat already there at that little landing.”

The attention not only of the boys but of their other passenger was at once called to the boat in the distance. And it was apparent too that the man was greatly excited by the discovery.

As the boys came nearer they both were convinced that they had never seen the boat before. They were able to see that it had been long since it had been painted and its general air of dilapidation was so manifest that under other circumstances the boys would have laughed at its appearance.

Occasionally they glanced at the man on board whose surprise and excitement or alarm at the discovery of the presence of the other motor-boat had now become more marked.

“Look yonder!” said Grant at last when they were within a few yards of the landing place. “There’s somebody coming from the house.”

Both boys were silent for a brief time as they watched the approaching men. One of them was tall and ungainly and had a strange swinging motion as he walked across the fields. Beside him were two boys.

George suddenly grasped his friend by the arm and in a low voice said, “Do you know who those fellows are?”

CHAPTER XXIII

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING

“They look like Fred and John,” replied Grant in a whisper. “Where do you suppose they came from?”

“I don’t care where they came from, the most I want to know is that they are here. You don’t suppose they are ghosts, do you?”

“I think you would find out whether they were ghosts or not if you tried to throw Fred. Come on, let’s go ahead and meet them.”

Advancing quickly the boys soon drew near the place where the approaching forms were seen.

“Fred, is that you?” called George anxiously.

Instantly the trio stopped and in amazement stared in the direction from which the unexpected hail had come.

“Is that you, Fred? Is that you, Jack?” George called again, this time speaking a little more loudly.

“Yes,” replied John. “Who is it calling us?”

“You have been gone so long you don’t recognize your own friend,” called back George. “What are you doing here?”

“That’s the same question we might ask you,” retorted Fred. “We didn’t expect

to find you here.”

“Neither did we expect to find you,” said George. “We’re mighty glad we have though, for we have been looking for you a long time.”

“The trouble is you didn’t look in the right place,” laughed Fred, who was delighted to be with his friends once more.

“You don’t need to tell us that,” retorted Grant. “We have had troubles enough of our own without having you twit us about them. We looked all around Western Duck Island and up and down the shore but couldn’t find any trace of you. Now tell us where you have been and what you have been doing.”

All six were now returning to the shore together, the strange companion of Fred and John walking in advance of the boys. Several times George nudged Fred as he pointed toward the ungainly figure which was somewhat dim in the obscure light. The peculiar gait, the strange swinging motion of the shoulders were not to be forgotten when once they had been seen. Rufus, however, had not spoken since the meeting of the boys and because of that fact there were still further revelations to be made that were to startle the newcomers.

“How did you get here, Fred?” demanded George unable longer to restrain his curiosity when the boys were within a few yards of the shore.

“We came in a motor-boat.”

“From where?”

“Sault St. Marie.”

“Be honest, Fred. This is no time for joking. Where did you come from?”

“I’m not joking and I’m telling you the truth. We started from Sault St. Marie.”

“How long have you been here?”

“About two hours.”

“Why did you come to Cockburn Island?”

“Because our skipper said he had to come here before he could take us to Mackinac.”

“What did he want to come here for?”

“Don’t talk any more now,” said Fred. “Wait until we get back and we’ll tell you all about it and there are some things worth hearing, too.”

When the boys and the strange skipper returned to the shore and it was discovered that there were two motor-boats there, John quickly said to Rufus, “Our friends are going back to Mackinac and we can go with them so you won’t have to go out of your course. You can go right back to Sault St. Marie.”

“How about them ten dollars?” demanded Rufus, speaking in his shrillest tones. “I don’t intend to let go of you until I see the color of them dollars.”

“Have you got any money with you?” demanded Fred, turning quickly to George and Grant.

“How much do you want?” inquired George.

“Ten dollars. That’s what we agreed to pay our skipper.”

“I guess we can make that up between us,” said Grant, and in a brief time the money was produced and the brilliant-hued Rufus was paid. With evident satisfaction, he said, “I don’t know, boys, but I shall stay over here to Cockburn Island for three or four days. If you show up again in these parts you might let me know and maybe I can do somethin’ more for you.”

“Thank you,” laughed Fred. “You certainly have helped us out of our troubles.”

“Did he help you out of your clothes, too?” demanded Grant, who now had become aware for the first time of the strange garb in which both his friends were clad.

“No, we picked them up on the lake-boat.”

“On the what?”

“On the steamer. We weren’t proud. We didn’t want the crew to think that we felt

above them so we put on the suits that they provided us with.”

“They certainly picked out choice ones,” laughed George, as he grasped the sleeve of Fred’s coat. “When are you going to start for Mackinac?”

“What’s become of our friend whose house is on the island here?” inquired Grant in a low voice.

So interested had they all been in the recent experiences that the passenger they had brought with them had been forgotten.

When the boys looked quickly about them they were aware that the man had disappeared. However, as he had landed and their duty was done they were all ready now for the return to Mackinac Island, where they could not expect to arrive before two or three o’clock the following morning.

The ungainly Rufus was again thanked for his aid and then the four boys speedily took their places on board the little motor-boat in which the searching party had set forth early that morning.

After the boat had left the shores of Cockburn Island behind them, so eager were George and Grant to learn what had befallen their friends that they insisted that the entire story should be told them.

And what a strange story it was. Fred or John, alternately breaking in upon each other, each insisting upon describing the perilous adventures through which they had passed, finally related the story of their rescue and the strange manner in which they had been taken to Sault St. Marie. Stranger still was the story they had to tell of their return and the reason why they had been found on Cockburn Island.

“But that isn’t the strangest part of all,” explained Fred when the first of their story had been told. “We have something else worth telling and when you hear it you’ll both sit up and listen to it.”

“What is it?” inquired George.

“This man Rufus who took us in his motor-boat over to Cockburn Island is a queer Dick.”

“I’m surprised to hear you say that,” laughed George.

“His clothes and his voice, to say nothing of his hair and his long legs, are a small part when you stop to think of some other things,” said John.

“What other things?”

“Now listen and we’ll tell you. We’ve about decided that the man who stays on Cockburn Island is a regular smuggler. You know those letters we found, or rather the letter that came to me and the one we picked up on the shore of Western Duck Island, don’t you?”

“Yes,” replied George and Grant together.

“Well, I suspect,” resumed Fred, “that this man Rufus wrote them both.”

“He’s almost as good a letter writer as he is a dresser, isn’t he?” laughed Grant.

“You just wait until I’m done,” retorted Fred. “That’s always the trouble in this party. Whenever I start in to give you information and try to teach you some things you need to know and don’t know, there’s always somebody that has to spoil it all.”

“We’re not spoiling it,” laughed George. “Go ahead with your story. What makes you think he wrote those letters?”

“Be quiet, me child,” said Fred, “and I will enlighten thee. We suspect Rufus wrote them because he talked almost all the way from Sault St. Marie to Cockburn Island. Even when we stopped on the shore of Mud Lake and he cooked our dinner for us he kept on talking just the same whether we were there or not.”

“That’s just the trouble with you, Fred,” retorted George. “You say he kept on talking whether you were there or not. Now how do you know he kept on talking when you weren’t there? You see that’s the reason we have to put in intelligent questions sometimes. You are just as likely to talk about things you don’t know as you are about things that you do.”

“Never mind,” retorted Fred. “This man in the course of his extended remarks dropped a few words that made us think he knew more than at first we thought

he did. We suspect that he runs a motor-boat for this man over on Cockburn Island.”

“Is that the reason why he took you there?” inquired George.

“Probably,” answered Fred. “At any rate he told us that he had to go that way and that he had to be there this afternoon. I tell you, fellows, that man is doing something he doesn’t want Uncle Sam to find out and my own impression is that he’s a smuggler and carrying on a regular trade at it.”

“What do you think he smuggles?” inquired George.

“I’m not just sure yet about that, but I’m pretty sure that I know where he hides the stuff before he takes it over to Mackinac or up to Sault St. Marie. In fact I think he has two places, one on Cockburn Island and the other down on Western Duck Island and I think, too, that he has a man or two on each island. Rufus runs a boat between Cockburn Island and Sault St. Marie and we suspect that he has another man down on Western Duck who gets rid of things there for him. And the strangest part of all is where he hides the stuff on Cockburn Island.”

“Where is that?” demanded George and Grant, who now were greatly interested in the story of their friends.

“I think he hides it in the barn.”

“Do you mean that old barn right behind his shanty?” inquired Grant.

“That’s the very place.”

“What makes you think he hides the stuff there?”

“From what Rufus said. You see, Rufus isn’t more than half or three quarters witted, and he feels that he hasn’t been treated by this man as he ought to have been. So he wrote those letters to get even, as he said, with the smuggler, and then as nothing was done about them he felt just as much provoked at Mr. Button as he had at the smuggler himself. So he has been first on one side and then on the other.”

“Whose side is he on now?” asked Grant.

“Just at the present time he’s on the smuggler’s side. But he was so anxious to talk all the while that we think he let out more than he knew. Among other things he told us why the smuggler keeps that big dog that we saw the other night. It seems there are three of those dogs and at night two of them guard the barn and the other is taken inside the house to protect that place. When we asked Rufus why they had to have two dogs around the barn he said that if we knew what was in the barn we wouldn’t ask any such foolish questions as that. Putting that together with some other things he said, I haven’t any doubt that whatever it is that Mr. Halsey deals in it is something that is very valuable and isn’t very large and can be easily carried.”

“What do you suppose it is?” inquired Grant. “That sounds like money.”

“Men don’t smuggle money,” sniffed Fred scornfully. “When we get back to Mackinac I’m going to tell Mr. Button, if he’s there, all about it and ask him what he thinks. And if he goes over to Cockburn Island and makes a search I want to go with him.”

“But he can’t make a search on Cockburn Island,” said George positively. “That’s in Canada. An American officer can’t go over there and make searches.”

“Not unless he gets a Canadian officer to go with him,” retorted Fred. “At all events when we get back to Mackinac we’ll find out what can be done and then we’ll just go ahead.”

CHAPTER XXIV

TWO BOATS

It was late when the party at last arrived at Mackinac Island.

“It’s twenty-five minutes past two,” said Grant sleepily as he looked at his watch after the party had landed at the dock.

“We’ve had so much excitement and so many things to do in the last two or three days that I think I shall sleep right through the bed,” said John.

The weary boys almost threatened to fulfill the prophecy of John. In spite of the excitement through which they had passed they were speedily asleep and it was late the following morning before any one arose.

“What’s up to-day?” called Fred as he opened the door between the rooms which the four boys occupied.

“Not very much,” responded George, who was already dressed and had been down in the office of the hotel. “I have learned one thing though.”

“Good for you,” laughed Grant. “You couldn’t learn many less, that’s one thing sure.”

“I have learned that Mr. Button has gone,” declared George, ignoring the bantering of his companion.

“Gone?” demanded Grant. “What do you mean?”

“Just what I say.”

“Do you mean he has left Mackinac Island for good and all?”

“I didn’t say that. I simply said he had gone. He is expected back here at night.”

“That’s all right,” called John, who now entered the room and joined in the conversation. “I’m glad he isn’t here. It will give us a chance to rest up. It’s ten o’clock in the morning now, but I feel as if I was almost ready to crawl back into bed again.”

“We’ll feel all right by night,” said Fred lightly. “I suggest that we sit around the hotel and not try to do anything very strenuous to-day.”

The suggestion was followed by all four boys and save for a walk about the Island they passed the hours reading or writing letters.

Darkness had fallen before Mr. Button was seen by any of the four boys. Approaching him, Fred said, “We have got another letter for you, Mr. Button. It will match the one that came to me that was intended for you.”

Mr. Button glanced keenly at the boy as he spoke and said, “Is the letter intended for me?”

“I think so,” said Fred.

“Where did you get it? Did it come to you through the mail as the other one did?”

“No, sir, we picked it up on the shore of Western Duck Island.”

“You did!” exclaimed Mr. Button more strongly moved by the statement than the boys ever had seen him before. “Where is it?”

“It’s in my pocket,” replied Fred. “We wish you would come up to our room, Mr. Button. We’ll give you the letter and tell you some other things we have found out besides.”

Accepting the invitation Mr. Button accompanied the boys to the room which Fred and John occupied and after he had seated himself in the chair which was

offered him by John, Fred at once began his story.

“We found this letter, Mr. Button, as I told you. It must have dropped out of the pocket of that man on the island or else Mr. Halsey lost it. At any rate we thought it belonged either to me or to you and I guess there’s no question now that it is yours.”

Fred handed the letter to their visitor, who at once read it through and laughing lightly thrust it into his pocket. “It matches the other one,” he said, “and sounds very much as if they both were written by the same man.”

“We have found the man that wrote them.”

“Have you?” inquired Mr. Button quietly.

“Yes, sir. When John and I were taken by that boat which rescued us we couldn’t land until we came to Sault St. Marie. It was almost morning and we had a great time, as our clothes were wet and we left them on the boat after we had put on some duds the sailors gave us. We found we didn’t have any money when we went up town and tried to get some breakfast, and when we went back to the dock we were horrified to find that the boat had gone on without us. Her next stop probably is Duluth.”

“And she took your clothes with her?” inquired Mr. Button, smiling as he spoke.

“She did that,” declared Fred ruefully, “and that wasn’t all of it either, for in our pockets were all the valuable things we possessed, though I guess money wasn’t among them. By and by we found a strange man there who agreed to bring us back to Mackinac in his motor-boat if we would go with him around by Cockburn Island.”

“Was he a red-haired man with big splotches of red on his face? Was he tall and ungainly and did he have a voice that no one could ever forget if he once heard it?”

“That’s the very man. He talked almost all the way to Cockburn Island. He can do one thing well though, let me tell you.”

“What is that?”

“He knows how to cook salt pork and potatoes.”

“I fancy,” said Mr. Button, “that the air and the appetites of you boys helped you to appreciate the quality of Rufus’s cooking.”

“Maybe it did, but the strange part of it all was after we stopped at Cockburn Island.”

“What happened then?”

“Why, he wanted us to stay on board the boat while he went up to that old house. He didn’t find what he wanted and when he came back he said we would have to wait there for a while. It was almost dark then. It seems he thinks he hasn’t been treated just right by this man Halsey, who is probably the smuggler you want to get.”

Mr. Button smiled, but did not interrupt the story which Fred was telling.

“While we were waiting, Rufus got to talking about his experiences and he made us think that he was the one that wrote both those letters. He wanted to get even with the man who didn’t give him his share, as he believed.”

“Is that all he told you?” inquired Mr. Button.

“No, there’s another thing he spoke about and that is the barn.”

“Ah,” said Mr. Button quickly. “What did he say about the barn?”

“It wasn’t so much what he said as what he made us believe. He told about two Great Danes they have to guard the barn and another one which they have to protect the house. He said if anybody tried to get into the barn they would have their troubles.”

“What did you say then?”

“Why, we asked him what any one would want to go into that old tumbled down barn for and he looked at us in a way that made us sure there was something there worth while. Do you suppose that Mr. Halsey hides in the barn the stuff which he smuggles into the United States?”

“I’m not sure—yet.”

“Are you going to find out?”

“That’s one of the things that brought me to Mackinac Island.”

“But the boys say,” suggested Fred, “that you haven’t any right to search his property over there. He’s in Canada and you belong to the United States.”

“I surely do,” responded Mr. Button smilingly, “but it is possible that I may try to make a few investigations, not as an officer, but simply to satisfy my personal curiosity.”

“What are you going to do?” inquired Fred impulsively.

Mr. Button laughed again and after a brief silence said, “Why not? Perhaps I can make use of your help. I don’t mind telling you, now that you know so much, that I expect to go over to Cockburn Island to-morrow. Furthermore I expect to make some investigations there. It may be that I might take two of you boys with me, though they used to tell me when I was a youngster that one boy is a boy and two boys is a half a boy.”

“Which two will you take?” demanded Fred excitedly.

“I have no preference. In fact I may be wrong in allowing any of you to go. If either of those huge dogs should attack you there would surely be trouble. Besides, the little Japanese cannot be ignored. And then too, the smuggler himself, if he is caught on the ground, or finds we are making our own investigations, may make more trouble than all the rest put together.”

“What’s the reason,” spoke up George excitedly, “that Grant and I can’t take another motor-boat and go over there near the channel and spend the day fishing? You see we would be within easy calling if you need us and the fact that we were there might help to explain why Fred and John were on the island.”

“There wouldn’t be very much for you to do,” suggested Mr. Button.

“It will be enough for us if we can just go ahead,” said Grant.

So eager were the boys and so intense was their desire to join in the expedition

of the morrow that at last Mr. Button somewhat reluctantly gave his consent, explaining that if there should be any real danger he would insist upon the boys at once withdrawing in their motor-boats across the American border.

“We must start to-morrow morning,” explained Mr. Button, “by four o’clock at the latest.”

“We’ll be ready,” declared Fred confidently.

“Then, all of you boys better turn in now,” said Mr. Button as he arose and departed from the room.

True to their promise all four boys were on the dock before four o’clock the following morning.

“I think we are going to have a good day,” said Mr. Button to Fred and John as soon as their motor-boat was free.

“It looks so,” said John as he glanced toward the eastern sky.

“I don’t mean the weather alone,” explained Mr. Button, “but I feel quite sure that Halsey will not be on Cockburn Island to-day.”

“How do you know? What makes you think so?” demanded Fred quickly.

Mr. Button smiled, but did not explain his reasons for the opinion which he held. Indeed, conversation lagged and every one in the motor-boat apparently was busy with his own thoughts.

The boat which George and Grant had secured manifestly was much slower, for it soon was left behind and had not been seen again when about ten o’clock in the morning the party drew near the shores of Cockburn Island.

“The first thing,” explained Mr. Button, “I want you to do is to stay on board this motor-boat while I go up to the house.”

“But you may need us,” suggested John.

“If I do I shall let you know,” laughed Mr. Button.

As soon as the boat came to anchor, taking the little skiff which the motor-boat had in tow, Mr. Button alone rowed quickly to the shore and soon was on his way toward the little house in the distance.

CHAPTER XXV

A SMALL BOX

The feeling of keen excitement, soon after the departure of Mr. Button returned in full force to the waiting boys. And what a sharp contrast it presented to the scene all about them! The waters of the lake were so smooth that an occasional gentle breeze ruffled the surface only in spots. There was scarcely a cloud to be seen in the summer sky. The shadows of the rocks and trees along the shore were so clearly reflected in the lake that the boys were reminded of the clearness of the water along the shores of Mackinac Island. Far away the motor-boat in which George and Grant were approaching now could be seen. Whenever the two boys looked toward the house in the distance they were again impressed by the almost unnatural quietness of the summer day. Not a person was to be seen near the building and the silence was broken only by the noisy flying grasshoppers near the shore.

“Suppose this is all a false alarm,” suggested John at last breaking in upon the silence.

“What do you mean?”

“Why, I mean suppose that there’s nothing in this. Suppose the whole thing is a wild goose chase.”

“Do you mean that Mr. Button may not be what he says he is?”

“Oh, I don’t know that I mean that,” rejoined John, “but somehow it seems so unreal. It doesn’t seem possible that men really should be trying to break the laws and smuggle goods across the border here when everything is so quiet and

peaceful on every side.”

“Look yonder!” suddenly exclaimed Fred, pointing as he spoke to a man who could be seen walking rapidly toward the shore. He was coming from the house and it was quickly manifest that it was Mr. Button himself who was returning. He was alone and as the boys watched his rapid approach their feeling of excitement quickly returned.

As soon as Mr. Button arrived it was manifest to both Fred and John that he too had been strongly aroused. His eyes were shining and though his manner was quiet it was plain that he was highly elated over some discovery he had made.

As soon as he was on board the motor-boat he said, “The little Jap has taken two of the dogs and gone away.”

“Gone for good?” demanded John.

“No. The woman says he has gone out to exercise them and that he is usually gone an hour at least. Now is the time when you boys can help me if you really want to.”

“We do,” said Fred eagerly. “We’ll go ahead the minute you say so.”

“That’s very good. What I want you to do is just this,—while these dogs are away I’ll go into the house and keep the attention of the woman there.”

“What about the third dog?” demanded Fred.

“I think I can manage that, too. Now, while I’m in the house I want you somehow to get into the barn. There’s a small box about six inches square. It is a wooden box, not very heavy and hidden somewhere in that place. I am sure your eyes are keener than mine and you’ll be more likely to find it. If you get that box, almost all the difficulties will be cleared away.”

“What’s in the box?” inquired Fred.

“You do not need to know that now. Perhaps I’ll tell you later. I haven’t any idea where the box is hidden, but I am sure it is somewhere in that little barn. You won’t have very long for your search. I might say too that even if you do not find the box, if you come across anything that is suspicious or that might contain

valuables, I wish you would bring it away with you.”

“Shall we look under the floor?” inquired Fred quickly.

“Yes, look under the floor. Anywhere and everywhere. Work as fast as you are able, but don’t forget that in about an hour the Jap will come back with those two Great Danes.”

“Do you want us to go straight to the barn!” inquired Fred.

“No. I think it will be better for you first to go up the shore about a mile. Then you can land and I don’t think you will be so likely to be seen from the house on your way to the barn. You will be pretty well behind it anyway. As I told you, I’ll try to keep the woman busy and I do not think that will be a very hard task.”

“Does she know you?” asked John.

“Yes, in a way. She has seen me several times and she is jealous. She thinks I am in the same business that her husband is working in.”

“Do you mean smuggling?”

“Yes.”

“Smuggling what?”

“If you find that box I will tell you more about it. Now, one of you boys take the skiff and land me and then take the skiff with you while you go farther down the shore in the motor-boat.”

The directions of Mr. Button were speedily followed. About a mile distant the boys discovered a curving, sandy shore near which the motor-boat was anchored. Taking the skiff, the boys speedily landed and then in high excitement, all the time watchful of the house in the distance, they ran swiftly toward the barn. A few trees and great rocks were found in the intervening distance and twice the boys stopped and concealed themselves while they tried to make sure that their presence as yet had not been discovered.

In this way they rapidly advanced and soon the two hundred yards which they were to cover had been left behind them and both now were standing at the rear

door of the barn.

They were keenly disappointed when they discovered that this door was locked or at least fastened from within.

“What shall we do?” whispered John quickly. Before he replied Fred turned and looked keenly all about him. He was as fearful as his friend of the return of the Japanese with the two huge dogs. “Maybe there’s some other way of getting in,” he answered at last, and a moment later he announced the discovery of a slide in the side of the barn.

Quickly the slide responded to his efforts and was pulled back. Then hastily John lifted Fred and in a moment the active lad was inside the barn.

In accordance with Fred’s suggestion John remained outside. In spite of his height it was difficult for him to enter the barn as he had assisted his friend to do. “Let me know what you find,” he whispered as Fred disappeared from sight.

Silence followed the suggestion, but John was easily able to understand how busy Fred at once became. The barn itself was small, covering not more than thirty feet square. On the ground floor, Fred discovered a small cart, two cramped stalls and an open piano box, which also stood on the floor. Apparently nothing alive was in the little building. In one corner stood a ladder which led to an opening in the loft above.

Quickly deciding to begin his search at the top Fred ascended the ladder. He discovered only a little hay on the floor above and with a pitch-fork, which was conveniently near, he hastily began to scatter it. There was nothing, however, to indicate that the musty hay had recently been disturbed and when a few minutes had elapsed Fred was convinced that nothing had been concealed in the loft.

Retracing his way to the floor below he was astonished to behold his friend already busily engaged in the search.

“How did you get in, Jack?” he whispered.

“Crawled in, the same as you did. Only I didn’t have any one to give me a boost.”

“You didn’t need any boost with those long legs of yours,” responded Fred.

“Sometimes I think it wouldn’t be so bad if more of us were built on your plan. Makes me think of a hickory nut stuck on two knitting needles.”

“Don’t stop for complimentary remarks,” retorted John good-naturedly. “What we want is to find that little box. You begin on one side and I’ll go on the other and we’ll examine the four sides to see if there are any more sliding panels.”

A hasty inspection, however, failed to reveal any concealed shelves. Next the boys inspected the floor. Several of the boards were loose, but the search was still unrewarded.

“I’m going up the ladder,” suggested John.

“I’ve been up there,” said Fred. “There isn’t anything up there. I know there isn’t. There isn’t much hay and what there is is old and musty. I turned it all over with the pitch-fork. It’s like looking for a needle in a haystack,” he added somewhat disconsolately.

“It doesn’t make any difference,” said John. “We’re going ahead with our search. I think Mr. Button knew what he was talking about.”

Diligently the boys continued their efforts, working rapidly and doing their utmost to discover the small box which Mr. Button had described, or find a place where it might be concealed.

All their efforts in the stalls, however, were as unavailing as had been those in the other parts of the barn.

“I tell you,” said Fred, as the boys stopped for a moment, “there isn’t any such thing here. It’s what I tell you, like looking for a needle in a haystack.”

“If you want to give up you can sit down here and wait for me,” said John resolutely; “I’m going to keep this thing up until I strike oil or gold.”

Both boys earnestly renewed their search, but their efforts in the rapidly passing minutes were still unrewarded.

“There isn’t anything here,” muttered Fred. “We’ve looked high and low. Mr. Button didn’t know what he was talking about.”

John made no response to the declaration of his discouraged companion and perhaps abashed somewhat by the zeal of John, again joined in the search.

“Have you looked in that piano-box?” inquired John at last.

“Yes, but there isn’t anything but a little meal in the bottom. It isn’t deep enough to cover a box of matches.”

“We’ll look again anyway,” said John as he lifted the cover and glanced within the high box. He was about to drop the cover when once more he hesitated. Leaning over the edge he thrust his long arms down into the meal below him. In one corner of the box his fingers came in contact with an object which instantly aroused his keenest interest. A moment later he brought out a small wooden box, discolored, heavy and apparently of no value. He speedily discovered, however, that the top of the box was fastened by a small and strong pad-lock. Holding his discovery aloft John quickly turned to Fred and said, “Do you see what I’ve found?”

“What is it? What is it?” whispered Fred as he ran to join his friend.

“It’s a box.”

“So I see, but how much does that mean?”

“I don’t know how much it means,” retorted John, “but I do know that it is a wooden box, that it’s about six inches square and that it is heavy—”

“Yes, to look at it,” broke in Fred; “it’s old and looks as if it had been left out in the weather. Even if it is locked I don’t believe that there’s anything of any value in it.”

“That isn’t what troubles me,” said John quietly.

“What do you mean?”

“Why, I mean this box is hidden here. I don’t know as we have any right to take it. I wonder too if Mr. Button is really what he says he is. Suppose we take this box away with us and then somebody arrests us for stealing? What’s to hinder?”

“That’s nothing to hinder,” said Fred, “but we’ll take the box with us just the

same.”

Each of the boys was confident whenever his companion became fearful or discouraged.

“We’ll say no more about it,” said John as he turned toward the open slide by which they had entered the building.

“Don’t show it to Mr. Button when that woman in there can see you,” suggested Fred.

“Thank you,” laughed John. “I’ll try to heed your advice, kind sir.”

Abruptly, however, both boys halted and neither made any effort to depart while they both were listening intently to sounds which they heard outside the building.

“Pull back the slide! Pull back the slide!” whispered Fred, now plainly alarmed. “The Jap is coming and he’s got those two big dogs with him, too. I don’t know what will happen to us now.”

CHAPTER XXVI

CONCLUSION

“Did he see you?” inquired John, who was now as keenly excited as his friend.

“I don’t know. The only thing we can do is to wait and see what happens.”

The slide had been left open an inch or more and through the open space both boys in their excitement watched the little Japanese as he drew near. The Great Danes were romping about the place evidently enjoying their freedom. They were still free when the Japanese turned and entered the house. When he had closed the door behind him the three dogs, for now the one that had not accompanied the Japanese joined his mates, ran about the place as full of life and kindness in their somewhat awkward activities as a clumsy puppy.

Relieved that the Japanese had not come at once to the barn the two boys were still anxious, for they were aware that Mr. Button was yet in the house. Indeed, as the time slowly passed, the excitement of the boys steadily increased.

“There comes Rufus,” whispered John at last.

“It’s time for us to leave,” said Fred, after he had convinced himself that the peculiar helper of Mr. Halsey was indeed coming to the barn. “It’s time for us to go above.”

Instantly Fred ran to the low ladder and swiftly made his way to the loft, an example which John speedily followed. John still held the box which he had discovered in the meal and when both boys had found a hiding place in the loft they peered through a knot hole in the floor and watched Rufus as he seated

himself in the little cart.

The interest of the boys became still more intense when after a few minutes had passed Mr. Halsey himself came into the barn and closed the door after he had entered.

“You’re right on time to-day, Rufus,” said Mr. Halsey.

“Be I?” replied Rufus, apparently not strongly elated by the compliment.

“Yes, you are, and I’m going to give you that box to take to Mackinac.”

“What else are you going to give me?”

“You’ll get all you deserve, Rufus, if you’ll do just what I tell you.”

“That’s what I’ve heard you say before.”

“Well, you hear me say it now,” said Mr. Halsey sternly. “You do your part and you need not fear that I shall not do mine.”

“What is it you want me to do?”

“I have told you. I want you to take your motor-boat and carry that little box to Mackinac. You mustn’t let anybody see it, for it is valuable and much of what you will get from me depends upon how successful you are in keeping everybody away from that box, and delivering it safely just where I tell you. I’m writing out the directions,” he added, as drawing a blank card from his pocket he hastily wrote upon the back and then handed it to the ungainly man who apparently was still not strongly impressed by the words he had heard.

As soon as this had been done Mr. Halsey advanced to the piano box and lifting the cover thrust his hand into the meal.

The boys were unable to see the expression which came over his face, but in their imagination they were both confident they knew how startling his appearance was. They were still able to see Rufus in his seat in the cart and the alarm which he quickly manifested was connected directly with the failure of his employer to find the object for which he was seeking.

“Where’s that box?” demanded Mr. Halsey, turning and approaching the cart.

“I don’t know nothing about the box,” grumbled Rufus. “All I do is take your boxes over to Mackinac or down to Western Duck Island. You promised to give me ten dollars a day and I’ve spent ten days for you this summer and you have paid me just twelve dollars and a half.”

“If you’ll find this box for me I will give you fifty dollars,” declared Mr. Halsey. His excitement was plainly manifest in his voice and John trembled slightly as he assured himself that the box he had found was still safely in his possession.

“Rufus,” said Mr. Halsey sharply, “have you got that box?”

“No.”

“Do you know where it is?”

“No.”

“Do you know what is in it?”

“Something good, I suppose, but I don’t know what it is.”

“Rufus,” said Mr. Halsey again after a brief silence, “I want you to give up that box.”

“I tell you I ain’t got your box.”

“You give me that box or I shall set the dogs on you.”

Instantly the smuggler ran to the door to carry out his threat. He whistled shrilly and in response to his call the three huge dogs came bounding into the barn.

“I’ll give you one more chance,” said Mr. Halsey turning again to Rufus. “You give me that box or get it and I’ll give you fifty dollars. If you don’t do it, then we’ll see what you can do against the dogs.”

“I don’t know nothing about your box,” whined Rufus. It was plain now that he was alarmed, but no one knew better than the waiting boys how truthful his statement was.

And then an almost unaccountable event followed. Angered by the persistent refusal of Rufus, Mr. Halsey turned sharply and said to the dogs, "Bite him! Bite him!"

A wild yell from Rufus followed when the three huge dogs at once leaped upon him. They were, however, possessed with the spirit of play and not one of them did the trembling man any harm. In his terror Rufus had slipped from his seat and when he tried to leap to the floor he fell in a heap. A series of wild yells followed when the Great Danes came sniffing about him, apparently puzzled by all the commotion.

Nor did they respond to the repeated demands of Mr. Halsey to attack the prostrate man.

The screams of Rufus, however, had been heard in the house and now Mr. Button and the Japanese were seen running swiftly toward the barn. At the same time the excitement of the dogs increased and there were loud barkings and yelpings as they ran and leaped about the place.

The little Japanese, however, as soon as he entered the barn threw back his head and emitted another of his wild, hoarse laughs.

"What's the joke?" demanded Mr. Halsey angrily as he turned upon his servant.

Again the Japanese laughed, and ignoring the question called to the dogs, every one of which instantly obeyed his call. Both Fred and John were convinced that if the Japanese should order the dogs to attack any one his word instantly would be obeyed.

Meanwhile the manner of Rufus again quickly changed. Assured that he was safe from an attack, the look of cunning again appeared in his little red eyes and when the three men departed from the barn there was a swagger in his walk as he led the way to the house.

As soon as the boys were convinced that the men had withdrawn, they quickly descended the ladder and ran out into the yard.

"Look yonder," said John grasping his friend by the arm and pointing toward the shore. "There are George and Grant and they are both coming here."

“The more the merrier,” laughed Fred, relieved by the sight of his friends. “There will be less danger now than there was before. That man Halsey is desperate. What have you done with the box?”

“I have got it here under my sweater,” answered John in a low voice. “Does it show?”

“Not much. I don’t believe I should notice it unless I was looking for it.”

At that moment Mr. Button appeared in the doorway of the kitchen and said, “Come into the house, boys.”

“Wait a minute, Mr. Button,” called John. “Come out here a minute.”

The man glanced hastily behind him and then turned quickly around the corner of the house. John at once joined him and in a low voice said, “We got the box.”

“Where is it?” whispered Mr. Button.

“Under my sweater.”

“Let me see it.”

Standing directly in the way so that no one coming from the house could see him, Mr. Button glanced quickly at the box and then said, “Keep it, John, and don’t let any one see it and guard it as if your life depended upon it.”

“Is that the box you were looking for?” whispered John.

“Yes. Now we’ll go into the house, or at least I shall. Perhaps you had better stay here with Fred until I call you or come out.”

George and Grant now had arrived, and laughingly the former said, “What’s the matter with you fellows? You’re all covered with dust and dirt.”

“Maybe you would be if you had been where we have.”

“Where have you been?”

John was unable to explain, however, for at that moment both Mr. Button and Mr. Halsey together came out of the house. The appearance of the latter

indicated that he was not so much angry as crestfallen and perhaps alarmed as well. Mr. Button, however, was quiet in his manner and as he glanced at the boys his confidence and pride were instantly manifest.

Rufus too came and joined the group and whispering to Fred said, "I want to go with you when you leave."

"What's the matter, Rufus?" laughed Fred.

"I don't want to stay here after you go. There's something happened."

"What has happened?"

"I can't tell you."

"Well, I'll back you up, Rufus. I know you didn't take it."

For a moment the jaw of the ungainly man dropped and he stared blankly at the boy. "What do you know about it?" he said at last.

"Not very much," laughed Fred. "If you want to go with us I'll see if Mr. Button is willing."

The consent was readily obtained and in a brief time the party which now consisted of six started toward the shore where their motor-boats were waiting for their coming.

It was not long before all were on board, Rufus insisting upon taking his place with Fred and John. It was on the same boat also that Mr. Button sailed.

For a time, until the shores of Cockburn Island could no longer be seen, silence rested upon the party. No one appeared about the house as they looked back at the island from which they had come. Not even the dogs now could be seen.

It was then that Mr. Button turning to the boys said, "I fancy you boys are anxious to know what all this means."

"Yes, we are," said Fred quickly. "We know a little, but not very much about it."

"This man," explained Mr. Button, "is one of the most expert smugglers of

diamonds in America. Sometimes he comes to New York, sometimes to Boston and then again he lands at New Orleans or Baltimore.”

“Why hasn’t he ever been caught?” inquired John.

“He was caught once and brought to trial, but on some technicality he went free. I had word that he was trying a new tack. Several times he has landed at Montreal and then coming up the river has made his way across the border hereabouts and taken his goods either to Chicago or Buffalo. But we have run the rascal down at last.”

“But you haven’t got him,” protested Fred.

“That’s true. I couldn’t take him on Canadian soil without extradition papers. I have his diamonds, however, and he prefers to give them up rather than take any chances of being arrested and handed over to our government.”

“It’s a strange way to smuggle,” said John thoughtfully.

“All smugglers are strange. I have been in the employ of the government a good many years and I never have found one that wasn’t ‘strange.’”

“What do you suppose those diamonds are worth?” inquired Fred.

“According to the word we have received,” replied Mr. Button, “there are diamonds in that box valued at from \$10,000 to \$15,000.”

“Whew!” said John. “I guess I will hand it over to you right away. You had better take it,” he said as he drew the box from its hiding place and handed it to the Government Agent.

“I want to thank you boys for the part you have taken,” continued Mr. Button, “and I shall not forget about other rewards. I think the first real evidence I had came when the clerk at the hotel by mistake gave you my letter. Why did you write those letters!” he added turning abruptly upon Rufus, as he spoke.

“What letters?” demanded Rufus.

“About the smuggler.”

For a moment the ungainly man appeared to be somewhat confused; then, rising from his seat and throwing back his shoulders, he said proudly, "I could not leave those diamonds on my conscience. I had to tell you about it."

"I wonder if that is the real reason. Did you get all the pay that Mr. Halsey promised you?"

"Not yet," said Rufus, "but I will have it pretty soon. What are you laughing at!" he demanded abruptly as he turned toward the boys who were all manifestly enjoying the scene.

"We're laughing to think that Halsey gave up his goods rather than take a chance of an arrest. Of course he did not know that we had them. By the way, Mr. Button, do you think it is right for us to take them?"

"Right! Why not?" demanded Mr. Button.

"Why, they aren't ours."

"That is true. They belong to the United States, or will very soon."

"But you took them on Canadian soil."

"Did I take them?" inquired Mr. Button smiling as he spoke.

"No, we took them," acknowledged Fred. "Perhaps we'll get into trouble."

"You need have no fear of that. They were simply confiscated on one side of the line instead of on the other and really this man Halsey has no just claim to them."

"This has been a great summer," said Fred enthusiastically. "There's been something stirring every day. We have been going from one excitement to another about as fast as we could go. But now we have come to the end."

"Oh, no," laughed Mr. Button. "You haven't gotten to the end by any manner of means. Go ahead boys never turn backward. I think you will find that you have still more exciting experiences before you."

"Then we'll go ahead and try them," laughed John.

“But not to-night,” said Fred. “We’ll be in Mackinac in a little while.”

“It doesn’t make any difference,” declared John. “We’ll go ahead wherever we are.”

THE END

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