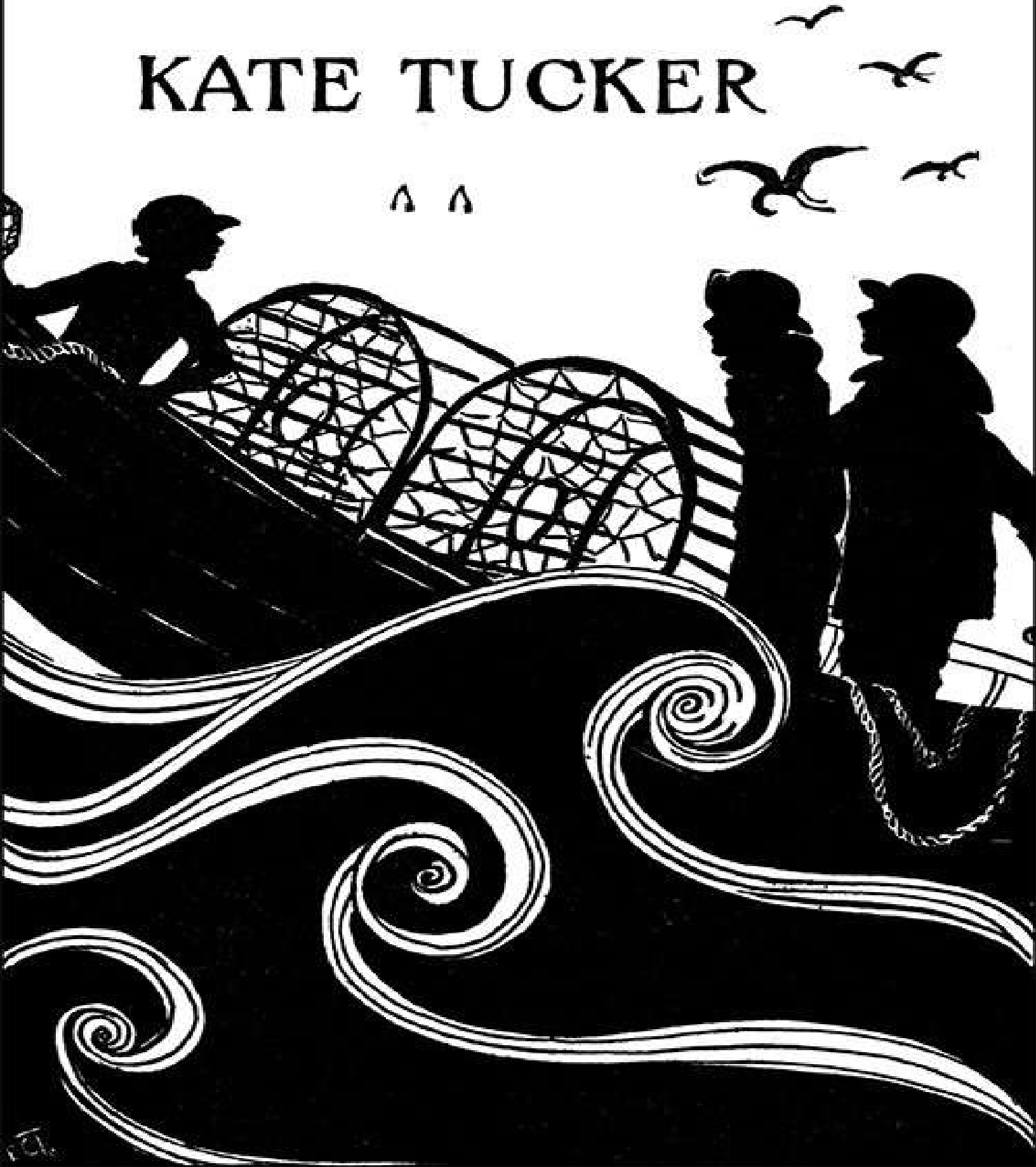
THE HAUNTED SHIP

KATE TUCKER



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Frontispiece

Ann could feel the dory rise and plunge.

Title page

THE HAUNTED SHIP

by

KATE TUCKER

Illustrated by—

ETHEL TAYLOR

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CHAPTER I

JO BAILEY AND THREE SEYMOURS

"HEY, Jerry, get along there, you fool horse!"

Jo Bailey flipped the reins over the back of the lumbering nag. Not that there was any hurry, but he was so eager to see what the Seymours would be like. They were coming from Boston to spend the summer at the Bailey house and Jo was on his way down to the station at Pine Ledge to meet their train.

The past winter had been a lonely one for Jo and his father, who lived up on a hill by the sea, far from the village. Some of the time the snowdrifts had been seven feet deep, but Jo didn't expect these city people to understand what that meant; they could not realize what the Maine people called "a shut-in winter." The Seymours were coming after the grass had grown green and the fields sprouted up through the brown moist earth, and they would be going home before the cold winds came down from the north woods, the cold that closed so surely and fiercely about the Baileys in their white house on the hill above the sea and shut them in so tightly that they could see nothing but the sea and the great stretches of snow for a long four months at a time.

Spring changed the whole world for Jo Bailey, and spring was here now; winter had gone. The soft dirt road sucked up under Jerry's clumping feet and brooks ran in merry freshets through their deep gutters on either side of the road. So Jo swung the old plow horse into place beside the little station platform and whistled while he waited. The year's fun would begin to-day. In the early spring he had helped his father plant, but that work was done and so was school, and he had long and pleasant days before him, when his chores could be finished before breakfast.

Jo never had seen the Seymour family and to-day he was going to find out what they were like. There were three of them coming with their father and mother and if they were as nice as their father they'd be all right. Mr. Seymour was a painter who had discovered the Bailey house last year while he was wandering along the Maine coast on a sketching trip. He had said that the Bailey farm was the most beautiful place he ever had seen.

Of course Jo liked hearing that, and he felt proud at knowing that an artist

from Boston found the old farm so lovely, though exactly what the painter saw in the big ocean pounding against the foot of the tall broken cliff, the stretch of smooth meadow running down over the slope of the hill, and the dense pine woods reaching back for miles and miles, Jo couldn't understand any better than the Seymours could comprehend his winter.

The Seymours were about his own age, Jo was thinking as he sat on a box on the station platform, whistling and waiting. The oldest was a girl, Ann, Mr. Seymour had told him last summer, and Jo was skeptical as to what he might expect from her. A little bit of a fraidcat, probably, always dressing up and particular about her clothes; but he could bear it, if only the boy was spry. "Spry" was a word that meant a great deal in Maine; in Jo's opinion if a boy was "spry" he was all that a boy should be.

While Jo waited at the station, Ann Seymour was sitting impatiently in the train, looking forward to just such a place as Jo's meadow to stretch her long legs in a good run. School and basket ball were very well in winter but she had grown as tired as Jo of the cold, and as soon as April weather brought out the buds on Boston Common, Ann grew restless and began to talk about Maine.

Ann was fourteen, just like Jo Bailey; her brother Ben was twelve, and Helen was ten. She was decidedly the baby of the family and one of the reasons for their all coming to Pine Ledge so early in the season. She had been dreadfully ill during the past year and Mr. Seymour had thought of Pine Ledge farm as the best place for Helen when they first talked about a summer vacation. So the plans were made and he had told the children about Jo—how he had no mother, and, because of this, they must share their own mother with him; how he lived bravely in the snow all winter and walked through the drifts to school; and how he knew all about the woods and the rocks and tides and went fishing, up-river and out to sea. He made Jo sound interesting, and the Seymours were waiting to see him quite as impatiently as he was waiting for them.

"Will there be Indians at Pine Ledge?" Helen's round blue eyes were like saucers as she peered out of the car window into the woods and fields through which the train was sliding so rapidly. "Will there be real live Indians with feathers and paint on them?"

"Don't be such a silly," said Ben. He secretly hoped there were Indians but he wouldn't have admitted it to any one. "Indians moved away from this country years ago, years and years ago, all except a few tame Indians. But perhaps there are bears out in those woods. Bears live where green bushes grow so thick. They hide in the bushes and jump out when you're not looking."

He was delighted to see Helen shiver in frightened excitement. It made him

feel rather trembly, too, to think of bears as big as men that jumped out and growled.

“Have they big teeth?” asked Helen, as she pressed her small nose against the window glass, looking hard for a glimpse of a bear.

“I guess they have teeth! And round ears and claws and fur.”

“Oh-h-h! I don’t want to met any bears.” Helen’s nose was pressed into a flat white spot in her desire to look deeper into the woods.

“Jo Bailey won’t let them touch you, will he, father?” said Ann reassuringly.

She turned to her father, who sat absorbed in watching the country flowing past his window. She knew how he loved the green fields and the woods, all the lovely shapes of things and the way they were placed on the green earth, for he painted them on wide, long canvases. Sometimes the things he painted didn’t look as Ann thought they ought to, but she always found him ready to explain why he made them so different from the way they had appeared to her eyes. People who knew about painting said that his work had unusually fine quality and Ann believed that soon he would be very famous and then there would be a great deal more money to spend than they had now. She would be able to go west and start a ranch with hundreds of horses and cowboys riding them. That was the dream of her life.

Ben didn’t care much about having more money. He was satisfied to sit and watch his father at work. Often Mr. Seymour gave him an old piece of stretched canvas to paint on while he sat so quietly there beside him. Ben liked to splash in the paint and try to do something himself.

In spite of being a boy he was not nearly as strong as Ann, although he was only two years younger. She could tumble him over easily, but she was unusually strong for her age. It was hard for Ann to remember always not to be too rough with Ben and Helen. She was not quite aware of how she was looking forward to being with Jo Bailey, for her father had said, “Jo’s as sturdy as they make ’em.” Jo, Ann knew, would be able to do everything she could and then do more. And Jo would tell them about bears and Indians, for though, like Ben, she knew perfectly well that no Indians or bears would be in the Pine Ledge woods, she liked to imagine that there might be some.

“Dad,” she said to Mr. Seymour, and he turned his keen smiling eyes toward her. “Jo will know whether bears come into his woods, won’t he? Tell Helen that Jo will take care of her.”

“I shouldn’t wonder,” answered Mr. Seymour, “but he will speak for himself in about one minute from now, for here we are.”

What a scurrying for coats and bags as the train pulled up before the square

wooden box that was Pine Ledge station! They all climbed down the high steps to the platform, Helen without hat or coat because, as usual, she had been too excited to get them on until the last moment had come.

So this was Jo, waiting for them beside a fat old plow horse and a roomy brown wagon that Ann learned to call the buckboard. Jo was much bigger than Ann had thought he would be, and freckles were spattered on his tanned face. He wore a very faded pair of clean overalls and the collar of his blue shirt stood out like a second pair of ears. He grinned a wide shy grin and his heavy boots scraped awkwardly on the platform as he walked across to meet them.

Helen couldn't wait. She ran across to him before the others were fairly out of the train. "Where are the Indians and the bears? Please show them to me right away."

"Bears?" answered Jo, laughing in spite of his bashfulness. "Bears— Well, I guess I can find you places where they have been, later in the summer, around the berry patches, but they don't linger here in the springtime. And the Injuns were scared away years ago. People ain't scalped up here any more."

All the Seymours were around him by this time. "We shall have to do without the Indians," said Mrs. Seymour gayly. "Really, I prefer not to be scalped."

Jo laughed again as he went to help with the baggage; a feeling of satisfaction and contentment filled him. These new people were friendly. He was going to like them.

"I'll take those, Mr. Seymour." And over Jo's square shoulders went the strapped shawls, the extra coats, and with three valises in each hand the boy strode down to the buckboard.

Ben's mouth dropped open in astonishment as he watched.

"Isn't that too heavy a load?" Mr. Seymour protested; but Jo called back, "Not a mite heavier than milk pails."

"How strong you are!" exclaimed Ann.

After Mr. Seymour had gathered up his share of the remaining luggage two bags remained. Ben looked at them. He had not supposed that he could lift them from the platform but he had watched Jo with admiring eyes, and now when Ann stooped for the bags he suddenly brushed her aside and grabbed the two valises.

"I'll do that," he said, and he struggled after his father and Jo, the two bags trailing from his lean frail arms.

Jo piled baggage and Seymours into the two-seated wagon, although how he managed to stow them all away Ann couldn't imagine until she saw him do it. The buckboard seemed elastic, and Jerry, the big lumbering old horse, traveled along as though he had no load at all.

“Want to sit on the little front seat with me?” Jo asked Ann. Jo had decided at first glance that he liked this thin tall ruddy girl with her bobbed hair. She didn’t seem like the girls he had known; she was more like a boy with her frank smile and clear eyes. No frills or fancies about her, no sly nudgings or giggles that might mean anything, no holding hands. No pretending not to understand his own sensible frankness, no trying to make him remember that she was a girl. She sat beside him as he drove, her bright eyes darting this way and that, letting nothing escape her sight, excitedly seeking out the things that Jo had known every day of his life. Jo knew that if he had gone to Boston he would have felt the same way about things that were different from those at home.

Funny thing—he had expected to like the boy best, but even this early Jo saw that he was going to have the most fun with the girl whom he had dreaded meeting.

They seemed to enjoy their drive so much that Jo took them the long way around, through the village. There the houses were grouped together, crouching down like a flock of little chickens about the tall church that looked like a guardian white hen. All around the outskirts green hillocks rose, framing the village into a cuddling nest. This was planned, Jo explained, to protect the houses in winter, when the gales brought the snow out of the north and buried the roads beyond the pine-covered mounds.

“The wind blows like all get out,” he chattered. “And the folks are glad to be together so that they can reach the store and the church, and the children can go to school. The wind blows so hard that it passes right over the top of this valley, playing leapfrog over the hills.”

“Where do you go to school?” Mrs. Seymour asked from the back seat.

Jo turned to answer her. “I come down here.”

“You mean you come down here to live in winter?”

“No, we don’t want to leave the homestead. Jerry brings me in good weather, and when he can’t get through I go on snowshoes to the nearest neighbors and the school dray picks me up there.”

“You walk? All that distance?” Even Mr. Seymour was astonished.

“It ain’t so far. Only four or five miles.”

Ann was tremendously impressed. “You come all that distance every day?”

“Lots of the fellows do it, and the girls, too. Everybody goes to school even if they do live out on a farm.” Jo was very matter-of-fact about it. He never had thought of pitying himself, nor thought of admiring himself, either.

Ann liked the way the small white houses nestled together with the church steeple standing over them. The steeple reminded her of a lighthouse piercing up

into the blue sky. Above it the scudding bits of cloud were flying by like little sailboats she had once seen racing across Boston Bay.

After they had passed through the village Jo turned into a winding road which grew wilder and more unkempt as Jerry plodded along. Puffs of dust rose behind the wheels and the hot sun on the pines made the air heavy with fragrance. Finally the road plunged down into a ravine where the air was cool and the sound of running water could be heard. The pines met overhead and made a soft rustling noise more quiet than silence.

“The river runs under the road here,” explained Jo. “Then it goes down into the sea. The sea is just beyond those trees,” and he pointed through the pines with his whipstock.

From the ravine once again they climbed into the sunlight, mounting up over cliffs and rocks, until the sea suddenly spread out endlessly before them. From here they could look back and see the mouth of the river as it foamed out of the pines into the broader expanse of water. Gray shingled huts were clustered on the banks just out of reach of the swishing rush of tide, and bent figures of men, tiny, and yellow in their oilskins, could be seen moving in and out of the boats drawn on the shore.

“Lobstermen,” said Jo before Ann had a chance to ask him. “They bring their boats in there. We have our boat down in the cove, my father and I. Do you know anything about lobstering?” And he turned to her with his eyes twinkling. Well enough he knew she did not.

Ann laughed aloud with him. “I’ve seen them in the fish market. And I’ve eaten them. But I don’t know a thing about catching them.” She looked at him inquiringly. “Is it fun?”

“I’ll take you out with me sometime, if you will promise not to be seasick.”

“I can’t promise that, because I don’t know and of course I couldn’t help it if I had to be seasick, but I shouldn’t care—I can be sure of that!”

“Take me, too,” Helen demanded from the rear seat.

“All right.” Jo nodded and turned to Ben. “And you, if you would like to come.”

“I’ll come if I can help row.” Ben was still feeling strong after his battle with the bags. He wanted to do everything that Jo did.

Jo understood. “You could, but we don’t have to row any more. The boat has a motor. But you can help to pull the lobster pots up; that’s hard work and Miss Ann wouldn’t like to get herself all over wet.”

“Don’t call me Miss Ann,” the girl cried impatiently. “It makes me feel grown up and I hate it! I’m Ann. My gracious, I’ve done nothing but talk of you as Jo

ever since my father planned to come up here this summer. I feel as if I'd known you for years."

"All right," said Jo. Secretly he was delighted, but he did not quite know how to show it and was not quite sure that he cared to let them see. "You will get all messed up with the bait and the water, but perhaps you won't mind. There's the house just yonder," and he pointed around the bend of the road.

"Where?" they all shouted. And there it was, outlined against the dark of the forest behind it. It was a small one-storied frame house like those in the village, with the roof at the back sloping almost down to the ground, a white hen with her wings outstretched to cover these children from the city.

The house stood at the extreme edge of a broad meadow that ran from the woods to the high bluff at the foot of which lay a rocky beach; black woods behind and then the smooth stretch of pasture and beyond it the ocean.

The sun had already set, leaving an afterglow that was dimming rapidly, and the Seymours suddenly felt tired and glad that they were to reach shelter before dark. The air grew colder with the setting of the sun and the glimmer of a lamp in the window was welcome.

Even Jo seemed anxious to get home and he urged Jerry into a trot. "Hey up, Jerry," he chirped, and slapped the reins over the smooth round back. Jerry pricked up his ears and blew his breath quickly through his nostrils. He obeyed as if he had meant to hurry without being told.

Everything grew tense in the peaceful twilight, as if a storm were creeping across the smooth sea to burst in fury against the cliff. Ann glanced at Jo's face and found that his chin was set tightly and his eyes looked straight ahead. He didn't look frightened, but Ann knew that he had no wish to be caught on this particular bit of road after the night had fallen.

Up over the bluff the wagon rattled, Jerry's feet making a clump-clump in the stillness. Across and down the slight hill they went.

CHAPTER II

THE WRECKED SCHOONER

THE great boat lay almost against the road. As the buckboard sped by she loomed above it in the gathering dusk, menacing and mountainous. Her broken bowsprit swung over the wagon and creaked in the breeze that had just sprung up. Directly below the bowsprit was a carved figurehead, larger than life and clearly outlined against the dull gray of the ship. Sea and rain had washed away the figure's paint and worn the wood bone-white. It represented a demon nailed to the battered prow, its wide ugly grin and blank eyes peering almost into Ann's face as the buckboard passed beneath. Ann was on the side of the wagon which was closer and could have touched the face if she had reached out her hand to do so. Helen gave a little shriek of fright at sight of the thing and Ann felt the cry echoing in her brain as if she had been the one who called out.

Instinctively she dodged back against Jo, and felt that his muscles were tense against the tightened reins in his hands.

Jerry needed no urging; with his back flattened down he ran, swinging his heavy feet swiftly as he mounted the hill toward the house. Ann glanced up from the strong brown hands holding the reins and saw that Jo was staring straight ahead as though he had not looked at the figurehead as he went by and was determined not to turn and look back at it afterward.

They were past, but as they went up the hill the evening wind suddenly grew stronger and sighed through the weatherworn boards that covered the schooner's hull, and the rattling of their loose ends was like the sound of clapping hands.

What was this old boat, and why did it impress them so? And yet Ann did not feel like asking Jo about it. She wished that her father would say something to quiet this fear that had come over her so suddenly. She never before had felt anything like this strange impression that the schooner was more than just a plain ordinary boat cast up on a narrow strip of beach.

As though Mr. Seymour had read her mind he asked Jo, "Where did that schooner come from? She wasn't here last summer when I was down."

"No, sir." Jo had trouble in making his stiff lips move. "She came in on a blizzard the winter past and stove up on the pond rocks."

“Whose boat was she? What is her name?”

“She had no cargo on board,” said Jo slowly, as if he did not wish to say anything about it. “She had no log either. And the waves were so heavy that her name plate was gone and never came ashore.”

“But wasn’t there somebody on board to tell you who she was?”

“A man had no chance to live in the sea the day she came in,” explained Jo. “Four of the crew were washed ashore the next day, but they carried no papers and nobody claimed them. None of the folks wanted to bury them down in the village churchyard so pop and I put them up back of the barn where grandpop lies. It didn’t seem right not to give them a bit of ground to lie in, even though we didn’t know what brought them in here.”

Mrs. Seymour exclaimed indignantly, “I never heard of anything so inhuman! Do you really mean that the people in the village refused to bury those poor shipwrecked sailors in the cemetery? Jo! Not here in a civilized land?”

“You couldn’t blame the folks,” apologized Jo.

But evidently Mrs. Seymour was quite positive that she could, and Ann agreed with her most thoroughly.

Jerry had stopped running. He was going uphill and besides they were almost home now, but Jo had time to say, “Nobody ever claimed the boat. I guess nobody owns her. And not even the sea wants her you can make that out by the way it threw her away up here by the road, just as if it wanted to be free of her. Only the flood tides reach her now.”

They had reached the house as Jo talked, and he jumped down from his seat with his face still grim and set. And then everything changed, for the house door was flung open with a flood of lamplight over the doorstep and there stood Fred Bailey, Jo’s father.

“Come right in,” he called, striding to meet them. “Don’t mind that stuff, Mr. Seymour. We’ll take it in for you.”

Ann liked Fred Bailey almost as much as she had liked Jo. As soon as she saw him standing there, tall and thin and gangling in his rough clothes, a fisherman and a farmer, all thoughts of the strange wrecked ship were forgotten. Here was some one who made her feel at home, some one who was strong and trustworthy and honest as the good brown earth and the mighty cliffs.

Mr. Seymour had rented the Bailey house and Jo and his father had moved into the barn for the summer. So presently, when the baggage had been brought in and when Mr. Bailey had shown Mrs. Seymour where things were in the pantry and the kitchen and the woodshed and where the linen and blankets were kept, he and Jo went off to their summer quarters leaving the Seymours alone.

Provisions had been sent from the village store and Ann and her mother found the shelves well stocked with all kinds of food, with big barrels of sugar, flour, and potatoes stored under the shelf in the pantry. After they had studied the workings of the kerosene stove they cooked the first meal over it, and Ann loved just such an opportunity to show how much she knew about cooking. Ben was ready to admit that she could boil potatoes expertly when she didn't forget and let the water boil away. As there was plenty of water this time, and as Mrs. Seymour knew how to cook the steak deliciously in a hot pan, and as Fred Bailey had left them a batch of soft yellow biscuits, the hungry travelers were very well off indeed this evening.

Mr. Seymour was already gloating over the work he meant to do this summer. "That boat is a find I didn't expect. I'll start sketching her the first thing in the morning. Just think of having a cottage with a wrecked schooner right in the front yard."

"I don't like that boat," said Helen. Her lips twisted as though she were going to cry. "It has such big round eyes that stare at you."

Her mother laughed. "You must have been sleepy when you passed the boat. That was only the figure of a man cut out of wood. The eyes didn't belong to anybody who is actually alive."

"I don't know about that, mother," Ben said soberly. "I saw the eyes, too, and I was wide-awake, for I pinched myself to make sure. Those eyes made little holes right through me when they looked down at me. They were looking at me, really, and not at Helen."

"They were looking at me!" Helen insisted. "And I don't like that ship! I want to go home to Boston."

Mr. Seymour looked at her in astonishment. "Come, come, my dear child, you mustn't let a thing like that frighten you. It is strange and grotesque but that only makes it more interesting. I'll tell you about figureheads. The sailors think of the ship's figurehead as a sort of guardian spirit that watches over the boat and protects it during storms. Even if it were alive it wouldn't hurt you because it was created only to protect. But it isn't alive, Helen, it is made out of wood. I'll go with all of you to-morrow and let you touch it and then you will never be afraid of it again."

"Do they always put figureheads on big boats, father?" asked Ann. She would not have been willing to admit that she, too, had those eyes upon her and had thought they seemed very much alive.

"No, not always," Mr. Seymour explained. "Sometimes the portion over the cutwater of a ship is finished off with scrollwork, gilded and painted. Modern

steamers don’t have them now, very often, but the deep-sea men who are on a sailing vessel months at a time like to feel that they have a figurehead to watch and care for them while they are asleep. The owners decide what it will be, and give directions to the builders. That is, if they name a boat after a man they will carve a statue of him for the bow, or else they will choose a saint or an old-time god, like Neptune, who was once supposed to rule over the sea. Sometimes they will have a mermaid, because mermaids are gay and dancing and will make the ship travel more swiftly; no sea could drown a mermaid. When a sailing ship makes a safe passage through storm and peril and brings the sailors home happy and well, they are very likely to believe that the figurehead has had as much to do with it as the captain with his real knowledge of navigation and charts.”

“It is a mascot, then?” said Ben.

“Yes, a sort of mascot,” his father assented. “And some of the old figureheads are beautifully made, real works of art. When he retired, many a sea captain took the figurehead from his ship and nailed it over the door of his home, for he felt a real affection for it. Perhaps he thought that since Neptune had taken such good care of the ship at sea he was entitled to the same enjoyment and rest ashore that the captain had earned.”

Mr. Seymour seemed to feel that everything was clear now, but Ann was not satisfied.

“This ship did not get home safely,” she said in a half whisper.

“No, it didn’t,” her father assented. He was perfectly frank in admitting that even the best of figureheads failed when storms were too heavy or when sailors made mistakes in calculating the force of wind and currents. “But that would not be the fault of the figurehead. I am sure we shall learn that the captain lost track of where he was and came in too close to shore.”

Ann’s doubts showed in her face. “But the crew and cargo have disappeared.”

“You mustn’t be superstitious, Ann. There is always a logical explanation for everything that seems strange and unnatural. There must be a good reason why that boat had no cargo and probably we shall learn all about her this summer before we go back to Boston. Some of the people about here may know more than they care to admit and have purposely kept it secret from Jo and Mr. Bailey.”

“Wouldn’t it be fun if we could find out all about her!” Her father’s calm confidence had reassured Ann; her father must be right and she didn’t want to be silly and timid. Never before had she felt the least bit afraid of anything.

Ben had been thinking. “Just exactly what does it mean to be superstitious, dad?” he asked.

“If you try to make yourself believe that the wooden figure out there is alive, or if you are willing to accept any one else’s belief in such nonsense, you will be superstitious and not intelligent. For instance, you may think you see something, or hear something, and not be able to explain what it is immediately. If instead of working to learn a true explanation you remember the incident as it first impressed you——”

“Like thinking a mouse at night is a burglar,” Ann interrupted.

“That is it exactly,” said Mr. Seymour. “Take that figurehead of a demon on the boat; we passed by it just at twilight when it couldn’t be seen as plainly as in full sunlight, and because the face was leaning toward us, with shadows moving over it, it gave you the impression that the thing was alive and watching you. To-morrow when the sun comes out you will go back to look at it and see that it is only a wooden statue, while if we should go home to-night, as Helen wishes, you children would remember it all your lives as something evil. And in that case you would be permitting yourselves to grow superstitious instead of taking this as an opportunity for the exercise of honest thinking and intelligent observation.”

“Is Jo superstitious?” asked Ben abruptly.

“Jo is too sensible to be superstitious,” answered his father.

“But Jo is afraid of that boat! I saw his face when we went past. And even Jerry was afraid. He ran.”

Mr. Seymour glanced quickly across the table to where his wife sat between Ann and Helen. Ann saw the look that passed between him and her mother and realized that they both were worried. They did not want Helen and Ben to go on thinking about the boat, nor did they want the children to know that they, too, had felt the strangeness of that gray broken boat and that grinning face.

Ann believed with her father that this was nothing more than an old wooden sailing vessel thrown on the shore by a great storm. Where had it come from, and for what port was it bound? Where were the families who were waiting for their men to come home to them? Were there children who thought that their father would come back in a few weeks, now that good weather had made the seas safe? Were there mothers who believed that their sailor sons would soon be home? How anxious they must be, waiting all this time since last winter. Something ought to be done about letting them know the truth. It was tragic, and it was romantic, too.

And if there was a mystery attached to the ship that mystery could be explained by a detective or by any one else who had the courage and determination to find out what was at the bottom of this strangeness. Her father had said there was a reason for everything that was queer and uncanny. If only

she were brave enough to face that grinning demon! Should she be sensible, or should she let herself be weak and unintelligent? Intelligent, that was what father wanted them all to be, it was his favorite expression, “Be intelligent.”

The others began to chatter about other things while they were finishing supper and washing the dishes afterward, but although Ann took part in the work and the jokes and laughter and all the anticipations of a great time to-morrow, she could think in the back of her mind of nothing but the ship. If Jo would help them, she and Ben would try to find out all about the wreck. It would be much more fun than hunting imaginary Indians and bears in the woods.

After supper had been cleared away and the sweet old kitchen put in order, all the Seymours trooped through every room in the house, patting the wide soft feather beds that stood so high from the floor that a little flight of steps was needed to climb into them.

“A tiny stepladder beside my bed!” exclaimed Helen. “What fun! I love this house.”

The unaccustomedness of the quaint old furniture, the wide floor boards polished with age, the small-paned windows, the bulky mahogany chests of drawers that smiled so kindly as they waited for the children’s clothes to be unpacked, all these things crowded the ship out of Helen’s mind. She went to bed perfectly happy.

“Don’t you fall out,” called Ben from his room, “because if you should you’d break your leg, probably, you’re so high.”

“I couldn’t fall out,” Helen called back. “You wait until you try your bed. It seemed high before I got in, but I sank away down and down into a nest; I think I’ll pretend I am a baby swan to-night with billows of my mother swan’s feathers all about me to keep me warm. I never slept in such a funny bed, but I like it!”

And then Helen’s voice trailed off into silence.

In each room the Seymours found a lamp trimmed and filled ready for use, with its glass chimney as spotlessly clear as the glass of a lighthouse.

“How kind the Baileys are!” exclaimed Mrs. Seymour gratefully. “I don’t feel as if we were renting this house; Jo and his father seem like old friends already.”

This time it was Ann and her father who exchanged a quick glance, a flash of understanding and satisfaction. Impulsively Ann threw her arms around her mother’s neck and kissed her. Her mother should have a chance to rest here, if Ann’s help could make it possible, dear mother who still looked so pale and tired after the long weeks of nursing Helen and bringing her back to health.

“I knew that you’d like the Baileys,” said Mr. Seymour.

“Jo is an unusually nice boy, isn’t he, father?” Ann had already grown

attached to him.

“He certainly is,” Mr. Seymour agreed heartily. “And I know that you will like him even better as you become better acquainted. His father couldn’t get along without Jo. He does a man’s work on the farm and helps bring in the lobsters every morning.”

“I’m going to be just like him,” Ben called from his bed in the next room. Jo’s sturdy strength and the simple unconscious way the boy used it had fired Ben’s imagination.

“Nothing could make me happier than to have you as well and strong as he is, when we go away next fall,” answered Mr. Seymour.

With supper and the lamplight and the homely charm of the old house, the atmosphere of uncanny strangeness had vanished, but after Ann had blown out her lamp, just before she was ready to climb the steps to her bed, she went to the window and peered through the darkness toward the wrecked ship.

And as she looked a flickering light passed across the deck.

She must be mistaken. It was a firefly. No, there it was again, as though a man walked carrying a swinging lantern with its wick no bigger than a candle flame. He passed the bow, and the glow swung across the figure of the demon.

Was it Jo or his father? That was Ann’s first thought, but she wanted to make sure. From a second window in her room, across a corner, she could see the windows of the barn which the Baileys had made into a living room, and she leaned far out to see clearly. Jo was there. He was talking to some one at the back of the room.

If Jo and his father were talking together, who could be prowling around the boat? She crossed the room to look again at the schooner. And as she watched, the bright pin prick of light disappeared; the lantern had been carried behind some opaque object that hid it.

“What’s up, Ann?” Ben stirred restlessly in the adjoining room. “It will be morning before you get to bed.”

“Oh, I was looking out of the window. The stars are so bright in Maine!”

“Ann! What do you think about that ship? I feel as if ghosts lived on her.”

Ann climbed her little flight of steps and slid down between upper sheet and feathers.

“Nonsense,” she called to Ben. “Ghosts don’t carry lanterns.”

“What?” Ben’s voice sounded much more awake. “What did you say, Ann?”

“I said I don’t believe in ghosts.”

Ann slid farther into her feather nest and promptly went to sleep.

CHAPTER III

HOW THE BOAT CAME ASHORE

VAGUELY Ann heard a bell ringing. She thought that she was lobstering with Jo and that Jo was pulling up a bell in one of the heavy lobster pots. They were bobbing about on waves as high as mountains.

"It is seven o'clock! No farmer stays in bed late, you know."

It was Mrs. Seymour's voice.

How could her mother have come away out to sea? Ann sat up in bed, not awake yet. And then she saw the sun pouring in through the open windows. Her mother was standing in the hall between Ann's room and Ben's, swinging an old ship's bell that she must have found somewhere in the house.

"In one minute, mother!"

How queer to wash in a huge bowl in her room instead of in a bathroom! And how lovely to dry oneself while standing on a braided mat before the washstand with the sun pouring down on one's back and legs! Bloomers and middy had miraculously appeared from her baggage; some fairy had been at work while Ann was sleeping.

The smell of breakfast tweaked her hungry nose and she scurried madly with her dressing, for Ben and Helen would eat everything in sight if they felt half as starved as she did.

The kitchen seemed altogether different in the daytime. It had grown smaller without the flickering shadows from the lamps. The ceiling was low and Mr. Seymour bumped his head as he came through the doorway; he would have to remember to stoop.

The big kitchen stove hummed merrily with the sweet smell of wood smoke seeping up through the lids, a delicate fragrant thread of gray that curled and

disappeared. Mrs. Seymour explained that Mr. Bailey built the fire for her; he had come early to show her how to make it. Just as she spoke he appeared in the doorway again with a foaming milk pail in his hand. His face was unsmiling but his blue eyes were alight.

“So much milk for us?” inquired Mrs. Seymour.

“Drink it down, free as water,” he answered. “That’s what puts the color in children’s cheeks. Get your milk pans ready.”

“Hello,” said Ann. “Isn’t this a fine morning?”

“Morning? Morning?” said Mr. Bailey. “This be the middle of the forenoon.”

Ann saw that his eyes were laughing at her although his face never moved a muscle. “What time is morning up here?” she demanded.

“Oh—about half past three, these days. That’s dawn.”

“Do we have to get up at half past three?” cried Ben.

“Well, you do if you want to keep up with Jo,” answered his father.

“Where’s Jo now?” Ben asked, getting up from his chair.

“He’s hoein’ corn,” said Mr. Bailey. “Got two rows done already. He’s not one to lie in bed, not Jo.”

“May I hoe with him? I’d like to, really.”

Fred Bailey looked at Ben’s mother. She nodded permission and Ben was off like a shot.

“Won’t you sit down and have a cup of coffee with us,” asked Mrs. Seymour, “to celebrate our first morning?”

“I don’t know but what I might,” said Fred Bailey. “Only don’t leave that pail o’ milk out there by the door for a minute.” And he picked it up and handed it to Ann. “It’ll be tipped over the second you take your eyes off it.”

“Your barn cats come over this far for milk?” inquired Mr. Seymour laughing. “They can smell a good thing from a long distance.”

“It ain’t no cats that dump it out on me,” said Fred soberly. “And I think that I’d better warn you, first thing. It’s the spirits, the spirits from the ship. They pester me almost to death, dumping out the milk from pails, and they tear up the packages left beside the door. You don’t want to leave nothin’ about.”

“You think that ship is haunted?” Mrs. Seymour poured out a big cup of coffee.

Helen had gone already and Ann hoped that neither of her parents would notice that she had stayed. She made as little noise as possible with the milk pans and then came and sat down quietly. She saw her mother’s eye wander toward her but she smiled pleadingly, hoping that her mother would know she could not

be frightened by any story about ghosts.

Fred was evidently glad to talk, once he had started on the subject. “I shouldn’t wonder but what something was aboard that boat that shouldn’t be there. I know this much—I’ve been bothered uncommon ever since she came ashore, and not by human beings.”

“How did she happen to be wrecked?” Mr. Seymour was as eager as Ann for the story, now that he felt sure that a story existed.

“She struck last winter in January,” began Fred, settling himself more comfortably in his chair. “It was during the worst storm we’ve had in these parts in the last hundred years.”

“It must have been a howler,” commented Mr. Seymour.

Mr. Bailey nodded soberly. “You’re right, I never saw nothin’ like it,” he said. “The storm had been brewing for days and we could feel it coming long before it struck us up here; there was warning enough in the Boston paper. Then the sea grew flat and shining without a hint of a whitecap on her. The wind was so strong it just pressed right down and smothered the waves, and it blew straight off the land. It never let up blowing off the land all through the storm, and that was one of the queer things that happened.

“We had three days o’ wind, and then the snow broke, all to once, as though the sky opened and shook all its stuffing right out on us. With the coming o’ the snow the wind eased up a bit an’ let the water churn on the top of the sea until it was as white as the falling snow. Finally I couldn’t tell where the water ended and the snow began.

“The wind driving the sleet was cruel. Whenever Jo or I ventured out it cut our faces and made them raw and bleeding. At times the wind lifted the house right off its stone foundations and shook it, and I feared it would be blown clear over the bluff and set awash in the sea.”

“How terrible!” exclaimed Mrs. Seymour.

“It was all of that,” Fred agreed. “The second day of the snow I thought the wind hove to a mite, it seemed more quiet. I went to the window to see if the snow had let up. It had—but not in any way I ever had seen it in all my fifty years of life on this bluff. It was as if a path had been cut through the flying storm, straight and clear with the wind sweeping through, so that I could see beyond the bluff over the water. It was then I had my first glimpse of it, riding over the waves and coming ashore dead against the gale. It was such a thing as no mortal ever saw nowadays. I thought I was losing my wits to see a boat coming toward me, riding in to shore against the wind and while the tide was running out. I just couldn’t believe what my eyes were telling me, for no boat

that I ever heard tell of had struck on this section of the coast. Nature built here so that they can't come in, what with Douglas Head stretching out to the north and making a current to sweep wrecks farther down; they strike to the north or the south of us, but never here."

"To see a ship coming in and be powerless to help it!" exclaimed Mr. Seymour as Fred paused for a sip of coffee and a bite of doughnut. "There was nothing that you could do?"

"Not a thing. I was alone with Jo, and even if we had been able to get out a small boat we couldn't have done nothin'. She was coming in too fast. So we bundled up, Jo and I, and went out to stand by on the shore."

"Into that storm?" Anne demanded. She had drawn close to her mother's chair during the story and now she stood tense against it. She could almost see the two figures, Fred so tall and Jo a little shorter, as they ventured out into the wind that threatened to blow them into the water. How the cutting sleet must have hurt, and how cold they must have been as they stamped their feet on the ice-covered rocks and beat their hands to keep from freezing!

"Nothing else to do but try to save the men as they washed ashore, now was there?" Fred asked gently, and Ann shook her head. She knew that if she had been there she would have gone with them and borne the cold as best she could.

"We waited and watched," Fred continued. "And all that time the narrow path stayed in the storm, swept clear of the driving snow. And the boat came nearer with no sails set and on even keel. When she struck she cried like a living thing.

"We couldn't see a man aboard. We waited all day and when night closed in I sent Jo down to the village for help, and I listened alone all night for the cry of some one washed to the beach; but no one came.

"When dawn broke Jo came back with ten or twelve men. They hadn't known a thing about the wreck in the village nor we shouldn't, either, if it hadn't been for that path in the storm; the snow was falling too thick for any one to see through it. Well, that morning the storm was over and the sun burst out. And there she lay, almost as you see her now, but farther out. The water was boiling all about her. The waves were crashing in pretty high but we thought we could get one of the boats launched at the mouth of the river and work it round to the ship. So we left Jo to watch the bluff here and picked my dory to make the trip as she shipped less water and rode the waves easier. We got her down the river and around the point and after a couple of attempts we pulled in under the schooner's stern and three of us swung aboard while Les Perkins and Pete Simonds held the dory.

"When we got on the schooner's deck we found that the sea had swept her

clean of anything that might have identified her. The name plates looked as if a mighty hand had wrenched them loose and great cuts showed in the bow and stern where they had been. There wasn't a sound but the pounding of the waves along her side. It made a queer sussh-sussh that didn't seem to come from where the water touched her. We broke open the hatches and went down in her—two by two. Wasn't a man of us who dast go down there alone, for you never can tell what you're going to find in a wrecked ship's cabin. We looked all about, but no one was in the place and I don't believe that any one was on her when she struck. The crew's quarters were in order but the cabin appeared as if there had been a struggle there, though the sea might have done it, tossing things about. Then we searched her careful but found no log nor no papers. Some clothes were scattered here and there but the pockets were empty and turned wrongside foremost. She had no cargo and the fire was still a-going in the stove."

Mr. Bailey had another cup of coffee and drank it silently while the Seymours waited for the rest of the story.

"Well, that's how she came in," he said at last.

"But what makes you think there are spirits on board?" asked Mr. Seymour. "There must have been something more than you have told us, to make you believe that."

"Yes, there is more to it," admitted Fred, "but if I was to tell ye you'd think me foolish."

"We'd never think that, I can assure you," said Mrs. Seymour quickly. "If we had been with you on the schooner probably we should be feeling exactly as you do about her."

"Perhaps you might, and perhaps you might not. I would think that the trouble was with me if it hadn't been for the other men, but every one of them down to the cove would back me up in what I say. And I might as well tell you, because if I don't some one else will, no doubt.

"We had almost finished searching when I got a sort of feeling that some one or something was peering at me. I kept looking around behind me, and then I noticed that the other men were doing the same thing. There was nothin' there. We kind of looked at each other and laughed at first. But soon it was all I could do to keep from running around the next corner to catch whatever was behind it. We did our search thorough, but I can tell you I was glad when Les Perkins pulled the dory under the stern and I could drop into her. None of us hankered to stay aboard that ship."

In spite of herself Ann shivered and was glad when her mother hugged her reassuringly.

“Two days after that,” Fred continued, “we picked up four men who had been washed in by the sea. We are God-fearing people up here and I couldn’t understand why the folks in the village wouldn’t put those sailors in the churchyard, but some of the people were foolish and said those men should not be put in consecrated ground, coming out of the sea like that. I didn’t know quite what to do, and I suppose I should have taken them out and put them back into the sea, the way most sailormen are done by when they’re dead. But I didn’t decide to do that way; I buried them with my own people, yonder in the field, and they lie there marked by four bits of sandstone.

“Jo and I have been back on the boat several times, for we felt we had a duty by her, lying at our door as she does, but we can’t find a trace of anything to identify her and we both had that feeling that something there is wrong. Something was watching us all the time we were on her. So I’ve given up trying to think where she came from or who sailed on her, for such things a man like me is not supposed to know. Spirits from the sea no doubt came on board during the storm and threw the crew overside. But if those spirits are there now I don’t understand why the sea don’t claim her and break her up. Sea seems to be shoving her back on the land as though it wanted to be rid of her.”

“That is a great story, Fred,” said Mr. Seymour. “And I can sympathize with the way you felt; it must have taken a great deal of courage to go back to her when you and Jo looked her over. And you have never seen anything move on the boat?”

Ann wanted to tell about the light she had seen there last night, but that was her discovery and she so hoped to be the one to solve the mystery! She said not a word about it.

“Nary a sight of anything have we ever had,” Fred answered.

“Very strange indeed,” said Mr. Seymour. “What about the coast guard? Of course you reported the ship to them. Weren’t they able to discover anything?”

Ann knew already of the blue-uniformed men who patrolled the shores of the United States on foot and in small boats, men who were stationed at dangerous points to look for ships in distress and help them, men who were always ready to risk their own lives in their efforts to bring shipwrecked sailors ashore.

“Yes, they came,” Fred answered. “They went aboard her, and they took her measurements, her type and capacity, but they could find no record of such a boat nor the report of any missing boat of her description. And because there was no salvage on her and as she didn’t lie in such a way as to be a menace to shipping they left her for the sea to break up—and that’s going to take a long time, by the rate she’s going now.”

“I’d like to go on her,” Mr. Seymour said. “Would you be willing to take me?”

“Any time,” Fred assented. “Any time you pick out as long as the sun shines.”

“What about now?” Mr. Seymour smiled into Fred’s steady blue eyes.

“Just as good a time as any,” agreed Mr. Bailey, rising from his chair.

Ann’s eyes were beseeching but she knew that her father would not be willing to have her go, too, so she did not ask. He stopped an instant as he passed her on his way to the door and gave her a pat of approval, for he was perfectly aware of how much she wanted to see the boat.

“If I find there is nothing on the ship,” he said, “you can play there to your heart’s content.”

Fred heard, and he shook his head dubiously. But he said nothing more. The two went out together and down the meadow toward the schooner.

Ann watched them, and as she stood in the doorway she noticed that the figurehead on the bow had completely lost its twilight menace, as her father had foretold. This morning it looked exactly as it was, a battered wooden statue almost too badly carved to resemble anything. The arms that she had thought were stretched above its head now seemed to be wings and the expression of the face was almost peaceful.

She watched the men as they climbed on deck and then she turned back to the cheerful cottage and her work.

“What brave men these fishermen are!” said Mrs. Seymour. “And they don’t seem to realize it, particularly. It is all in the day’s work. Think of Jo’s walking five miles through heavy snow to bring help!”

Ann nodded. In her enthusiasm she stopped sweeping and leaned on her broom while she talked. “I’d like to have been here with them. Mother, I think I’d have found something on that boat!”

Her mother laughed. “Perhaps. You surely would have seen if anything had been there. But Mr. Bailey’s eyes are keen, too.”

“Y-e-s,” admitted Ann. “Aren’t he and Jo nice people! It is much more exciting here than going to school and walking across the Common. Don’t you think that I could stay here next winter and not go back to town?”

Her mother laughed again. “It is rather early to talk of next winter. School is a bit more important than adventures for you until you are a few years older.”

“I know that you are right,” Ann apologized. “Only I think that I will study to be a farmer.”

“Very well,” agreed her mother. “But don’t grow up too fast, my darling Ann. Promise me you won’t.”

Ann’s broom began to work fast. “If I have to grow up,” Ann said, as she swept under tables and chairs, “you can be sure that I am not going to sit around playing bridge with a lot of dressed-up people. No! I’m going to wear overalls and buy a ranch. I might take Jo in as a partner, but I haven’t decided on that yet, and I haven’t asked him.”

CHAPTER IV

IN THE GOOD GREENWOOD

MR. SEYMOUR returned from the boat and reported that he had found nothing unusual aboard her. He had not experienced the feeling of being watched by some uncanny creature, which Fred had described so vividly. And Fred acknowledged that while Mr. Seymour was with him he had found the boat a different place, free from any unhealthy suggestion.

So Helen, Ben, and Ann were told that they might scramble about her as they pleased, provided, of course, that they were careful not to fall down the open hatches or slip over the sides where the rails had been broken.

Ann was disappointed in her father's report although she knew that if he had found the boat unsafe she would have had no opportunity to investigate for herself. She tried to be sensible and forget that a mystery had ever been attached to the ship. But it was evident to her mind that there must have been something. As Jo said, "Where there's so much smoke there must be some fire." She had felt it so strongly last night—were those shivers caused by nothing at all?

Jo, at least, was not convinced by Mr. Seymour's report. He refused to join the Seymour children in a hunt over the boat that afternoon and consequently Ann and Ben were forced to wait until they could get a ladder before they could get up the high steep side of the schooner. It meant that they were not to go on the boat for some time to come, for Mr. Seymour made no suggestions as to how they were to go about getting up to the deck and Mr. Bailey seemed not to understand their hints that one of his ladders would be useful if he were willing to lend it.

Each night Ann looked out of her window, hoping to see that light flickering over the deck. It had not appeared again and she did not say a word about it to Jo

and Ben. She wanted to be sure that she really had seen it and not imagined it while excited by that first glimpse of the ship with its guardian demon. And so she watched faithfully every night before she climbed into her high bed.

In the meantime she put her energy into helping her mother with the housework, into hoeing the garden and hunting new thrills in the woods.

In the garden she did her stint shoulder to shoulder with Jo and Ben. Fred Bailey had given each of them a section of the vegetable garden for his own and had promised them a commission on all the vegetables sold. Ann had already planned what she would do with her money; she knew before any green had shown above the ground. She intended to put it into the bank as the beginning of her fund for the purchase of her western ranch.

Ben, of course, was going to spend his for paint and brushes.

Each of them had his own patch of potatoes, beans, and corn, a section of the main planting allotted to his special care. And they put the seeds in the ground themselves, with the experienced Jo as instructor. It was difficult to believe that those small hard kernels would grow into green plants.

One morning Ben reached the garden ahead of Ann and suddenly turned and shouted to her to hurry. “The beans are coming through! I suppose they’re beans, because that’s where we planted beans. Don’t they look funny!”

Funny they did look, great curling stems that thrust through the soil like crooked fingers, cracking and heaving the ground all around them. In the rows where the children had planted them the earth hummocked up and hundreds of plants were forcing their way up into the sunlight.

She knew they must be coming soon but the sight of them was a greater surprise than any Christmas Day Ann ever had known. To think that the little hard beans that she had dropped and covered with fine earth had been growing and putting out such curly twisted sprouts that had shot up overnight! The dear baby things! She knelt down to touch them but Jo’s voice stopped her. He had walked while she ran forward in reply to Ben’s call.

“I wouldn’t do that,” he suggested mildly. “The morning dew is on them and nobody touches beans while they’re wet. It turns them black when they get bigger.”

“But there are no beans yet,” Ann protested, looking up at Jo over her shoulder. “I don’t see how I could hurt them if I touched them delicately, just to find out whether they feel as strong as they look.”

“It doesn’t make any difference how young they are,” Jo answered. “It won’t seem to hurt them when you touch them, but when the beans form on the plants you have handled nobody will be able to eat them. They’ll be black and spotted;

rusted, the farmers call it. Of course sometimes you can't help beans rusting when there's too much rain."

"What makes them rust?" asked Ben. "You wouldn't imagine that the grown-up plants would remember anything that happened to them when they were babies."

"I don't know why," and Jo shook his head. "I wish I did know more about it. I don't know any reasons, but there must be some. I only know that things happen, not why."

"Well, I know this much," said Ann decidedly. "When I go back to school this fall I shall find out, and then I'll write to tell you, Jo."

"That would be fine. I'd like that," Jo said shyly.

Ben had gone over to the rows of corn and potatoes, and he came back with a perplexed expression on his face. "Where are they?" he asked. "Do you suppose that some animal has eaten them? We shall have nothing but beans in our gardens, or can we plant more corn and potatoes?"

Jo threw back his head and laughed heartily.

"What did you expect?" he asked. "Did you think that everything came through at the same time? The potatoes ought to sprout within a day or two, but corn is slow. It often takes three weeks. The weather has hardly been hot enough to start it yet. You need hot weather to make corn grow. Beans are about the quickest things."

"Gee, what a lot you know!" said Ben admiringly. "I didn't know there was so much to learn about a real garden. I thought that a farmer put his seeds in the ground and they came up, and then after a while he picked his vegetables and sold them."

"Lots of people think that," said Jo in a stiff tone of voice as he began to hoe his morning row. "That is why so many city people make jokes about farmers, and think they don't know anything. Most farmers know very little about the city, but they understand their job of getting food for the city people to eat. I should like to see some of those sneering city fellows plow an acre of ground under the hot sun. A man walks pretty near thirty miles doing such a stretch, and he has to hold his plow nearly a foot in the ground while he does his walking, so as to turn over a six or twelve inch furrow. It takes a pretty good man to do that."

"I never laughed at farmers, Jo," Ann protested mildly. "It is only that I never knew anything about farming."

"That's all right," answered Jo, smiling at her. "I wasn't thinking about any of you folks. I was calling to mind some of these summer tourists who come through camping by the wayside. We don't get pestered by them because we're

too far from the main highway, but the farmers nearer the village go well-nigh crazy trying to protect their gardens and fruit from stealing. Why, last summer Les Perkins had all of his pears just ready for picking and shipping to Boston. It took him three years to grow those pears for a perfect crop all free from worms and spots. He had sort of hoped to make something of them at last. He got to his trees one day in time to see a dozen city folks piling into a first-class car, all loaded up with pears. Not only that, but they had shaken the trees and the fruit was all stripped off. What they hadn't stolen was too bruised to sell."

"They ought to have been arrested for that!" Ann exclaimed breathlessly.

"Yes." Jo laughed half-heartedly. "Catch 'em if you can. I caught one of them stealing Pete Simonds' raspberries. He had a bunch of kids with him. I heard him tell 'em to pick the ripe ones and throw the green ones away. They were stripping the bushes. I told them to get out, but the man only laughed and said that all berries were common property."

"What did you do then?" asked Ben eagerly.

Jo was rather shamefaced. "Well, I shouldn't have done it. But the way the man said it made me mad, so I hauled off and gave him a punch in the jaw. He looked so funny, the way he sprawled with raspberries all over him! He was a good-sized feller, and he got up on his feet and came after me ugly, but he saw Pete coming on the run and I can tell you he legged it for his car with all the kids streaming after him. He knew just as well as I did that he was stealing."

"Well," said Ben slowly, "if any one stole my beans I'd punch him in the jaw, too. After a farmer has planted seeds on his own land the crop is his exactly as much as the vegetables in my mother's kitchen are hers after she has brought them home from the market."

"There ought to be policemen to watch city people," said Ann. "They ought to be made afraid to steal, if they are not the kind of persons who would be ashamed to take what isn't theirs."

"There don't seem to be many of that last kind," said Jo.

"It makes me feel rather queer," said Ann. "I don't like to think that you have learned to have such a bad opinion of people who live in the city."

"Tell us some more about farming, Jo," begged Ben. "What happens to beans after they have sprouted and begun to be plants?" He looked fondly at his row with their yellow-green stems.

"Oh, we'll have plenty of work from now on," began Jo. "We'll have to hunt for cutworms right away. See—here is one now." He uncovered a small gray worm about an inch long and crushed it with his hoe.

"Let's see!" said Ben excitedly, and he and Ann began to examine their own

allotments.

“They work at night and dig in under the soil when the sun comes out,” Jo explained. “They bite the young plant off just where it goes into the ground. Whenever you find a plant lying on the ground you know that a cutworm has eaten it off and he is hiding under the dirt a few inches away. You’ll have to dig each one up and kill it before he does any more damage. He would come back again and again and finally eat off the whole row.”

“I’ve found one!” Ben cried. “I hate them! Why do they have to come?” he asked as he stamped on it.

“I guess they have to eat like the rest of us,” answered Jo. “But if we didn’t watch there would be more cutworms than beans in the world. They sure were invented to pester us farmers.”

“They are almost as bad as the tourists,” and Ann laughed.

“Well, in a way we don’t mind them so much as we do tourists. We expect the cutworms.”

“I don’t believe the tourists would enjoy being cut in two,” said Ann.

So the days went happily by, full of new experiences for the Seymours. Whenever the short rains came the children sat before the open fire in the living room, or, as Jo called it, the parlor, while Mrs. Seymour read to them, or while Jo told stories of the country near Pine Ledge; for Jo was always included in the circle.

Ann never grew tired of watching the sea. While the others watched the fire she often sat by the window, listening, of course, but with her eyes fixed on the ocean. How the waves shone in the sun, and how they tumbled and grew dark when the squalls rushed over them! At such times she wondered about what had happened on the schooner cast up on the shore, lying on its side almost at her very feet. Fred believed what he had felt while he was on her, and Jo so evidently had a horror of everything connected with the wreck; there was her father’s testimony that nothing was wrong there. And as a climax to that, there was what her own eyes had seen, the moving light.

Mr. Seymour was working hard and getting a great deal done. His sketches grew rapidly under his hands. Already he had a number of canvases leaning against the walls of the living room and he had asked Jo if he might paint his portrait.

Then one day a heavy northeaster broke and gave promise of lasting two days at the very least. It was a good time for indoor work and Jo was called into service as a model. He did not know the story of Robin Hood, so Mrs. Seymour read it aloud while he sat for Mr. Seymour. The others had heard it many times,

but they were never tired of those adventures in the glade and the good greenwood and they listened as eagerly as did Jo.

Then came clear days that were the best of all, for after their gardens had been hoed, Maude, the cow, milked and put to pasture, and the chickens watered and fed, they followed Jo's lead into the dense pine woods, where they held forth as Robin Hood and his band.

Jo was, of course, Robin Hood, for he knew all the trails through the merry greenwood and could find clear fresh springs no matter in which direction they tramped. Ben was Allan-a-Dale, although he couldn't sing very well. In fact, after he had proved to know only one tune and had sung that one a great many times, the entire band requested him to stop it.

"Allan-a-Dale was a minstrel and he was supposed to sing," Ben protested.

But Helen, who was taking the part of Ellen, had a good reason for wishing that Ben would be quiet and she did not hesitate to tell him. "I want to watch the birds, and you scare them away. Can't you just pretend to sing? It would be very much nicer."

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In the lookout tree they mounted guard in turn.

As the band contained only one woman besides Ellen, Ann finally consented to be Maid Marian, although she much preferred to be Friar Tuck.

"You're a girl," Ben said decidedly. "And a girl can't be Friar Tuck."

"What difference does that make?" protested Ann. "I can swing a stave as well as you do; better."

"I know you can," said Jo. "But Maid Marian is far more important than Friar Tuck. Robin Hood couldn't have done a thing without her. She went everywhere the band did and thought things out for them, but Friar Tuck didn't do much except eat and drink."

"It is such a nice name," mourned Ann. But Maid Marian she decided to be.

The band discovered a place high up in the wood that was exactly suited to be their glade. It was a wide bare spot covered with pine needles, and along its edges a few walnut trees were scattered, one of which the boys could climb easily. This was the lookout tree, and after Ann learned how to get up it they mounted guard in turn. From its branches one could see far away across the green forest to the village, a cluster of white dots. On the other side the watcher

looked over the home meadow and the house to the sea beyond. From such a high perch the expanse of water seemed much greater and the house and meadow very small in contrast.

“What ho, what ho,” Ben called the first time Ann settled herself among the branches. “Sister Ann, do you see anybody coming?”

“Pooh!” exclaimed little Helen contemptuously. “That’s Bluebeard! That’s not Robin Hood.”

“So it is,” admitted Ben. “What ho, what ho, Maid Marian, doth an enemy draw nigh?”

“I see only one,” Ann answered as a small blue figure that was Fred Bailey crossed the meadow far away, “but he holds at a distance and is seemingly unaware of our hiding place.”

No band is complete without its longbows and staves. Jo quickly filled this lack. He made staves by cutting branches from the straight alder bushes that grew in the brook, peeling them until they were white and shining. They whipped lithely in the air with a clear whistling sound. Jo gathered them up every evening and kept them in the running water of the brook, so that they would not dry out and become brittle.

At first he was puzzled as to how he could make longbows that were strong as well as limber, but soon he thought of the young willows. These he cut and bent into a regular bow-shape without destroying the springiness of the wood. And for bowstrings they used old fishing line.

There was no problem concerning life in the greenwood that Jo could not solve; the making of proper arrows, for instance. He built a small fire after scraping away the dry pine needles and sprinkling the ground with fresh moist earth, and cut some thin lead into strips. These he fastened to the points of the short arrows he had made, so that the tips would have weight to carry them straight to the mark. Of course each member of the band took great care not to shoot his fellow members and only one person was allowed to practice at a time, so that the arrows would be easy to locate after they had been shot.

At first the band made forays into the wood in pairs, Jo and Ann, then Ben and Helen, so that the glade might not be left unprotected. Under this arrangement Jo was always worried when it was his turn to stay in the shelter. He knew that Ben was unfamiliar with big woods and might get lost. So the band was called for conference and it was decided that the entire band should foray together. Meeting enemies in full strength they stood a better chance of beating them, and before starting out they carefully concealed all the trails to the glade and knew that no enemy could uncover them.

“To-day I shall get me a fine buck,” Ben said as he swung his longbow over his shoulder and seized his stave. “I hanker much for fresh meat.”

“I’ll show you where the deer come to drink,” Robin Hood offered. “Methinks if Allan be a good shot he can easily bring down a couple for our goodly dinner. I saw tracks by the river a month or so ago.”

“Really?” exclaimed Ben. “Gee! I’d like to see a deer!”

The trip to the river was all downhill and they scrambled through the prickly barberries and juniper like true outlaws, courageously ignoring the thorns that pricked and tore. Great ledges of gray rock, covered with lichens and holding small hemlocks and spruces in their cracks, opposed their way and they were obliged to climb up the rocks on one side and slide down over the steep slope beyond. Helen had the most trouble because her legs were shorter, but after Jo and Ann had pulled her down once or twice she lost her fear. With the aid of her stave she sat down on the top of the rock and coasted, landing upright on her feet in the soft underbrush at the bottom. It wasn’t very good for her bloomers, but they were made of stout cloth and managed to hold together.

As they drew near to the wide pool where the river spread out over the low land Jo motioned for them to step quietly. He took the lead and crept slowly foot by foot, crouching low in the underbrush. Finally they came on a narrow trail through which they could just pass with the bushes touching their shoulders. Ann noticed how Jo avoided touching the branches so that they should not move any more than necessary and she tried to imitate him. It was not easy. He twisted his shoulders this way and that, all the time moving forward slowly. Ben went along with his hands on his knees, bent forward, while Helen was so short that she had no difficulty at all.

At last Jo looked back over his shoulder, put his finger on his lips and beckoned for them to come beside him. He pointed to a mark in the soft ground before him. It was the imprint of a small cloven hoof and even Ann’s inexperienced eye could see that it was fresh.

“He’s been down here this morning,” Jo whispered. “I wish we had been around—he’s a big fellow all right.”

“Isn’t he here now?” whispered Ann. “How do you know that he isn’t?”

“We’ll find out,” Jo answered. “He may be sleeping under the bushes, but they don’t stay in this neighborhood generally; too many people in the daytime, passing, and deer are nervous, nowadays. They like it best back on the hills where there is more protection.”

As he spoke he turned at right angles from the trail and plunged silently into the undergrowth. The bushes closed about him and it was all Ann could do to

follow. Suddenly he stopped.

He did not so much as whisper. Silently he motioned for them to come forward quickly.

They looked to where his finger pointed.

Under a group of pines a few feet away a huge buck deer lay asleep, with the sun through the trees splotching his dark coat and turning it into shimmering velvet. His horns were short and looked like dull leather; Jo told them afterward that was because he had not yet made his full year's growth.

As the band watched he leaped from the ground, fully awake in the instant that he scented danger. He leaped almost as if his feet had not touched the earth and he bounded lightly into a jungle of thorns and scrub oak. And with that one beautiful jump he vanished.

"Well, Allan," Jo turned toward Ben's wide-eyed face with a laugh. "Why didn't you shoot him?"

"Shoot him— Try to kill him? I couldn't kill anything as lovely as that, ever. I want to draw him, paint him, just as he jumped in the sun, with the light on his skin and the green all around. Oh," he cried excitedly, "do you suppose that father could see a deer so that he could show me how to make a picture that was halfway good?"

"If Mr. Seymour would really like to see one, we can come out some morning at dawn and if we are quiet perhaps we can see a deer as he comes down to drink. It is great fun to lie in the bushes when they don't know any one is watching; they walk about and drink."

"We'll go home and ask him now," said Ann with determination. "It is just too wonderful, and I know he'll want to come, perhaps to-morrow."

"And I want to tell mother about it," said Helen.

"All right," agreed Jo. "We'll follow the river out to the road. That will be easier than going back over those high ledges."

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With one beautiful jump he vanished.

The trail led down to a smooth swamp pond filled with such clear water that the children could see the long grass moving at the bottom. A short distance from the edge little heaps of leaves, straw, and twigs rose here and there above the surface of the water. Jo said they were houses that the muskrats had built to

live in last winter.

“They build just before the cold weather sets in,” he said. “It is great sport to come every day and see how the houses grow. Sometimes the muskrats don’t bother very much with building, and the winters that follow are open and warm, generally. But when old Mr. Muskrat builds high, wide, and handsome, look out for thick ice and deep heavy snow.”

“How curious!” said Ann. “How do you suppose they know what the weather is going to be?”

The band walked along beside the swamp until it narrowed into a running river again.

“Gulls like the pond, too,” Jo said. “Especially when a storm is blowing up. When the wind begins to be too strong the gulls sweep into the cove and watch for the fish that are beating into the mouth of the river. They hang up there in the air and laugh as if they liked the storm. They laugh out loud and shriek and have a great time. When they get tired and pretty well fed they let the wind carry them back here to the pond, where they settle in droves on the sheltered water. They wait until the storm blows over. Next nor’easter that blows up, I’ll remember to show them to you. You can see them easily from the kitchen.”

He was leading the band and they were drawing nearer to the road. Suddenly he stopped short, so short that Ann, who was next, bumped into him.

“Hello!” he said. “What’s this?”

At his feet were the charred embers of a fire. They were still smoldering and, as he brushed the ashes aside with his foot, the coals gleamed brightly.

“Who do you suppose did that?” he exclaimed indignantly. “None of the folks around here would ever leave a fire burning in the woods. Why, it might spread and burn off the whole territory. Once a fire got started up through the pines nothing could stop it.”

Ann looked down at the wicked gleam. She never would have dreamed that it was wicked if Jo hadn’t told her it was, but what he had said made her regard the fire from a very different standpoint. To her imagination the live embers glowed and flickered like the lantern she had seen on the wrecked ship.

She grew vaguely excited, for if no native of Pine Ledge could have left that fire, then some stranger must be prowling around the neighborhood, some one who didn’t want to be seen. Perhaps the very person who lighted this fire to cook his breakfast was the same invisible person who carried the swinging lantern across the deck, that first night.

The keen-minded Jo saw her excitement. “What’s up?” he asked. “Is something the matter?”

Ann hesitated. “Perhaps I am imagining, but I think I know of some one who might have built this fire.”

So she told them about that tiny pin point of lantern light.

Jo listened silently until she had finished, although Ann could see that he, too, was growing excited.

“I shouldn’t wonder if you were right,” he said at last. “It looks to me as if some one who has no business here is hanging about. But if we tell the other folks about it they will say that it is nonsense; they think that we are too young to know much of what we are talking about. I think we had better keep a good lookout, and if we actually discover anything we can tell them then. This is a job for Robin Hood’s men all right.”

Jo threw up his head and squared his shoulders.

“What ho, merry men!” he shouted. “How many will follow me in fathoming the mystery of the wrecked ship?”

“I will follow,” Ann said quickly.

“I want to be in on it, too,” Ben cried breathlessly.

“Me, too,” Helen chimed in a voice that was a bit frightened but nevertheless determined. “I want to help hunt for ghosts.”

“Then we are united?” Jo asked.

“Aye, aye,” shouted Ben. “Lead on.”

Before they started on their way again they dipped water from the river in their cupped hands and threw it hissing upon the live coals until the fire was out. As an extra precaution, for the fire might have gone deep into the pine needles beneath, Jo raked away the leaves and twigs and needles until he had made a wide circle of bareness.

CHAPTER V

ON THE WRECK

ROBIN HOOD and his band did not let the grass grow under their feet, after they had once decided to thoroughly investigate the mystery of the wrecked schooner. Ann, herself, felt much stronger and braver now that she had allies. She was quite willing to admit that she had been squeamish about going aboard and examining the ship alone or with no one but Ben and Helen. Although Mr. Seymour had reported the boat to be uninhabited and perfectly safe, Ann, nevertheless, had wondered whether perhaps the ghosts might not have been on a vacation the day her father went aboard with Mr. Bailey.

The band chose to begin their undertaking early in the afternoon of the day following their discovery of the fire in the woods. The sun was bright and therefore the demon on the bow was quite unlifelike and battered.

Jo bent his back, for a step, and Ann was the first to climb up to the sloping deck. After she had scrambled to safety she let down her hands to help Ben and then Helen, and then she lent a hand to Jo as he braced his feet against the wooden side and walked as a fly might until he could catch the gunwale and swing himself over the rail.

“It is a very big boat,” ventured Helen, whispering, as she looked over the wide deck with its shining weathered gray boards. “It is much bigger than it looks from the house.”

“Now, right here,” Jo interposed, “let’s make up our minds to one thing. Nobody is to whisper and nobody is to scream, no matter what happens. A whisper will frighten a person even when there is nothing to be afraid of, and if anybody screams in my ear I know I shall jump right out of my skin.”

“I don’t see how you have the courage to come back, Jo,” said Ben

admiringly.

“I’m not so terribly courageous,” admitted Jo candidly. “If it hadn’t been for Ann’s thinking that the fire had something to do with the ship I shouldn’t be here now, I know that much!”

“Where shall we go first?” Ann asked, and then, because she thought she might have seemed unsympathetic, she added, “I don’t believe we shall find anything wrong to-day. If men are really hanging about the boat they couldn’t come here in the open daylight, for they’d be sure to be seen.”

“We’ll go down to the captain’s quarters first,” Jo decided. “And then we’ll work forward into the crew’s sleeping place, and later look down in the hold. The whole place was bare and empty when my father and yours came to look her over.”

As they walked along the deck Ben kept close to the railing, as if he thought he could jump over it in case anything happened. And as he walked he ran his hand along the side, for the sea had worn the rails until they felt like silk under his fingers. Suddenly he stopped by a splintered break in the top rail and picked something from its outside edge.

“See what I’ve found,” he exclaimed as he glanced at what he held in his hand. “Oh,” he said in a tone of disappointment, “it is nothing but a piece of old cloth.”

He started to throw it away but Jo caught his arm.

“Let’s see it,” Jo said, and took the torn piece of blue woolen from Ben’s hand. “Hum,” he grunted thoughtfully as he turned it over and felt of it carefully.

“What is it, Jo?” asked Ann. “Does it mean something?”

“That I don’t rightly know,” Jo answered slowly. “It is just ordinary blue wool, but I know that not one of the fishermen around here wears anything like it. The really interesting thing about it, seems to me, is that it hasn’t been out in the weather any time. I should say it had never been rained on, nor the sun had a chance to bleach it. See, it hasn’t begun to fade.”

“You are right,” said Ann. She took the soft material in her hands. “This couldn’t have been torn from the clothing of any of the men who came to investigate, because that was so long ago that cloth torn from their suits would have worn away, such a little piece as this, with threads sticking out where it was torn off.”

“What sort of suit did your father wear the day he came here with my father?” inquired Jo.

“It was gray. He didn’t bring any dark suits with him, I’m sure,” answered Ann.

“And that isn’t the kind of cloth his blue suits are made of,” asserted Ben. “This is so thick; he wouldn’t wear that fuzzy thing.”

Jo put the bit of cloth into a pocket and carefully tucked it down into a safe corner; then he examined the splintered rail where their clue had been found.

“See,” he explained while the others hung over the edge to look, “the cloth caught on the outside of this splinter, as though the man who wore it slid down the side, holding on to the rail with his hands before he jumped free.”

“Well, ghosts don’t wear thick blue woolen clothes,” said Ann. “We can be sure that real people have been here.”

“I call this a pretty promising find of Ben’s,” said Jo, as he led the way toward the open hatch. “It makes me feel very different about this boat.”

Sliding down the companion-ladder they landed in the tiny passage from which the captain’s cubbyhole and the mate’s opened on either side. The captain’s stateroom was slightly larger than the mate’s, and his berth ran under the open porthole in which the thick glass had been shattered. The berth was piled with moldering blankets; apparently no one had touched them since the wreck. Beside the berth, wedged between it and the wall, a table stood with its only drawer pulled open, showing that it was empty.

“The log should have been there,” explained Jo, “in that drawer. But it had been taken away before ever our men got to the wreck. And over here on this wall is the closet where the captain kept his clothes; they were hanging in it when we were here last.”

Ann unhinged the latch and swung the door open. Two suits hung from the hooks. She felt them to discover whether anything was in the pockets, and she found the cloth damp and sticky. The closet smelled of the sea.

There was a familiar feel to the cloth under her fingers. “I believe that this coat is made of the same cloth as the piece Ben found.”

Jo and Ben came quickly to her side. “The cloth of this suit is better quality,” pronounced Jo, “and the coat isn’t torn anywhere. Most deep-sea men wear clothes like that and so the torn piece doesn’t mean much except that the man who wore it is a sailor, most likely.”

Helen was very much interested in the little cubbyhole. “I should like this room for a doll house,” she said, and she stayed in it while the others went across the passage to the mate’s stateroom.

They found things there in the same condition; empty drawers, moldy blankets and a closet damp with brine.

Suddenly Helen called from the other cabin. “Come quick, Jo!”

They tumbled over each other in their efforts to reach her, and they found her

pointing to the blankets on the berth.

“Some one has been sleeping there!” she said breathlessly.

They had not looked closely at the berth when they had been in the cabin and now they saw that the tousled heavy blankets were matted flat, just as they would be if a man had slept on them and had not troubled to shake them when he rose.

“Whoever he was, he didn’t choose a comfortable place,” said Ben, looking up at the broken port. “The rain must beat in here every time there is a storm.”

Ann turned to speak to Jo; she thought that he was directly behind her, for she heard him move. But when she looked he was not there. He was standing before the table, running his hand behind the drawer. If he hadn’t been close beside her, who had? Neither Ben nor Helen was near enough to be the person whose presence she had felt. Ann shook herself slightly. She mustn’t be so foolish and nervous; she hadn’t supposed she was capable of imagining things that weren’t there. The others were so bravely forgetting that they once had thought that the ship might be haunted, and she, the oldest of the Seymours, mustn’t be a coward.

Jo left the drawer and came over to the berth again.

“We’ll shift these blankets,” he said, “stir them up a little. And then next time we come we can tell whether some one has been sleeping on them again.”

A second time Ann heard a slight stir behind her, and this time Jo heard it, too. He stooped with the edge of the blankets in his hands, as though he were frozen. Then he dropped the blankets and leaped from the doorway into the hall. Ann ran after him, and so did Ben and Helen.

“Whoever it was has gone up the ladder,” said Jo, evidently trying to make his voice sound natural. His lips were set in a straight line.

“Was somebody here?” asked Ben in surprise. He had not felt the presence nor heard the sound that had been so plain to Ann and Jo.

“Somebody came back of us,” Jo told him. “You heard him move, didn’t you, Ann?” He seemed to wish to be reassured.

“I heard it twice,” said Ann. Her fingers were cold and she tucked them into the palms of her hands. She was chilly all over.

“Shouldn’t wonder if it might not be the wind coming in through the porthole of the mate’s cabin,” suggested Ben. “Wind often makes a queer noise.”

“You may be right,” said Jo slowly. “We’ll look.”

He led the way into the smaller cabin again. The porthole was closed tightly and it was unbroken.

“I think I will go up on deck,” said Helen abruptly.

“We will all go,” said Jo. “We’ve seen about everything down here, I should think.”

Once more on deck in full sunlight everybody felt more comfortable, for it is a spooky business to hunt through the empty cabins of a haunted ship and there are plenty of grown-ups who never would have gone there at all.

From the deck they peered into the blackness of the hold, but they could see nothing without the flashlight that Ben promised to bring next time. Down in the depths bright little glimmers showed here and there from the opened seams in the side of the schooner, but there was not enough light to reveal any possible secrets hidden in the hold. A ladder led down into the darkness, but after Jo had tested it and descended a few steps he reported that some of the rungs were broken; it was too unsafe to go down unless one could see the exact condition of every step before he trusted his weight to it.

He paused a few seconds before he climbed into the light again, and he bent his head to listen.

“The water is in here,” he called. “I guess it keeps pretty high up; I can hear it swish a little.”

“If the water is so high, no one could hide down there,” said Helen decidedly. “They would get all wet.”

“It wouldn’t be much over their knees,” Jo answered. “That’s about where the first cracked seam comes. Any water that got in above that would run out with the tide. But it wouldn’t be pleasant to stay down there long, you can bet on that.”

The band found the crew’s quarters very much as they found the cabins, except that the sailors’ clothing had been tossed on to the floor. Dungarees, boots, slickers, and coats were all thrown everywhere and great spots of green mildew showed on them.

“I think that some one should have carried these clothes home and worn them,” said Ben.

“Yes, it seems a dreadful waste,” said Ann. “Has every one in Pine Ledge more than enough warm suits and coats?”

Jo laughed sarcastically at Ann’s question. “They could have used the things, all right,” he said, “and by the law of salvage anybody has a right to take what is found on beaches or in an abandoned boat, if it is not claimed by its original owner. But nobody in these parts has any use for a thing from this boat. I don’t believe that any man in the village would touch these clothes; you couldn’t make anybody wear one of these oilskins out into a storm, not for love nor money. They all think there is a curse on this boat and they believe the curse would settle

on them if they so much as wore a southwester that came off of her."

Ann and Jo had been listening almost unconsciously for the return of the sound that had startled them. They were keyed up to a high pitch and their nerves were taut. While they searched the crew's quarters Ann had to fight to keep herself at the work in hand. She constantly had the feeling that some one was watching; she wanted to turn her head quickly and look over her shoulder. She looked at Jo, and instinctively she knew that he was struggling against the same desire.

Then she remembered again that Mr. Bailey had told her father and mother about this curious impression; it was the feeling of eyes upon them that made him and all the other fishermen shun this boat. Evidently it hadn't been their own fearful and timorous imaginations, as her father believed. Something or some one must be on board. She couldn't have had this feeling so strongly unless there were some foundation for it.

"There is nothing here," Jo finally said. "We might as well finish up with the kitchen galley now. That is the only place left."

Ann was glad to be able to turn around at last. She spun quickly, but— Of course nothing stood in the broken sagging doorway. She was being silly!

Once more on deck, the feeling evaporated. The four adventurers stood in the warm sun a moment or two and then plunged into the gloom of the kitchen galley. Over in one corner the rusted stove stood awry, its doors gaping open. Ben lifted the lids. Within the stove the thick ashes of many fires lay undisturbed, although a little ash had scattered over the kitchen floor when the boat tilted. All around the walls of the little room shelves climbed up to the ceiling and from them tin cans had rolled helter-skelter. There was not one left on a shelf.

Already the sun had sunk low in the west. It was down behind the pines on the hill, and in a few minutes it would be gone.

"It is time to go home," said Helen. "I'm not going to stay any longer."

"I think that we are late for supper already," and from the tones of his voice Ann could tell that Ben had been as anxious as she for some word that would take them over the side of the schooner without having seemed to hurry away.

Ann could not help remembering how that figurehead had leered in the dusk of the evening of their arrival; it hadn't seemed half as menacing since that time, but to be on the schooner as night fell was more than she was willing to endure unnecessarily.

Jo glanced around the galley as though to prove to himself that he wouldn't be afraid to stay longer. Suddenly he stopped and threw his head up.

“Listen!” he said in a low tense voice.

They all heard it this time and Helen crept close into Ann’s protecting arm. This was not an evasive faint sound like the other; it was a regular soft sussh-sussh that seemed at first to come from the deck. Jo stole to the door on tiptoe but the deck was as bare and empty as when they had entered the galley.

The noise did not stop. Sussh-sussh-sussh-sussh. It seemed farther away now, up near the bow and the figurehead. It was stilled for a moment and then it began again, near the captain’s cabin. They heard a faint scratching, as though something had slid along the floor somewhere, and then again the sussh-sussh growing fainter.

“Come on,” Jo spoke hoarsely through pale tight lips. “Now’s our chance to get off.”

The doughty band ran in full retreat to the side of the ship. Jo swung each of them overside in his strong arms and he was the last to leave the wreck. He dropped beside them in the sand.

None of them stopped to look up into the face of the figurehead that towered over them as they ran by. With wings of the wind in their feet they sped up the meadow toward the lights where their suppers were waiting for them.

At supper Mrs. Seymour noticed Helen’s pale tired face. She had grown to expect a certain sort of tiredness in all of the children at night, and this was very different. She looked from one to another of them.

“How did you like playing on the ship?” she asked casually.

“How did you know that we were there?” asked Ann.

“I saw you climbing up and once in a while I saw you on deck,” explained Mrs. Seymour.

To Ann there was something very reassuring in the thought that all the time they had been on the schooner their mother had been keeping an eye on them; they had been perfectly safe, even when Ann was feeling nervous and fidgety and wanting to look over her shoulder. That was that, thought Ann, “And I’ll never let myself feel the least bit afraid again, when I am on the wreck.”

She could not know that Mrs. Seymour had spent an anxious afternoon. She trusted her husband’s judgment, but sometimes mothers know things without being told, while fathers have to hear reasonable explanations before they can understand the very same things that mothers have known by instinct.

“We had such a lot of fun on the wreck, mother,” said Ann.

“Yes,” said Helen pluckily, “we had lots of fun. You won’t tell us not to go there, will you, mother? Please!”

Ben looked at both the girls as if he wished to remind them of the band's pledge of secrecy. But he need not have worried. Ann's determination to solve the mystery unaided by the help of older people was even stouter than his, and Helen had always proved a trustworthy young thing who never gave a secret away.

Ann knew that her mother wanted to hear more about the afternoon; she must explain a part of what they were doing. "The band has taken an oath, a strict oath to keep secret everything connected with the wreck—you'll understand, won't you, that is why we can't talk about it more? If you ask us to tell you, of course we will, but we are planning a surprise."

"I don't think you need to worry about the ship, Emily," said Mr. Seymour. "Helen played too hard to-day, that's all that is wrong. To-morrow she will be as brown and rosy as ever."

So Mrs. Seymour said nothing more and the whole family talked about other things.

Later in the evening Jo came over and the band gathered around the fire in the living room for a conference while Mr. and Mrs. Seymour read in the kitchen.

"What do you suppose it was that we heard?" Ben asked in a whisper; sometimes his mother had been known to hear more than she should. Not that the band wished to deceive, but they had started on an exciting adventure and they meant to put it through alone.

"I know it was not made by ghosts," asserted Ann. "Nor by that wicked demon, either. He's nailed too tight to the bow."

"I don't believe that I want to go on the wreck again to-morrow," said Helen. "It makes me feel too tired."

"We won't go on again, not any of us," Jo said. "I've been thinking over the situation while I had my supper. We'll keep a sharp lookout for the man who built that fire; sort of hang around the woods, we will, and watch the ship, too, but from the outside. If anybody or anything climbs over the side we're bound to see it."

"I'm going to watch for that lantern," said Ann.

Jo nodded wisely. "If we can find out who it is that carries the lantern we shall know what made the noise; that's how it looks to me."

CHAPTER VI

GOING LOBSTERING

"HIST-SST! Ann! Wake up!"

It was Ben's voice that woke Ann, and his hand on her shoulder. She thought it was the middle of the night, it was so dark, and her second thought was of the wreck. Had anything happened there? They had watched for days and never seen a sign of life on it.

"Jo just called me," whispered Ben. "He wants to know whether we would like to go after lobsters with him. He says it is going to be a fine day and not too rough for landlubbers like us."

Would she like to go? Well, rather! Jo had promised that he would take them some fine day when the swell on the water was not too heavy. The Baileys, either Jo or his father, made a daily trip out through their lobster string, which was set beyond the pond rocks and Douglas Head in the wide expanse of the sea. Jo had decided that Helen had better not go as she was still so frail that if she grew dizzy and ill out there probably she would have to go to bed for the rest of the day. And as she would be grief-stricken if she knew that she was being left behind the others arranged to go some day without letting her know anything about it.

Ann's room was just light enough for her to see her way without lighting a lamp. She had not realized that the night faded so slowly just before the sun rose, for she never had been up so early in all her life. The small clock on the chest of drawers pointed to half past one. She could hear Ben moving about in his room, scurrying into his clothes with a sound like the little scramblings of a squirrel.

They found Jo waiting for them by the kitchen steps with a lighted lantern in his hand.

“Probably we won’t need this after we get across the meadow and strike the road,” explained Jo, “but now it will be easier going with a light to shine and show up the bumps. Dawn is coming pretty fast now.”

He struck off down the sloping meadow, going across it diagonally in such a way as to give the wreck a wide berth. Ann realized that he deliberately chose the rougher ground of the field in preference to walking along the road, merely because of that ship waiting to draw their thoughts into her shadows. Ann had no desire to peer into the grinning face of the demon in the half-light of the pale dawn. She still had a vivid recollection of its leer the first time she had seen it in the gathering shadows of dusk. And dawn is exactly like the dusk in its power to make things look different from the way they really are.

“I’m glad we’re not going past the boat,” Ben murmured heartily in her ear, and she nodded in sympathy.

The cove lay at the mouth of the swamp river and was only a short walk from the road at the end of the meadow. Jo swung into a swift pace as waiting for Ben and Ann had made him later than usual. He always timed himself with the sunrise and should have his dory in the water and well started before the sun hopped up over the horizon. The others kept beside him only by running now and then with short quick steps, and when they caught him Jo would spurt ahead and the race would start again.

“Ben Seymour couldn’t have paced this,” Ben cried breathlessly. “But Allan-a-Dale can. Chasing bucks in the wood is fine for strengthening the wind.”

It was true. In the past few weeks Ben had filled out considerably and he had grown an inch as well. Ann looked down at her own strong brown lean hands; they had changed since she first undertook to handle a hoe. The healed blisters still showed on her palms but they had long ago ceased to hurt. And so the three of them frisked away in the early dawn like three young colts turned loose in the meadows.

The gray shacks of the fishermen, clustered at the mouth of the river, seemed not much larger near at hand than they looked from the bluff. They all were built with only one story, the shingled roofs coming almost down to the ground on either side. Small square doors led into the dark interiors and the windows were nothing but little openings cut in the walls.

A narrow winding lane led from the dirt road down through the ravine bordered by thick brush and the same variety of dark pines that stood about the swamp pond above. After the track reached the pebbly beach it was paved with crushed clamshells that glistened in the early light like a pale ribbon over the dark oval pebbles.

As soon as the lane met the shacks it twined gracefully in and out among them all, so that although the shacks seemed from a distance to stand together, pressed up in a heap, the lane managed to come directly to the door of each one of them. Suddenly from a regular workaday world Ann felt that she had been transplanted into a tiny village out of some fairy tale, whose inhabitants were yellow gnomes with big sou'wester hats pulled over their heads. Under the reversed brim of each gnome's yellow oiled hat a pair of keen blue eyes, laughing as Fred Bailey's eyes laughed, peered out at the children. Every face was brown, seamed, and leathery. Always a small stubbed pipe belched clouds of smoke about each lobsterman's head. All the men were built alike, square and solid, and they all wore yellow.

"How do you tell them apart?" Ann asked Jo.

"Tell them apart?" Jo echoed Ann's question; it sounded so foolish to him that he barely took the trouble to make any answer. "Why, I've known them since I was a baby in long clothes. Why shouldn't I be able to tell them apart?"

Then, seeing that she was actually puzzled, he stopped teasing and pointed them out to her; she had seen them all before.

"I do suppose," he said, "that in the dim light they look as much alike as so many Chinamen. Don't you recognize that one down by the boat in the water? That's Jed; he's a mite shorter and rounder than the rest, though I don't suppose you'd notice it in broad daylight. Yes, I know he looks very different with his slicker off. The one traveling along with the basket—he's Walt. He's the youngest next to me. He'll be fifty-three this fall. That fellow coming toward us now, he's Pete Simonds; he's quite a joker."

"Pete Simonds was one who went out to the ship with your father the day after she was wrecked," said Ann, remembering the name.

"Sure," said Jo. "They all were there. They all came up from the village when I told them that a boat needed help. Why shouldn't they?"

Ann could not take her eyes from the figures pottering up and down the shelving beach of pebbles, fitting their dories for the trip out to sea. These were the men who had taken a small boat across the terrible pounding waves to go to the help of sailors who had come from no one knew where. They had risked their lives to try to do something for others. While Fred Bailey was telling the story Ann had listened as if some one were reading a thrilling tale out of a magazine or a book, without half realizing it all had actually happened. But these were real live men, and old men at that. She had seen them, often, going along the road on their way to the cove, but she never had thought much about their connection with the wreck.

She looked more closely at Pete Simonds. As she came up beside him she noticed how powerful he was in spite of the wrappings of his cumbersome slicker. His great fingers were gnarled and looked like steel rods. Under his sou'wester she could see frayed ends of his snow-white hair and his eyes shone as cold ice shines when the winter sky is unclouded.

"Hallelujah, Jo-ey," he shouted as he came abreast of them, shifting his bitten pipe to the other corner of his shaven lips. "Ain't you a mite late? A spry boy like you layin' abed till afternoon! You oughter be ashamed of yourself."

"It wasn't his fault," Ann spoke bravely into the unsmiling face. "We delayed him. He promised to take us out in the boat with him this morning and he had to wait for us. We're the lazy ones, not Jo."

"Oho!" The big foghorn voice boomed out and Ann was sure he could be heard in the village. "So it was you, young lady, he was waiting for. Wal, now, I don't blame him."

"Hush your noise," ordered Jo, laughing. "This is Ann Seymour and Ben Seymour who are staying up at the homestead this summer. They don't know that you're pestering them just for fun."

"Why, o' course she knows I was only a-funnin'. This young lady has good sense, I can see that." Pete clapped one huge hand down on Ann's shoulder. "I wouldn't go for to hurt her feelings." He looked into Ann's eyes. "Jo's a good boy and a first-class skipper. You couldn't have picked a better captain among us."

Jo visibly swelled under the compliment after Pete had left them, and Ann was happy to see him so pleased.

"It was nice of Pete to say that about you," she said softly.

"You bet it was," said Jo. "He is a close-mouthed old fellow but he sure knows how to handle a boat. And his bark is a good deal worse than his bite. He has been awfully kind to me. He taught me just about everything I know, what with father being so busy often when I needed help. But Pete never said anything to make me think he was pleased with the way I was sailing the boat. I can remember when I was very small and came down here to watch the men; Pete used to pull a pair of oars in his boat and make a straight trip of over twenty miles a day and think nothing of it."

"You said twenty miles?" asked Ben incredulously.

"All of that," asserted Jo. "He was the first fisherman to buy a motor for his dory, when everybody thought he was a fool to do it. He used to sit here on the beach for hours reading over the book of instructions that came with the engine, and finally he put the parts together and made the thing work without any help

from anybody. It has made a heap of difference, having engines in the boats. A man can take care of pretty nigh eighty pots if he has a motor boat, when he used to be held down to twenty, pulling oars."

Ann had peeped into a shack where a lantern glowed. It was stacked with barrels of salt and open kegs of steeping fishbait; nets were festooned on the walls, coiled ropes were thrown here and there, and a yellow goblin was preparing for his morning's voyage out to sea. The air was filled with the pungent smell of tar.

Jo opened the padlock of his own shack, reached into the darkness, and pulled out a pair of oars. Then he shut the door after him, leaving the lock dangling from the hinge.

"We don't clasp it," he explained, "while we are out on the water; otherwise our neighbors would think we didn't trust our tackle open to them."

"Why are you taking oars, if it is a motor boat that you use?" asked Ann.

"In case anything should happen to the engine. It's safer."

"And why aren't you taking all the rest of the things that the other men are working with?" inquired Ben.

"I thought it was likely to be fine to-day, so I stored the bait kegs in the dory last night. We can get off right now."

With Ben's help he shoved the light dory into the smooth water of the river and helped Ann aboard, suggesting that she should sit in the bow as she was heavier than Ben. The two boys in the back would balance the dory evenly.

"She would have been afloat if the tide had been up a mite," apologized Jo; "but sometimes the water runs out on the ebb a bit faster than we calculate and that drops the boats a mite high up the beach."

Ben had climbed in over the gunwale without minding his wet feet. Sea water would dry without giving him a cold. He really had enjoyed helping to push the dory afloat.

Jo took his place by the engine; he could manage it and the tiller at the same time. He spun the wheel of the motor once or twice, the engine sputtered as the spark ignited the gasoline and then it caught in a clear put-put. Then he seized the tiller cord and pointed the boat's nose steadily out toward the dark smoothly rolling waves of the sea beyond the mouth of the river. They were off.

Under Jo's expert handling the boat took the first wave without effort. With the second wave she rolled a little, but as Jo swung her more toward the end of Douglas Head she moved steadily up and over the crest of each running wave and slid gently down on the far side.

From where she sat in the bow Ann could feel the dory rise and plunge, run

forward and rise to plunge again. The wind was fresh and cool, blowing straight into her face and tossing her short hair all topsy-turvy. The sky far over to the east had turned a blood-red with flames of orange shooting up through the center of the mass of color. Suddenly the first sun ray shot out over the water and touched the racing boat. The last of the darkness melted quickly away.

"Oh, Ben! Isn't it wonderful!" Ann exclaimed.

But her brother was not so enthusiastic. "I am not sure that I like it yet," he admitted. "I have a queer feeling in my middle; all gone, like dropping down in a fast elevator."

"That comes from the pancakes you ate last night," said Jo unsympathetically. "Don't think about them and you will be all right in a minute."

"I forgot," said Ann, putting her hand in her pocket. "I brought these crackers; it will be rather a long time before breakfast and I thought that mother would say we must eat something."

"I ought to have thought of that," apologized Jo, "but I never have anything myself."

But though he did not feel the crying emptiness that was upsetting Ben, Jo ate his share. Never had crackers tasted better to any of them.

"That was a fine idea of yours, Ann," said Ben.

"Now," advised Jo, "if you should sing you'd feel even better. I've heard that some doctors cure patients by giving them something worse than they have already."

"That cure might work," admitted Ben, "but it seems hard to give you and Ann a dose of the same medicine, and besides, I don't need any, now. What shall I sing?"

"Oh, we wouldn't suffer in silence," said Jo. "We'll sing, too. How's this one?" And he began:

Oh, it's bonny, bonny weather
For sailormen at sea,
He pulls his ropes and trims his sails,
And sings so merrily——

His fresh young voice rang out high and clear in the new warm sunlight.

"Jo!" exclaimed Ann. "I never have heard you sing. I didn't know you could. Where did you learn that song?"

"I sing only when I'm in the boat," Jo answered laughingly. "It must be the bobbing up and down that makes me want to do it, just like a chippie bird

swinging on the branch of a tree. My mother used to sing me that song when I was little. She taught it to me."

"You were old enough to remember her?" Ann asked gently.

"Yes," he replied, speaking as gently as Ann had asked her question, "I remember her very well. I was nine years old when she got through."

Ann had learned since she came to Pine Ledge that the fishermen never spoke of any one as dying. They talked as though the person who had left this world had finished a task and gone somewhere else. They had "got through" with the present job of living and were resting.

"My mother taught the district school before she was married," Jo continued. "She was very smart and she taught me a great deal during the winter evenings. In lots of ways she was like your mother; kind, you know, with never a cross word, and always understanding when I tried to please her. She knew lots of songs and taught them to me. How she used to laugh because I always got the tune right even when I was so little that I could hardly say the words! One bit she used to sing a lot and I liked it one of the best, but though I remember the tune I have forgotten most of the words. I wish I knew them. Maybe you know it, Ann. It started something like this:

Maxwelton's braes are bonnie,
Where early fa's the dew——"

"Oh, I know that," said Ben.

"Yes, we know the rest of that, Jo. It is 'Annie Laurie,' an old Scotch song, and it goes on like this," and Ann took up the song where Jo had been interrupted.

"That's the one! That's the one!" cried Jo happily. Then he stopped suddenly. "Hey! Here's my first buoy, and I came near running it down."

Ben peered after the block of green and yellow that Jo had just missed striking. "However do you manage to come away out here and hit a little block of wood floating in the middle of the ocean?"

"That's easy. I do it every morning," Jo answered. "And I don't generally pass it by, as I was going to do to-day."

He turned the dory in a wide circle and just before reaching the buoy he shut off his engine and coasted alongside. Seizing a short boat book that lay beside him on the thwart he deftly caught the rope attached to the buoy and began to haul it in. Yard after yard ran through his hands until finally it began to pull harder, as if a heavy load were attached to it.

“Here she comes,” he said.

The huge wooden crate swung up beside the boat. Jo opened the catch at the top and threw up the swinging lid. Then he began to take out the lobsters. They were green and shining, with big claws waving frantically in their effort to catch Jo’s fingers. One, two, three, and four he fished out of the crate. The last was a small one and he threw it back into the water.

“It is too short,” he said. “We are not allowed to bring them in as small as that.”

“Aren’t they good to eat?” asked Ann.

“They’re the sweetest and the tenderest. But if the lobstermen began selling them there soon wouldn’t be any left to grow up. Lobsters under ten inches long aren’t allowed to be sold in the state of Maine.”

“What a lot you know, Jo!” exclaimed Ben admiringly.

Jo looked a little surprised. “That’s my business; of course I know that, about boats and lobsters. There’s a plenty of things that you know and I don’t.”

He dropped the three big lobsters into a wooden box in the dory. “Now hand me one of those bait bags, Ben, if you please; out of the keg behind you.”

He took the bag, wet and dripping, from Ben’s outstretched hand and fastened it into the trap, taking out the half-empty one that had been there. Then he closed the cover, hasped it, and let the trap slip gently down, down, away from sight in the clear green water.

“Now for the next,” he said as he spun the wheel, and the dory once again pointed her course up the coast.

Jo visited twenty of his pots that morning, replacing the bait in each before he dropped it back into the water. Ann soon learned to fill the little bait bags which he handed across to her as he pulled them out of the pots and she always had them ready for him by the time the next pot had been hauled to the surface. They had taken pity on Ben and forbidden him to handle the bait, for the smell of the fish was a little too much for his slight attack of seasickness.

“I’m all right now,” he insisted.

“Next time you come out you won’t feel the motion at all,” Jo promised. “And you’ll forget all about this as soon as you step on shore. Everybody gets a little sick the first time they go outside in a small boat. Ann’s just tough, that’s the only reason she has escaped.”

“Where do you get the fish for the bait, Jo?” asked Ann after she had filled the twentieth bag and they were sweeping in toward the cove with the morning’s catch.

“The lobstermen get it. We would catch our own bait, but the farm work takes so much of my father’s time and I’m not strong enough to handle a trawl alone. So we buy from the men who go out after fish. You see, to go lobstering the way most of the fishermen do would take all day. First, they have to dig their clams down on the sand beach a mile to the south; they use the clams to bait the fish trawls. After the trawls are baited, they have to go out and catch the fish and bring them in. Then the fish are used to catch the lobsters.”

“Sort of ‘great fleas have little fleas to bite ’em,’” Ben quoted.

“I guess you are almost well now, after that,” said Jo as he swung the boat into the river.

Just before landing he once more cut off his engine and let the dory drift alongside a large wooden box afloat in the smoother protected water of the river. “This is the storage box where we put our catch until we gather enough to pay to ship them to Boston.”

He opened the padlock on the cover and swung the big lid up, dumping the day’s catch into it, eighteen in all, most of them fair-sized. Jo felt that his morning’s work had been well worth while.

They landed, pulling the dory after them until it was slightly out of the water. Jo threw the iron anchor well up the beach, so that the tide would not set the boat adrift as it rose to the flood.

When she began to walk Ann discovered that she still felt the motion of the boat and she swayed a bit as she went up the lane. She had real “sea-legs” Jo told her and would soon be a regular deep-sea man.

On the way back to the shack to replace the oars and snap the lock on the door they passed a building Ann had not noticed in the early morning. It was merely a built-in shed between two shacks, a sort of lean-to in a sad state of repair. The door stood open so that she could see the man working inside as she passed by. He was dressed in rough clothing, a pair of dark trousers and a thin shirt opened at the throat, and what surprised her most was the fact that he was not wearing oilskins. He was much younger than any of the other men she had seen that morning and this, too, astonished her, for Jo had said that Walt was the youngest of the fishermen, while this man could not have been as old as her own father. He wore no hat and his thick hair was unkempt. She could see, even as she walked by, that he was unshaven and looked like a tramp—a rather interesting tramp, however.

“Who is that man?” she asked Jo.

“Him? That’s Warren Bain.” Jo’s voice sounded contemptuous.

“He doesn’t seem like the other fishermen.” Ann did not wish to show her

interest, especially as Jo did not seem eager to talk about the stranger. But she was feeling inquisitive about him and she had already learned that Jo talked more freely if he were not being questioned.

“He’s a queer fellow,” Jo continued after a moment, as though it had taken him a while to decide whether or not to gossip. “He don’t belong to these parts. Came from Down East this spring and set out lobstering from the cove here. We don’t quite take to his coming, because there are more lobsters down his way than there are here and we feel that it would be fairer for him to keep to his home grounds. Besides, he ain’t been none too friendly with the men since he came, and he pries into other folks’ private affairs a good deal. I haven’t got anything against him, but I just don’t like his way.”

As they passed the open door of the shed Warren Bain lifted his head from his work and saw them. Then he moved slowly and lazily to the doorway and watched them. He said nothing, although he looked Ann and Ben over from head to foot. Ann was annoyed by his intense stare and she resented the fact that he did not reply immediately to Jo’s curt greeting.

“Fine morning,” Jo had said when the man first noticed them.

Finally Bain shifted his eyes a little from Ann and Ben and relaxed against the side post of his shack, lounging comfortably. “Good enough,” he said, and nodded his head to Jo.

“You kids stayin’ up at the Baileys’?” he asked with a slow drawl.

Trying not to be angry, Ann answered, “Yes. We are spending the summer with Jo.”

“Hum,” and Bain brought his piercing eyes back to Ann’s face. “Where do you spend all o’ your spare time?”

Jo interrupted Ann before she could answer such an astonishingly rude question. “I don’t know that that is for you to worry about,” Jo said, and though his words were discourteous, his voice was quietly polite.

“Oh,” Warren Bain apologized, “I was just interested. I didn’t mean to be pryin’. It really ain’t none of my business.”

Ann thought that he was going to laugh at their indignation, but he did not. He lounged against the door and watched them as they went away up the lane.

When she thought that they must be completely out of sight, Ann turned excitedly to Jo. “You don’t suppose that he knows anything about the wrecked schooner?” she whispered breathlessly, although the man couldn’t hear, not possibly. “Perhaps he doesn’t want to have us play on it and perhaps interfere with whatever he plans to do.”

“Gee, Ann!” exclaimed Ben. “You have brains! I’ll bet that he knows

something! No man would have acted in such a strange way for no reason at all."

"What do you think, Jo?" insisted Ann.

Jo did not answer for another moment. He thought for a little space, piecing together all the different things that had happened—especially trying to tie them up with that lantern and the fire in the woods.

"I think you are right, Ann," he said at last. "I believe he does know something, and we will watch him as well as the ship."

CHAPTER VII

PAINTING THE DEER

ANN did not have to watch alone for the lantern that might again be seen flickering and swaying across the deck of the schooner. The band mounted guard in turn and watched so industriously that Mr. and Mrs. Seymour began to wonder what the children hoped to see out in the night.

Jo took upon himself the watch during the late hours, for he believed that no one would be likely to venture aboard the wreck while lamps still glowed from house windows so near. At least a man would not carry a lantern there during the early hours of the night but would creep about in the shadows or hang a covering over the portholes so that whatever light was needed would be hidden.

“I think that the reason you saw it that first night, Ann, was because pop and I go to bed so early. Whoever it was got careless. He thought we always were asleep by that hour and he didn’t know that you folks were coming.”

The evenings were long now; the sun did not set until after supper, and it made the time of watching for a lantern very short.

Mr. Seymour had been interested in hearing about the buck deer that Robin Hood had tracked to its lair and he joined with the band in several early forays. They picked their way stealthily through underbrush that dripped with dew and waited silently by the swamp pond, counting discomfort nothing if only they could sometime see a deer drink.

At last they were rewarded in the half-light of one clear dawn. A big buck stepped gently out from the end of the narrow trail they had followed that first day. He slowly approached the pond, cautious at first. But Jo had chosen a hiding place where the breeze would not betray their presence and the animal soon felt perfectly safe. First he nosed about through the tender young marsh

grass which grew close to the water's edge. He pulled a little of it, here and there, before he raised his head. Whether he signaled that all was safe the human beings could never know, although Jo said afterward that deer had ways of warning their own kind, but when he had taken several mouthfuls of grass he threw up his head and looked carefully about him, sniffing into the light rustling breeze.

Down the same trail by which he had entered, his doe came with mincing steps to take her place beside him. The legs that carried her slim body so easily seemed no thicker than the twigs of the trees through which she came so swiftly and quietly, and her big soft ears pricked forward over her gentle brown eyes.

The children hardly dared to breathe and they spoke no louder than a whisper even after the deer had vanished.

"Oh, father!" sighed Ben. "How lovely they are! You will show me how to draw them, won't you?"

So Allan-a-Dale resigned temporarily from Robin Hood's band and became the constant companion of his father. After his beans were hoed and his potatoes hilled—for both corn and potatoes had sprouted rapidly and gave promise of making an excellent crop—Ben took his canvas and easel and went with his father to the swamp pond. Here they set up their props and worked every day.

Mr. Seymour showed Ben how to plan his picture, so that his drawing would be balanced and the deer stand straight on their own four legs.

"You will have to decide first of all, Ben, just how the deer balances his weight on his feet while he is jumping, and then draw him so that this point of balance comes as a straight right angle up from the line where you are going to draw in your ground. That point of balance is what makes people and animals stand upright, for otherwise they would fall down. So when you draw pictures of them, you have to plan very carefully to get an effect of stability in your drawing."

In beginning his own picture Mr. Seymour planned to paint the swamp first, and then place the deer in position some morning after he had had an opportunity to sketch them rapidly from life. He hoped to see them again, poised on the edge of the water before him. Consequently he busied himself in transferring the pond with its green motionless water surrounded by the dark pine woods to a canvas that was twice the size of the one that Ben was working on.

Often the rest of the band gathered around the painters to watch the growth of the two pictures, for they felt a personal interest and responsibility because of their share in discovering the deer. Jo liked to watch the brush in Mr. Seymour's quick deft fingers and see how a few strokes of color here and there made a

splotch of green look like a pine tree. Under his eyes Jo saw the swamp grow on the gray canvas. It was the swamp, and yet it was not exactly like the swamp itself, for Mr. Seymour had left out a great deal of underbrush and many of the trees. When Jo asked him why, he explained:

"When you look at that pond out there with the trees for a background, it fills the entire space so far as you are concerned while you are looking at it. That is the first thing you notice. Now what is the second thing?"

"Well, I guess," Jo ventured, "that I notice next that the pine trees are pointed up into the sky, all jagged, while down below the trees come together and I can't separate one from another. It is all a darkness."

"Yes," said Mr. Seymour, "but doesn't that mean something more to you than just a lot of pine trees growing together?"

"I don't exactly know what you mean," Jo answered. "They are pine trees, most of them, although I can see one or two foliage trees among them—shouldn't wonder but what they are swamp maples."

"You're too definite, Jo." And Mr. Seymour laughed. "I didn't mean to ask you to look for the other trees, because you can see them only when you look carefully."

"I know what you mean, father, and you shouldn't ask questions—it takes too long. You should tell Jo right out." Ann looked at her father with her eyes twinkling. "You wanted Jo to say that the first thing he saw in looking into a space filled with trees was the line they grew in."

"Of course," Jo agreed. "Everything grows in a line or a clump."

"That is just what I mean," Mr. Seymour replied. "After you decide that the space before you is filled with trees you next decide what the line or pattern of the background of your picture is to be. After you decide this, you can plan how to transfer the trees which fill the big space into the much smaller space that is your canvas. You do it by following the pattern which you see before you."

"But you can't get all that swamp on a little canvas," Jo protested.

"Exactly," said Mr. Seymour. "And that's why I am leaving out so much. By following the pattern of the pine trees for my background and the twisting shore of the pond for my foreground, I can shrink the whole swamp to the size of my canvas even though I leave out a great deal that your eye sees growing there in the living wood. Now, while you are looking and comparing so closely, watching picture and swamp at the same time, the swamp, in contrast, seems magnificent. But next winter when you see only the picture you will forget about these details that mean so much to you now, and you will think the picture looks quite like the swamp as you remember it."

“Gee!” Jo said sadly. “You’ve forgotten that I won’t be seeing the picture next winter.” He scraped the toe of his boot disconsolately against the loose pebbles. “You aren’t thinking of going home too soon?”

“Not for ages!” exclaimed Ann. “And I’ll write to you every week after we get back,” she promised.

“We’ll sign our names to the same letter,” said Ben.

“You won’t!” Ann assured him, in her most decided manner. “If I write a letter I am going to be the only one to sign it. He will have to write his own letters, won’t he, father?”

“It looks as if he would have to.” Mr. Seymour laughed. “I know that Jo would like to get more than one a week through the winter. How about it, Jo?”

“You bet I would,” answered Jo, his eyes shining.

Ben was almost entirely interested in painting the animals. He was trying to draw them from his recollection of the leaping buck. He got the action very well, Mr. Seymour told him, but he would have to practice more on the outlines, so that the leaping figure would look more like a deer.

“When I saw that deer,” Ben explained excitedly, “I felt as if I were jumping in exactly the same way. That is why I am sure about how the lines should go.”

“With a little patience, Ben,” his father promised, “I feel certain that you will be able to draw.”

“And I shall be very famous?”

“I can’t promise that. The famous—but of course you don’t mean ‘famous’; you aren’t using the right word and I can’t have you saying it. You are trying to ask me whether you can do work that will satisfy yourself, and that no one can prophesy. You will have to work hard. Don’t think that you can be anything you wish by merely wishing it. And besides, some of the greatest painters have only made a bare living after studying and working all their lives long.”

“I don’t care if I don’t make any money,” said Ben stoutly, “if I can paint as much as I like.”

“Paint costs money,” said Mr. Seymour rather sadly. “And an artist has to feed himself and his family.”

“Don’t you worry about that, Ben,” Ann protested. “When Jo and I get our ranch started you can come and live with us—can’t he, Jo?”

“Sure he can,” Jo assented readily. “And he can paint all the time; there will be lots of animals out there, steers and horses. And we can live on potatoes and beans.”

Mr. Seymour seemed to think that this was very funny, for he laughed heartily.

“I’ll come to visit you once in a while,” said Helen. “But I am going to marry a millionaire and live on candy and nuts.”

“You’ll be glad to eat some of Jo’s beans, in that case,” said Ben quite positively. He once had known what it was to eat too much candy. “And if Jo lets me live there with him and with Ann, I’ll promise to do my full share of hoeing.”

“Father will come, too,” said Ann eagerly, “even though he will be the greatest painter in America by that time. When our ranch is paying, neither father nor mother nor Mr. Bailey will need to do any more work for money.”

“That’s a very kind promise,” said Mr. Seymour. “And I shall expect to enjoy visiting you. Helen can bring some of her candy and nuts, for they will make us a pleasant change from a steady diet of beans and potatoes.”

In the evenings Ben was tracing his deer drawings on a piece of shellacked cardboard which he planned to cut into stencils, so that he could stencil some new curtains for the Boston apartment, curtains with deer leaping all along the bottom.

CHAPTER VIII

A MAN WITH A LANTERN

MEANWHILE Jo made a ladder exactly long enough to reach from the ground to the porthole of the captain's cabin. He had reasoned that the band would be safer outside the ship; he was afraid, and with good reason, of being caught in a trap. But if some one were sleeping on the blankets in the captain's stateroom Jo could look in and see who was there without disturbing the sleeper. The man could be caught unaware before he had time to hide.

Jo made his ladder by splitting a young green cedar. He selected a straight slender tree, cut it down and trimmed the branches close to the trunk. It looked like a beautiful pole with the bark still on it. Then Jo struck the ax along the grain of the log, inserting wedges in the open gashes. This split the tree evenly as he pounded the wedges in. Then he pared the two pieces smooth and nailed flat bits of boxboard across for rungs, making sure that every nail pointed down as he drove it home.

"When we put our weight on each rung," he explained to the interested band, "we shall drive the nails farther into the cedar instead of working them loose. Lots of people don't think of that and their weight comes down in such direction that gradually the nails are pried out. I don't trust a ladder that I haven't made myself. I'm always kind of nervous when I'm up on it."

When the ladder was finished it looked bulky and heavy, as homemade ladders always look, and Ann was astonished to find that she could lift it easily.

Jo explained that, too. "That's because of the wood I chose. Cedar and spruce and the pine that grows up North here are lighter than hemlock or yellow pine. Yellow pine comes from down South, and you might as well try to lift a stone. And hemlock is not much good for such work as this, as it cracks too easily and once you drive a nail into it you can never pull it out again. Hemlock is used for rough work only, because it is most unreliable. It will crack when you least expect it and let you fall."

"I should think oak would be the strongest," said Ben.

"Oak is about the best lumber that grows in these parts," Jo agreed, "but it is worth a lot of money and it is hard to get, these days. So it is used for finish

wood, that is, for furniture and expensive flooring. And supposing we could get it, it weighs more than yellow pine. I'll bet you couldn't lift a ladder made of oak, much less carry it down to the wreck; I know I shouldn't hanker after that job. It sure is pretty wood, though; the grain runs so evenly."

"The grain is the darker lines through the boards, isn't it?" asked Ann. "We helped mother scrape the paint from some chairs last winter and then we smoothed the wood with sandpaper so that the grain would show. They were lovely when we had finished. They looked like satin."

"Sure," said Jo. "And the grain comes from the way the tree grows. The longer it takes a tree to grow the finer its grain. Oak is grained straight with narrow lines, and yellow pine has a grain that looks like broad bands of ribbon running through it and it shows much pinker in color. The northern pine—white pine, we call it—is so soft that you can't see the grain; the boards are all the same color and are very white and the wood is easier to cut with a saw than any hard wood."

"That is the strangest ladder I ever saw," said Ben, looking at it critically.

Ann had thought the same thing although she had not cared to say it to Jo. She believed in Jo and he must have had some reason for making it as he had. He had kept his two long poles far apart and the rungs were twice as long as in the ordinary ladder. Naturally it was a short ladder because the porthole was not very high above their heads when they stood below it on the beach, but why make it so very wide?

"It is wide because I wanted it to be very steady and because, if it's wide enough, more'n one of us can look in the port at the same time."

"Gee! A big idea, Jo!" exclaimed Ben admiringly.

"I think that three of us can get up on it. Let's practice. We don't want to make much noise when we're really using it against the side of the wreck. Anybody inside the cabin could hear us like rats in the wall."

So Jo placed the ladder under a small window in the barn. He climbed up until his head was opposite the window and then Ben followed. Jo stood as near one end of his rung as possible and Ben stood on the other end; they had one foot each on the ladder while the other twined about the pole. Then Ann came up between them. She was glad that she was thin and lanky!

"Pretty good," said Jo. "I think that we can manage that."

In order to be ready for any emergency they carried the ladder down to the road and hid it in the bushes that made a hedge between the road and the meadow, directly opposite the wreck.

They had not made their preparations a day too soon, for that very night as

Ann was ready to hop into bed she heard a tap against her window, a secret tap, the signal of the band. She pulled back the curtains and saw Jo standing outside in the moonlight.

"Somebody is coming," he said in low tones. "See there," and he pointed across the meadow.

At first Ann could see nothing; then a small light flashed and instantly disappeared.

"I thought he wouldn't bring a lantern again," said Jo with quiet satisfaction in his powers of deduction. "He has a flashlight this time."

The gleam showed again and swung in a semicircle over the meadow.

"He don't know his way," said Jo. "He has to watch pretty carefully where he is going."

"I'll get Ben," Ann whispered excitedly. "Helen said that she didn't want to go to the boat at night—and I don't believe that mother would like to have her go even if she wished it. We'll dress quickly and be with you in a minute."

"All right," agreed Jo. "Get a move on you. If we can reach the road before the man gets there we will have a fine chance to see who he is as he goes by. I'll keep track of the light while you're getting ready."

"Ben!" whispered Ann. "Are you awake? Robin Hood waits for his men—the marauders are upon us."

"What's that?" said Ben, sitting up in bed, and feeling his hair rise.

"Some one is walking toward the wreck with a flashlight! Don't talk out loud; we don't want to be told that we mustn't go out!"

"Is Jo ready to go?"

"Yes. I'll beat you at dressing." Ann whisked back to her room. "And if I'm ready first we'll go without you!"

"If you beat me you'll be beating some one worth while," answered Ben as he swung out of bed and thrust his bare feet into his shoes without bothering with stockings. But in spite of his omissions he finished at the same time as Ann and reached her side as she climbed over her window sill.

"Where is he?" she asked Jo.

"About halfway, I should judge. Time to see his light now."

Even as Jo spoke the light flashed yellow.

"Just where I thought he would be," whispered Jo exultantly. "Now follow me and be quick and quiet, for you can bet he is watching and listening or he wouldn't be traveling so slowly. Keep in the shadows as much as possible and remember he is less likely to see us when he has the light. Light shows up things

that are close by but it blinds pretty well for distance."

Jo crouched low into the shadow of the ground so that he would not be outlined against the white house in the moonlight. Lithe as a cat he sped into the shadow of a tree a short distance away.

"He won't move on from there until the light shows," Ben said to Ann. "Wait until he runs again and then we will go together to the tree where he is now."

The light flashed almost immediately.

Ann could see Jo's dark slim bulk speed on to a bush and shoulder to shoulder she and Ben reached the shelter of his first hiding place. Jo waited where he was and in the next flash his followers slid over to his patch of darkness.

There was shadow most of the way now and they quickly reached the underbrush that bordered the road by the wreck. They were several minutes ahead of the man with the flashlight.

"Flatten down," Jo warned softly. "He won't expect anybody to track him from this side, so there's nothing to be scared of now. He'll make for the far side of the ship."

They could hear the sound of heavy boots walking cautiously along the road. Nearer and nearer it came and Ann had to swallow hard. Although she hoped that Jo was right when he said there was no danger while they were lying in the bushes, she could not help fearing that the man must hear them as plainly as they heard him. Ben's arm trembled where it pressed against her shoulder and she knew that he felt as she did.

Jo lay a little ahead of them, where he could peep through an opening that gave him a good view of the road. "Almost here now," he warned under his breath. "If he swings his light this way hide your face but don't move a muscle unless you have to."

The man was walking in the dark now. As he drew closer to the ship he walked more quietly and more quickly, as if he were stalking something in the night. Ann could see the shadows cast by his legs as he passed in the moonlight and he almost touched Jo, but the boy lay as if frozen. He did not even tremble and Ann knew that he would have kept exactly as quiet if the big boots had trodden on him.

The man went directly to the prow of the boat. Vaguely in the moonlight the figure of the demon hung over him. The man looked up at it and Ann heard him give a low chuckling laugh. "Well, old boy," he said, "you are one grand guard for the old boat and you keep her well protected for me."

Then Ann thought that the torch must have slipped from his hands, for it turned as he clutched it and the light went on. The reflection flashed across the

man’s face.

“Warren Bain!” Ben breathed close to her ear.

If Ann had not remembered Jo’s instructions she would have hushed Ben impatiently. She felt certain that he had been heard. Warren Bain—for it was he—shut off his light instantly and stood listening. Ben, realizing that perhaps he had betrayed the band, pressed so close to the ground that Ann almost expected to see him disappear into it.

But Warren evidently was satisfied that whatever sound he had heard came from the noises of the night. After a moment he started on his business again. He slipped his flashlight into his coat pocket and then leaped up into the dangling irons that were swaying from the bow. Having mounted these he reached up and caught the top of the rail with both hands and pulled himself up to the deck. For a minute he stood erect, outlined against the bright sky, and then he strode forward and vanished from sight.

“He’s going to the cabin,” whispered Jo. “Now’s our chance to get the ladder placed.”

There was no need of concealment for the next moment or two, and the ladder was beside them in the bushes. Jo raised it noiselessly against the side of the wreck.

Stealthily he mounted, peered through the window, and listened. Ann thought of the buck deer, listening by the pond. Then Jo beckoned to Ben. Quickly Ben climbed after him and placed himself in position where the two boys balanced each other perfectly. Then Ann went up.

The boys stood one rung above her and could peer into porthole one on either side over her head. Ann found that from where she stood she could just manage to see over the bottom edge of the round window. She could dodge down quickly if Bain happened to glance toward the porthole.

He was coming now. How different his steps sounded from the strange sussh-sussh she had heard that other day when the band visited the wreck. Bain walked lightly but he came steadily with abrupt steps that sounded like those of a human being. The other sound, she felt sure now, could not have been human. But what had made that curious noise? Ann could not bring herself to believe in ghosts.

As Bain entered the captain’s cabin he flashed his light into all the corners and the band dodged out of the glow. The port was so high from the floor that there was no danger of Bain’s seeing anything that was not directly in front of the opening.

In a minute they pulled back where they could see and all three watched the man as he examined the cabin. He gave most attention to the table. He pulled the

drawer out, banging it on the floor and listening for some sound that would indicate a secret compartment; then he took out his pocketknife and ran the open blade around the joining of the wood. It was evident that he found nothing. When he began to work he fixed his torch in his belt in such a way as to allow the light to follow his hands and let him see clearly what he was doing. Once in a while he would stop and listen intently, and each time he took up his task again he worked faster than before, as if he expected interruption.

As he searched his dark face was very intent. But it did not appear evil. He looked far more friendly to Ann to-night than when she had seen him at the cove. But in spite of that she had no desire to let him know that Robin Hood's band were spying upon him.

Under his hands one of the table legs suddenly loosened; apparently it had been screwed together in the middle where the crack was hidden by a line of decoration. The piece in Bain's hands was hollow and from it he took a roll of paper. He opened it and grunted with satisfaction as he read. Then he slipped the paper into his pocket and replaced the table leg carefully, taking great pains to screw it tight.

He was searching for something more than the paper, for he crossed to the closet and began to shake and finger the clothes hanging there. When he found nothing in them he ran his hands up and down the closet walls, tapping them at intervals. Evidently he found what he wanted; as he latched the door he wore a pleased smile and as he turned away he said, "Stay there, sweet babies, some one will come for you."

Such a funny thing to say! The words had no meaning for the three listeners.

Bain's light flashed across the blankets in the berth. Ann could feel Jo start in astonishment, and glancing toward him Ann saw that his eyes, too, were riveted on the berth. She followed them and realized that the blankets were matted down as they were before Jo had shaken them that other day. Some one had been sleeping on them again; some one who had come aboard in spite of their vigilance and walked about the boat without a light. And it was not Warren Bain; that was perfectly evident, for he had taken his flashlight out of his belt and was running it slowly over the blankets.

Suddenly Bain stopped. He was listening intently. Had he heard their breathing or perhaps heard them moving against the side of the ship above his head? Ann was quite prepared to slip from her precarious perch and scamper away to the safe farmhouse.

But no, he was not paying any attention to the porthole. Slowly he turned his head and glanced back over his shoulder to the door. Ann recognized the

movement. So he was beginning to feel that strange sensation, too. Ann strained her ears to hear the mysterious noise that he must be hearing.

From the deck above the three, near the top of the ladder, faintly came the phantom sussh-sussh. Slowly it drew nearer and louder, then it came from a spot farther away; always moving nearer or farther, it came with the same rhythm, the first sussh heavy and scraping, the second lighter and with more of a rasp.

“Hold tight,” whispered Jo. “We’ll weather it through with Warren.”

But Warren had no intention of weathering through any such meeting. He reached his free hand into his coat pocket and brought out a heavy automatic which he cocked. Shifting the flashlight into his left hand he rushed out of the door and up the companionway.

“Hurry,” ordered Jo. “Slide into the shadows under the boat. Jump, Ben; I’m letting go of my side.”

The boys dropped together and Ann stepped down to the ground. Jo barely had time to take the ladder and cut under the stern of the boat. From their hiding place they could hear Bain run across the deck and they saw him swing out over the prow and drop. He switched off his flash as he landed on the beach and crept into the underbrush where the children had hidden to watch him go by. Then he was gone.

The shuffling noise had ceased as the three left the wreck and went home.

When they were once more under Ann’s window Jo exclaimed, “There goes Bain now! Out toward the swamp.”

And a sudden pinprick of light showed beneath the dense growth of pine on the edge of the wood.

“He was not the one who left that fire,” said Ann with conviction.

“How do you know?” asked Ben.

“I don’t actually know,” admitted Ann, “but I feel sure.”

“Jo, what do you think was in that roll of paper?” Ben asked.

“Perhaps it was a few sheets from the lost log,” suggested Jo. “But if it was that, a table leg was a funny place to keep it.”

“You don’t suppose that Warren was the captain of the ship?” Ann questioned.

“I thought of that,” said Jo. “But if he was captain, what reason had he for skulking aboard in that fashion? He would have full right to occupy the ship.”

“Besides,” said Ben, “Warren Bain searched for that paper; if he had been the captain he would have remembered where he hid it.”

“Perhaps,” agreed Ann. She was loath to believe that Bain was where he had no business to be, for suddenly she had begun to like the man. In a moment she

had another idea. “Perhaps the captain stole something from Warren and hid it, and Warren has been searching for it.”

“That sounds more like it,” said Jo. “But if it were the log that he took, had he any right to it? Logs aren’t included in a ship’s salvage.”

“It sounded to me,” said Ann, “as if he found something that he didn’t take away with him. Did you hear the strange thing that he said as he came away from the closet?”

“Yes!” exclaimed Ben. “‘Stay there until some one comes for you, babies.’ Only of course it wasn’t babies—they’d have starved to death before now.”

Ann and Jo laughed at that. “I guess you’re right about that, Ben,” said Jo.

“And what do you think he is doing, back there in the woods?” said Ann.

“Ask me another,” answered Jo. “I’m stumped about the whole thing.”

And then he slipped away in the darkness and Ann and Ben crept silently over the window sill. For the second time that night Ann undressed and went to bed.

CHAPTER IX

A DAY OF MYSTERIES

"BEN," Mrs. Seymour asked next morning at the breakfast table, "did you bring home the cheese yesterday when you came back from the village?"

"Yes, mother," Ben answered. "I left it with the other packages on the bench outside the kitchen door."

"You are sure that you didn't leave it in the store?" Mrs. Seymour was not questioning Ben's statement, for she, too, was quite certain that the cheese had been accounted for when Ben had dropped all his marketing on the seat by the door and checked each purchase by the list she had given him.

"I know I brought it with me," repeated Ben. "This chil' loves cheese too well to let himself forget anything as important as that. Didn't you find it out there?"

Mrs. Seymour shook her head without answering.

"Probably it dropped behind the bench, or perhaps it is in the buckboard," Mr. Seymour suggested. He knew that his wife must be thinking of Fred Bailey's warning against leaving any food outside the door. This was the first time that the advice had been overlooked.

Followed by Ann, he went out to look for the missing cheese. There might be remnants left to indicate what had happened to it. But there was not a trace to be found anywhere. He and Ann looked at each other incredulously. As they stood there, not yet quite ready to put their questions into words, they saw Mr. Bailey running toward them from the back field, holding something in his outstretched hand. He was waving frantically to them in most unusual excitement. As he came closer Ann could see that what he carried was a package wrapped in torn paper.

Ben, standing in the kitchen doorway, recognized this bundle and hailed Mr.

Bailey. “Hey!” he called. “Where did you find our cheese?”

“So it be yours,” Fred gasped as he stopped before them, very short of breath. “I thought it would be, but I wanted to make sure of it.”

Ann saw that the man was pale beneath his tan and the laughter had fled from his blue eyes. Whatever he might have to say now could have no joke hidden behind it.

“I left that cheese out on the bench and forgot it,” Ben explained.

“I warned you folks not to leave food lyin’ around outdoors; I told you that you mustn’t leave anything that would tempt spirits to come from the sea and pester us,” said Mr. Bailey. “I don’t know as we shall ever be free from them again,” he added despairingly.

“I never heard that spirits were especially fond of cheese,” commented Mr. Seymour. “Where did you find it, Fred?” he asked quietly.

“Up by the stone wall in the back field,” Mr. Bailey half whispered, staring at the package that he was holding. “Mr. Seymour, Mrs. Seymour, marm, something terrible must have been going on this past night.”

Ann was tremendously impressed by his attitude; he was so tense and earnest. Never had she seen any grown person so moved and anxious. She looked at Ben and saw that he shared her own feeling, while Helen’s face was white with excitement.

But the assurance of Mr. Seymour’s calm reply steadied the children and they turned with relief to watch him while he spoke. “Why are you so sure it was taken during the night? Why not in the afternoon? Much more likely then, I think, for if it had been lying on this bench all the afternoon and evening somebody would have noticed it and taken it into the pantry.”

Just then Jo came across from the barnyard and stood beside his father, listening. Ann could tell from his drawn face and wide eyes that he was as seriously upset as was Mr. Bailey.

“I’ll admit that I’m puzzled,” said Mr. Seymour, “though your theory, Bailey, is perfect nonsense. Who in the name of reason would have carried off a great chunk of cheese?”

“Not one of your hens, I suppose?” asked Mrs. Seymour.

At that the children laughed, even Jo; the cheese was nearly as big as a hen. The Seymours all liked cheese, plain and in rarebits, and as they went to the village for groceries only twice a week Mrs. Seymour had ordered what might have seemed an overgenerous supply.

“What have you missed at other times?” asked Mr. Seymour.

“Milk, first of all,” Fred answered. “I put a pail down in the yard and turned my back on it a minute to go into the house and when I looked at it again it was lowered a couple of inches. Next time, they tipped a pail over and spilled the whole of it. And then they took a piece of meat—walked off with Jo’s and my Sunday dinner.”

“Who could have done it?” exclaimed Mrs. Seymour, and Ann felt a shiver of excitement running down her spinal cord; her thought flashed back to that shushing noise on the wreck.

“Who done it?” echoed Mr. Bailey. “That grinnin’ sea demon on the prow o’ that ship is who done it.”

“Rubbish, Fred!” Mr. Seymour came out with his flat denial. But he looked very grave. “I don’t like to believe there is a sneak thief in the neighborhood; in fact, I can’t believe it.”

And even gentle Mrs. Seymour was indignant. Her eyes shone with sympathy as she said, “And these things are too unkind for any one to have done them with the idea that he was playing a practical joke. Your Sunday dinner! How mean!”

“Practical jokes? Sneak thieves?” Mr. Bailey repeated scornfully. “I told you what’s been troubling everything around here. It’s that devil figurehead.”

“Bailey! I never would have thought you capable of such superstition. It comes from living alone so much, I suppose, and being so close to the sea and the sky. Are you going to be frightened by the mischief of some bold rascal of a woodchuck or stray dog? Put the cheese on the kitchen table, Ben. Before we throw it away I want to examine it and see whether there are marks of fingers or claws and teeth, to try to get some clue to who or what has been handling it.”

“Who or what about says the whole of it,” said Mr. Bailey as he turned away to go back to his farm work.

Ann thought that he looked very tired and anxious. Why had that ship ever come to his shore to worry him? She wished more than ever that she could do something to solve the mystery; she hoped still to accomplish what she had promised herself to do, but she was so slow about it!

“What are you going to do, Jo?” Ben called after him.

“Goin’ down to the beach to get a load of small pebbles and sand—want to come?”

“Yes, of course I do,” answered Ben, forgetting that half of his time lately had been given to painting.

“And I’m coming, too,” called Ann. “Bring three shovels, Ben.”

“Haven’t but two,” Jo called back, laughing. “You can drive.”

So down to the beach they went, joggling over the ruts and rocks in the two-wheeled cart as sensible Jerry plodded steadily along regardless of the bumping cart behind his heels.

A great change had come over Ben during these weeks at Pine Ledge. Instead of the boy who had hardly known whether or not to help carry the bags at the station that first day, he now took his place beside Jo and shoveled with him, tossing the shovelfuls of beach sand into the high cart and keeping pace with Jo. This pleased Ben very much, for though he could not lift as heavy a load it was only because he was younger and shorter than Jo; proportionally he was doing exactly the same amount of work. He did not say anything about it, but Ann noticed, and so did Jo,

"Pretty good work," he said approvingly. "You're getting up a fine muscle."

In the afternoon great thunderheads of clouds began to climb up toward the sun and blacken the sky. The Seymours were up in a field watching Mr. Bailey and Jo as they laid a platform of cement in the milk house for which the beach gravel had been carried that morning. Already squalls were sweeping in from the sea in dark and menacing blots, and to the Baileys this did not promise to be merely a passing thundershower but an all-night deluge.

"See the gulls coming in," said Jo. "They are beginning to notice the storm, just like I said they would, even before the blow begins."

Ben and Ann looked to where Jo was pointing, and sure enough, a scattering of gulls showed white as they clustered about the mouth of the river, rising up on spread wings and crying spasmodically with a plaintive note that sounded almost human.

"They will ride with the wind that way until they get fed up," Jo explained, "and then shift back to the shelter of the swamp pond." He looked at the clouds with a speculative eye. "Along about sunset they should be taking to the pond. We'll watch carefully and see how they act, for that will show us, very likely, how heavy the wind will blow before morning."

To Ann and Ben the sky looked as though the storm would break in a few minutes, for the clouds were black and massed, with a white misty foam along their edges. But Jo's prophecy was right. The clouds hung steadfastly just over the top of the pine forest, as though fixed in that one spot, moiling and running in layers over themselves but not advancing. The Seymours kept glancing at the sky, for it made the afternoon seem very strange and threatening.

But Mr. Bailey's thoughts could not have been on the approaching storm, for suddenly he looked up at Ann, who was standing near by, watching him as he smoothed the cement with gentle unhurried strokes of his trowel.

“I’ve been thinkin’ about what your father said this mornin’, kinder turnin’ it over in my mind. And I don’t know but what he’s right about that cheese; he was talkin’ to me after dinner an’ he says—an’ he showed ’em to me—that there’s marks of dog teeth on the cheese. But there ain’t any stray dog around here; there couldn’t be, without Jo or me catchin’ sight of it now and then. Maybe it’s a wolf. They’ve been known to come down from the backwoods, now and again. But that old sea demon, I don’t like him at all. Ain’t got no use for him. We would all be better off without him.”

“I don’t like him,” Ann agreed most readily. “But what can you ever do to get rid of him before the wreck breaks up?”

“I’ve made up my mind to fix him,” Fred answered grimly. “I’ll chop him off the boat and burn him up on the beach.”

“Oh!” Ann danced gayly in anticipation. “Won’t that be fun! We’ll have a bonfire and bake potatoes in it. And that will be the end of the old grinning demon.”

“And we’ll roast some of our own corn,” Ben chimed in. “Don’t you suppose, Jo, that we could find a few ears that would be ripe enough?”

“Shouldn’t wonder,” Jo answered. “Lobsters are mighty good cooked in the open, too. After the rocks get hot you put the lobsters under a pile of wet seaweed and steam them. We’d do it to-night only the storm would open right on top of us.”

Mr. Bailey squinted up at the western sky. The clouds were weaving in and out above the tops of the pines. The dropping sun had now tinged their white edges with a line of yellow fire. The squalls out at sea had melted together into one great blot of dark shadow relieved here and there by a bit of foam that showed startlingly white against the somber blackness.

“You two had better skite for the house now,” he said. “Jo and I will hurry and finish this work before the rain comes, and get the critters under cover. The thunder makes them run the pasture.”

“The critters” were Jerry, the horse, waiting with the empty cart, and Maude, the cow, feeding placidly in the pasture near by although she had more than once looked up at the sky as though she understood what was coming.

“Let us take Maude and Jerry,” begged Ann. “We’ll get them into the shed.”

“All right,” Mr. Bailey consented. “Only get a move on you. After this long dry spell the storm will be some blow, and don’t you forgit it.”

Ben chose to bring in Maude, for he loved the slow-moving gentle creature with her soft brown eyes that always seemed so interested in him every time he appeared.

Ann's job was Jerry. He was as eager as she to get within the four walls of his shelter. He went briskly down the cart path and into the barnyard and stopped on the spot where the cart belonged, all without the need of much guiding from Ann. It was there that Ann's trouble began. She didn't know how to unharness him. She could not discover which of the big buckles distributed about the harness would free him. Even after she had unfastened the traces, as she had seen Jo do, Jerry still stayed firmly fixed between the shafts. He turned his head and looked at her with patient wonder as if he wanted to know why he was being kept there.

Ben, coming in with Maude walking sedately before him, proved to be of little help. "Jerry sticks there because he is so fat," he suggested. "See, the shafts bulge out over his sides. We'll have to pull him out."

But though Ben held the shafts while Ann pulled at Jerry's head they had no better success. Whenever Jerry moved forward an inch the cart came, too.

Ann knew how Mr. Bailey would laugh if he and Jo reached the barnyard and found that she had been beaten by a buckle. Besides, she had promised to get Jerry under cover, and into his stall he should go if it were a possible thing; she was determined to get him there. She would unbuckle every strap in his harness until she came to the ones that held him to the cart. So she and Ben began with those nearest, and some of them were so stiff that they couldn't have been unfastened since the harness was bought, goodness knew how many years ago.

At last Jerry was free. He seemed to know when the right buckle came undone. He stepped forward and looked at Ann and Ben with an expression of mild disgust, then he braced himself and had one fine shake, the harness showering down in dozens of little straps. Again he looked at the children, as if to say, "Now see what you have done!"

Without waiting he stalked away to his stall.

Ann and Ben began to pick up the miscellaneous bits of harness as fast as they could, but Jo came and caught them before they had quite finished. He laughed until he was weak as he watched them on their hands and knees picking up the little pieces. Even Jerry turned around in his corner and stared with astonished eyes.

"I'll give you a good lesson to-morrow," said Jo, "show you how to put a set of harness together. The big buckle under his forelegs and the two straps on the sides wrapped about the shafts were all that you should have opened."

The harness showered down in dozens of little straps.

“I didn’t know there were so many straps in the world!” exclaimed Ben. “And look at Jerry over there. He is laughing at us, too.”

“We don’t get many city hicks out here, do we, Jerry?” Jo took a sly nudge as he rubbed the soft nose of the old horse, and Jerry opened his mouth in a wide bored yawn. “That’s the way to treat ’em,” said Jo. “Yawn again, a bigger one this time.”

The Seymours rushed through their supper, for they were eager to see the first real storm of the season beat against the cliffs. Fred had promised that there would be gorgeous sights, to-night and all day to-morrow, and they did not wish to miss a bit more than necessary.

Mr. Seymour was eager to see the color of sea and sky and rocks and the struggle of the wind against the water. Ben found the curling, twisting sea fascinating to watch as the wind closed down beyond the pond rocks. The gale seemed to have shut them into a wide semicircle, for the tops of the tallest pines far against the sunset were swaying and bending gently, while the house and the meadow still stood in the first soft yellow twilight where not a breath of air moved. It was early yet, for the Seymours had fallen into country ways and it was hardly six o’clock.

Jo joined the group as they stood watching the sea. He touched Ann lightly on the shoulder. “Come over here if you want to see the gulls now,” he said, and Ann went with him to the corner on the kitchen side of the house.

Ben followed, for he wished to see the birds. Anything that had movement interested him enormously, the flight of the gulls as well as the sweeping onward of the crested waves.

“How strangely the gulls act!” said Ann.

Dozens of the great gray birds were poised over the spot where the children knew that the swamp pond lay circled with great pines. Their wings were outstretched as they rode the still air and they were calling in a confused jumble of high-pitched chuckling cries.

“They ought to light.” Jo’s face was puzzled. “Strange the way they hang up there. Usually it looks as if they dropped straight down, out of sight.”

“Why do they come inland?” asked Ben. “To get out of the wind?”

“Partly. But they know, same as I do, that the storm will blow the fish up the river to seek quiet water.”

“I don’t believe that they mean to settle on the pond to-night,” Ann ventured

after a while.

“Strange,” said Jo again. “It would almost seem as though something down there on the pond was keeping them off, but gulls don’t fret about muskrats. I never have heard of a bobcat around these parts, but it looks suspicious to see them act in that jumpy way.”

“Perhaps it’s the same animal that took our cheese,” suggested Ann.

“Perhaps,” agreed Jo. He dropped his eyes from the poised birds and ran them thoughtfully along the fringe of the woods where the trees cut sharply into the growing twilight. Suddenly he caught hold of Ben’s arm.

“Look! See there!”

“What?” Ben asked. “I don’t see anything. What do you mean?”

“Right there alongside of that big pine. Don’t you see the smoke? Some one has lighted that fire again. It must be just where we found the embers.”

As he spoke he began to run down over the meadow in the direction of the spot from which the smoke rose. Ben and Ann could see it plainly, now that their attention had been called to it, a thin wisp of smoke curling above the top of one of the tallest pines.

“Come on,” said Ann. “I’m going, too.”

“Sure,” said Ben, and they started to run after Jo.

“Where are you going?” called Mr. Seymour. “The rain will be here soon.”

“Jo thinks there is a fire down in the swamp,” Ben answered, “and we are going to help him put it out.”

“Well, don’t stay too long. Remember that the rain will be of more use than you are.”

“I want to go with them,” said Helen. “Mayn’t I, father?”

“Take care of her, Ann,” cautioned Mr. Seymour.

And then the three Seymours ran down the hill to where Jo was waiting for them in the shadow of the woods, for he had turned to see whether they were following. He was standing in a spot that was hidden from the entrance to the path into the woods.

Vaguely Ann wished that Helen had not come; she was such a little girl.

CHAPTER X

THE FIRE IN THE WOODS

JUST beyond lay the deer trail that had grown so familiar to them all. A little fringe of undergrowth to be broken through with the utmost caution, stooping low to avoid as many branches as possible, and then they were on the trail in Indian file creeping stealthily toward the swamp pond with Jo ahead. As they drew nearer they could smell the wood smoke in the air.

This was even more exciting than stalking deer, Ann thought, as she went forward noiselessly, hardly daring to draw a full breath.

Jo stopped for a whispered conference.

"As we draw close," he instructed, "we had better scatter, so the noise won't come always from the same direction if we step on twigs or stumble. And that will give us all a chance to light out and make our getaway if somebody is there by the fire. I'll take the center. Ben and Ann swing out on either side of me and Helen had best stay right here behind me."

So the band took the formation that Robin Hood suggested and bore down upon the fire in a wide semicircle, within sight of one another, if one knew where to look and peered through the green leaves of the underbrush. Through the scrub growth and briers, now, they could see the glow of flames and hear a murmur of men's voices speaking in low tones.

Jo dropped flat on his stomach and pulled Helen down beside him and the others followed his example. Slowly they crept forward and came to the edge of the little clearing on the edge of the pond.

Two men were seated before the crackling sticks of a small fire. Ann had never seen either of them before. They were dressed in dark blue wool and she felt sure that the cloth was like the torn piece that Jo carried constantly in his pocket. Were they sailors from the wreck? And where had they been all the time since the boat came ashore last winter?

The nearer man was big. His shaggy hair was tumbled and long on his bare head and a heavy beard covered the lower part of his face. Ann knew that he would be an ugly customer, and quieter than ever she lay motionless under the bushes. The other man was small and lithely thin like a weasel. He had a

weasel's tiny pale eyes that darted nervously everywhere while he talked. He was very white with an unnatural pallor and as the glow of the fire leaped up in his face Ann could see a long newly healed scar that ran from one eye down across his cheek to his small receding chin.

The men were talking in low tones, the big man gruff and hoarse, the smaller one in a screechy weak whine. At times their voices rose louder as their argument became intense, and then dropped back into a low rumble. Finally the small man looked up at the sky.

"It's going to be a terrible blow," he said bitterly.

"What of it?" demanded the big one. "The darker the night the easier it will be to take care of that butting-in detective, and no one will be the wiser. What's the matter with you, Charlie? Your yeller streak is comin' forninst, now that the real job is ahead of us."

Charlie's weasel eyes jumped furtively as he looked into the big man's face. "I ain't no squealer," he snapped. "You know that. I ain't the one to shy off when I can see my way clear. You found me ready enough with my bit against the captain and the mate. But this guy you're planning for now is something different. You can't knock off men like him; it doesn't do any good. Some one else steps into his place and then they hunt you until they get you."

"I ain't arguing that," Tom answered soberly. "But who is going to know what happens to one lone man? If he falls off the deck of that wrecked schooner and hits his head against a rock as the sea washes him about, who is going to connect us with the accident? That farmer will bury him alongside the captain and the mate and blame nobody but the boat itself, blame that figurehead, probably. And you and me will be living like kings down in Boston."

"That sounds first-class," the other sneered scornfully. "But I been noticing that things aren't going quite so much your way as you expected they would."

"What do you mean?" growled Tom.

"You haven't found much as yet, have you? You've come this far with your plans, and here you've stuck. Find the money, why don't you? What's the use of getting rid of Bain before you get the money that's hidden?"

"He might find it first," answered the big man.

Ann heard, but she was too astonished and excited to realize that the secrets of the wreck were being revealed to her at last. The great surprise that eclipsed all the others was the news that Warren Bain was a detective. Had he known everything from first to last?

But she must listen and learn all she could. This was no time to be wondering about things; what was Charlie saying? She had missed part of it already, but he

ended with a sneering laugh, “And I noticed that you ran as fast as I, the minute you heard that noise last night, on the boat. You didn’t wait to see what made it, did you?”

In reply the big man muttered something that sounded to Ann like nothing but a savage roar.

“I tell you,” said Charlie, “it was that blamed figurehead. Him and the captain was friends; I seen them talking to each other on many an evening.”

“You did not! Maybe the cap’n talked but no wooden figure ever answered. Come along now, you coward. I’ll admit that Bain scared me off last night, but now I’m ready for him!”

“Bain!” echoed Charlie.

“It was, too, Bain. He was dragging something along the deck to make that ssush-ssush to scare us.”

“But it wasn’t Bain,” thought Ann, “because we were watching him.”

The men had risen and begun to scatter the fire, kicking the burning wood into the pond. The gulls rose even higher, screaming.

Under cover of the noise that the men were making Jo and Helen began to creep slowly backward into the denser shadows. Ann became aware of what they were doing and she, too, made a successful retreat. She reached the deer path and stood beside the others.

Ben, however, was not so lucky. His foot slipped on a stone and he crashed down into the underbrush.

Instantly Charlie was after him, while Jo and Ann stood as if paralyzed. There was nothing that they could do to help. Helen, in agonizing fear and excitement, put both hands over her mouth so that no sound could escape.

“It’s a boy,” called Charlie. He had caught Ben’s arm and was pulling him roughly toward the fire.

Ann’s courage had come surging back, but Jo leaned toward her and put his lips close to her ear; he seemed to know that she was going out to Ben. “Hush! We can’t do a thing now. Wait!”

Tom yanked Ben by his coat and turned his face toward the light. “What kid is this? What are you doing here, spying on us?”

Ann thought that she would have been frightened nearly out of her wits if that black unshaven face had been so near hers, but Ben drew back as far as he could and answered bravely.

“I saw the smoke and came to put out the fire.”

“Did you come alone?” demanded Tom, giving him a shake. “Don’t you dare

to lie to me!”

“Yes, I am alone!” answered Ben. “Do you see anybody with me?”

Ann felt her heart swell with pride. She caught Jo’s hand and squeezed it and he answered with a like pressure.

“What are you doing here?” asked Ben in his turn. He took care to shout it as loudly as possible, knowing well that the men had tried to be quiet.

In reply Tom cuffed him sharply. “Be still, there.” The hard-muscled seaman could hold the boy at arm’s length and Ben kicked and struggled in vain. “What’ll we do with him?”

“Let him go home,” said Charlie.

“Go home and tell, and have a batch of farmers chasing down here to look for us? Not on your life.”

“What’s he got to tell? We aren’t doing any harm, two men sitting peacefully in the woods.”

“You don’t know how much he heard.” And again Tom shook Ben vindictively.

Ann had to clench her fingers; how she wished she had a gun! Those men could be frightened easily. Their conversation had told her how superstitious they were. Just one shot to scare them off and they would run like deer. But there wasn’t any gun. The house was so far away. How could she get word to her father?

“Tie him up and leave him here. We can stop his noise.”

But Tom never seemed to care to profit by Charlie’s suggestions. “What’ll we tie him with? No; we’ll take him along to the boat. I want to know where to put my hand on him, I do.” He lifted Ben and set him on the ground again, although Ben made his legs limp as a child does when it refuses to be led along by the hand. “Stand up there!” ordered Tom.

Evidently Ben thought he had better do as he was told. It was easier to walk than to be dragged through the woods.

“You march between me and Charlie, and step along now!”

Silently the remaining three of the band waited in the shadows until a moment or two after the bushes had stopped waving behind Charlie’s back as he, the rear guard, disappeared.

Helen turned and threw her arms around Ann, seeking comfort. “Ben’s gone! What will they do to him?” she whispered, even in her distress remembering to be quiet.

Ann had no answer. She hugged Helen tight and patted her back as though her

little sister were a kitten, but her own anxiety looked toward the sturdy, resourceful Jo. “Will they hurt him?”

“Not if he does as they tell him.” Jo shook his head thoughtfully. “He seemed to catch on to that and stopped kicking when he found it got him nowhere. Probably they will take him down to the boat and tie him somewhere there while they search for the money.”

“What money is it?” asked Helen.

“I don’t know any more’n you do. Seems like they thought Bain was coming there to-night.”

“Did you hear them say that Bain is a detective?” said Ann excitedly. “Perhaps he’s there now and can save Ben!”

“Maybe,” answered Jo. “But we can’t wait on the chance of that; we’ve got to do something right now.”

In the shelter of Ann’s arms Helen had stopped sobbing. “They mustn’t hurt my brother Ben even though he does tease me all the time.”

“What can we do?” Ann spoke with a small quaver in her voice although she had grown calm in this real danger.

“Don’t you worry too much,” Jo assured her stanchly. “Things always seem worse than they are and we’ll get Ben, don’t you fear!”

“If only the house wasn’t so far away,” said Ann despairingly. All possible help seemed so remote.

“It ain’t more’n a mile,” said Jo. “Now, Helen, you go just as fast as you can to get pop and Mr. Seymour. Tell pop to bring his gun. And tell them that Ann and I are going straight to the ship.”

“Oh, Helen,” cried Ann, “run across the meadow and don’t mind wetting your feet!”

“Yes, I’ll go a short cut, right through the brook!” And Helen was off, following the more direct path by the river, the path by which Jo had taken them home the first day they saw the deer.

CHAPTER XI

THROUGH THE PORTHOLE

Jo and Ann dashed across the clearing and down the path that the men had taken. There was no danger of their being heard, if the men had kept up the pace at which they started. When the two reached the edge of the woods they paused a moment or so, to see whether the coast was clear, but there was not a sound or a trace to indicate that any one had lately passed that way.

Night had fallen by that time and Ann was glad of its shelter. She would not have wished to cross the road and the narrow strip of beach with an uncomfortable feeling of certainty that she was being watched from some crack in the warped hull.

"You stay here," commanded Jo. "I'm going to take a look around."

Obediently Ann settled herself in the deeper darkness under the side of the boat. There was a gentle rattle as Jo swung himself up into the irons and then absolute silence, so far as any human sounds came to her ears. It seemed as though she waited for ages, alone in the dark. There was plenty of time to think and to worry. Helen must be nearly there and it wouldn't take long for father and Mr. Bailey to get started after they heard the news of Ben's capture. They must hurry, hurry! Perhaps she ought to have gone for them, she could run so much faster than Helen and she surely wasn't being of much use now, sitting under the side of the boat! Perhaps Helen had fallen, stepped into a hole in the turf and broken her leg, so she could not go on for help.

Something was making a slight noise, something was coming across the pebbles toward her! She half rose to her feet to meet it—and then she saw that it was Jo cautiously creeping along, bent almost double in his efforts not to be seen from the deck of the schooner.

“I found Ben,” he whispered. “I know where he is—in the hold. He ought to be about here, behind where you are sitting.”

“Did he see you?”

“No. And I didn’t see him, but there isn’t any other place for them to hide him. You both know the Code, don’t you? You let him know that we are here while I get the ladder.”

It seemed a slight chance to Ann. But Jo was certain that Ben was there and so Ann began to tap against the plank nearest her right hand. It sounded fearfully loud in the stillness and she could only hope that the thunder of the waves and the rattle of the pebbles as each wave receded might keep the men from hearing. It seemed to her almost too great a risk to run. But if Jo told her to rap, rap she would.

“Ben! We are here!”

Three times she tapped it out and then the SOS signal. Each time she listened and received no reply.

And at last an answer came, clear, but fainter than the taps she had given. “OK, OK, OK.”

That was enough; she was not taking any unnecessary risks. As softly as possible she went to join Jo.

He had hoisted the ladder already and climbed up, and he motioned to her to follow. In another minute Ann was looking through the porthole of the captain’s cabin.

She wouldn’t have thought of speaking in any case but Jo’s finger on his lips cautioned her to be quiet as possible. As she stepped on to the ladder with her eyes lifted toward the porthole she realized that there must be a light in the room and when she could see over the rim she was not surprised to find the two men hard at their search.

Tom was running a knife through the cracks and crevices of the berth. Not a sound could be heard except his heavy breathing, and Charlie stood close by, watching.

“I tell yer it ain’t there,” said Charlie as Tom straightened his back at last and stood glowering at the berth.

“It’s—” And then Tom stopped, giving every thought and attention to a strained listening. “Hist!”

Charlie heard it, too, whatever it was, but Ann could catch no faintest echo. Was the ssushing sound coming?

Suddenly the light went out and with utter darkness came perfect silence in

the cabin. Ann wished that she could keep her heart from beating so loud. It seemed as though the thuds must be noisy enough to be heard by the men below. But this complete silence did not last long. Suddenly came the sound of thuds and blows, and light came again.

Warren Bain was stretched out on the cabin floor, unconscious. Tom was glaring angrily at the man whom he had knocked down. “He’ll come back, all right. Gimme some blanket strips to tie him fast.”

Charlie scurried to the berth and with his knife ripped one of the blankets into strips and with these Tom began to tie Bain’s arms and legs.

Ann had no time to think; things were happening too fast.

First Tom tied Bain’s ankles together, then used another strip for his wrists, and then tied the two together using a peculiar slip knot that seemed to tie the tighter the more it was strained.

“Now you”—and Tom swung about toward Charlie with a suddenness that so startled Ann that she nearly fell off the ladder—“you rout out them blankets and tear the berth to bits and I’ll take care of the floor. There’s a secret hiding hole in here somewheres and the money is in it.”

Charlie obediently threw the remaining blankets and the mattress and pillow into a pile outside the cabin door and began to wrench and tear at the boards. But apparently he was not convinced of the value of what he was doing. “What makes you so sure the cash is down here?” he snapped.

“Captain Jim had it on him when the men started rioting, up forward,” Tom answered. “He came down here to the cabin to hide it, I reckon. Why else did he come down? And after he was on deck again he went no place but overboard.”

“And he put three good men there, before him,” commented Charlie dryly. He seemed to have a wholesome respect and fear of the captain, even now.

“Any one of ’em was a better man than three of you!” Tom growled. He had taken a short iron from his pocket and now began to pry up big pieces of floor boards.

Jo touched Ann’s shoulder to call her attention to Warren Bain. He was stretched just within the circle of light cast by Tom’s torch and Ann saw at once that he had regained consciousness. Not only that, but as she looked down into his open eyes he stared straight up into hers. He smiled slightly, but instantly his face became expressionless as Tom turned in his work.

But he was not quick enough. Tom caught the flicker of Bain’s eyelids. The sailor dropped his iron and stood upright over the detective. “None of that faking!” And he kicked the bound man in the side. “You ransacked this place and we want what you found!”

To Ann’s amazement Bain opened his eyes and answered, “Yes, I found it. What are you going to do about it?”

Tom seemed as much surprised as Ann and for a moment he gaped stupidly down into Bain’s face.

“There is not a thing you can do,” Bain went on. “Kill me if you like but the secret of the money goes with me—Tom Minor.”

Charlie leaped to his feet with a cry of terror. “He knows us! Knock him off, Tom, knock him off! He’ll tell on us.”

“Not until we get what we’ve come for,” answered Tom, with one shove of his hand pushing Charlie back into the wrecked berth. “There is ways of making people tell secrets.”

Into Ann’s mind came all the tales of days gone by when men were tortured and put on the rack; historical tales were her great love in reading, Crockett and Scott and the others. What were she and Jo going to do to save Warren Bain? Run to the house? There wasn’t time for that to be of the slightest use. Her father and Mr. Bailey should be here now.

Ann had no idea how long it was since Helen had left them. She knew well enough that it could not be as long as it seemed, but surely it wouldn’t have taken Helen more than half an hour to get home. Half an hour, and then five minutes for Mr. Bailey to get his gun—Ann was sure that her father hadn’t one—and then ten minutes across the sloping field from the house. But all those minutes had seemed like an hour each, with all the excitement and all the happenings. Help would come in a minute, but it seemed as though time had stopped. Anything could be done in a minute, and no one was there but Jo and herself.

All at once she knew. The strange noise! It had frightened the men last night; she had heard Tom admit it, she had heard Charlie taunt Tom with his fear of it.

“Jo!” She hardly breathed the words. “Get two sticks, two dry sticks!” He could go more silently than she; pebbles seemed never to rattle under his feet.

Jo did not stop to ask why. Down the ladder he went while Ann tried to press more firmly against the hull of the ship, so that no sound of a ladder bumping against the planks of the side could be noticed by the men. It was only now that Ann realized that the storm had come at last. The rain was pouring in torrents and she was wet through.

Jo came back with several small rough branches from the hedge beside the road where they kept the ladder hidden. Taking one branch from him Ann reached out as far as possible along the side of the wreck and rubbed it harshly against the boards. She tried to make it sound like the weird haunting shuffle, a

noise that there was no danger of her forgetting as long as she lived.

Sussh—she rubbed the branch away to the length of her arm and the wet leaves on the little twigs added to the effect that she hoped to give. Sussh, she went, making it hard and scraping, then sussh, she pulled it back with a slight rasp.

She was afraid to peek into the porthole, for surely the men would be looking in the direction from which the noise came. But she could hear what they said.

Charlie gave a squeal of fright. “There it is!” he cried.

“That devil figurehead!”

“The captain’s sent him after us!” Charlie’s voice rose in a shrill yelp.

It was impossible to hold her hand steady, but she kept on with scrape after scrape as rhythmic as that dread sound she had heard on the first day they visited the ship.

“Put the table against the door, Charlie,” ordered Tom.

“You can’t keep him out with that,” Charlie shouted. “That table would have been just kindling wood to Cap’n Jim and it won’t be even that much to the figurehead. I’m going!”

“Hands up!”

Heads up, too, for it was Mr. Seymour’s voice and instantaneously Jo’s and Ann’s eyes came level with the porthole.

In the doorway stood Mr. Seymour with a shotgun in his hands and behind him, his lean face grimly set, Mr. Bailey stood with a long rifle held above Mr. Seymour’s shoulder. The shadows in the cabin were strange, for Tom and Charlie had dropped their torches as they raised their hands and all the light in the room came from the two circles on the floor. Warren Bain, still trussed like a fowl, had been shoved into a corner.

“Where are the children?”

Ann could hardly believe that it was her father’s voice that said those words, so changed it was from the voice she knew.

“Here we are!” she called.

CHAPTER XII

THE FIGUREHEAD'S SECRET

"GEE, this is a terrible storm, for the summer-time," exclaimed Jo as they reached the deck.

He and Ann had been sheltered by the great hull of the schooner, for the wind and rain were driving from the direction of the sea, but now they felt its full force. The sweeping blasts almost carried Ann off her feet. A steady sheet of rain was sweeping across the bare deck and hissing out through the scuppers. She had to lean against the storm as she pushed her way to the ladder that led below.

"Ann!" her father cried at sight of her. "Are you all right? Where's Ben?" He held her tightly, as if he wanted to make sure that his daughter was once more safe beside him.

"Ben's down in the hold. Oh, dad! I thought you'd never get here! I won't try to solve another mystery without telling you beforehand."

"'Mystery'?" repeated Mr. Seymour. "Why are you children here? I thought that you went to put out a fire in the woods." In spite of his relief at seeing Ann unharmed he kept his gun pointed in a very businesslike manner. "Who are these men? And who is this, tied up?"

"That chap is Warren Bain," said Mr. Bailey. "He's been hanging around the cove all season. No one knows aught of him."

"He's a detective!" announced Ann in great excitement.

"You'd better fasten those two before you do much talking," advised Bain dryly, speaking for the first time. "In my coat pocket, Bailey."

A bit doubtingly Mr. Bailey put his hand into Bain's pocket and took out two pairs of handcuffs. Finding them there seemed to assure him of the truth of Ann's statement and his manner was quite different as he snapped them around

the wrists of Tom and Charlie. Ann and Jo, and Mr. Seymour, too, never had seen that done and for the moment all their attention was given to that grim proceeding.

Then, “Where’s Ben?” Mr. Seymour asked again.

“In the hold,” answered Jo, “and I guess we’d better be getting him out. He’ll be pretty cold and wet.”

Mr. Bailey had cut the strips of blanket that bound Warren Bain, and now the detective stood on his two feet again, stretching his aching arms and legs and back. “Boy in the hold,” he said. “I was wondering where the third one of you was keeping himself. Well, with the tide that there’s likely to be to-night, it is lucky we can get him up before the hold is half full of water.”

“You’re right,” said Mr. Bailey. “We don’t often get such a storm as this in summer. It’s a hummer, all right. Can you take care of these fellers alone?”

“Just watch me,” answered Bain, bringing out his automatic.

The heavy driving rain had settled to a drumming downpour. The sea seemed to be flattened under the weight of it, to be spreading out like a pond when the water rises. The tide had turned and the waves were breaking nearer and nearer the stern of the wreck.

They reached the open hatchway and Mr. Seymour called, “Ben?”

“Hey, there!” The boy’s voice came faint but cheerful. “Have you really come at last? I thought a week had gone by!”

“We’ll have you out in a jiffy,” shouted Jo. “Come on up, the coast is clear.”

“I can’t,” answered Ben. “The ladder’s broken and I can’t reach high enough.”

Mr. Bailey and Mr. Seymour looked anxiously about. “Any rope?” asked Mr. Bailey. The bare rain-swept deck offered nothing.

“Get our ladder!” exclaimed Ann, and Jo dashed after it.

That, dropped down to the bottom of the hold and placed against the ship’s ladder, enabled Ben to climb to safety.

“Did they hurt you, my son?” asked Mr. Seymour, his hand on Ben’s shoulder.

“Oh, they banged me around a bit—a few black and blue spots, I suppose, but nothing permanent. What’s been happening, Jo? Tell a feller, quick!”

“We all want to know,” said Mr. Bailey. “What’s been goin’ on here, anyway?”

“Those men were robbing the ship—” began Ann.

“Of what?” demanded her father.

“That’s what we don’t know, exactly,” said Ann.

“I don’t believe that anybody knows the whole of it,” Jo said. “Let’s go back

to the cabin; each person can tell what he does know and we can piece it all together."

"Great idea," said Mr. Seymour.

They found Warren Bain grinning sardonically at his two captives.

"Well, I swan!" said Bailey. "An' you've been laying by this wreck all these weeks, and no one had any notion of what you were here for. We thought you was a-buttin' in on our lobster fields."

"I thought that was how you folks figured; you didn't act any too welcoming. But I'd be some sleuth if I went telling my business to every Tom, Dick, and Harry. I have to count on a little unpopularity once in a while. Yes, we knew the boat as soon as we came here and looked her over. She was just the boat we expected she would be. A government cutter had been trying to pick her up before the blizzard came down."

"Then she wasn't a phantom ship at all," Ann remarked. And her disappointment must have shown in her voice, because her father and Warren Bain seemed to think that was one of the funniest things they ever had heard. But was all that excitement and anxiety over nothing but an ordinary boat that had been wrecked in a perfectly natural way?

Bain went on with his story.

"She ran under the name of *The Shadow* although she carried no name, and her owner, Jim Rand, captained her. She carried a crew of five men besides himself and she ran a good trade, smuggling Italian silk and Indian spices into the North Atlantic harbors. She wasn't hard to pick up because of that figurehead, but Rand wouldn't give it up. It was his mascot and the crew believed that he talked things over with that wooden image. Rand was a clever one. This boat was stopped many a time, but when the men from the government cutter climbed aboard to examine her they never found anything. She seemed to be running empty. We never found a cargo and consequently we never could pin anything on Rand."

"Well, you got it on him now," Fred said heartily. "Which one o' these is Rand?"

"Neither one," and Warren sounded contemptuous. "Rand was a lawbreaker but he wasn't like either of these two low-down thieves and murderers here. Rand is up in your burying ground. You put him there with the mate and two of the crew."

"So, one o' those was the captain, hey?" Fred rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Well—I guess he's glad to be resting in the ground."

"He made the worst mistake of his life when he shipped these two," went on

Bain, “both of them with criminal records, although he didn’t know it. Of course he couldn’t expect to get too high-class sailors for his business, but those he’d had were harmless, at least. As near as I can make out from what Tom tells me, Rand had just sold a cargo of silk in Boston and for some reason or other refused to divide the cash the minute the crew wanted it. So they mutinied, on the advice of these two jail birds. The captain went overboard, but he accounted for three of the crew before he went. Tom and Charlie hid on the wreck until after you searched her”—he nodded to Fred—“and then they blew for shore to wait until the excitement cooled down and our hero Charlie was tucked into jail, somewhere upcountry, for taking a lady’s pocket-book while he was stealing her chickens.”

They all turned to look at Charlie, who acted very sheepish. Ann had a suspicion that his shame came from having been caught, rather than from the actual crime. So that was why his face had that queer pallor.

“They were hidin’ on the boat when we came on?” Mr. Bailey demanded incredulously. “We looked her over well; there weren’t a cubic inch in her that we didn’t see.”

Charlie snickered and Tom growled, but both sounds gave Ann to understand very clearly that Tom and Charlie knew things about that boat that would be forever hidden from Mr. Bailey.

“It wasn’t strange you didn’t find them,” said Bain, “if our government inspectors couldn’t find where the men had tucked away whole cargoes.”

“Well, God was good to the whole of us, that is all I have to say.” And Mr. Bailey gripped his rifle tighter as he looked at the two captives. Sailors they were not; they were just two criminals who had gone to sea for a time.

“So that was why you felt as if some one was there!” exclaimed Ben. “They were peeking at you, and you didn’t know it!”

Tom must have been on the boat the day she and Jo so strongly felt that impression of eyes upon them, thought Ann, and shivered as she thought it. Anything might have happened if Tom had chosen to come out and frighten them. Her mother had been right, after all, when she had worried about their playing on the wreck.

“And we peeked at you, Mr. Bain, when you didn’t know it,” Ben went on. “Will you tell us, please, what you meant when you said, ‘Stay there, babies, and wait for me.’”

“Yes!” cried Ann. “What was in the closet? We couldn’t find anything there.”

Warren Bain looked at Ann and Jo with a wide smile. “You kids were on the job all right, weren’t you! So you saw me at that! Well, I’ll show you something

pretty."

Tom had wrenched the closet door from its hinges and now Bain took it in his hands. "This panel looks exactly like the others, but it actually is a sliding panel that goes back like this." Under Bain's fingers the thin board slid back and revealed a space filled with papers closely covered with writing. "These are Jim's bills of lading; I tell you, he knew how to hide his stuff." Bain put the door down and looked at Tom and Charlie. "Even after he was dead you couldn't beat him. You were foolish to try."

Charlie nodded his head miserably, but Tom did not deign to acknowledge that he had heard.

"As you children are so interested," Bain continued, "it won't do any harm to let you see the whole of it. Do you want to see where Rand hid the money?"

"You'd better believe we do!" exclaimed Jo.

Even Tom showed signs of excitement at this, although any chance of his getting any of that money had vanished, money for which he had thrown away all freedom for the rest of his life.

"It is just where Rand left it," said Bain, "double safe and out of his cabin. I knew that Tom was around because the blankets here were shifted."

"But it wasn't Tom," Ann said quite defiantly. "We did it, to see if they were being used."

"H-u-mm—" said Bain.

"And you aren't solving any of our mysteries," Ann went on. "You're clearing things up for the sailors and Mr. Bailey, but I want to know what made the noise that frightened us, and frightened you, too, last night."

"That's true," admitted Bain. He rumpled the hair on his head, knocking his cap sidewise. "And I knew that you must have heard it, some time or other, when you used it just now to scare the men away from me." He looked at Mr. Seymour. "You haven't heard the half of it yet. These children had the wit to imitate this strange noise in order to frighten these gentlemen away from trying to make me tell where to find Rand's money. The scheme would have worked, too; Charlie's nerve was gone and Tom's was growing weak. Our Charlie was half paralyzed with fright when you came. That's why you held them up so easily."

Ann and her father exchanged a glance; she was glad he knew without her telling of her splendid idea. It might have sounded like boasting. And to have her father proud of her was one of the things Ann most desired.

"When we were watching them by their camp fire I heard them say that the noise frightened them," she explained modestly.

“What made the noise?” inquired Mr. Seymour.

“Nobody kn—” began Ben, but Charlie interrupted him.

“That blasted figurehead makes it, coming to scare folks away from the captain’s money. I told you, Tom Minor, that no good would come from signing on a ship with that figurehead.”

“Do you suppose the figurehead really walked about?” asked Jo, his confidence shaken by Charlie’s firm belief. “The sound was just like scaly feet rubbing over the deck boards.”

Instead of laughing at him, Bain was considerate enough of the boy’s feelings to answer soberly, “No, I can’t think that. But it is a queer noise, I’ll admit that much. You see, the other night I thought it was made by the men, so it didn’t occur to me to attribute it to the figurehead.”

“And who took Mr. Bailey’s milk and our cheese?” asked Ben.

“Foodstuff stolen from your place?” inquired Bain of Mr. Bailey.

“I never touched a crumb of it!” denied Tom. “Don’t you say I did. Everything I ate I bought! Don’t you dare say I stole your milk!” He glared at Mr. Bailey.

“Yes,” said Mr. Bailey, “enough was stolen so it wasn’t safe to leave anything about; but nothin’ else ever was took.”

“That’s curious,” commented Bain thoughtfully. “Well, who is coming to see where Rand hid the treasure? How about it, Bailey? Will you stay down here to guard the prisoners and let these young people have the first look?”

“Sure,” Fred answered, and settled himself on the broken edge of the captain’s berth.

“It makes me laugh,” said Jo as he crossed the deck with the others, “to think of pop holding a gun on them down in the cabin!”

They had left the lantern with the men below but Bain’s torch carried ample light. It gave Ann a thrill to think that she should be crossing the deck with a moving light. How often she had looked toward the wreck before she climbed into bed, hoping to see a pin prick of yellow there as she had seen it on the night she arrived at the Bailey house! And now that the light was here she was here with it! Not she, but her mother, was looking at it from the house windows, looking out through the rain and wondering what was happening down here.

She wondered where Bain could be taking them, and then she realized that they were headed straight for the demon figure.

Bain strode up to it and flashed his light over its grotesque outlines. He looked back over his shoulder to the Seymours and laughed. “Jim Rand knew his best friend aboard this boat.”

Reaching forward he thrust his hand into the mouth of the figurehead, fumbling and stretching to the end of his reach, and when he brought his hand back it held a huge roll of paper money.

“All in hundreds” he explained. “A pretty good haul for Uncle Sam. I never found it until to-night! And it was a lucky thing that I left them where they were before I went down to the cabin.”

“Oh—may I touch them?” asked Ann with a shiver of excitement.

Bain handed them to her. “Take them, if you like.” And to Mr. Seymour he said, “I’ll be glad to get that safely into some one else’s care.”

“I don’t doubt it,” replied Mr. Seymour. “Hold them tight, daughter; we can’t have the wind blowing any of it away.”

Ben and Jo crowded around, and the three children looked at the money with silent awe. Suddenly the sharp-eared Jo lifted his head. Then they all heard.

Again that sound! Sussh-sussh, sussh-sussh.

“It’s the money,” Jo exclaimed. “He’s after the money.”

The shuffle did not waver this time nor did it stop. It came steadily down the deck toward them although whatever made the noise was veiled by the storm. Warren Bain snatched the bills from Ann’s paralyzed hands and dropped them into his pocket.

The sound was very near the group by the figurehead when it stopped.

CHAPTER XIII

A REASON FOR EVERYTHING

ANN was most dreadfully afraid, but her feelings were not in the least like those when she heard the noise last night. She had no sense of panic, no desire to run away. Her father was here now and she would stand by him, come what might. He wasn't running. Neither were Ben and Jo. The three children stood as firm as the two men.

Without warning, Bain shut off his light, for they stood in its circle of brightness while anything beyond its rim was invisible in the darkness of the stormy night. Suddenly he flashed it on again.

A big black dog was there.

His teeth were bared and he was crouched to spring.

Jo was the first to recover. He knew dogs and he saw at the first glance that this one was more terrified by their presence on the boat than he and Ann and Ben had been by the strange noise. He walked steadily toward the animal, reaching quietly into his pocket.

What was he going to do? Ann was afraid that anything he could do wouldn't be enough. The dog would spring and then— Why didn't Warren Bain shoot?

But Jo knew what he was doing. Out of his pocket he took two or three crackers. "Come, boy," he said gently. "So-o-o-o, puppy, it's time to eat."

The dog snarled but Jo paid no attention to threats or growls; he put the crackers in a small pile on the deck and backed slowly away. The dog drew nearer by one stealthy step and sniffed suspiciously toward Jo's offering. Then he slunk forward within reach of it and crunched it ravenously.

"Want some more?" Jo reached again into his pocket and the dog wagged his tail.

“He is starved!” Mr. Seymour at last found his voice. “That dog has been without proper food for weeks.”

Bain looked at the gaunt wild-eyed creature whose ribs showed plainly under his shaggy matted coat. “He is that,” he agreed. “I shouldn’t wonder if he isn’t the answer to Bailey’s stolen milk and your cheese. He must have come in with the boat and hung around here ever since.”

To think that noise was made by a dog as it slunk across the deck! Even though Ann had seen and heard at the same instant she could hardly credit her senses. A dog? Robin Hood’s band had been utterly routed by a starving dog? Never again would she run from anything unless she actually saw with her own eyes that there was need of fear. She looked at Ben and in spite of the rain streaming down his face she could see that his thoughts were very much like her own. They hadn’t been cowards, exactly, and those men down below had been frightened, too, but nevertheless she was ashamed of herself.

The noise of the breakers had risen until now it was a roar; it was hard to talk against the combined crashes of storm and gale and sea. And it was high time to seek better shelter than the wreck afforded.

When they returned to the cabin to relieve Fred and to get Bain’s captives the dog hung close to Jo’s heels and could not be persuaded to leave him for an instant. The dog followed at his heels down the companionway and stood behind him in the passage outside the cabin.

“Ready?” asked Bain. “Come along now, men. We’ll be moving along to where you can stay awhile without being disturbed. A fine evening for a stroll of three or four miles.”

But Tom did not move. “If you want me, get me up,” he growled.

At sound of his voice came a scratching of paws in the passage and through the doorway leaped the dog, making straight for him. Jo sprang as quickly and seized the shaggy coat of his new friend. And in the meantime Tom had scrambled to his feet without any more argument.

“Captain Jim’s dog,” Charlie crowed with shrill laughter. “He remembers you all right, Tom. You forgot to heave him overboard with the rest of ’em!”

Under Fred’s vigilant gun the men were herded up the ladder and across to the side of the ship. The rain still poured ceaselessly and the wind blew in gusts that pierced Ann’s wet clothes and made her shiver. But she was not too uncomfortable and tired to lose her desire to know every detail of what had happened on the wreck.

“There’s one thing you haven’t told us,” she said to Bain. “What was it that you found in the leg of the table?”

“You children had better be trained to be first-class detectives. There wasn’t much you didn’t see last night, I should say. Well, it won’t do any harm to tell you and I think you deserve to know. The papers were a sort of log that Rand kept; told where he got his cargoes and how he disposed of them and for how much. It is much more important than the money, to the government.”

Ann hadn’t thought of that; of course, a man who was willing to buy smuggled goods was exactly as dishonest as the person who sold them. It made it seem to her as though Captain Rand wasn’t quite as—as—— She didn’t like to say “bad” even to herself, for surely a man couldn’t be really bad if he had made his dog so fond of him that the dog had rather starve than go away from the place where he’d last seen his master.

As they left the wreck Warren Bain flashed his torch into the face of the figurehead, high above them as they stood on the beach. The light shone straight up into the huge ugly face and, to Ann, the demon still grinned with its eyes looking far out and away, as though it saw something they couldn’t see and knew a great deal more than human beings ever could know. Suddenly Ann wished that she might never have to see that demon again. His work was done; he had taken care of the captain’s money, and now was there any use of his staying there to frighten people? Perhaps to-morrow Mr. Bailey would carry out his intention of burning him with an accompaniment of lobsters and corn and roast potatoes. What a wonderful plan that was, because then she would remember that glorious picnic and let that memory offset some of her other recollections of the figurehead!

Ben was the last to leave the boat and when he landed from his jump he was wet to the knees by a swift unexpected sweep of undertow from the rising tide. He ran clear of the water, but the next wave, chasing him, met him around the bow of the boat. Not that a little fresh wetness mattered to a soaked-to-the-skin Ben; the interest lay in the fact that the Seymours never had seen the water so high on the beach.

Fred Bailey had offered to lend Jerry to Bain so that he could drive his prisoners to the village instead of having to walk all that distance in the stormy night and Bailey had offered, too, to go with him.

Jo went ahead to hitch Jerry for the trip. “Shall I tell Mrs. Seymour that everything is all right?” he asked.

“Thank you, Jo, yes,” said Mr. Seymour. “Just call out to her as you go by and let her know that we are coming.”

Away went Jo, with the black dog at his heels.

“Jo’s found a new friend,” said Warren Bain with a smile.

“Jo!” called Ann, for she had just remembered. “Has Jerry another harness?”

“Sure!”

When they reached the house door Jerry stood waiting for his load while Jo talked with Helen and Mrs. Seymour, who, in raincoats, were standing on the porch.

“You haven’t told mother everything before we came?” asked Ann, greatly disappointed that such exciting news should be told without her having been there to share the thrill.

Jo shook his head, the reliable Jo who could be counted on to do the right thing. “No, marm, I didn’t tell,” he answered gayly. “That’s your job, not mine. I was only saying that you were all right, and Mrs. Seymour is mighty hard to convince. I had to say that all of you were safe, all of you together, and then each one separately.”

But Mrs. Seymour was not ready to smile, even yet. Her face was pale and her eyes widened as she saw Tom and Charlie slouch handcuffed into the light that spread from the door in a wide semicircle of welcome through the driving rain. As she realized her mother’s anxiety Ann dashed across the intervening space and flung herself into the outstretched arms.

Ben followed, and for an instant no one of the three spoke.

After Fred and Warren Bain had driven away they all sat around the fire to tell the story. Like powwowing Indians in blankets and bathrobes they sat before the snapping black stove, the storm shut outside.

Jo had turned red man with the rest and was bundled in one of Mr. Seymour’s big wool robes, his thick hair on end and his blue eyes dancing with excitement and happiness. The dog lay at his feet.

“And now,” said Mr. Seymour, “what are you children going to do with the wealth that the capture of these men will bring you?”

“I didn’t know there was going to be any,” answered Jo in astonishment, and Ann and Ben, and Helen, too, pricked up their ears. “Gee! Money?” said Ben.

“Bain insists that he never could have got the men if it hadn’t been for the way you two worked on their superstitious fears, and he says that he is going to share the reward. What will you do with it? There’s something practical for you to think about and change your line of thought before we all go to bed.”

Ben put his hand on his father’s knee. “You know what I want more than anything else in the world,” he said, with his fascinated eyes resting on the finished portrait of Jo that Mr. Seymour had set against the wall only a day or two before. “If I could only learn to paint! Would there be enough money for me to do that?”

“I don’t know, Ben. It will be only a few hundred at most, after it is divided, and you understand, of course, that we aren’t going to let Mr. Bain rob himself more than seems absolutely necessary to him. But you’ll go on painting at home for a long time yet and if we put your share away it will have grown before you are ready to use it. It will help a great deal, anyway.”

“What about you, Jo?” asked Mrs. Seymour gently. It seemed as though the farm boy had suddenly grown lonely as new plans began to be talked over. “Have you any idea about what you wish to do with your share?”

“I have always wanted to go to a bigger school than we have here,” Jo answered slowly, “but pop never seemed to be able to get ahead enough to send me and hire help in my place. Perhaps he might be able to manage without me for a while now.”

“Father!” exclaimed Ann. She had not said anything about her own plans; it seemed as if everybody ought to know what she would do with her money, she had wanted one thing for such a long time. Any share given to her would go toward her western ranch; five minutes ago she wouldn’t have supposed that any other use of it would be possible. But now she knew differently. “Father! I am going to lend mine to Jo, to make his last longer.”

Mr. Seymour looked at Jo. “Will you accept Ann’s offer?” he asked.

The boy was dazed; it took him a moment to answer. “I don’t rightly know why she should do that for me,” he said finally, “but I do think kindly of her for being so generous.”

“I want to do it, Jo! Why shouldn’t I? Think of all you have done for us this summer. And besides that, if we are going to have a ranch together sometime, one of us will really have to know something. I am sure I couldn’t learn how to add or subtract any better than I do now.”

At last they all trooped to bed and slept soundly. Now that the haunted ship had become a solved puzzle each one of them had his own new dream.

The next morning broke clear and bright. The rain of the night had painted the grass a new green, the sky was cloudless. The sun woke Ann and she dressed hurriedly.

What a glorious day! She peered out of the window, glad that she was alive.

Something out there was different. What?

Then she saw Jo coming from the barn.

“I thought you’d never wake up,” he shouted excitedly. “Do you see what’s happened? The wreck’s gone!”

“The wreck?” repeated Ann.

“It went adrift in the storm last night.”

Quickly Ann climbed through the window that she might see better. It was true. The beach at the foot of the sloping meadow was bare. And as far as the eye could see there was no sign of a boat on land or ocean.

“I’m glad! I’m glad!” she cried. “I didn’t want that old demon to stare at us all of the time.”

“Well, he won’t stare no more,” answered Jo. “He’s gone to Davy Jones’ locker, where all good sailormen go.”

Transcriber's Note:
Punctuation has been standardised. Spelling and hyphenation have been retained as in the original publication.

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