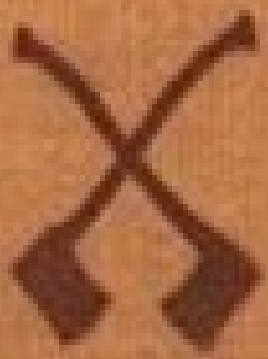
The
RIVAL
CAMPERS
ASHORE

RUEL
PERLEY
SMITH

PAGE
BOSTON

The RIVAL CAMPERS ASHORE



RUEL PERLEY SMITH

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The Rival Campers Ashore

Or, THE MYSTERY OF THE MILL

By Ruel Perley Smith

Author of "The Rival Campers Series," "Prisoners of Fortune," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY

LOUIS D. GOWING

BOSTON

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"HE HANDED THE PACKAGE TO COLONEL WITHAM."

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THE RIVAL CAMPERS ASHORE

CHAPTER I

AN INLAND VOYAGE

The morning train from Benton, rumbling and puffing along its way through outlying farmland, and sending its billows of smoke like sea rollers across the pastures, drew up, ten miles from the city, at a little station that overlooked a pond, lying clear and sparkling at the base of some low, wooded hills. An old-fashioned, weather-beaten house, adjacent the station, and displaying a sign-board bearing the one word, "Spencer's," indicated that Spencer, whoever he might prove to be, would probably extend the hospitality of his place to travellers. Here and there, widely scattered across the fields, were a few farmhouses.

The locomotive, having announced its approach by a mingled clanging and whistling that sent startled cattle galloping for the shelter of the thickets, came to a dead stop at the station; but, as though to show its realization of the insignificance of Spencer's, continued to snort and throb impatiently. Certain important-appearing trainmen, with sleeves rolled to the elbows, hastily throwing open the door of the baggage-car, seemed to take the hint.

Presently a trunk, turning a summersault through the air, landed, somewhat damaged, on the platform. A few boxes and packages followed likewise, similarly ejected. Then, through the open doorway, there appeared the shapely, graceful bow of a canoe. Whatever treatment this might have received, left to the tender mercies of the trainmen, can only be imagined; for at this moment two youths, who had descended from one of the passenger coaches, came running along the platform.

"Hold on, there," said the larger of the two, addressing a man who stood with arms upreached to catch the end of the canoe, "let me get hold with you. We don't want to be wrecked before we start,—eh, Henry?"

"Hope not," responded his companion, quietly taking the bow of the canoe, which the larger youth relinquished to him, while the latter stepped to the car door and put a stalwart shoulder and arm under the stern, passed to him by a man inside.

Together, the two boys deposited their craft gently on a patch of grass near-by; the locomotive puffed away from Spencer's, dragging its train; the station agent resumed his interrupted pipe. Soon the only sounds that broke the stillness of the place were the clickings of a single telegraph instrument in the station and the scoffing voices of a few crows, circling about the tops of some pine trees that overlooked the farmhouse.

The prospect that met the eyes of the boys was most enticing. On one hand lay the little pond, reflecting some great patches of cloud that flecked the sky. All about them, as far as eye could discern, stretched the country, rolling and irregular, meadow and pasture, corn and wheat land, and groves of maple, pine and birch.

Flowing into the pond, a thin, shadowy stream wound its way through alders and rushes, coming down along past Spencer's, invitingly from the fields and hills. It was the principal inlet of the pond, flowing hence from another and larger pond some miles to the westward.

"Well, Henry, what do you say?" said the larger boy. "Looks great, doesn't it?"

"Ripping, Jack!" exclaimed the other. "I feel like paddling a mile a minute. Let's pick her up and get afloat."

They reached for the "her" referred to—the light canoe—when the station agent, welcoming even this trifling relief from the monotony of Spencer's, approached them.

"That's a right nice craft of yours," he remarked, eying it curiously. "Going on the pond?"

"No, we're going around through the streams to Benton," replied the elder boy. "Think there's water enough to float us?"

"Why, p'raps," said the station agent. "It's a long jaunt, though—twenty-five or thirty miles, I reckon. Calc'late to do it in one day?"

"Why, yes, and home in time for a late supper. We didn't think it was quite so far as that, though. How far do you call it to the brook that leads over into Dark Stream?"

"Oh, two or three miles—ask Spencer. He knows more'n I do 'bout it."

Spencer, a deliberate, sleepily-inclined individual, much preoccupied with a jack-knife and a shingle, "allowed" the distance to be a matter of from a mile and a half, to two miles, or "mebbe" two and a half.

"Henry Burns, old chap, get hold of that canoe and let's scoot," exclaimed his companion, laughing. "Tom and Bob said 'twas a mile. Probably everyone we'd ask would say something different. If we keep on asking questions, we'll go wrong, sure."

Henry Burns's response was to pick up his end of the canoe, and they went cautiously down through the tangle of grasses to the stream. The buoyant craft rested lightly on its surface; they stepped aboard, Henry Burns in the bow, his companion, Jack Harvey, in the stern, dipped their paddles joyously together, and went swiftly on their way.

It was about half-past seven o'clock of a June morning. The sun was lightening the landscape, yet it was by no means clear. The day had, in fact, come in foggy, and the mist was slow in burning off from the hills. Often, at intervals, it hung over the water like a thin curtain. But the mystery of an unknown stream, hidden by the banks along which it wound deviously, with many a sharp twist and turn, tempted them ever to vigorous exertion.

Just a little way ahead, and it seemed as though the narrow stream were ending against a bank of green. Then, as they approached, an abrupt swerving of the stream one way or the other, opened up the course anew for them. This was a matter of constant repetition. Theirs were the delights, without danger, of exploration.

"Warming up a bit, isn't it, Jack?" said Henry Burns, laying aside his paddle for a moment and peeling off a somewhat dingy sweater. "I'm not so sure about getting the sun for long, though."

"Nor I," replied his companion, driving the canoe swiftly with his single paddle till the other had freed himself of his garment and was braced, steadily, once more; when he, too, laid his paddle across the gunwales and stripped for the work. "I don't just like the looks of those clouds. If we were in the old Viking now, I'd say put on all sail and make for harbour; for it looks like rain by and by, but no wind."

"Well, this is all one big harbour from here to Benton," laughed Henry Burns. "Avast, I sight a cow off the port bow. Never mind the cow? All right, on we go.

If it rains hard, we'll run ashore and hunt for a barn. Wouldn't Tom Harris and Bob White laugh to see us poking back by train, instead of making the trip?"

"Oh, we won't turn back," said Harvey. "Besides, there's no train in to Benton till night. Fancy spending the day at Spencer's station! It's through the streams for us now, rain or shine."

As though to demonstrate more fully his determination, Harvey dipped with a sharper, quicker stroke, put the strength of two muscular arms into his work, and they sped quickly past the turns of their winding course. Perhaps either Tom Harris or Bob White, of whom Henry Burns had spoken, might have wielded the paddles with a bit more of skill, have kept the course a little straighter, or skimmed the turns a trifle more close; but neither could have put more of life and vim into the strokes. A large, thick-set youth was Harvey, strongly built, with arms bronzed and sinewy—clearly a youth who had lived much out of doors, and had developed in sun and air.

Harvey's companion was considerably slighter of build, but of a well-knit figure, whose muscles, while not so pronounced, played quickly and easily; and whose whole manner suggested somehow a reserve strength, and a physique capable of much endurance.

Had they possessed, however, more of that same skill and familiarity with canoeing which comes only with practice, they would have perceived more clearly the speed with which they were travelling, and how great a distance already lay between them and the point where they had embarked.

"Queer we don't come to that inlet," remarked Harvey, at length. "I haven't seen anything that looked like the land-arks: the two houses, the road and a bridge, that Tom spoke of."

"No," replied Henry Burns, but added, reflectively, "unless we passed them at least three-quarters of a mile back. But there wasn't any inlet there. Hang it! Do you suppose Spencer was right after all?"

"May be," said Harvey. "Let's hit it up a little harder; but watch sharp for the brook."

"Aye, aye, skipper," said Henry Burns.

But at this moment the glassy surface of the stream dimpled all over with the sudden fall of raindrops; a compact, heavy cloud wheeled directly overhead and

poured its contents upon them, while, afar off, the fields were still lit with patches of sunlight. They scrambled as hastily as they could into their sweaters again.

"Let it come," said Henry Burns, resuming his wet paddle; "it's only a cloud-bank that's caught us. We'll work out of it if we keep on. Then the sun will dry us."

They pushed on in the rain, peering eagerly ahead for some signs of the landmarks that would show them the brook. Then, all at once, to their amazement, the stream they were following divided into two forks; the one at the right coming down from higher land, broken in its course, as far as they could see, by stones and boulders that made it impassable even for the light canoe; the other branch emerging from a thick tangle of overhanging alders and willows.

"Well now, what do you make of that?" cried Harvey, in disgust. "That can't be the brook, to the right, and the other doesn't look as though it led anywhere in particular." He stopped paddling, and squeezed the water out of his cap.

"We've come past the brook," replied Henry Burns. "It's rainy-day luck. We've got to go up to that farmhouse on the hill and find out where we are."

"I haven't seen a farmhouse for more than half an hour," exclaimed Harvey.

"No, but there are cattle in that pasture, and a track going up through the grove," said Henry Burns. "We'll follow that. It won't be any blinder than this stream."

They brought the canoe in upon the muddy bank, slumped into the ooze, pulled the canoe half out of water and started off.

"Nice trip!" said Henry Burns. "And the worst of it is, I have a suspicion I know just where that brook is. I can see it now. There was a tiny bit of a cove, a lot of rushes growing there, and two houses back about a quarter of a mile. But it was dry—no water running—and it was so near the station I didn't suppose that could be the place."

"It isn't so dry by this time," remarked Harvey.

"No, and neither are we," said Henry Burns. "Look out!"

He dragged one leg out from a mud-hole into which he had sunk to the knee. The path they were following led through clumps of fern and brake, almost waist

high. These, dripping with rain, drenched them as they pushed their way through. Some fifteen minutes of hard travelling brought them to a little rise of land, from the top of which they could see, down in a valley beyond, a farmhouse.

"More wet day luck," muttered Harvey. "We're in for it, though. It's a good half mile more."

They tramped on, in silence. The particular cloud that had first wet them had blended much with others by this time, and it was still raining. But they came up to the house soon, and, the big barn door standing open invitingly, they entered there. A man and two boys, busily engaged mending a harness, looked up in surprise.

"Sort er wet," the man commented. "Come from the city, eh? Well, I guess it's only a shower. What's that? The brook that runs into Dark Stream! Huh! You're two miles past it."

Henry Burns and Harvey looked at each other helplessly. Then Harvey grinned.

"It's so tough, it's almost a joke, Henry," he said.

"Great—if it had only happened to somebody else, say your friend Harry Brackett," replied Henry Burns. "Guess we won't tell much about this part of the trip to Tom and Bob, though. What do you want to do, go back to the station, or keep on?"

"Back!" exclaimed Harvey. "Say, I'm so mad, I'd keep on now if every drop of rain was as big as a base-ball. I'll never go back, if it takes a week—that is, if you're game?"

"Come on," said Henry Burns quietly.

CHAPTER II

TURNED ADRIFT

Soon they were on their way again, with the sky lightening a little and the rain almost ceased. They plunged through the tangle of dripping brakes, down to the shore; pushed off once more in midstream, and started back the way they had come.

There was not quite so much spirit to their paddling as there had been on the way up. Every stroke had meant to their minds, then, just so much of their journey accomplished. Now they knew they were striving only to put themselves on the right track again, and that there would be four wet miles of wasted effort. However, they were still strong, and the canoe went rapidly down stream.

The two miles seemed nearer four when Henry Burns suddenly pointed with his paddle ahead and said, soberly, "There's the place, Jack. I saw it, coming up, but I thought it was only a patch of bull-rushes. We can't get a canoe through, anyway. Let's go ashore and have a look at the country."

They paddled in and scrambled up the bank. Sure enough, there was what would be a small brook, at some stages of water, coming in from across country; doubtless with water enough, in the spring of the year, to float a canoe; but now impassable. They followed it up through a wheat field to a road, from which, to their relief, a stream of about the dimensions of the one they had been following —not quite so large—was to be seen. A horse drawing a wagon at a jog trot came down the road, and they accosted the occupant of the seat.

"How many miles to Mill Stream by the way of Dark Stream?" he said, repeating their question. "Well, I reckon it's fifteen or sixteen. Water enough? Oh, yes, mebbe, except p'raps in spots. Goin' round to Benton, you say? Sho! Don't esactly envy yer the jaunt. Guess there'll be more rain bime-by. Good day. Giddap."

"Wall, I reckon," said Henry Burns, dryly, imitating the man's manner of speech, "that I don't ask any more of these farmers how many miles we've got to travel. According to his reckoning, we'd get to Benton sometime to-morrow night. The next man might say 'twas fifty miles to Benton, and then you'd want to turn

back."

"Never!" exclaimed Jack Harvey, grimly. "Let's go for the canoe."

They got the canoe on their shoulders, and made short work of the carry. But it was after ten o'clock when they set their craft afloat in Dark Stream; and the real work of the day had just begun.

Knowing they were really on the right course, however, cheered them.

"Say," cried Harvey, in a sudden burst of enthusiasm, "we'll not stop at Benton, at all, perhaps; just keep on paddling down Mill Stream past the city, down into Samoset river, into the bay, and out to Grand Island. Make a week of it."

But even as he spoke, a big rain drop splashed on his cheek, and another storm burst over them. Down it came in torrents; a summer rainfall to delight the heart of a farmer with growing crops; a shower that fairly bent the grass in the fields with its weight; that made a tiny lake in the bottom of the canoe, flooded back around Harvey's knees in the stern, and which trickled copiously down the backs of the two boys underneath their sweaters.

"What was you saying about Grand Island, Jack?" inquired Henry Burns, slyly.

"Grand Island be hanged!" said Harvey. "When I start for there, I'll go in a boat that's got a cabin. I guess Benton will do for us."

They looked about for shelter, but there were woods now on both sides of the stream, and through them they could get no glimpse of any farmhouse.

"Well, I wouldn't go into one if I saw it, now!" exclaimed Harvey. "I can't get any wetter. Pretty soon we'll begin to like it. I'll catch a fish, anyway. This rain will make 'em bite."

He unwound a line from a reel, attached a spoon-hook, cast it over and began to troll astern, far in the wake of the canoe. It was, in truth, an ideal day for fishing, and the first clump of lily pads they passed yielded them a big pickerel. He came in fighting and tumbling, making the worst of his struggle—after the manner of pickerel—when he was fairly aboard. Once free of the hook, he dropped down into the puddle in the canoe and lashed the water with his tail so that it spattered in Jack Harvey's face worse than the rain. Harvey despatched the fish with a few blows of his paddle.

"Guess I won't catch another," he said shortly. "I can't stand a shower coming both ways at once."

Henry Burns chuckled quietly to himself. "Let's empty her out," he suggested.

They ran the canoe ashore, took hold at either end, inverted the craft and let the water drain out. Then they went on again. It was a fair and pretty country through which the stream threaded its way, with countless windings and twistings; but the rain dimmed and faded its beauties now. They thought only of making progress. Yet the rain was warm, they could not be chilled while paddling vigorously, and Henry Burns said he was beginning to like it.

Presently, in the far distance, a village clock sounded the hour. It struck twelve o'clock.

"My, I didn't know it was getting so late," said Henry Burns. "What do you say to a bite to eat?"

"I could eat that fish raw," said Harvey.

"No need. We'll cook him," responded Henry Burns. "There's the place," and he pointed in toward a grove of evergreens and birches. "That village is a mile off. We don't want another walk through this drenching country."

They were only too glad to jump out ashore.

"You get the wood, Jack, and I'll rig up the shelter and clean the fish," said Henry Burns. Drawing out a small bag made of light duck from one end of the canoe, they untied it and took therefrom two small hatchets, a coil of stout cord, a fry-pan, a knife and fork apiece and a strip of bacon; likewise a large and a small bottle. The larger contained coffee; the smaller, matches. They examined the latter anxiously.

"They're all right," said Harvey, shaking the bottle. "Carry your matches in a bottle, on a leaky boat and in the woods. I've been in both."

Taking the cord and one of the hatchets, Henry Burns proceeded to stretch a line between two trees; then interlacing the line, on a slant between other trees, he constructed a slight network; upon which, after an excursion amid the surrounding woods, he laid a sort of thatch of boughs.

"That's not the best shelter I ever saw," he said at length, surveying his work,

"but it will keep off the worst of the rain."

It did, in fact, answer fairly well, with the added protection of the heavy branches overhead.

In the mean time, Harvey, having hunted for some distance, had found what he wanted—a dead tree, not so old as to be rotten, but easy to cut and split. Into the heart of this he went with his hatchet, and quickly got an armful of dry fire-wood. He came running back with the wood, and a few sheets of birch-bark—the inner part of the bark—with the wet, outer layer carefully stripped off. They had a blaze going quickly, with this, beneath the shelter of boughs.

They put the bacon on to fry, and pieces of the fish, cut thin with a keen hunting-knife. The coffee, poured from the bottle into a tin dipper, they set near the blaze, on some brands. They they gazed out upon the drizzle, as the dinner cooked.

Harvey shook his head, gloomily.

"We're in for it," he said. "It's settled down for an all day's rain."

"I hope so," responded Henry Burns, with a twinkle in his eye, "I like it—but I wish I could feel just one dry spot on my back."

They ate their dinner of fried bacon and pickerel and coffee beside a fire that blazed cheerily, despite an occasional sputtering caused by the rain dripping through; and when they had got half dry and had started forth once more into the rain, they were in good spirits. But the first ten minutes of paddling found them drenched to the skin again.

They ran some small rapids after a time, and later carried around a little dam. The afternoon waned, and the windings of the stream seemed endless. It was three o'clock when, at a sudden turn to the right, which was to the eastward, they came upon another stream flowing in and mingling with the one they were following. Thenceforth the two ran as one stream, the banks widening perceptibly, the stream flowing far more broadly, and with increased depth and strength. The way from now on was to the eastward some three or four miles, and then almost due south to Benton, a distance of ten of eleven miles more.

They were soon running swiftly with the current, shooting rapids, at times, of an eighth of a mile in length, going very carefully not to scrape on submerged rocks. And still the rain fell. There were two dams to carry around, and they did

this somewhat drearily, trudging along the muddy shores, climbing the slippery banks with difficulty, and with some danger of falling and smashing their canoe.

Five, six and seven o'clock came; darkness was shutting in, and they were three miles from Benton. To make matters worse, with the falling of night the rain increased, pouring in such torrents that they had frequently to pause and empty out their canoe.

A few minutes after seven, and a light gleamed from a window a little distance back from the stream, less than a quarter of a mile.

"There's our lodgings for the night, Jack," said Henry Burns, pointing up through the rain. "I don't mind saying I've had enough. It's three miles yet to Benton, or nearly that, there are three more dams, and as for walking, the road must be a bog-hole."

"I'm with you," responded Harvey. "If it's a lodging house, I've the money to pay —three dollars in the oiled silk wallet. If it's a farmhouse, we'll stay, if we have to sleep in the barn."

Presently they perceived a landing, with several rowboats tied up. They ran in alongside this, drew their canoe clear up on to the float, turned it over, and walked rapidly up toward the house from which the light shone.

"We're in luck for once," said Harvey. "There's a sign over the door."

The sign, indeed, seemed to offer them some sort of welcome. It bore an enormous hand pointing inward, and the inscription, "Half Way House."

"I wonder what it's half way between," said Henry Burns, as they paused a moment on the threshold of the door. "Half way between the sky and China, I guess. But I don't care, if the roof doesn't leak."

The picture, as they entered, was, in truth, one to cheer the most wretched. Directly in front of them, in line with the door, a fire of hickory logs roared in an old-fashioned brick fireplace, lighting up the hotel office almost as much as did the two kerosene lamps, disposed at either end. An old woman, dozing comfortably in a big rocking chair before the blaze, jumped up at their appearance.

"Land sakes!" she ejaculated, querulously. "What a night to be comin' in upon us! Dear! Dear! Want to stay over night, you say? Well, if that ain't like boys—

canooering, you call it, in this mess of a rain. Gracious me, but you're wet to the skin, both er yer. Well, take them wooden chairs, as won't be spoiled with water, and sit up by the fire till I make a new pot of coffee and warm up a bit of stew and fry a bit of bacon. Canooering in this weather! Well, that beats me."

"The proprietor, you say? Well, he's up the road, but he'll be in, soon. You can pay me for the supper, and fix 'bout the stay in' over night with him. I jes' tend to the cookin'. That's all I do."

She called them to supper in the course of a quarter of an hour, and had clearly done her best for them. There was coffee, steaming hot, and biscuit, warmed up to a crisp; bacon, freshly fried, with eggs; a dish of home-made preserves, and a sheet of gingerbread.

"Eat all yer can hold," she chuckled, as they fell to, hungry as panthers. "Canooering's good fer the appertite, ain't it? It's plain vittles, but I reckon the cookin's good as the most of 'em, if I say it, who shouldn't."

She rambled on, somewhat garrulously, as the boys ate. They did full justice to the cooking, stuffed themselves till Henry Burns said he could feel his skin stretch; paid the old woman her price for the meal—"twenty-five cents apiece, an' it couldn't be done for less"—and went and seated themselves comfortably once more by the fire in the office. They settled themselves back comfortably.

"Arms ache?" inquired Harvey of his comrade.

"No," replied Henry Burns, "but I don't mind saying I'm tired. I wouldn't stir out of this place again to-night for sixteen billion dol—"

The door opened, and a bulky, red-faced man entered, stamping, shaking the rain from his clothing like a big Newfoundland dog, and railing ill-naturedly at the weather.

"It's a vile night, gran'," he exclaimed; then espying his two newly-arrived guests, he assumed a more cordial tone.

"Good evening. Good evening, young gentlemen," he said. "Glad you got in out of the storm—hello! what's this? Well, if it don't beat me!"

At the sound of the man's voice, Henry Burns and Jack Harvey had sprung up in amazement. They stood beside their chairs, eying the proprietor of the Half Way House, curiously. He, in turn, glared at them in astonishment, fully equal to

theirs, while his red face went from its normal fiery hue to deep purple, and his hands clenched.

"AT THE SOUND OF THE MAN'S VOICE, HENRY BURNS AND JACK HARVEY HAD SPRUNG UP IN AMAZEMENT."

"Colonel Witham!" they exclaimed, in the same breath.

"What are you two doing here?" he cried.

"What new monkey-shine of yours is this? Don't you know I won't have any Henry Burnses and Jack Harveys, nor any of the rest of you, around my hotel? Didn't yer get satisfaction enough out of bringing bad luck to me in one place, and now you come bringing it here? Get out, is what I say to you, and get out quick!"

"You keep away, gran'," he cried to the woman, who had stepped forward. "Don't you go interfering. It's my hotel; and I wouldn't care if 'twas raining a bucket a drop and coming forty times as hard. I'd put 'em out er doors, neck and crop. Get out, I say, and don't ever step a foot around here again."

Henry Burns and Jack Harvey stood for a moment, gazing in perplexity at each other.

"Shall we go, or stick it out?" asked Harvey, in a low voice.

"Why, it's a public house, and I don't believe he has a right to throw us out this way," said Henry Burns. "But it means a fight, sure, if we try to stay. I guess we better quit. It's his own place, and he's a rough man when he's angered."

Ruefully pulling on their sweaters—at least dry once more—and taking their paddles, which they had brought with them, from behind the door, they went out into the night, into the driving rain.

CHAPTER III

THE OLD MILL

The two boys, thus most unexpectedly evicted, stood disconsolately on the porch of the Half Way House, peering out into the storm. The character of it had changed somewhat, the rain driving fiercely now and then, with an occasional quick flaw of wind, instead of falling monotonously. And now there came a few rumblings of thunder, with faint flashes of lightning low in the sky.

"Well, Jack," said Henry Burns, at length, speaking with more than his customary deliberation, "wet night luck seems to be worse even than wet day luck. But who'd ever thought we'd have such tough luck as to run across Col. Witham up here, and a night like this? The boys never said anything about his being here."

"No—and he's got no right to put us out!" cried Harvey. "If you'll stand by, I'll go back into that office and tell him what I think of him."

"He knows that already," replied Henry Burns, coolly. "Wouldn't be any news to him. Say, I see a light way up on the hill to the left. Suppose we try them there. I wish we could see the road and the paths better, so as to know where we are."

As though almost in answer to this wish, a brilliant flash of lightning illumined the whole sky; and, for a brief moment, there stood clearly outlined before them, like a huge magic-lantern picture, the prominent features of the landscape.

Past the hotel where they stood, the highway ran, gleaming now with pools of water. Some way down the road, the land descended to a narrow intervale through which a brook flowed, with a rude wooden bridge thrown across in line with the road. Farther still down the road, and a little off from it, beside the larger stream which they had travelled all day, an old mill squatted close to the water, hard by the brink of a dam. Away up on the hillside, some three quarters of a mile off, a farmhouse gave them a fleeting glimpse of its gables and chimneys. Then the picture vanished and the black curtain of the night fell again.

"All right," assented Harvey, to the reply of his comrade, "I suppose we better go without a fuss. It isn't getting out in the rain here that makes me maddest. It's to

think of Col. Witham chuckling over it in there, snug and dry."

"He isn't," said Henry Burns. "He never chuckles over anything. He's madder than we are, because we got our suppers and a drying out. Come on, dive in. It's always the first plunge that's worst."

They stepped forth into the rain and began walking briskly down the road. They had gone scarcely more than a rod, however, when something brushed against Jack Harvey, and a hand was laid lightly on his arm. He jumped back in some alarm, for they had heard no footsteps, nor dreamed of anybody being near.

To their relief, a girl's merry peal of laughter—coming oddly enough from out the storm—sounded in their ears; and a slight, quaint little figure stood in the road before them.

"Oh, how you did jump!" she exclaimed, and laughed again, like some weird mite of a water-sprite, pleased to have frightened so sturdy a chap as Jack Harvey. "I won't hurt you," she continued, half-mockingly. "I'm Bess Thornton. Gran' got the supper for you. Oh, but I'm just furious at Witham for being so mean."

Henry Burns and Harvey, taken all by surprise, stood staring in amazement. A faint glimmering in the sky came to their aid and they discerned, indistinctly, a girl, barefoot and hatless, of age perhaps twelve, poorly dressed in a gingham frock, apparently as unmindful of the rain as though she were, indeed, a water-sprite.

"Well, what is it?" asked Henry Burns. "Witham doesn't say come back, does he?"

"Not he!" cried the little creature, impetuously, "Oh, the old bogey-man! He's worse than the wicked giant in the book. I wish I was a Jack-the-giant-killer. I'd —"

Words apparently failing her to express a punishment fitting for Col. Witham, the child shook a not very formidable fist in the direction of the tavern, then added, sharply, "Where are you going?"

"Up to that house on the hill," said Harvey. "They'll take us in there, won't they?"

The answer was not encouraging.

"No-o-o, not much he won't," cried the girl. "Oh, don't you know old Farmer Ellison? He's worse than Witham. He hates you."

"Guess not," said Henry Burns. "We never saw him."

"No, but you're from the city," said the child. "He hates all of you. Haven't I heard him say so, and shake his old cane at Benton? He'll cane you. He'll set the collies on you—"

"I'd like to meet anything that I could kick!" cried Harvey, clenching his fist. "What kind of a place is this we've got into? That's what I'd like to know. Henry, where in this old mud-hole shall we go? Think of it! Three miles to Benton on this road."

"That's what I've come to tell you," said the child, "though I'd catch it from Witham if he knew—and old Ellison, wouldn't he be mad?"

The very idea seemed to afford her merriment, and she laughed again. "Come, hurry along with me," she continued. "It's the old mill. I know the way in, and there's a warm fire there. You'll have to run, though, for I'm getting soaked through." And she started off ahead of them, like a will-o'-the-wisp.

"Here, hold on a minute," called Henry Burns, who had gallantly divested himself of his sweater, while the rain drops splashed coldly on his bare arms. "Put this on. I don't need it."

But she tripped on, unheeding; and twice, in their strange flight toward the mill, the lightning revealed her to them—a flitting, odd little thing, like a figure in a dream. Indeed, when they saw her, darting across the bridge over the brook, just ahead of them, they would scarcely have been surprised had she vanished, as witches do that dare not cross running water.

But she kept on, and they came presently, all out of breath, in the shadow of the old mill. The three gained the shelter of a roof overhanging a narrow platform that ran along one side, and paused for a moment to rest.

It was a dismal place, by night, but the child seemed at ease and without fear.

"I know every inch of the old mill," she said, as though by way of reassurance. "You've just got to look out where you step, and you're all right."

Had it not offered some sort of shelter from the storm, however, the place would

hardly have appealed to Harvey and Henry Burns. The aged building seemed to creak and sway in the wind, as though it might fall apart from weakness and topple into the water. The stream plunged over the dam with a sullen roar, much as if it chafed at the barrier and longed to sweep it altogether from its course and carry its timbers with it. Once the lightning flashed into and through all the cobwebbed window-panes, and the mill gave out a ghastly glare.

"Nice, cheerful place for a night's lodging," remarked Henry Burns. "Perhaps we'd better roost right here. I don't exactly take a fancy to the rickety old shell."

"Oh, but it's lovely when you're inside," exclaimed the child, almost reprovingly. "There's the meal-bags to sleep on. And look, you can see the stove, in through the window, red with the fire. It keeps things dry in the mill. I've slept there twice, when gran' was after me with a stick."

"All alone?" asked Henry Burns, looking at the child wonderingly, and feeling a sudden pity for her.

"Why yes," said she. "There's nothing to be afraid of—only rats. Ugh! I hate rats. Don't you?"

"Go ahead," said Henry Burns, stoutly. "We'll follow you. It looks like a real nice place, don't it, Jack?"

"Perhaps," muttered Harvey.

The girl crept along the platform and descended a short flight of steps that led to the mill flume—a long box-like sluice-way that carried the water in to turn the mill wheels. These wheels were silent now, for two great gates at the end of the flume barred out the waters. The girl tripped lightly along a single plank that extended over the flume. The boys followed cautiously.

"Can you swim?" asked Harvey.

"Why, of course," said she.

Presently she paused, took a few steps across a plank that led to a window, raised that, climbed in and disappeared.

"Come on," she called softly. "I'll show you where to step."

"Whew!" exclaimed Harvey. "This is worse than a gale in Samoset Bay."

"Oh, it's lovely when you get inside," said Henry Burns—"all except the rats. Come along."

They climbed in through the window, dropping on to a single plank on the other side, by the child's direction.

"Now stay here," she said, "till I come back."

It was pitch dark and they could not see where they were; but they could hear her light steps as she made her way in through the mill and disappeared.

"She'll never come back," exclaimed Harvey. "Say, wake me up with a good, hard punch, will you, Henry? I know I'm dreaming."

But now they perceived the dull glimmer of a lantern, turned low, being borne toward them by an unseen hand. Then the figure of the girl appeared, and soon the lantern's rays lighted up vaguely the interior of the mill.

They were, it proved, still outside the grinding-rooms, in that part of the mill where the water would pour in to turn the wheels. It was gaunt and unfinished, filled with the sound of dripping waters; with no flooring, but only a scanty network of beams and planking for them to thread their way across.

They followed the child now over these, and came quickly to a small sliding door, past which they entered the main room on the first floor. There, in truth, it would seem they might not be uncomfortably housed for the night. A small box-stove, reddened in patches by the burning coals within, shed warmth throughout the room. There were heaps of empty meal-bags lying here and there. And, for certain, there was no rain coming in.

And now, having been guided by their new acquaintance to their lodgings, so strangely, they found themselves, almost on the moment, deserted.

"Here you are," said the child, with somewhat of a touch of pride in her voice. "Didn't I say I'd get you in all right? Don't turn that light up too bright. Someone might see it from the road. And get out early in the morning, before old Ellison comes. Good night and sleep tight. And don't you ever, ever tell, or I'll catch it. I don't need the lantern. I can feel my way."

The next moment she was gone. They would have detained her, to ask more about herself; about the mill wherein they were; to ask about Ellison, the owner. But it was too late. They heard her steps, faintly, as she traversed the dangerous

network of planking, and then only the steady, dripping sound came in through the little doorway.

"Well," exclaimed Harvey, throwing himself down on a pile of meal-bags, close by the fire, "this isn't the worst place I ever got into, if it is old and rickety. Don't that fire feel good?"

He drew off his dripping sweater and hung it on a box, which he set near, and rubbed his arms vigorously.

"This is such a funny old room I can't keep still in it," he continued. "The fire feels great, but I want to explore and see what kind of a place I'm in."

"Oh, sit down and be comfortable," replied Henry Burns. "Just make believe you're in the cabin of the *Viking*."

"Say, Henry," exclaimed Harvey warmly to his friend's reply, "do you know I'm half sorry we let the *Viking* go for the summer. Of course 'twas mighty nice of Tom and Bob to ask us to spend the summer in Benton with them; but I don't know as canoeing and fishing and that sort of thing will do for us. I'd like to have a hand on the old *Viking's* wheel right now."

"Oh, we'll get sailing, too," answered Henry Burns. "We're going to try the pond, you know. Hello, there's a wheel, now. Looks like a ship's wheel, at that—only rougher. You can stand your trick at that, if you want to, while I sit by the fire."

He was sorry he spoke, the next moment, for Harvey—never too cautious—gave a roar of delight, and darted over to where his friend had pointed.

There, attached to a small shaft that protruded from the wooden partition which divided the two lower rooms of the mill, was a large, wooden wheel, with a series of wooden spokes attached to its rim, after the manner of a ship's wheel.

"Hooray!" bawled Harvey, seizing the wheel and giving it several vigorous turns, "keep her off, did you say, skipper? Ay, ay, we'll clear the breakers now, with water to spare.

"Here you," addressing an imaginary sailor, "get forward lively and clear that jib-sheet; and look out for the block. Hanged if we want a man overboard a night like this, eh, Mister Burns?"

"Say, Jack, I wouldn't do that," replied Henry Burns, laughing at his comrade's

antics. "You don't know what that may turn."

"Don't I, though!" roared Harvey, jamming the wheel around with a few more turns. "Why, you land-lubber, it turns the ship, same as any wheel. This is the good ship, *Rattle-Bones*, bound from Benton to Boston, with a cargo of meal—and rats. We've lost our pilot, Bess—what's her name—and we've got to put her through ourselves.

"Hello!" he cried suddenly, checking himself in the midst of his nonsense and listening intently. "What's that noise? Henry, no joking, I hear breakers off the port bow. We're going aground, or the ship's leaking."

Henry Burns sprang up, and both boys stood, wondering.

Out of the darkness of the other part of the mill there came in a sound of rushing water, plainly distinguishable above the roar of the water flowing over the dam, and the dashing rain and the gusts of wind. Then, as they stood, listening curiously, there came a deep, rumbling sound out of the very vitals of the old mill; there was a gentle quivering throughout all its timbers; a groaning in all its aged structure; a whirring, droning sound—the wheels of the mill were turning, and there was needed only the pushing of one of the levers to set the great mill-stones, themselves, to grinding.

"Jack," cried Henry Burns, "you've opened the gates. The wheels are turning. We've got to stop that, quick. Someone might hear it."

He sprang to the wheel, gave it a few sharp whirls, turned it again and again with all his strength, and the rushing noise ceased. The mill, as though satisfied that its protests against being driven to work at such an hour had been availing, quieted once more, and the place was still.

Still, save that the wind outside swept sharply around the corners of the old structure, moaning about the eaves and whistling dismally in at knot-holes. Still, save that now and again it seemed to quiver on its foundations when some especially heavy thunder-clap roared overhead, while the momentary flash revealed the dusty, cobwebbed interior.

One standing, by chance, at the door of the mill that opened on to the road, might have espied, in one of these sudden illumings of the night, a farm wagon, drawn by a tired horse, splashing along the road past the mill, and turning off, just below it, on the road leading to the house on the hill.

The driver, a tall, spare man, thin-faced and stoop-shouldered, sat with head bent forward, to keep the rain from beating in his face. He was letting the horse, familiar with the way, pick the road for itself.

All at once, however, he sat upright, drew the reins in sharply, and peered back in the direction of the mill.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he exclaimed. "If that isn't the mill. I must be crazy. It can't run itself. Yes, but it is, though. What on earth's got loose? It's twenty years and it's never done a thing like that. Back, there. Back, confound you! I'll have a look."

The horse most unwillingly backing and turning, headed once more toward the main road, and then was drawn up short again.

"Well, I must have been dreaming, sure enough," muttered the driver. "I don't hear anything now. Well, we'll keep on, anyway. I'll have a turn around the old place. There's more there than some folks know of. I'll see that all's safe, if it rains pitchforks and barn-shovels. Giddap Billy."

A few moments later, Henry Burns and Harvey, having tucked themselves snugly in among the meal-sacks close by the fire, with the lantern extinguished, roused up, astounded and dismayed, at the sound of carriage wheels just outside, and the click of a key in the lock of the door. They had barely time to spring from their places, and dart up the stairs that led from the middle of the main floor to the one next above, before the door was thrown open and a man stepped within.

They were dressed, most fortunately, for canoeing; and they had gained the security of the upper floor, thanks to feet clad in tennis shoes, without noise. Now they crouched at the head of the stairs, in utter darkness, not knowing whither to move, or whether or not a step might plunge them into some shaft.

"It must be Ellison," whispered Harvey. "What'll we do?"

"Nothing," answered Henry Burns, "and not make any noise about it either. He heard your ship, Jack. Sh-h-h. We don't want to be put out into the rain again."

Farmer Ellison shut the door behind him, and they heard him take a few steps across the floor; then he was apparently fumbling about in the dark for something, for they heard him say, "It isn't there. Confound that boy! He never puts that lantern back on the hook. If he don't catch it, to-morrow. Hello! Well, if

I've smashed that glass, there'll be trouble."

Farmer Ellison, stumbling across the floor, had, indeed, kicked the lantern which had been left there by the fleeing canoeists. That it was not broken, however, was evidenced the next moment by the gleam of its light.

By this gleam, the boys, peering down the stairway, could make out the form of a tall, stoop-shouldered man, holding the lantern in one hand and gazing about him. Now he advanced toward the little door that opened into the outer mill, and stood, looking through, while he held the lantern far out ahead of him.

"Queer," he muttered. "I closed that door before I went up, or I'm getting forgetful. But everything's all right. I don't see anything the matter. Ho! ho! I'm getting nervous about things—and who wouldn't? When a man has—"

The rest of his sentence was lost, for he had stepped out on to one of the planks. They heard him, only indistinctly, stepping from one plank to another; but what he sought and what he did they could not imagine.

"He must think a lot of this old rattle-trap, to mouse around here this time of night," muttered Harvey. "What'll we do, Henry?"

"Hide, just as soon as we get a chance," whispered Henry Burns. "He may take a notion to come up. There! Look sharp, Jack. Get your bearings."

Again a sharp flash of lightning gleamed through the upper windows, lighting up the room where they were, for a moment, then leaving it seemingly blacker than before.

"I've got it," whispered Henry Burns. "Follow me, Jack."

The two stole softly across to an end of the room, to where a series of boxes were built in, under some shafting and chutes, evidently constructed to receive the meal when ground. Henry Burns lifted the cover of one of these. It was nearly empty, and they both squeezed in, drawing the cover down over their heads, and leaving an opening barely sufficient to admit air.

They had not been a minute too soon; for presently they heard the sound of footsteps. Farmer Ellison was coming up the stairs. Then the lantern appeared at the top of the stairway, and the bearer came into view.

They saw him go from one corner to another, throwing the lantern rays now

overhead among the tangle of belting, now behind some beam. Then he paused for a moment beside one of the huge grinding stones. He put his foot upon it and uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

"All right—all right," they heard him say. "Ah, the old mill looks poor, but there's some men dress just like it, and have money in their pockets."

Then he passed on and up a flight of stairs leading to the third and highest floor of the mill. He did not remain long, however, but came down, still talking to himself. And when he kept on and descended to the main floor, he was repeating that it was "all right," and "all safe;" and so, finally, they heard him blow out the light, hang the lantern on a hook and pass out through the door. The sound of the wagon wheels told them that he was driving away.

Quickly they scrambled out from their hiding place, descended the stairs and crouched by the fire.

"Well, what now?" asked Harvey. "Guess we'll turn in, eh?"

But Henry Burns was already snuggling in among the meal-bags.

"I'm going to sleep, Jack," he said. "Didn't you hear old Ellison say everything was 'all right'?"

"Yes. I wonder what he meant," said Harvey.

"Oh, he said that just to please us," chuckled Henry Burns. "Good night."

The bright sun of a clearing day awoke them early the next morning, and they lost no time in quitting the mill.

"Jack," said Henry Burns, as he followed his companion across the planking of the flume, "you look like an underdone buckwheat cake. There's enough flour on your back for breakfast."

"I'd like to eat it," exclaimed Harvey. "I'm hungry enough. Let's get the canoe and streak it for Benton."

They were drawing their canoe up the bank, a few moments later, to carry it around the dam, when something away up along shore attracted their notice. There, perched in a birch tree, in the topmost branches, with her weight bending it over till it nearly touched the water, they espied a girl, swinging. Then, as they looked, she waved a hand to them.

"Hello," exclaimed Henry Burns. "It's Bess What's-her-name. She's not afraid of getting drowned. That's sure."

The boys swung their caps to her, and she stood upright amid the branches and waved farewell to them, as they started for Benton.

CHAPTER IV

THE TROUT POOL

The brook that flowed into Mill Stream, just above the old mill, itself, came down from some heavily wooded hills a few miles to the northeast, and its waters were ever cold, even in hottest summer, save in one or two open places in the intervening meadows. It was called "Cold Brook" by some of the farmers. Henry Burns and Harvey and Bess Thornton had crossed this brook, by way of the bridge on their flight to the mill.

A wayfarer, standing on the little bridge, of an afternoon, keeping motionless and in the shadow, might sometimes see, far down in the clear water, vague objects that looked like shadows cast by sticks. He might gaze for many minutes and see no sign of life or motion to them. Then, perchance, one of these same grey shadows might disappear in the twinkling of an eye; the observer would see the surface of the water break in a tiny whirl; the momentary flash of a silvery side, spotted with red, appear—and the trout would vanish back into the deep water once more.

Let the traveller try as he might, he seldom got one of these fish. They were too wary; "educated," the farmers called them. They certainly knew enough not to bite.

Tim Reardon occasionally came back to Benton with two or three of the trout tucked inside his blouse; but he wouldn't tell how he got 'em—not even to Jack Harvey, to whom he was loyal in all else. Most folks came back empty-handed.

To be sure, there was one part of the brook where the least experienced fisherman might cast a line and draw out a fish. But that was just the very part of all the brook where nobody was allowed. It was the pool belonging to Farmer Ellison.

A little more than a mile up the brook from the bridge the water came tumbling down a series of short, abrupt cascades, into a pool, formed by a small dam thrown across the brook between banks that were quite steep. This pool broadened out in its widest part to a width of several rods, bordered by thick alders, swampy land in places, and in part by a grove of beech trees.

Come upon this pool at twilight and you would see the trout playing there as though they had just been let out of school. Try to catch one—and if Farmer Ellison wasn't down upon you in a hurry, it was because he was napping.

You might have bought Farmer Ellison's pet cow, but not a chance to fish in this pool. Indeed, he seldom fished it himself, but he prized the trout like precious jewels. John and James Ellison, Farmer Ellison's sons, and Benjamin, their cousin, fished the pool once in a great while—and got soundly trounced if caught. It was Farmer Ellison's hobby, this pool and its fish. He gloated over them like a miser. He watched them leap, and counted them when they did, as a miser would money.

The dam held the trout in the pool downstream, and the cascades—or the upper cascade—held them from escaping upstream. There were three smaller cascades which a lusty trout could ascend by a fine series of rushes and leapings. The upper water-fall was too steep to be scaled. When the water in the brook was high there was an outlet in the dam for it to pass through, to which a gate opened, and protected at all times by heavy wire netting.

Farmer Ellison's house was situated on a hill overlooking this part of the brook, less than a half mile away.

Some way up the brook, if one followed a path through mowing-fields from Farmer Ellison's, and crossed a little foot-bridge over the brook, he would come eventually upon a house, weather-beaten and unpainted, small and showing every sign of neglect. The grass grew long in the dooryard. A few hens scratched the weeds in what once might have been flower-beds. The roof was sagging, and the chimney threatened to topple in the first high wind.

The sun was shining in at the windows of this house, at the close of an afternoon, a few days following the adventure of Henry Burns and Harvey in the mill. It revealed a girl, little, sturdy and of well-knit figure, though in whose childish face there was an underlying trace of shrewdness unusual in one so young; like a little wild creature, or a kitten that has found itself more often chased than petted.

The girl was busily engaged, over a kitchen fire, stirring some sort of porridge in a dish. Clearly, hers were spirits not easily depressed by her surroundings, for she whistled at her task,—as good as any boy could have whistled,—and now and again, from sheer excess of animation, she whisked away from the stove and danced about the old kitchen, all alone by herself.

"Isn't that oatmeal most ready, Bess?" came a querulous voice presently, from an adjoining room. "What makes you so long?"

"Coming, gran', right away now," replied the child. "The coffee's hot, too. Don't it smell go-o-od? But there's only one—"

"What?" queried the voice.

"Nothing," said the child.

She took a single piece of bread from a box, toasted it for a moment, put it on a plate, poured a cup of coffee, dished out a mess of the porridge, and carried it all into the next room. There, an elderly woman, muttering and scolding to herself as she lay on a couch, received it.

"Too bad the rheumatics bother so, gran'," said the child, consolingly. "If they last to-morrow, I'm going to tell old Witham and make him send you something good to eat."

"No, you won't," exclaimed the woman sharply. "Much he cares! Says he pays me too much now for cooking; and he says I've got money tucked away here. Wish I had."

"So do I," said the child. "I'd buy the biggest doll you ever saw."

"Fudge!" cried the old woman. "Why, you've outgrown 'em long ago."

"I know it," said the child, solemnly. "But I'd just like to have a big one, once."

"And so you should, if we had our rights," cried Grannie Thornton, lifting herself up on an elbow, with a jerk that brought forth an exclamation of pain. "If he didn't own everything. If he didn't get it all—what we used to own."

"Old Ellison?" suggested the child.

"Yes, Jim Ellison." Grannie Thornton sat up and shook a lean fist toward the window that opened off toward the hill. "Oh, he bought it all right. He paid for it, I suppose. But it's ours, by rights. We owned it all once, from Ten Mile Wood to the bridge. But it's gone now."

"I don't see why we don't own it now, if that's so," said the child.

"Well, it's law doin's," muttered the woman. "Get your own supper, and don't bother me."

"I don't understand," said the child, as she went back to the kitchen.

She might have understood better if Grannie Thornton had explained the real reason: that the Thorntons had gone wild and run through their farm property; mortgaged it and sold it out; and that Ellison, a shrewd buyer, had got it when it was to be had cheapest. But she asked one more question.

"Gran"' she said, peeping in at the door, "will we ever get it again, s'pose?"

"Mercy sakes, how do I know!" came the answer. "It's ours now, by rights. Will you ever stop talking?"

The child looked wonderingly out across the fields; seated herself by the window, and still gazed as she drank her coffee and ate her scanty supper. She was sitting there when night shut down and hid the hill and the brook from sight.

The sun, himself an early riser, was up not anywhere near so early next morning as was Bess Thornton. There was light in the east, but the sun had not begun to roll above the hill-tops when the child stole quietly out of bed, slipped into her few garments, and hurried barefoot, from the room where she and Grannie Thornton slept. The old woman was still slumbering heavily.

"I'll not ask that old Witham for anything for gran," she said. "I'll get her something,—and something she'll like, too. It all belongs to us, anyway, gran' said."

The girl gently slid the bolt of the kitchen door, stepped outside and closed the door after her. Then she made her way out through the neglected garden to an old apple-tree, against which there leaned a long slender alder pole, with a line and hook attached. Throwing this over her shoulder, she started down through the fields in the direction of the brook.

On the way, a few grasshoppers, roused from their early naps in the grass by the girl's bare feet, jumped this side and that. But, with the coolness of the hour, they seemed to have some of old Grannie Thornton's rheumatism in their joints, for they tumbled and sprawled clumsily. The girl quickly captured several of them, tying them up in a fold of her handkerchief.

Presently she came near the borders of the pool, dear to the heart of Farmer Ellison. But the edge of the pool on the side where she walked was boggy. Gazing sharply for some moments up at the big house on the hill, the girl darted

down to the edge of the brook close by the dam, then suddenly skimmed across it to the other side.

A little way above the dam, on that side, there were clumps of bushes, among which one might steal softly to the water's edge, on good, firm footing. The girl did this, seated herself on a little knoll behind a screen of shrubs, baited the hook with a fat grasshopper and cast it into the pool.

"Grasshopper Green, go catch me a trout," she whispered; "and don't you dare come back without a big—"

Splash! There was a quick, sharp whirl in the still water; a tautening of the line, a hard jerk of the rod, and the girl was drawing in a plump fellow that was fighting gamely and wrathfully for his freedom. The fish darted to and fro for a moment, lashed the water into a miniature upheaval, and then swung in to where a small but strong little hand clutched him.

"Oh, you beauty!" she exclaimed, gazing triumphantly and admiringly at his brilliant spots. "Didn't you know better than to try to eat poor old Grasshopper Green? See what you get for it. Gran'll eat you now."

She took the trout from the hook, dropped it among the shrubs, took another "grasshopper green" from her handkerchief, and cast again. A second and a third trout rewarded her efforts.

But Bess Thornton, the grasshoppers and the trout were not the only ones stirring abroad early this pleasant morning. A person not all intent upon fishing, nor absorbed in the excitement of it, might have seen, had he looked in the direction of the house on the hill, Farmer Ellison, himself, appear in the doorway and gaze out over his fields and stream.

Had one been nearer, he might have seen a look of grim satisfaction, that was almost a smile, steal over the man's face as he saw the grass, grown thick and heavy; grains coming in well filled; garden patches showing thrift; cattle feeding in pasture lands, and the brook winding prettily down through green fields and woodland.

But the expression upon Farmer Ellison's face changed, as he gazed; his brow wrinkled into a frown. His eyes flashed angrily.

What was that, moving to and fro amid the alder clumps by the border of the trout pool? There was no breeze stirring the alders; but one single alder stick—

was not it waving back and forth most mysteriously?

Farmer Ellison gave an exclamation of anger. He knew these early morning poachers. This would not be the first he had chased before sunrise, taking a fish from the forbidden waters. He stepped back into the entry, seized a stout cane, and started forth down through the fields, bending low and screening himself as he progressed by whatsoever trees and bushes were along the way.

That someone was there, whipping the stream, there could be no doubt. Yet, someone—whoever it was—must be short, or else, perchance, crouched low in the undergrowth; for Farmer Ellison could get no glimpse of the fisherman.

Crack! A dead branch snapped under Farmer Ellison's heavy boot.

Bess Thornton, gleeful,—joyous over the conquest of her third trout, looked quickly behind her, startled by the snapping of the branch only a few rods away. What she saw made her gasp. She almost cried out with the sudden fright. But she acted promptly.

Giving the pole a sharp thrust, she shoved it in under the bank, beneath the water. The trout! The precious trout! Ah, she could not leave them. Hastily she snatched them up, and thrust all three inside her gingham waist, dropping them in with a wrench at the neck-band.

"Ugh! how they squirm," she cried, softly.

Then, creeping to the water's edge, she dived in—neatly as any trout could have done it—and disappeared. One who did not know Bess Thornton might well have been alarmed now, for the child seemed to be lost. The surface of the brook where she had gone down remained unruffled. Then, clear across on the other side, one watching sharply might have seen a child's head appear out of the pool, at the edge of a clump of bull-rushes; might have seen her emerge half out of water, and hide herself from view of anyone on the opposite shore.

She had swum the entire width of the pool under water.

From her hiding-place she saw Farmer Ellison rush suddenly from cover upon the very place where she had sat, fishing. She saw him run, furiously, hither and thither, beating the underbrush with his cane, shaking the stick wrathfully. His face showed the keenest disappointment and chagrin.

Up and down the shore of the pool he travelled, searching every clump that might afford shelter.

"Well," he exclaimed finally, "I must be going wrong, somehow. First it's the mill I hear, when it isn't grinding, and now I see somebody fishing when there isn't anybody. I'll go and take some of them burdock bitters. Guess my liver must be out of order."

Farmer Ellison, shaking his head dubiously, and casting a backward glance now and then, strode up the hill, looking puzzled and wrathful.

When he was a safe distance out of the way, a little figure, dripping wet, scrambled in across the bog on the other side, and stole up through the fields to the old tumble-down house.

"What's that you're cooking, child?" called out a voice, some time later, as the girl stood by the kitchen stove.

"M-m-m-m gran', it's something awful good. Do you smell 'em?" replied the child, gazing proudly into the fry-pan, wherein the three fat trout sizzled. "Well, I caught 'em, myself."

"I do declare!" exclaimed Grannie Thornton. "I didn't know the trout would bite now anywhere but in Jim Ellison's pool."

The girl made no reply.

"You like 'em, don't you, gran'?" she said, gleefully, some moments later, as she stood watching the old woman eat her breakfast with a relish. Grannie Thornton had eaten one trout, and was beginning on the half of another.

"They're tasty, Bess," she replied. "Where did you catch 'em? I thought the fishing in the brook wasn't any use nowadays."

The girl stood for a moment, hesitating. Then she thought of the old woman's words of the night before.

"I caught 'em in the pool, gran'," she said.

The iron fork with which Grannie Thornton was conveying a piece of the trout to her mouth dropped from her hand. The last piece she had eaten seemed to choke her. Then she tottered to her feet with a wrench that made her groan.

"You got 'em from the pool!" she screamed. "From the pool, do you say? Don't yer know that's stealing? Didn't I bring you up better'n that? What do you mean by going and being so bad, just 'cause I'm crippled and can't look after yer? Would you grow up to be a thief, child?"

The old woman's strength failed her, and she fell back on the couch. The girl stood for a moment, silent, the tears rolling down her cheeks.

"But you said 'twas all ours, anyway, gran'," she sobbed. "Will I have to go to prison, do you think?"

"Nonsense!" cried Grannie Thornton. "But if Ellison found it out—"

Bess Thornton was darting out of the doorway.

"He'll find it out now," she said, bitterly. "I'll tell him. I don't care what happens

to me."

Benjamin Ellison, James Ellison's nephew, a heavy-set, large-boned, clumsily-built youth, lounged lazily in the dooryard of the Ellison homestead as the girl neared the gate, a quarter of an hour later.

"Hello, Tomboy," he said, barring her entrance, with arms outstretched. "Don't know as I'll let you in this way. Let's see you jump the fence. Say, what's the matter with you? Ho! ho! Why, you look like that cat I dropped in the brook yesterday. You've got a ducking, somehow. Your clothes aren't all dry yet. Who —?"

The youth's bantering was most unexpectedly interrupted. He himself didn't know exactly how it happened. He only knew that the girl had darted suddenly forward, that he had been neatly tripped, and that he found himself lying on his back in a clump of burdocks.

"Here, you beggar!" he cried, spitefully, scrambling to his feet and making after her. "You'll get another ducking for that."

But the girl, as though knowing human nature, instinctively ran close beside another youth, of about the same size as Benjamin, who had just appeared from the house, caught him by an arm and said, "Don't let him hurt me, will you, John? I tripped him up. Oh, but you ought to have seen him!"

Her errand was forgotten for an instant and she laughed a merry laugh.

The boy thus appealed to, a youth of about his cousin's size, but of a less heavy mould, stood between her and the other.

"You go on, Bennie," he said, laughing. "Let her alone. Oh ho, that's rich! Put poor old Bennie on his back, did you, Bess? What do you want?"

The girl's mirth vanished, and her face flushed.

"I want to see your father," she said, slowly.

"All right, go in the door there," responded John Ellison. "He's all alone in the dining-room."

Farmer Ellison, finishing his third cup of coffee, and leaning back in his chair, looked up in surprise, as the girl stepped noiselessly across the threshold and confronted him.

"Well! Well!" he exclaimed, eying her somewhat sharply. "Why didn't you knock at the door? Forgotten how? What do you want?"

The girl waited for a moment before replying, shuffling her bare feet and tugging at her damp dress. Then she seemed to gather her courage. She looked resolutely at Farmer Ellison.

"I want a licking, I guess," she said.

Farmer Ellison's face relaxed into a grim smile.

"A licking," he repeated. "Well, I reckon you deserve it, all right, if not for one thing, then for something else."

"I guess I do," said Bess Thornton.

"Well, what do you want me to do about it?" queried Farmer Ellison, looking puzzled. "Can't old Mother Thornton give it to you?"

"No," replied the girl. "She's sick. And besides, she didn't know what I was going to do. I did it all myself, early this morning."

Farmer Ellison looked up quickly. An expression of suspicion stole over his face. He looked at the girl's bedraggled dress.

"What have you been up to?" he asked, sternly.

"I've been stealing," replied the girl. "'Twas—'twas—"

Farmer Ellison sprang up from his seat.

"'Twas you, then, down by the shore?" he cried. "Confound it! I knew I didn't need them burdock bitters all the time I was takin' 'em. Stealing my trout, eh? Don't tell me you caught any?"

"Only three."

The girl half whispered the reply.

Farmer Ellison seized the girl by an arm and shook her roughly.

"Bring them back!" he cried. "Where are they?"

"I can't," stammered the girl; "they're cooked."

He shook her again.

"You ate my trout!" he cried. "Pity they didn't choke you. Didn't you feel like choking—eating stolen trout, eh?"

"Gran' did," said the girl, ruefully. "But 'twas a bone, sir. She didn't know they were stolen till I told her."

The sound of Farmer Ellison's wrathful voice had rung through the house, and at this moment a woman entered the room. At the sight of her, Bess Thornton suddenly darted away from the man's grasp, ran to Mrs. Ellison, hid her face in her dress and sobbed.

"I didn't think 'twas so bad," she said. "I—I won't do it again—ever."

Mrs. Ellison, whose face expressed a tenderness in contrast to the hardness of her husband's, stroked the girl's hair softly, seated herself in a rocking chair, and drew the girl close to her.

"What made you take the fish?" she inquired softly.

"Well, gran' said we ought to have the whole place by rights—"

Mrs. Ellison directed an inquiring glance at her husband.

"She's been complaining that way ever since I bought it," he said.

"And gran' was sick and I thought she'd like some of the trout," continued the girl. "She's got rheumatics and can't work this week, you know."

"But wouldn't it have been better to ask?" queried Mrs. Ellison, kindly. "Didn't you feel kind of as though it was wrong, eating something you had no right to take?"

"I didn't," answered the girl, promptly. "I didn't eat any. I was going to, though, till gran' said what she did—"

"Then you haven't had anything to eat to-day?" asked Mrs. Ellison, feeling a sudden moisture in her own eyes.

"No," said the girl.

"And what makes your dress so wet? Did you fall in?"

"No-o-o," exclaimed the girl. "I swam the pool. And I did it all the way under water. I didn't think I could, and I almost died holding my breath so long. But I did it."

There was a touch of pride in her tone.

"James," said Mrs. Ellison. "Leave her to me. I'll say all that's needed, I don't think she'll do it again."

"Indeed I won't—truly," said Bess Thornton.

Farmer Ellison walked to the door, with half a twinkle in his eye. "Clear across the pool under water," he muttered to himself. "Sure enough, I didn't need them burdock bitters."

A few minutes later, Bess Thornton, seated at the breakfast table in the Ellison home, was eating the best meal she had had in many a day. A motherly-looking woman, setting out a few extra dainties for her, wiped her eyes now and again with a corner of her apron.

"She'd have been about her age," she whispered to herself once softly, and bent and gave the girl a kiss.

When Bess Thornton left the house, she carried a basket on one arm that made Grannie Thornton stare in amazement when she looked within.

"No, no," she said, all of a tremble, as the girl drew forth some of the delicacies, and offered them to her. "Not a bit of it for me. I'll not touch it. You can. And see here, don't go up on the hill again, do you hear? Keep away from the Ellisons'."

She had such a strange, excited, almost frightened way with her that the child urged her no further, but put the basket away, put of her sight.

"Mrs. Ellison asked me to come again," she said to herself, sighing. "I don't see why gran' should care."

CHAPTER V

SOME CAUSES OF TROUBLE

It was early of a Saturday afternoon, warm and sultry. Everything in the neighbourhood of the Half Way House seemed inclined to drowsiness. Even the stream flowing by at a little distance moved as though its waters were lazy. The birds and the cattle kept their respective places silently, in the treetops and beneath the shade. Only the flies, buzzing about the ears of Colonel Witham's dog that lay stretched in the dooryard, were active.

They buzzed about the fat, florid face of the colonel, presently, as he emerged upon the porch, lighted his after-dinner pipe and seated himself in a big wooden arm-chair. But the annoyance did not prevent him from dozing as he smoked, and, finally, from dropping off soundly to sleep.

He enjoyed these after-dinner naps, and the place was conducive to them. The long stretch of highway leading up from Benton had scarcely a country wagon-wheel turning on it, to stir the dust to motion. In the distance, the mill droned like a big beehive. Near at hand only the fish moved in the stream—the fish and a few rowboats that swung gently at their ropes at the end of a board-walk that led from the hotel to the water's edge.

The colonel slumbered on. But, far down the road, there arose, presently, a cloud of dust, amid which there shone and glittered flashes of steel. Then a line of bicyclists came into view, five youths, with backs bent and heads down, making fast time.

On they came with a rush and whirr, the boy in front pointing in toward the Half Way House. The line of glistening, flying wheels aimed itself fair at Colonel Witham's dog, who roused himself and stood, growling hoarsely, with ears set back and tail between his legs.

Then the screeching of five shrill whistles smote upon the summer stillness, the wheels came to an abrupt stop, and the five riders dismounted at a flying leap at the very edge of Colonel Witham's porch. The colonel, startled from sweet repose by the combined noise of whistles, buzzing of machines, shouts of the five riders and the yelping of his frightened dog, awoke with a gasp and a

momentary shudder of alarm. He was enlightened, if not pacified, by a row of grinning faces.

"Why, hello, Colonel Witham," came a chorus of voices. "Looks like old times to see you again. Thought we'd stop off and rest a minute."

Colonel Witham, sitting bolt upright in his chair, and mopping the perspiration from his brow with an enormous red handkerchief, glared at them with no friendly eyes.

"Oh, you did, hey!" he roared. "Well, why didn't you bring a dynamite bomb and touch that off when you arrived? Lucky for you that dog didn't go for you. He'll take a piece out of some of you one of these days." (Colonel Witham did not observe that the dog, at this moment, tail between legs, was flattening himself out like a flounder, trying to squeeze himself underneath the board walk.) "What do you want here, anyway?"

"Some bottled soda, Colonel," said the youngest boy, in a tone that would seem to indicate that the colonel was their best friend. "Bottled soda for the crowd. My treat."

"Bottled monkey-shines and tomfoolery!" muttered Colonel Witham, arising slowly from his chair. "I wish it would choke that young Joe Warren. Never saw him when he wasn't up to something."

But he went inside with them and served their order; scowling upon them as they drank.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"Making a fifty mile run, Colonel," replied one of the boys, whose features indicated that he was an elder brother of the boy who had previously spoken. "Tom and Bob—you remember them—are setting the pace on their tandem for Arthur and Joe and me. Whew, but we came up a-flying. Well, good day, we're off. You may see Tim Reardon by and by. We left him down the road with a busted tire."

They were away, with a shout and a whirl of dust.

"Hm!" growled the colonel. "I'll set the dog on Tim Reardon if he comes up the way they did. Here, Cæsar, come here!"

The colonel gave a sharp whistle.

But Cæsar, a yellow mongrel of questionable breeds, did not appear. A keen vision might have seen this canine terror to evildoers poke a shrinking muzzle a little way from beneath the board walk, emit a frightened whine and disappear.

Colonel Witham dozed again, and again slumber overtook him. He did not stir when Grannie Thornton, recovered from her attack of rheumatism, appeared at a window and shook a table-cloth therefrom; nor when Bess Thornton, dancing out of the doorway, whisked past his chair and seated herself at the edge of the piazza.

The girl's keen blue eyes perceiving, presently, an object in the distance looking like a queer combination of boy and bicycle, she ran out from the dooryard as it approached. Tim Reardon, an undersized, sharp-eyed youngster, rather poorly dressed and barefoot, wheeling his machine laboriously along, was somewhat of a mournful-looking figure. The girl held up a warning hand as he approached.

"Hello," said the boy. "What's the matter?"

The girl pointed at the sleeping colonel.

"Said he'd set the dog on you if you came around the way the others did," replied Bess Thornton. "They woke him up. My! wasn't he mad? Here," she added, handing a small box to the boy, "George Warren left this for you. Said they wanted to make time. That's why they didn't stop for you."

"Thanks," said the boy. "Thought I'd got to walk clear back to Benton. But I was going to have a swim first. Guess I'll have it, anyway. It's hot, walking through this dust."

"I'll tell you where to go," said the girl. "Do you know what's fun? See that tree way up along shore there, the one that hangs out over the water? Well, I climb that till it bends down, and then I get to swinging and jump."

Tim Reardon gave her an incredulous glance, with one eye half closed.

"Oh, I don't care whether you believe it or not," said the girl. "But I'll show you some time. Can't now. Got to wash dishes. Don't wake him up, or you'll catch it."

She disappeared through the doorway, and Tim Reardon, leaving his wheel leaning against a corner of the house, went up along shore. In another half hour

he returned, took from his pocket the box the girl had given to him, got therefrom an awl, a bottle of cement and some thin strips of rubber, and began mending the punctured tire of the bicycle. The tire was already somewhat of a patched affair, bearing evidences of former punctures and mendings.

"It's Jack's old wheel," he remarked by way of explanation to Bess Thornton, who had reappeared and was interestedly watching the operation. "He's going to give me one of his new tires," he added, "the first puncture he gets."

"Why don't you put a tack in the road?" asked the girl promptly.

Tim Reardon grinned. "Not for Jack," he said.

"Say," asked the girl, "what's Witham mad with those boys about? Why did he send 'em out of the hotel the other night?"

"Oh, that's a long story," replied Tim Reardon; "I can't tell you all about it. Witham used to keep the hotel down to Southport, and he was always against the boys, and now and then somebody played a joke on him. Then, when his hotel burned, he thought the boys were to blame; but Jack Harvey found the man that set the fire, and so made the colonel look foolish in court."

But at this moment a yawn that sounded like a subdued roar indicated that Colonel Witham was rousing from his nap. He stretched himself, opened his eyes blankly, and perceived the boy and girl.

"Well," he exclaimed, "you're here, eh? Wonder you didn't come in like a wild Indian, too. What's the matter?"

"Got a puncture," said Little Tim.

The colonel, having had the refreshment of his sleep, was in a better humour. He was a little interested in the bicycle.

"Queer what new-fangled ideas they get," he said. "That's not much like what I used to ride."

Little Tim looked up, surprised.

"Why, did you use to ride a wheel?" he asked.

"Did I!" exclaimed Colonel Witham, reviving old recollections, with a touch of pride in his voice. "Well, now I reckon you wouldn't believe I used to be the

crack velocipede rider in the town I came from, eh?"

Little Tim, regarding the colonel's swelling waist-band and fat, puffy cheeks, betrayed his skepticism in looks rather than in speech. Colonel Witham continued.

"Yes, sir," said he, "there weren't any of them could beat me in those days. Why, I've got four medals now somewhere around, that I won at county fairs in races. 'Twasn't any of these wire whirligigs, either, that we used to ride. Old bone-shakers, they were; wooden wheels and a solid wrought iron backbone. You had to have the strength to make that run. Guess some of these spindle-legged city chaps wouldn't make much of a go at that. I've got the old machine out in the shed there, somewhere. Like to see it?"

"I know where it is," said Bess Thornton. "I can ride it."

"You ride it!" exclaimed Colonel Witham, staring at her in amazement. "What?"

"Yes," replied the girl; "but only down hill, though. It's too hard to push on the level. I'll go and get it."

"Well, I vum!" exclaimed Colonel Witham, as the girl started for the shed. "That girl beats me."

"Look out, I'm coming," called a childish voice, presently.

The door of the shed was pushed open, and Bess Thornton, standing on a stool, could be seen climbing into the saddle of what resembled closely a pair of wagon wheels connected by a curving bar of iron. She steadied herself for a moment, holding to the side of the doorway; then pushed herself away from it, came down the plank incline, and thence on to the path leading from the elevation on which the shed stood, at full speed. Her legs, too short for her feet to touch the pedals as they made a complete revolution, stuck out at an angle; but she guided the wheel and rode past Tim Reardon and the colonel, triumphantly. When the wheel stopped, she let it fall and landed on her feet, laughing.

"Here it is, Colonel Witham," said she, rolling it back to where he stood. "Let's see you ride it."

Colonel Witham, grasping one of the handle-bars, eyed the velocipede almost longingly.

"No," he said. "I'm too old and stout now. Guess my riding days are over. But I used to make it go once, I tell you."

"Go ahead, get on. You can ride it," urged Tim Reardon. "It won't break."

"Oh no, it will hold me, all right," said Colonel Witham. "We didn't have any busted tires in our day. Good iron rim there that'll last for ever."

"Just try it a little way," said Bess Thornton.

"I never saw anybody ride that had won medals," said Tim Reardon.

Colonel Witham's pride was rapidly getting the better of his discretion.

"Oh, I can ride it," he said, "only it's—it's kind of hot to try it. Makes me feel sort of like a boy, though, to get hold of the thing."

The colonel lifted a fat leg over the backbone and put a ponderous foot on one pedal, while the drops of perspiration began to stand out on his forehead.

"Get out of the way," he shouted. "I'll just show you how it goes—hanged if I don't."

The colonel had actually gotten under way.

Little Tim Reardon doubled up with mirth, and rolled over on the grass.

"Looks just like the elephant at the circus," he cried.

"Sh-h-h, he'll hear you," whispered Bess Thornton.

Colonel Witham was certainly doing himself proud. A new thrill of life went through him. He thought of those races and the medals. It was an unfortunate recollection, for it instilled new ambitions within him. He had ridden up the road a few rods, had made a wide turn and started back; and now, as he neared the hotel once more, his evil genius inspired him to show the two how nicely he could make a shorter turn.

He did it a little too quickly; the wheel lurched, and Colonel Witham felt he was falling. He twisted in the saddle, gave another sharp yank upon the handle-bars —and lost control of the wheel. A most unfortunate moment for such a mishap; for now, as the wheel righted, it swerved to one side and, with increased speed, ran upon the board walk that led down to the boat-landing.

The walk descended at quite a decided incline to the water's edge. It was raised on posts above the level of the ground, so that a fall from it would mean serious injury. There was naught for the luckless colonel to do but sit, helpless, in the saddle and let the wheel take its course.

Helpless, but not silent. Beholding the fate that was inevitable, the colonel gave utterance to a wild roar of despair, which, together with the rumbling of the wheels above his head, drove forth his dog from his hiding-place. Cæsar, espying this new and extraordinary object rattling down the board walk, and mindful of the agonizing shrieks of his master, himself pursued the flying wheel, yelping and barking and adding his voice to that of Colonel Witham.

There was no escape. The heavy wheel, bearing its ponderous weight of misery, and pursued to the very edge of the float by the dog, plunged off into the water with a mighty splash. Colonel Witham, clinging in desperation to the handle bars, sank with the wheel in some seven feet of water. Then, amid a whirl and bubbling of the water like a boiling spring, the colonel's head appeared once more above the surface. Choking and sputtering, he cried for help.

"Help! help!" he roared. "I'm drowning. I can't swim."

"No, but you'll float," bawled Little Tim, who was darting into the shed for a rope.

Indeed, as the colonel soon discovered, now that he was once more at the surface, it seemed really impossible for him to sink. He turned on his back and floated like a whale.

And at this moment, most opportunely, there appeared up the road the line of bicyclists returning.

They were down at the shore shortly—Tom Harris, Bob White, George, Arthur and Joe Warren—just as Little Tim emerged from the shed, with an armful of rope.

"Here, you catch hold," he said, "while I make fast to the colonel." The next moment, he was overboard, swimming alongside Colonel Witham.

"Look out he don't grab you and drown you both," called George Warren.

Little Tim was too much of a fish in the water to be caught that way. The most available part of Colonel Witham to make fast to, as he floated at length, was his

nearest foot. Tim Reardon threw a loop about that foot, then the other; and the boys ashore hauled lustily.

The colonel, more than ever resembling a whale—but a live one, inasmuch as he continued to bellow helplessly—came slowly in, and stranded on the shore. They drew him well in with a final tug.

"Here, quit that," he gurgled. "Want to drag me down the road?" The colonel struggled to his feet, his face purple with anger.

"Now get out of here, all of you!" he roared. "There's always trouble when you're around. Tim Reardon, you keep away from here, do you understand?"

"Yes sir," replied Tim Reardon, wringing his own wet clothes; and then added, with a twinkle in his eyes, "but ain't you going to show us those medals, Colonel Witham?"

It was lucky for Tim Reardon that he was fleet of foot. The colonel made a rush at him, but Tim was off down the road, leaping into the saddle of his mended wheel, followed by the others.

"Don't you want us to raise the velocipede, so you can ride some more?" called young Joe Warren, as he mounted his own wheel.

The colonel's only answer was a wrathful shake of his fist.

"Colonel Witham," said Grannie Thornton, as her employer entered the hotel, a few minutes later, "here's a note for you, from Mr. Ellison. Guess he wants to see you about something."

"Hm!" exclaimed the colonel, opening the note, and dampening it much in doing so, "Jim Ellison, eh? More of his queer business doings, I reckon. He's a smart one, he is," he added musingly, as he waddled away to his bed-room to change his dripping garments; then, spying his own face in the mirror: 'What's the matter with you, Daniel Witham? Aren't you smart, too? In all these dealings, isn't there something to be made?'

Colonel Witham, rearraying his figure in a dry suit of clothing, was to be seen, a little later, on the road to the mill, walking slowly, and thinking deeply as he went along. He was so engrossed in his reflections that he failed to notice the approach of a carriage until it was close upon him. He looked up in surprise as a pleasant, gentle voice accosted him.

"Good afternoon, Colonel Witham," it said.

The speaker was a middle-aged, sweet faced woman—the same that had appeased the wrath of her husband against Bess Thornton. She leaned out of the carriage now and greeted Colonel Witham with cordiality.

"Oh, how-dye-do," replied Colonel Witham abruptly, and returning her smile with a frown. He passed along without further notice of her greeting, and she started up the horse she had reined in, and drove away.

Only once did Colonel Witham turn his head and gaze back at the disappearing carriage. Then he glowered angrily.

"I don't want your smiles and fine words," he muttered. "You were too good for me once. Just keep your fine words to yourself. I don't want 'em now."

Colonel Witham, in no agreeable mood, went on and entered at the office door of the mill. A tall, sharp-faced man, seated on a stool at a high desk, looked up at his entrance. One might see at a glance that here was a man who looked upon the world with a calculating eye. No fat and genial miller was James Ellison. No grist that came from his mill was likely to be ground finer than a business scheme put before him. He eyed Colonel Witham sharply.

"Aha, Colonel," he exclaimed, in a slightly sneering tone, "bright and cheery as ever, I see. I thought I'd like to have you drop in and scatter a little sunshine. Sit down. Have a pipe?"

Colonel Witham, accepting the proffered clay and and the essentials for loading it, sat back in a chair, and puffed away solemnly, without deigning to answer the other's bantering.

James Ellison continued figuring at his desk.

"Well," said Colonel Witham after some ten minutes had passed, "Suppose you didn't get me down here just to smoke. What d'ye want?"

"Oh, I'm coming to that right away," replied Ellison, still writing. "You know what I want, I guess." He turned abruptly in his seat, and his keen face shaded with anger. He pointed a long lean finger in the direction of the town of Benton. "You know 'em, Dan Witham," he said, "as well as I do. Though you didn't get skinned as I did. You didn't go down to town, as I did twenty odd years ago, with eight thousand dollars, and come back cleaned out. You didn't invest in mines

and things they said were good as gold, and have 'em turn out rubbish. You didn't lose a fortune and have to start all over again. But you know em, eh?"

Colonel Witham nodded assent, and added mentally, "Yes, and I know you, too. Benton don't have the only sharp folks."

"And now," added James Ellison, "when I've got some of it back by hard work, you know how I keep it from them, and from others, too. Well, here's some more of the papers. The mill and a good part of the farm and some more land 'round here go to you this time. All right, eh? You get your pay on commission. Here's the deeds conveying it all to you—for valuable consideration—valuable consideration, see?"

The miller gave a prodigious wink at his visitor, and laughed.

"You don't mind being thought pretty comfortably fixed, eh—all these properties put in your name? Don't do you any harm, and people around here think you're mighty smart. Your deeds from me are all recorded, eh? People look at the record, and what do they see? All this stuff in your name. Well, what do I get out of that? You know. There are some claims they don't bother me with, because they think I'm not so rich as I am. There's property out of their reach, if anything goes wrong with some business I'm in.

"Why? Well, we know why, all right, you and I. Here's the deeds of the same property which you give back to me. Only I don't have them put on record. I keep them hidden—up my sleeve—clear up my sleeve, don't I?"

"You keep 'em hidden all right, I guess," responded Colonel Witham; and made a mental observation that he'd like to know where the miller really did hide them.

"So here they are," continued the miller. "It's a little more of the same game. The property's all yours—and it isn't. You'll oblige, of course, for the same consideration?"

Colonel Witham nodded assent, and the business was closed.

And, some time later, as Colonel Witham plodded up the road again, he uttered audibly the wish he had formed when he had sat in the miller's office.

"I'd like to know where he keeps those deeds hidden," he said, apparently addressing his remark to a clump of weeds that grew by the roadside. The weeds withholding whatever information they may have had on the question, Colonel

Witham snipped their heads off with a vicious sweep of his stick, and went on. "I don't know as it would do me any good to know," he continued, "but I'd just like to know, all the same."

And James Ellison, his visitor departed, wandered about for some time through the rooms of his mill. One might have thought, from the sly and confidential way in which he drew an eye-lid down now and again, as he passed here and there, that the wink was directed at the mill itself, and that the crazy old structure was really in its owner's confidence; that perhaps the mill knew where the miller hid his papers.

At all events, James Ellison, sitting down to his supper table that evening, was in a genial mood.

"Lizzie," he said, smiling across the table at his wife, "I saw an old beau of yours to-day—Dan Witham. He didn't send any love to you, though."

"No," responded Mrs. Ellison, and added, somewhat seriously, "and he has no love for you, either. I hope you don't have much business dealing with him."

"Ho, he's all right, is Dan Witham," returned her husband. "He's gruff, but he's not such a bad sort. Those old times are all forgotten now."

"I'm not so certain of that, James," said Mrs. Ellison.

CHAPTER VI

CAPTURING AN INDIAN

Tim Reardon, a barefoot, sunburned urchin, who might be perhaps twelve years old, judging from his diminutive figure, and anywhere from that to fifteen, by the shrewdness of his face, stood, with arms akimbo, gazing in rapturous admiration at a bill-board. It was a gorgeous and thrilling sight that met his eyes. Lines in huge coloured letters, extending across the top of the board, proclaimed the subject of the display:

Bagley & Blondin's Gigantic Circus
Two Colossal Aggregations in One
Stupendous—Startling—Scintillating
Moral—Scientific
Applauded by all the Crowned Heads of Europe.

The pictorial nightmare that bore evidence to the veracity of these assertions was indeed wonderful and convincing. A trapeze performer, describing a series of turns in the air that would clearly take him from one end of the long bill-board to the other, was in manifest peril, should he miss the swinging trapeze at the finish of his flight, of landing within the wide open jaws of an enormous hippopotamus —designated in the picture as, "The Behemoth of Holy Writ." An alligator, sitting upright, and bearing the legend that he was one of the "Sacred Crocodiles of the Nile, to which the Indian Mothers Throw Their Babes," was leering with a hopeful smile at the proximity of a be-spangled lady equestrian, balanced on the tip of one toe upon the back of a galloping horse.

The jungle element was generously supplied by troops of trumpeting elephants, tigers with tails lashing, bloated serpents dangling ominously from the overhanging tree branches, while bands of lean and angular monkeys jabbered and chattered throughout all the picture.

Little Tim heaved a sigh.

"Gee!" he exclaimed. "I'd like to see that Royal Bengal tiger that ate up three of

his keepers alive."

Little Tim, fired with the very thought, and emulative of an athlete in distorted attitude and gaudy fleshings, proceeded to turn himself upside down and walk upon his hands, waving his bare feet fraternally at the pictured gymnasts. He found himself suddenly caught by the ankles, however, and slung roughly across someone's shoulder.

"Hello, Tim," said his captor, good naturedly, "going to join the circus?"

Little Tim grinned, sheepishly.

"Guess not, Jack," he replied. "Say, wouldn't you like to see that tiger eat up a keeper?"

Jack Harvey laughed, setting Tim on his feet again.

"I'll bet that tiger isn't as great a man-eater as old Witham," he said. "They put that in to make people think he's awful fierce, so they'll go to the show. You going?"

Tim Reardon, thrusting his hands into his pockets and closing his fingers on a single five cent piece, three wire nails and a broken bladed jack-knife, looked expressively at Harvey.

"I dunno," he replied. "P'raps so."

Jack Harvey took the hint.

"Come along with us," he said. "Where's the rest of the crew?"

"They're going—got the money," said Tim.

Harvey looked surprised. His crew, so called because the three other members of it besides Tim Reardon had sailed with him on his sloop in Samoset bay, were generally hard up.

"All right," said Harvey, "you can go with Henry Burns and George Warren and me. Come on. Let's go down town and see the parade."

The blare of trumpets and the clashing of brass was shaking the very walls of the city of Benton. A steam calliope, shrieking a tune mechanically above the music of the band and the roar of carts, was frightening farmers' horses to the point of frenzy. Handsome, sleek horses, stepping proudly, were bearing their gaily

dressed riders in cavalcade. And the rumble of the heavy, gilded carts gave an undertone to the sound. Bagley & Blondin's great moral and scientific show was making its street parade, prior to the performance.

Tim Reardon stood between Henry Burns and Jack Harvey on a street corner, with George Warren close by. Tim Reardon's eyes seemed likely to pop clean out of his head.

"There he is! There he is, Jack!" he exclaimed all at once, fairly gasping with excitement.

"Who is?" asked Harvey.

"The man-eating tiger," cried Tim. "It says so on the cage."

Harvey chuckled. "I'd like to throw you in there, Tim," he said. "He'd be scared to death of you. Here's the real thing coming, though. Say, what do you think of that?"

The float that approached was certainly calculated to fire the brain of youth. On the platform, open to view from all sides, there was set up in the centre the trunk of a small tree, to which was securely bound, by hand and foot, the figure of a huntsman, clad in garb of skins, buckskin leggings and moccasins. A powder horn was slung picturesquely from one shoulder, and a great hunting-knife—alas useless to him now—stuck conspicuously in his belt.

Around this hapless captive there moved the figures of three savages, their faces streaked with various hues of paint, their war-bonnets of eagles' feathers flaunting, and wonderful to behold. Each bore in his right hand a gleaming tomahawk, which now and then was raised menacingly toward the unfortunate huntsman. Again one would put his hand to his lips, and a shrill war-whoop would rival the screaming of the steam calliope.

Close by, a wigwam, of painted skins thrown over a light frame-work of poles, added to the picture. At the entrance to this there stood now a man in ordinary dress, who thus addressed the crowd through a megaphone:

"Ladies and Gentlemen, this historical representation which you now see before you is a scene from real life. It represents the perils of the plainsman in the midst of bands of cruel savages. It shows a captive bound to the stake and about to be put to torture. (Increased activity on the part of the Indians, and a suggestive squirming on the part of the prisoner.)

"Ladies and Gentlemen, this daring scout was one of General Miles's most trusted and heroic followers. (Name not mentioned.) He was captured by these three chiefs, Leaping Panther, Crazy Bear and Red Bull—a kinsman of the famous Sitting Bull—after one of the most desperate struggles ever known, and after twice disarming his adversaries and nearly killing them all. (Revengeful gestures on the part of the three toward the captive.)

"Ladies and Gentlemen, the continuation of this thrilling adventure, the rescue of this famous scout and the capture of Leaping Panther, Crazy Bear and Red Bull, will be enacted under canvas at the great Bagley & Blondin moral and scientific show this afternoon and evening."

"Hi! yi!" yelled Little Tim, "Real Injuns, Jack. Look at the big one, with the red streak across his chin."

Tim's shrill voice rang out above the noise of the procession. Perhaps it may have penetrated, even, to the group upon the float; for, at that moment, the great chief, Red Bull—kinsman to the sitting variety—turned and shook his tomahawk in the direction of the group of boys. Little Tim squealed in an ecstasy of pleasurable alarm.

"Look out; he'll get you, Tim," said George Warren.

"Gee!" exclaimed Little Tim. "Bet I wouldn't like to be tied to that tree, though."

"Why not?" asked Jack Harvey, grinning at Tim's serious expression.

"Because, how'd I know they wouldn't forget some time and go ahead and really scalp me? Oh, they might do it, all right. You needn't laugh. I wouldn't like to be mas-sick-ered the way they were at that Fort some-thing-or-other in the Last of the Mohigginses."

"Ho, you mean the 'Last of the Mohicans,'—the book I told you about, eh?" said Henry Burns—"all about Uncas and the rest."

"That's it," cried Little Tim. "Wouldn't I like to be Un-cuss, though, and scalp Red Bull."

"Fine!" laughed Henry Burns. "Come on, we'll go up to the circus grounds."

To Little Tim the afternoon was one glorious dream; a dream through which there pranced horses in bright trappings, ridden by be-spangled men and women;

chariots rumbled in mad races; bicyclists shot down fearful inclines; and the whole proceedings made glad to the heart of the youngster by the roaring of wild beasts.

The impending torture of Gen. Miles's scout was happily averted by the timely arrival of a band of mounted soldiers, whose cracking rifles laid in the dust the painted warriors—barely in time to save Little Tim, also, from utter collapse. He emerged from the tent, some hours later, wild eyed; so freighted down with red lemonade and peanuts that if dropped overboard he must surely have sunk without a struggle.

Evening came, and with it the night performance. Night found Little Tim again on the grounds. True, he had no money for a ticket, but it was a delight to wander about the grounds; to climb upon the great carts and be chased off by angry circus men. The gaudy canvases, stretched here and there, reminded him of what he had seen inside; and he eyed them affectionately.

Once there was a thrill of excitement for him, when the Indian warriors, their evening act over, hurried past him in a group and disappeared within the opening of a small tent, on the outskirts of the grounds.

Time passed, and it had struck nine o'clock a half hour ago. The show would be over in half an hour more. Young Joe Warren, who had seen the main circus in the afternoon and who was strolling in and about the side-shows, suddenly found himself accosted by Tim Reardon, who gasped out a greeting as though the words choked him.

"Hello, Tim," replied Joe, eying him with astonishment. "Say, what's the matter? Any of the snakes got loose? You look as though they were after you."

Tim was breathless, sure enough, as though he were being pursued. His very eyes seemed to have grown larger, and he was hardly able to stand still long enough to reply.

"Come on, Joe," he whispered. "I'll show you something. Better'n snakes, a big sight. Easy now, don't talk. Follow me."

Young Joe Warren, a boy slightly taller than Tim and perhaps a year older, ready at all times for a lark, followed his barefoot guide, but on the look-out, half suspecting it was one of Tim's tricks. They threaded their way through a maze of carts and circus paraphernalia, out to the edge of the grounds; past a line of small

tents, used as the encampment of the performers, to a grove of maple trees skirting the field.

"I say, Tim, what's up, anyway?" inquired Joe Warren presently. "You needn't think you can fool me—"

"Sh-h-h," warned Tim, turning and raising a hand to silence his companion. "Here he is."

He took a few steps forward, grasped Joe Warren's arm, brought him to a stand-still and pointed toward a figure that reclined upon a blanket spread beneath a tree.

"Well, what of it—what is it?" asked Joe Warren, "I don't see anything but somebody asleep."

Tim Reardon again gestured for silence and induced his companion to approach nearer. Whereupon he pointed gleefully at the face of the sleeper. Young Joe, bending down softly, beheld the painted features of the great chief, Red Bull.

"Hmph!" he exclaimed. "It's only one of the Injuns. Saw 'em at the show this afternoon."

Little Tim, in reply, seized Young Joe mysteriously by an arm, drew him away a few paces and whispered something, excitedly.

Young Joe gave a subdued roar.

"Cracky!" he cried, doubling up. "Tim, you're the craziest youngster. What put it into your head? We couldn't do it."

"No, you and I couldn't," answered Tim; "but the whole of us could—Jack Harvey and Henry Burns, and the rest of the fellers. Gee! Joe, just think of it. A real live Injun—a live one-'twould be just like the Last of the Mohigginses."

"What would we do with him if we got him?" asked Joe.

"Nothin'," replied Little Tim—"Oh, yes, we could,—take him off up stream to the camp and—dance 'round him, like they do in the show."

"Come on," said Joe Warren. "Let's find Jack and Henry Burns and George. They won't do it, though."

If one could have seen Henry Burns's eyes twinkle, when they had found the

three a few moments later, however, they would have thought differently.

"Tim, you're all right," he said. "But how could we get him away from here?"

"Why, get the wagon," said Young Joe. "Come on, George, will you? I'll go down to the house for it, if you'll join. 'Twon't take more'n half an hour. You find Tom and Bob; they're 'round somewhere. Then wait here till I come back."

Young Joe, reading a half consent in his elder brother's hesitation, darted away. George Warren was not keen for it, however.

"Tim, you and Joe are a couple of young idiots," he exclaimed. "We're not going to do any such fool thing as that. We couldn't do it, in the first place."

"Yes we can," argued Little Tim. "He ain't got his tomahawk nor any scalping knife. And he ain't very much bigger than Jack."

Harvey drew himself up and felt of his muscle.

"Tom and Bob could lick him, without the rest of us," continued Little Tim.

Tom and Bob, who had been added to the group, likewise flexed their biceps and thought how strong they were.

"I ain't afraid," said Harvey.

"Nor I," said Tom and Bob, respectively.

Thus they argued. A half hour went by, and the band inside the tent was making loud music as a youth darted up to them, out of breath with running.

"Come on," cried Young Joe, softly. "I've got the wagon over back in the grove, and some ropes, and some cloth. Come and take a look."

To look was to yield. The sleeping, snoring figure of the great chief, Red Bull, gave no signs of suspicious dreams when, some moments later, a band of boys approached noiselessly the place where he lay. The moment could not have been timed more opportunely for success. The circus was about breaking up for the night, and the great tent was buzzing and resounding with noise.

A half dozen figures suddenly sprang forward upon the slumbering chieftain. The arms of the dread Red Bull, seized respectively by Jack Harvey and Tom Harris, were quickly bound behind him. A light rope, wound securely about his ankles by George Warren, and made fast in sailor fashion, rendered him further

helpless; while, at the same time, a long strip of cloth, procured by Young Joe for the purpose, and swathed about his head, stifled his roars of rage and fright. Red Bull, the great Indian chief, the terror of the plains, was most assuredly a captive —an astounded and helpless Indian, if ever there was one.

Borne on the sturdy shoulders of his pale-face captors, Red Bull, bound and swathed, uttering smothered ejaculations through the cloth, was conveyed to the waiting wagon and driven away.

A little less than an hour from this time there arrived at the shore of Mill Stream a strange party, the strangest beyond all doubt that had come down to these shores since the days when the forefathers of circus chiefs had skimmed its waters in their birch canoes, carrying their captives not to pretended but to real torture.

Two canoes, brought down from an old shed, were launched now and floated close to shore. Into one of these was carried the helpless and enraged Red Bull, where he was propped up against a thwart. In front of him, on guard, squatted Little Tim. Jack Harvey and Henry Burns took their places, respectively, at stern and bow, equipped with paddles. The second canoe was hastily filled with the four others. They made a heavy load for each canoe, and brought them down low in the water.

"Easy now," cautioned Tom Harris, as the party started forth. "We're well down to the gunwales. No monkeying, or we'll upset."

They proceeded carefully and silently up stream, with the moon coming up over the still water to light them on their way.

A mile and a half up the stream, they paused where a shabby structure of rough boards, eked out with odds and ends of shingle stuff, with a rusty funnel protruding from the roof, showed a little back from shore, on a cleared spot amid some trees.

"Here's the camp," cried Harvey; and they grounded the canoes within its shadow.

The chief, Red Bull, clearly not resigned to his fate, but squirming helplessly, was conveyed up the bank and set down against a convenient stump. The canoes were drawn on shore, and the party gathered about him.

"What are we going to do with him, anyway, now we've got him?" inquired

George Warren.

"Oh, he's got to be tried by a war council," said Henry Burns; "and all of us are scouts, and we've got to tell how many pale-faces he's scalped, and then he's got to be sentenced to be put to torture and scalped and—and all that sort of thing. And then we'll dance around him and—and then by and by—well, I suppose we'll have to let him go. I don't know just how, but we'll arrange that. But we've got to have a fire first, to make it a real war council."

They had one going shortly, down near the shore, and casting a weird glare upon the scene.

After a preliminary dance about their captive, in which they lent colour to the picture by brandishing war-clubs and improvised tomahawks, they sat in solemn council on the chief.

"Fellow scouts," said Henry Burns, addressing his assembled followers, "this is the great Indian chief, Magua, the dog of the Wyandots—"

"Whoopee!" yelled Little Tim, "that's him. He killed Un-cuss, didn't he, Henry?"

"The brave scout has spoken well," replied Henry Burns. "This is the cruel dog of the Wyandots; slayer of the brave Uncas; shot at by Hawkeye, the friend of the Delawares—"

"I thought you said he killed him—in the book," cried Little Tim.

"Shut up, Tim," said Joe Warren.

"He's alive again," declared Henry Burns, solemnly. "He was only wounded.

"Here is the cruel Huron," continued Henry Burns, "delivered into our hands by that daring scout who knows no fear."

Little Tim grinned joyously at this praise from his leader.

"What shall we do with our captive?" solemnly inquired Henry Burns. "Shall we show mercy to the slayer of the brave Uncas? Shall we be women and let him go, to roam the forests and ravage the homes of our settlers, or shall he be put to death?"

"He must die," growled Scout Harvey. "The daring leader has spoken well. Is it not so, men?"

The doom of Red Bull, otherwise Magua, the dog of the Wyandots, was declared.

The death of the captive followed swiftly—in pantomime—the brave scouts, under the leadership of Henry Burns, performing a series of dances about the helpless one, accomplishing his end with imaginary tomahawk blows.

"Now he must be scalped," said Henry Burns. "What say you, men, shall we cast the lot to see who takes the scalp of Magua, the great chief of the Hurons?"

It was done. The short stick was drawn by Little Tim—to his inexpressible joy.

"Take the scalping-knife, brave scout," said Henry Burns, handing him a huge wooden affair, whittled out for the purpose. "The scalp of Magua the chief shall hang at the cabin of Swift Foot, the scout who captured him."

Swift Foot advanced to perform the last act in the drama. It was a weird and dreadful moment. The fire-light cast its flickering glow upon the doomed chief, his captors and the executioner. The form of Magua was seen to quiver, as though life was indeed not all extinct.

Swift Foot performed his grim office with a flourish. The wooden scalping-knife descended upon the gorgeous head-piece of the victim, which the scout grasped with his other hand and pulled as he drew the knife.

But at this moment the form beneath the knife wriggled in the hands of the executioner; lurched to one side, and the head-piece fell away, so true to life that an involuntary shudder went through the group, as though the act had really been accomplished. The flaunting head-piece of eagle feathers fell indeed away, clutched in the hand of Little Tim. And, at the same instant, by some loosening of the cloth, that, too, dropped down, freeing the jaws of the Indian chief.

To their amazement, the fire-light shone now not on the straight black hair of an Indian, but upon a towsled top-knot of unmistakable red. While from the parted lips of the figure there issued a sound that was not of the child of the forest.

"Tim Reardon, yer little divvle," cried the victim, glaring at the astounded youth with unfeigned rage, "it's yerself I'll be takin the hair off—yer little scallerwag—an the hide of yer, too. Sure an ye'll be doin some lively dancin' around when I git me two hands on yer. Scoutin' is it ye'll be doin? I'll scout ye and the likes of all er ye. Lemme go, I tell yer,—"

The scalping knife dropped from the palsied hand of Swift Foot, the scout. He stood, glaring wildly at the outraged captive.

"Danny O'Reilly!" he exclaimed, gasping for breath. "Oh, gimminy crickets!"

"Yes, an it's Danny O'Reilly that'll be scalpin' ye all over from head to foot to-morrow," cried the captive, wriggling in his bonds. "Lemme out er this, I tell yez. Sure an I've got a hand out now, and in a minnit I'll be showin' the likes of ye what it is to take an honest man away from his job with the circus."

True enough, in some way, by his wriggling, Danny O'Reilly was rapidly emerging, not only from his disguise as an Indian chief, but from his bonds as well. Panic seized upon the brave scouts—a panic born of dread of what might be in store in days to come. There was a rush to the canoes; a hasty scrambling aboard; a frenzied launching of the craft, and an ignominious flight from the place of execution.

Five minutes later, one walking the highway leading up from Benton might have beheld a strange figure, striding in to the city, breathing words of wrath upon the night air; a figure clad in Indian finery, but bearing the likeness beneath his war-paint of Daniel O'Reilly, a stalwart labourer of Benton, for the time being a valuable accession to the Bagley & Blondin great moral and scientific show.

CHAPTER VII

A LONG RACE BEGUN

The circus remained two days longer in Benton, but there were certain youths who kept away from it. A solemn oath of secrecy bound them as to the reason why. Only Tim Reardon and Joe Warren couldn't resist the temptation of stealing in among the wagons and watching for the appearance of Danny O'Reilly in all the glory of his paint and feathers; and, when they beheld a crowd of farmers gaze upon him admiringly as he passed in for the Wild West performance, they nearly choked to death with laughter, and couldn't have run if he had espied them.

"Guess we won't get licked, after all," whispered Little Tim. "Not if we keep dark, we won't. Danny's going on with the show up the state. He told Jimmy Nolan, his cousin, and Jimmy told me. 'You'd never guessed he wasn't an Injun,' says Jimmy to me, 'unless I'd told yer. Don't you ever let on,' he says—and I like to died—hello, who's that coming?"

Looking in the direction pointed out by Tim Reardon, Young Joe beheld an old wagon, drawn by a lean horse, the seat of the wagon nearly bent down to the axles on one side by the weight of the occupant.

"Well, if it isn't Colonel Witham!" exclaimed Young Joe. "Didn't suppose he'd pay to go to a circus."

It seemed, however, that Colonel Witham had no immediate intention of entering the main tent, for he proceeded to walk along the line of smaller pavilions, where the side-shows proclaimed their many and monstrous attractions. The canvas of one of these presently attracted the colonel's attention, for he paused in front of it and stood studying it contemplatively.

Little Tim and Young Joe, stealing around in the rear of Colonel Witham, beheld the object of his curiosity. There was a full length portrait on the canvas, painted in brilliant colours, of a woman standing before an urn from which vague vapours were arising. She held in one hand a wand, with which she seemed in the act of conjuring forth a shadowy figure from within the vapours. A little black satanic imp peered coyly over her right shoulder. The inscription beneath

her portrait read:

Lorelei, the Sorceress.
Your Future Foretold—All Mysteries Explained—Your Fate Read by the Stars—Hidden Things Revealed—Lost Property Recovered.

Something about the gaudy and pretentious sign seemed to fascinate Colonel Witham. He walked past it once, reading it out of the corner of one eye; but he went only a little way beyond, then turned and stopped and surveyed it once more. He edged up to the canvas, sidled into the entrance and disappeared.

"Cracky!" cried Young Joe. "Isn't that rich? The colonel's going to have his fortune told. Wow! wow! Suppose he's fallen in love?"

"Not much," said Little Tim. "He wants to know where he's lost a dollar, probably. Hello, Allan, come over here."

Little Tim, in high glee, bawled out a greeting to a comrade, Allan Harding, and conveyed the great news. The three stood awaiting the colonel's reappearance.

If they could have seen within the tent, they might have beheld Colonel Witham, seated at a table upon which a light was thrown, its object being not so much to illuminate the occupant of the seat as to obscure his vision. It served to render more shadowy a vague figure that occupied a little booth across which a gauze curtain hung, and from which a voice now issued:

"I see a dusty road, with fields running back from it," droned the voice, with mysterious monotony, while the person behind the veil scrutinized keenly the figure and dress of her visitor. "I see a great house a little way back from the road, with—with what seems to be a porch in front."

"Yes, yes," said Colonel Witham, beginning to be impressed, ignoring the fact that his person indicated his occupation and that the description would answer almost every farmhouse along the road from Benton.

"I see a figure sitting on the porch, and it resembles—yes, it is yourself. You are thinking. There is something that you want to know. You do not seem to be in love—"

Colonel Witham snorted—and the hint to the sorceress was sufficient.

"The stars are very clear on that point," continued the voice. "Your mind is bent on more serious things. You have a business matter that troubles you."

"Wonderful!" ejaculated Colonel Witham, under his breath. "What else do you see?" he inquired, eagerly.

"Let me read the stars," continued the voice. "I see what looks like another man."

"Yes, yes," said Witham, forgetting in his eagerness that he had come in, half skeptical, and meant to reveal nothing on his own part. "Is he hiding anything?"

"Wait—not so fast," replied the voice. Then, after a pause, "No, he is not hiding anything."

Colonel Witham's jaw dropped.

"But," continued the sorceress, "there is something strange about him. Wait, until I ask the spirits. They will tell something. Yes, he has something already hidden. It is secreted. He has hidden something away. Let me see, are they papers? They look like papers, but it is vague—"

"And where are they hidden?" cried Colonel Witham, rising from his seat eagerly.

"The spirits will not say," answered the voice. "They seem to be angry at something. Ah, they say they must have more money."

"But I paid at the door," protested Colonel Witham.

"Yes, but they are angry," said the voice. "They are angry at me for taking so little for all I impart. They will have two dollars more, or—yes, they are already disappearing—quick, or you will be too late."

Colonel Witham groaned in anguish; slowly produced a shabby wallet, took therefrom two greasy dollar bills and passed them across the table to an outstretched hand.

"Ah, they are coming back," said the voice. "Another moment and it would have been too late. Now the stars are coming out clearer also. What is it they tell? Ah, they say—listen—they say the man has concealed papers that are wanted by you—concealed them *in his place of business*."

"Yes, yes, but where?" cried Colonel Witham. "In the safe, or around the

machinery—where-abouts?"

"Listen," said the voice. "The spirits seem angry again—"

"Let 'em be angry!" bellowed Colonel Witham. "They'll not get another cent, confound 'em!"

"Softly, softly," said the voice soothingly, "The spirits are greatly agitated by loud words. And the stars are growing dim once more. The spirits want no more money. They will tell you all; that is, all you need to know. Listen: They say you will find the papers. But you must be patient. They are hidden in a building where there are wheels turning rapidly. And the spirits say the noise hurts their ears. They say, though, that you must wait a little while, and then you will go into the building and find them. That is all now. You will certainly get them. The spirits are gone. They will not come back again to-day."

The voice became silent; and Colonel Witham sat sheepishly in his chair. Then he arose and walked slowly to the doorway. Had he been fooled? He did not know. It was certainly strange: how the voice had described his hotel—a big house with a porch—and he looking out—and the other man—the man that had hidden the papers. No, there was something remarkable about it all. He would surely get them. Colonel Witham emerged from the tent.

A chorus of three young voices greeted him:

"Hello, Colonel Witham, been having your fortune told? Tell us what the witch said, will you, colonel?"

The colonel, gazing at the grinning faces of Tim and Joe Warren and Allan Harding, flushed purple and raised his cane, wrathfully.

"You little ras—" he began, but bethought himself and halted. "Ho, ho," he said, looking half ashamed. "That was only a joke. Just took a notion to see how funny it was. Here boy, give these lads some peanuts." The colonel produced a dime from his trousers pocket.

"Say, Tim," said Joe Warren some moments later, "I guess the colonel is in love, after all. Ten cents' worth of peanuts! My, he's got it bad. Let's go tell Henry Burns."

A day or two following, toward the end of a pleasant afternoon, Tim Reardon and his friend, Allan Harding, sat by the shore of Mill stream watching a small

fleet of canoes engaged in active manoeuvring. It was at a point on the stream opposite the scene of the execution of the great Indian chief, where the small cabin stood. Back from this a few rods was an old barn, of which the boys of Benton rented a small section for the storage of canoes and paddles.

There were four canoes now upon the stream, each containing two occupants. The eight canoeists were stripped for the work, showing a gorgeous, if somewhat worn, array of sleeveless jerseys. The boys were bronzed and healthy looking. Back and forth they darted across the stream from shore to shore; or again, tried short spurts up and down stream.

"What are they going to do, Tim?" inquired his companion.

"Don't you know?" queried Tim, by way of reply. "Say, it's going to be the dandiest race ever. Start to-morrow morning right after breakfast from in front of the cabin, and go straight up stream all day long. Only when Jack blows the horn at noon everybody's got to stop and go ashore and eat something. Then they start again when Jack blows for 'em to. And paddle like everything all the afternoon till six o'clock. Then stop again when Jack blows, and leave every canoe just where it is.

"Then they get together and pitch tents and camp all night, and race back next day. And everybody has got to come up to where the first canoe is before they turn back. Henry Burns, he got it up. I'll bet he and Jack win the race, too."

"What'll you bet?" demanded Allan Harding, who had been eying the canoeists sharply.

"Thousand dollars," replied Tim, promptly, shoving his grimy hands into pockets that contained several marbles, a broken-bladed knife and other valuables.

"Well," replied Allan Harding, cautiously, "mebbe you're right, but I guess those fellows in the green canoe stand a good chance. Look how strong they are. Say, who are they, anyway?"

"Hm! Jack Harvey's stronger'n any of them," asserted Jim loyally, eying his stalwart friend, as a canoe passed containing Harvey and Henry Burns. "Those other chaps are Jim and John Ellison. They live up on the farm above here. That's what makes 'em strong. But you know Jack. Didn't he make us stand around, aboard the *Surprise*?"

"Well, who's going to win, Tim?" called Tom Harris, as he skilfully turned the

canoe paddled by himself and Bob White, to avoid collision with one which held George and Arthur Warren.

"'Spose you think you are," answered Tim, "because you and Bob know how to paddle best. Look out for Jack, though."

Tom Harris laughed. "You'd bet on Jack if he had a broken arm," he said.

"Count us last, I guess," said George Warren, good-naturedly. "We're pretty new at it. Going in for the fun of it. Hello, who's this coming?"

"Look out, Jim, it's Benny," exclaimed the elder of the Ellison brothers.

"I don't care. I won't stand any nonsense from him," replied his brother, a handsome young fellow, athletic, but slightly smaller than the other.

Just what he meant by this remark was best explained when Benjamin Ellison, strolling lazily down to the shore, paused in the process of devouring a huge piece of molasses cake and said, in a sneering tone:

"My, Johnnie, don't you and Jim look fine though, with city chaps? What'll Uncle Jim say when I tell him—"

He didn't get much further, for a canoe shot in to shore, and from the bow of it sprang John Ellison. He seized his cousin by the shoulder.

"You will tell tales, will you?" he cried.

"Let me alone," replied the other, striving to shake off John Ellison's grasp, but failing. Then he added, as the other canoes came in to shore and the boys stepped out of them. "Can't you take a joke?"

"No, not when you've done the same kind of a thing before," exclaimed John Ellison. "Come on, fellows, in with him."

Ready for any kind of a rough joke, several of the canoeists laid hands on the unfortunate Benjamin.

"Most too many against one," remarked Henry Burns, quietly. "Better let him go."

"No, he's got to be ducked," insisted John Ellison, whose anger was aroused.

"Well, only a little one," assented Harvey, grinning good-naturedly. So they held the luckless youth heels over head and plunged his head beneath the surface up to his coat-collar. He was sputtering wrathfully as they lifted him out again.

"Going to tell on us?" cried John Ellison.

Benjamin Ellison glared at his cousin, doubtfully.

"Once more," said John Ellison; and they put the victim's head under again.

He wasn't hurt and his clothes were still dry; but he was whining, and he begged

for mercy after the second ducking.

"I won't tell," he said.

"Honest?"

"Honest Injun!"

They let him go, and he departed hastily up through the field.

"Tell, will he?" queried Harvey, as Benjamin departed.

"Guess not," replied John Ellison. "He's got enough. He'd like to, though. He don't like you city fellows any better than father does. He hasn't got anything against you, either. He's too lazy to paddle. Come on, Jim, let's follow him up. Well be on hand to-morrow, if there's no trouble."

The brothers took up their canoe and left the party.

"They're all right, those Ellison chaps," said Harvey; "all except Benny. He's no good. Come on, fellows, let's lock up, and no walking in to town, remember. Running's good for the wind. Coming along, Tim?"

"No, I'm going to sleep in the cabin," replied Tim Reardon, "and see the start in the morning."

"Guess I will, too," said Allan Harding. So the two remained, while the troop of canoeists set off soon after, on the run back to Benton.

The following morning, the first of a double holiday, came in bright and clear. Little Tim and his companion were early astir, and cooking a mess of oatmeal from the cabin's scanty stores over a cracked sheet iron stove.

"There they come," cried Tim presently, as the sounds of fresh, boyish voices came from outside. "Hooray! I wish 'twas a yacht race, though. Wouldn't I go along?"

By nine o'clock the four canoes were fully equipped, drawn up in line off the cabin, and the canoeists, paddles in hand, arms bared, and sweaters tied around the thwarts, were ready to start. Jim and John Ellison were there, a sturdy pair of farm lads; Jack Harvey, apparently much over-matching his mate in physique, but with something in the slighter figure of Henry Burns that indicated resource and staying powers; Tom and Bob, old and hardened canoeists; and George and

Arthur Warren, clean-cut and athletic.

"Ready for the horn!" called Harvey, holding his paddle in his right hand and a long, tin horn in the other.

"All ready!" sang out the canoeists.

Harvey put the horn to his lips and blew a loud, full blast. The paddles struck the water with a vigour, and the race was begun.

The three canoes shot ahead of Harvey's at the start, owing to the slight delay caused him in dropping the horn.

"Let them lead, Jack," said Henry Burns, quietly. "It's a two days' race. Take it easy."

"That's so," said Harvey, half pausing in a stroke in which he had started to exert his strength to the utmost. "Lucky I've got you. You always keep cool. How do you manage to do it?"

Henry Burns smiled, but made no reply. Instead, he pointed ahead to where the Ellison brothers, putting their strength into their work, were showing several rods of clear water between them and the two nearest canoes, which were going along side by side.

"They've got the race won in the first five minutes," said Henry Burns. "See Tom and Bob take it easy till they get limbered up."

The two thus indicated were, indeed, setting an example worthy to be followed. They had started off at an easy, regular stroke, one which they could keep up for hours and increase when they should see fit. They were paying no attention to the leading canoe, but were exchanging a word or two with the Warrens, who were striving to imitate their course and pace.

The first mile and a half that intervened between the starting point and the Ellison dam was quickly covered. The Ellison boys, still leading, were out on shore and carrying their canoe up the bank when the others were still some rods away. It was a steep pitch of the shore, and Tom and Bob, when they came to it, took it leisurely, saving their wind. The others followed, in like fashion. Harvey and Henry Burns were the last to make the portage.

Once around the dam, on higher level, the canoes were launched again, and the

race continued.

A little way up the shore from the dam, Tom and Bob and the Warren boys, some distance ahead of the rear canoe, saw an odd little figure swinging and swaying in the top of a birch tree overhanging the water. The Ellison boys had passed her unnoticed. Her bit of skirt fluttering, and her hair waving, showed that the occupant of this novel swing was a girl.

All at once, to their horror, she seemed to slip and fall. Down she came from her perch, struck the water with a splash and sank beneath the surface.

Tom and Bob, driving their paddles into the water with desperate energy, darted on ahead of the Warren boys, who bent to the paddles and shot after them. The two canoes fairly flew through the water, while the four occupants gazed anxiously ahead over the surface for signs of the girl's reappearance.

To their amazement, a laughing voice hailed them most unexpectedly, from shore. They looked toward the bank, where, just emerging, dripping wet, the girl was waving a hand to them.

"How was that for a dive?" she called, pushing her wet hair back from her eyes, and looking at them roguishly.

"Bully!" exclaimed George Warren, wiping the drops of perspiration from his forehead. "We thought you had fallen. My, but it gave me a scare."

The girl's eyes danced with merriment. Then espying the other canoe coming up, she called, "Hello, you back again? Look out Ellison don't catch you."

"It's Bess Thornton," said Henry Burns, and the two boys called out a greeting to her.

"Say, do you know Tim Reardon?" she asked abruptly.

"Why, yes," answered Henry Burns. "Should say we did."

"Well," said Bess Thornton, "tell him you saw me dive from the tree, will you? He didn't think I dared, when I told him." Then she added, laughing, "Don't get rained on again. But if you do, remember the mill." And she danced away, wringing the water from the hem of her short skirt.

"Confound her!" exclaimed Harvey. "Look at the start Jim and John have got. Come on, Henry."

They pushed on again, Tom and Bob soon taking the lead of the three rear canoes, with a strong steady stroke that meant business. The first canoe was by this time a quarter of a mile ahead.

CHAPTER VIII

CONQUERING THE RAPIDS

This part of the stream, for some two miles above the Ellison dam, was deep, still water, lying between quite steep banks, and there was little perceptible current. So that now, the water being unruffled by any wind, the four canoes shot ahead at good speed, retaining generally their relative positions.

Tom and Bob gradually quickened their stroke, hoping to make some slight but sure gain on the leaders; but the Ellison brothers were evidently of a mind to hold their lead as long as possible, and continued to do so. This, however, was at the cost of some extra exertion, which might tell in the long run.

In the course of half an hour, after leaving the dam, the current began to flow faster against them; now and then it came down over shoals of quite an incline, so that they made better headway by getting out their setting-poles and using them, instead of the paddles.

Then, at a point a mile farther up stream, they came to rapids of some considerable extent, flowing quite swiftly and boiling here and there around sunken rocks. The Ellison brothers had avoided this place, and were to be seen now, on the right bank of the shore, carrying their canoe with difficulty.

The shore here was broken up by the out-cropping of ledges, amid the breaks of which a canoe must be carried with great care, as a false step would mean a bad fall and perhaps the smashing of the canoe. The only other alternative, besides the water, was to make a long detour through the off-lying fields, with loss of time.

Tom and Bob guided their craft swiftly in to land and proceeded to drag it ashore, as the Ellison boys had done. The Warren brothers followed, and Jack Harvey was turning his canoe in the same direction when a word from his companion caused him to cease paddling.

"Jack," said Henry Burns, "I think we could make the rapids. What do you say? If we win out, we may be in time to call the Ellison fellows back."

It was a rule of the race that, if a canoe succeeded in ascending any difficult place in the stream, the successful pair was entitled to call back any of the other canoes that were still carrying around the place, and make them do likewise. If, however, any of the canoeists had made the carry completely, and had launched their craft above, they could not be called back.

The Ellison brothers were about half way up the carry at this time.

"I don't think we could do it, Henry," answered Harvey, to the other's suggestion. "We could get part of the way up, all right, but the last few rods are too steep."

He pointed, as he spoke, to the upper incline of the rapids, which was, indeed, much sharper than the first of the ascent, bending over from the higher level of the stream abruptly, like a sheet of rounded, polished ebony; flowing smoothly but with great swiftness; then broken here and there below with rocks, sharp and jagged, and foaming threateningly as it whirled past them.

"I think we can do it, Jack," insisted Henry Burns, quietly. "I remember the place. The water was a little higher when we came through in the rain; but we ran these rapids, and don't you remember, half way down that steepest part, we thought we were going to hit a sunken ledge—just to the right of the middle of the slope?"

"Why, yes, seems to me I do," replied Harvey, gazing ahead. "But I didn't care much what we hit that evening, I was so wet and tired."

"Well, look now," continued Henry Burns. "You can see the water whirling at that very spot. The ledge doesn't show above water, but it's there. What's the matter with working up to that, hanging on it till we get rested, and then make one quick push up over the top?"

"Oh, well," said Harvey, "I'm game. You seem to guess things right. We'll try it, anyway."

They pushed on into the first of the rapids, while the Ellison brothers, turning and espying what they were attempting, redoubled their efforts to make the carry. Tom and Bob cast a glance back, and also continued along the carry; but George and Arthur Warren, having seen Henry Burns's schemes work successfully before, turned and came out to the rapids. There they waited, ready to make the attempt should they see it prove successful, or to be in a position to put hurriedly for shore should it prove a failure.

"Better come on. You're wasting time," called Tom Harris once, as he set his end of their canoe down on a shelf of ledge. But Henry Burns made no reply, while Harvey only waved his paddle defiantly.

For several rods, Harvey and Henry Burns made fair progress, working quick and sharp, plying their paddles with rapid thrusts. Little clumps of white froth floated fast by them, indicating the swift running of the water, and its disturbance. Then the stronger current caught them, and they barely forged ahead. By the appearance of the water, looking down upon it as they struggled, they seemed to be flying; but it was the water, and not they, that was moving rapidly. They hung close by the little points of projecting ledge for moments at a time, making no headway. They redoubled their efforts, drove their paddles through the water with desperate energy, and gained the first mark they had set.

Slowly the bow of the canoe crept up to a spot where the keen eyes of Henry Burns had noted the sunken ledge, at a point only a rod from the upper incline. This ledge did not show above water, but the boiling of the stream and an almost imperceptible sloping of the surface on either hand showed that it was there.

Henry Burns leaned over the side of the canoe and gazed anxiously. Should the water there prove deeper than he had hoped, they would not ground, and must be carried back, their strength exhausted. But he had not been mistaken.

In a moment the water suddenly shallowed. A hard thrust with the paddles, and the canoe grated gently.

"Easy, Jack," cried Henry Burns. "She's hit. Get out the pole."

Harvey seized the setting-pole from the bottom of the canoe, dropping his paddle in its place. He thrust it quick and with all his strength into the swift-running water. At a depth of about three feet it caught the rocky bottom and held. Harvey braced with the pole and shoved the bow of the canoe, which had touched on the part of the ledge that was close to the surface, a little farther ahead.

"Great!" shouted Henry Burns. "Take it easy now. She'll stay if the pole don't slip."

Harvey relaxed his exertions, holding the pole at an angle sufficient to keep the canoe where it was, with only slight pressure. Henry Burns, dropping his own paddle and likewise taking up his setting-pole, got a grip in the rocks and aided his companion. They could rest now, with the swift water rushing past them on

either bow, and recover their wind and strength for the final struggle.

Their plan was, when they should have rested, to let the canoe drop back about a foot, enough to clear the sunken ledge; then, before the current should catch them, to shove out into it quickly, turn the bow of the canoe to meet the rush of the rapids, and push over with the poles, by main strength. They could do it, if, as Henry Burns expressed it, the canoe "did not get away from them."

The five minutes they waited seemed like hours. Away up along the carry, they could see the Ellison brothers, lifting their canoe across the broken bits of shore; Tom and Bob some way behind these, hurrying as fast as they dared over the treacherous footing. But now, as they gathered their strength, and gently shoved their canoe back, a cry from Tom, who had noted their move, arrested the progress of the Ellison boys. They paused for a moment and, with Tom and Bob, watched the outcome, eagerly.

Alas! it was sharp and bitter for Henry Burns. The canoe hung for a moment, as they arrested its drifting with strong thrusts of the poles. Then it shot ahead, as they pushed its nose diagonally out into the sharp slope of the rapids. Henry Burns thrust his pole down hard, as they cleared the sunken ledge, to swing the bow straight into the current. But the bottom proved treacherous.

It was all over so quickly that neither he nor Harvey knew hardly how it had happened. He only knew that the pole did not catch, but instead, struck the slippery face of a smooth bit of the rocky channel, slipped, gave way, and that he barely recovered his balance to avoid going overboard.

The next moment, the canoe had swung around, receiving the full force of the current broadside. A moment more, they were running with it and being borne down to where George and Arthur Warren greeted them with cries—not all sympathetic—of "hard luck."

They had hardly got their canoe under control and turned it into an eddy, and had realized the unhappy turn of affairs, when a shout of derision and triumph came down to them from the Ellisons. They had made the carry successfully and were launching their canoe in the smooth water above.

The Warren boys lost no time in paddling for shore. Tom and Bob, seeing the discomfiture of their rivals, quickly picked up their canoe and proceeded along the carry. Harvey looked inquiringly at Henry Burns, who turned, smiling and unruffled.

"Well?" said Harvey, "got enough?"

"No," replied Henry Burns, and added deliberately, with a twinkle in his eyes, "we might as well do it, now we've started. We've got two days to get up over there in, you know."

"Good for you!" exclaimed Harvey. "Come on, if you're ready. We've got time yet before Tom and Bob make the carry."

They bent to the paddles and got once more to the sunken ledge, panting and perspiring, for they had worked hard and the current seemed, therefore, even swifter now than before. There, holding their canoe in place, they waited a little longer than on the first attempt, to rest and study the current.

"Let's try the right hand from the ledge this time," said Henry Burns. "Those whirls mean shallow places. Perhaps the bottom isn't so slippery."

He pointed at some almost imperceptible breaks in the ebony surface of the slope, and Harvey agreed.

"I can shove this canoe up over there as sure as you're alive," said Harvey, gazing proudly at a pair of muscular arms that were certainly eloquent of strength; "that is, if you can keep her head straight. Don't try to do much of the poling. Just try to hold what I gain each time, till I can get a fresh hold. What do you say—rested enough?"

"Aye, aye, captain," replied Henry Burns, coolly. "Up we go."

Again the canoe dropped back a little from the ledge, and again they caught and held it and shoved out into the current—this time on the right, instead of the left side.

Their comrades ashore watched anxiously. They saw the canoe strike the swift running of the water and hang for a moment, as if irresolute, uncertain whether it would turn its bow upstream or be swerved broadside. The moment it hung there seemed minutes in duration. They saw Henry Burns, lithe and agile, but cool and self-possessed, strike his pole into the slope of the water where he had seen a shallow spot. And the pole held.

The watchers ashore saw the canoe slowly turn and face the swift current, lying upon its polished slope as though upon a sheet of glass. They saw Harvey in the stern set his pole and shove mightily, his muscles knotted and his face drawn and

grim with determination. They saw the canoe slowly gain against the current.

"THE WATCHERS ASHORE SAW THE CANOE SLOWLY TURN AND FACE THE SWIFT CURRENT."

At the edge of the slope it stood still for what seemed an age. They saw the two in bow and stern struggle desperately again and again to wrest their craft from the clutch of the current. Then, almost with a leap, freed from the fierce resistance of the rapids, the canoe slid over the brink of the incline, into the deeper part of the stream above.

A moment later, they saw the poles dropped and the paddles snatched up. The canoe shot swiftly ahead, propelled by triumphant arms. The rapids were conquered. Henry Burns and Harvey had won their hard fight.

In vain had Tom and Bob, hurrying recklessly, bumping their canoe along the rough shore, essayed to complete the carry before it would be too late. To their chagrin and dismay, the sound of a horn blown three times with a vigour announced to them the triumph of their comrades. Sadly they shouldered their canoe, which they had set down at the first blast of the horn, and turned their faces back along the trail, toward the foot of the rapids.

Likewise, the Warren boys, accepting the inevitable, turned back and prepared to attempt the difficult feat which they had seen accomplished. At all events, they were, by reason of their position in the rear of Tom and Bob, in possession of that much advantage over the more skilled canoeists.

"Whew! but that was a tough one," exclaimed Harvey, dipping his paddle leisurely, and recovering his breath. "Say, look at poor old Tom and Bob—the champion canoeists. Bet they feel sore."

Henry Burns turned, looked back and smiled. Then, gazing up stream again, he said, "Yes, but look there."

At a bend of the stream, fully a half mile ahead, the first canoe was gliding easily

along.

Harvey groaned. "And they'd be back there, too," he exclaimed, "if we hadn't made that slip. Never mind, there's another day coming."

It seemed a long, long time, and they, themselves, had reached a point fully a half mile above the rapids, before they espied first one canoe and then another achieving the incline. They could not discern which was in the lead, but it proved later to be the canoe handled by Tom and Bob, the Warrens having made two failures before succeeding, giving time to the others to come up and pass them. They were about abreast now, coming along slowly.

It was smooth paddling now, along the shores of green meadows and pasture land, until noon arrived. Then, at the signal of four blasts of the horn, by Harvey, answered in turn by all the others above and below, the canoes were drawn out on shore and luncheon was eaten. They built no fires, but ate what they had brought, cold. With an hour to rest in, the leaders strolled back to where Harvey and Henry Burns were, and chaffed them good-naturedly on their failure to make them take the rapids, and over their own strong lead. To which, Harvey and Henry Burns, being good sportsmen, replied good-humouredly, assuring the Ellisons they should beat them on "the next hard place."

The other canoeists remained where they were, and ate their luncheons together.

CHAPTER IX

AN EXCITING FINISH

When, at about two o'clock that afternoon, the sound of the horn, blown four times by Jack Harvey, announced that the race was resumed, there was a do-or-die expression on the faces of Tom Harris and Bob White. Harvey and Henry Burns were a good half mile ahead of them; the Ellisons fully a mile.

Not that this was disheartening to athletic lads in good training, who had learned in many a contest of skill and strength to accept a result fairly won, even though they were beaten. On the contrary, here was a contest worth the winning, now that the odds were against them. Their first pique, over the clever move of Henry Burns that had set them back in the race, having subsided, they were ready to give him credit for carrying it out.

But they were still bound to win. So that soon, settling down to a strong, vigorous stroke, which had often carried them over miles of rough water in Samoset Bay, they gradually drew ahead of George and Arthur Warren. They seemed tireless. Their muscles, trained and hardened, worked like well oiled machinery. In vain the Warren brothers strove to keep up the pace. They were forced finally to fall back. That quick, powerful thrust of the paddles, as Tom and Bob struck the water with perfect precision, sent the light canoe spurting ahead in a way that could not be equalled by less trained rivals.

Henry Burns and Jack Harvey, toiling manfully, seemed to feel that they, too, were being out-paddled; for ever and again one of them would glance back over his shoulder; after which he would strike the water with a sharper thrust, and the canoe would respond to the fresh endeavour.

"They'll gain some," said Henry Burns once, calmly. "We can't help that. They've had too many years of it, not to be able to set a stronger pace. But they can't catch us in one afternoon. If they do, we're beaten. We'll hold some of our advantage, eh, Jack?"

"You bet we will!" exclaimed Harvey, jabbing the water savagely. "I'm going to make a gain, myself, if only for a spurt."

So saying, he called to his companion to "give it to 'em lively," and they set a pace for the next fifteen minutes that did, indeed, exceed the speed at which Tom and Bob were travelling. But spurts such as that would not win a two days' race. Gradually they fell back into their normal swing, and Tom and Bob crept up on them once more.

The Ellisons, too, were feeling the strain of the long test of skill and endurance. Now, as the afternoon hours went by, their stroke fell off slower and slower. Heavier built somewhat than Tom and Bob, their muscles, hardened and more sluggish with harder work, did not respond to the call. Harvey and Henry Burns were gaining on them; and Tom and Bob were gaining on both.

On went the four canoes; up rapids or around them, as proved necessary according to the depth of the water. Harvey and Henry Burns, seeing they were gaining on the leaders, would take no more chances on questionable rapids, but carried around those that the Ellisons did. Tom and Bob and the Warrens also took the readiest way around each difficulty.

Had the race a few more hours to run for that afternoon, it is certain Tom and Bob must have overtaken and passed their rivals. But now the time for the end of the first day's contest was at hand, and presently Harvey, after a glance at his watch, lifted the horn to his lips. Four blasts sounded far up and down the still waters, and four answering blasts came from each canoe. The first day's race was done. The canoes headed for shore. It was six o'clock, and the Ellisons were still in the lead.

But the margin was not now so great. Between them and the nearest canoe there was not over a quarter of a mile of winding stream. Harvey and Henry Burns had done well. But Tom and Bob had accomplished even more. Scarcely more than an eighth of a mile intervened between their craft and the canoe of Harvey and Henry Burns. The Warrens had paddled gamely, also, but were fully three quarters of a mile behind the leaders.

Leaving their canoes drawn up on shore, at precisely the spot where each had been at the sound of the horn, the boys met together now and shook hands all around. It was clean, honest sport, and no mean jealousy.

"But look out for to-morrow," said Tom Harris, good-naturedly shaking a fist at Jim Ellison.

They brought forth now from each canoe a light frame-work of three bamboo

poles, standards and cross-piece, and a thin, unbleached cotton "A" tent, and quickly pitched the four tents on a level piece of ground, in a semi-circle. The tents were flimsy affairs, light to carry, and would not do in rainy weather; but they had picked their day, and it was clear and no danger of a wetting.

Then, for there had been a careful division of weight, each canoe furnished some necessary article for getting the supper: a pail for boiling coffee from one, fry-pan from another, and so on; with bacon for frying, and bread and potatoes. They soon had a fire going in the open space in front of the four tents, with a log rolled close to it, and the coffee-pail hung on a crotched stick, set aslant the log and braced in the ground. The bacon sizzled later in the pan, set on some glowing coals. The potatoes were buried in the hot ashes, under the blaze, just out of reach of burning.

The canoeists stretched themselves on the ground around the fire, hungry and healthfully wearied. Twilight was upon them when all was ready, and they had removed the feast away from the warmth of the fire, piling on more wood and making it blaze up brightly for its cheer.

Then they fell to with amazing appetites; and the amount of crisp bacon and hot potatoes and bread they made way with would have appalled the proprietor of the Half Way House, or any other hotel keeper, if he had had to supply it. Then, when they had startled the cattle in near-by pastures with a few songs, heartily if not so musically bawled, they were ready to turn in for the night, almost with the glowing of the first stars. It was surprising how soon they were off to sleep, each rolled in his single blanket, slumbering soundly on the bare turf.

"Well?" remarked Henry Burns inquiringly, next morning, sitting up and looking at his companion, who had scarcely got his eyes open. Harvey gave a yawn, stretched and roused up. "I feel fine," he answered. "Lame any?" "Not a bit," replied Henry Burns.

Stepping outside the tent, he found, to his surprise, Tom and Bob already up and their tent and blankets snugly packed and stowed.

"Have a plunge?" asked Bob.

"Yes," said Henry Burns. "Come on, Jack?"

The four went down to the shore, leaving the others still finishing their morning naps. One quick plunge and they were out again, ready for breakfast. It was plain

they were ready for the day's race. So said Jim and John Ellison, when they were out, some minutes later. But Henry Burns gave a sly wink at Harvey, as his sharp eye observed the motions of the brothers when they came to strike their tent. Nor did he fail to note the quickness with which Jim Ellison dropped his right arm, when he had raised it once over his head.

"Just a bit lame," said Henry Burns, softly. "We'll give it to 'em hard at the start, before they get limbered up."

Breakfast eaten, and the camp equipments stowed, they all proceeded now to the spot where the Ellisons' canoe was drawn ashore. There they set up a pole cut for the purpose. It marked the turning point of the race. At the signal, the Ellisons could start down stream from there; and each canoe must go up stream to that point before it could begin its home run.

It was a race now, as Henry Burns expressed it, for glory and for dinner. They had eaten their stock of food and would stop for nothing more till they reached camp. They had covered some fifteen miles of water, up stream against rapids and the current, in the preceding day's paddling; but they could make it down stream in about half the time.

They were soon afloat now, for Harvey was impatient to be off, and he was by consent the one to give the signal. The Ellison brothers would gladly have delayed, but Harvey, at a word from Henry Burns, was firm.

They took their places, struck the water together at the sound of the horn, and the second day's race was begun.

Confident as were the occupants of the second and third canoes, it was a bit disconcerting, at the outset, to see the leaders go swiftly past them on the way down stream, while they had still to go on against the current up to the turning point. Moreover, the leading canoe quickly caught a patch of swift running water, which the Ellisons had carried around the day before, but could run now, by merely guiding their canoe. So, at the start, they made an encouraging gain, and turned once, at the foot of some rapids, to wave back defiance at their opponents.

Skill and training were bound to tell, however. In the miles that were reeled off rapidly now, the second and third canoes gained on the leaders in the calm, still, sluggish places. There was more spring and snap to their muscles. Their canoes moved faster through the water.

Eight miles down stream, they were overhauling the foremost canoe rapidly, the canoes of Tom and Bob and Henry Burns and Harvey being nearly abreast, and the four straining every nerve and muscle. The Warrens had fallen at least a half mile behind them.

Luck had been with the Ellisons, surely; for running rapids in shallow water is most uncertain work. Tom and Bob, old canoeists, knew well the appearance of water that denotes a sunken rock, and by sheer skill and watchfulness turned their canoe aside ever and again with a quick sweep of the paddles, to avoid a treacherous place, where the water whirled ominously. Henry Burns and Harvey had lately come down the stream, and knew by that experience how easy it was to get hung up when it was least expected.

Yet, with all experience, now and again a canoe would grate and perhaps hang for a moment in some rapid; and once, when the canoe of Tom and Bob would have shot ahead of Harvey's, they went hard aground, and lost precious minutes.

When they were within a mile of the rapids where Henry Burns had won honours on the preceding day, however, Tom and Bob had shown the proof of their superior training and skill; they were leading Harvey and Henry Burns and were close upon the leaders.

"Cheer up, Jack," said Henry Burns, coolly, to his comrade; "they ought to win, but we've given them a good race, anyway. Something may happen yet."

And something did happen—but not to the canoe steered by Tom Harris.

The three foremost canoes were now upon the brink of the worst rapids, and each youth was bracing himself for the run. They saw the Ellisons shoot quickly over the brink, go swiftly down the smooth incline into the rougher water. All at once, the canoe seemed to be checked abruptly and hang for a moment. Then it slid on again. But the damage had been done. A sharp point of ledge had penetrated the canvas, and the canoe was leaking.

Down went the two next canoes, one after the other; deftly handled; sheering a little this way and that, as the watchful eyes detected the signs of danger; riding gallantly through the frothing, fretting rapids into clear water beyond. Their pace was not abated much as they got into their swing again, and, one by one, they passed the Ellisons. The latter's canoe, encumbered by water that leaked slightly but steadily through the rent in the canvas, dragged somewhat and had to be bailed before they had gone a half mile further.

That afternoon, a boy, barefoot and hatless, stood by the shore at a point a little way above the Ellison dam, anxiously watching up stream as far as he could see. That he was intensely excited was evident by the way he fidgeted about; and once he climbed a birch tree that overhung the water and gazed away from that perch.

"Hello, Tim," said a voice close by him, suddenly. "What are you looking for?"

"Oh, hello, Bess," responded Tim Reardon, turning about in surprise. "How you startled me! I'm watching for the canoes—don't you know about it? Cracky, but don't I hope Jack'll win."

"Why don't you go out on the logs?" queried the girl. "You can see up stream farther from there. Come on."

Without waiting for a reply, Bess Thornton darted out across a treacherous pathway of light cedar and spruce logs that lay, confined by a log-boom, waiting to be sawed into shingle stuff; for the old mill occasionally did that work, also, as well as grinding corn. Many of the logs were not of sufficient size to support even the girl's light weight, but sank beneath her, wetting her bare feet. She sprang lightly from one to another, pausing now and then to rest and balance herself on some larger log that sustained her. Little Tim, equally at home about the water, followed.

The boom confining this lot of logs was made of larger and longer logs, chained together at the ends, and extending in a long irregular line from a point up the shore down toward the dam, to a point just above the landing place for the canoes. Tim Reardon and Bess Thornton ran along this boom as far as it extended up stream.

Presently Little Tim gave a yell and nearly pitched head-first into the stream.

"They're coming! they're coming!" he cried. "Who's ahead? Can you see?"

The next moment he gave an exclamation of dismay. Two canoes shot around a bend of the stream, one not far behind the other—but the second canoe, to Little Tim's disappointment, that guided by Jack Harvey. Tom and Bob had a fair lead, and, by the way they were putting life into their strokes, seemed likely to maintain it.

"Ow wow," bawled Little Tim. "Come on, Jack! Come on, Henry! You can beat 'em yet. Give it to 'em!"

Bess Thornton, catching the enthusiasm and spirit of her companion, and espying who the occupants of the second canoe were, added her cries of encouragement to those of Little Tim.

But the leaders came on steadily and surely, heading in slightly toward the point on shore where they would disembark to make the carry about the dam.

Away up the stream, two more canoes could be seen, about abreast, the four boys plying their paddles with all the strength in them.

So the leading canoe passed the boy and girl, Little Tim yelling himself hoarse, with encouragement to Harvey and Henry Burns to come on. Surely if there had been any impelling power in noise, Tim's cries would have turned the scale in favour of his friends.

The leading canoe touched shore, and Tom and Bob sprang lightly out; snatched up their craft and were off up the bank, to make the carry. Henry Burns and Harvey headed in to do likewise. But now Bess Thornton, catching Tim suddenly by an arm, started back down the boom, saying to him, "Come on quick." He, surprised, wondering what she meant, followed.

The girl ran swiftly along the line of logs to a point a little way above the dam. There the line of the boom swung inshore in a sweep to the left. To the right of them, as they stood, was the deep, black water, flowing powerfully in the middle of the stream, and with a strong current, toward an opening in the dam. This was the long flume, a steep, long incline, down which the water of the stream raced with great velocity. It was built to carry rafts of logs through from time to time—a chute, planked in on either side, with the entrance formed by the cutting down of the top of the dam there a few feet. There was no great depth of water in the flume—no one seemed to know just how much. It depended on the height of water in the stream.

Now the girl, waving to Harvey and Henry Burns, cried shrilly for them to watch. Surprised, they ceased their paddling for a moment and looked over to where she stood.

To their amazement and Little Tim's horror, the girl, barefoot and bare-armed, and clad in a light calico frock, gave a laugh and dived into the stream. A moment more, she reappeared a few feet from the boom, and was unmistakably heading for the swift water beyond running down to the flume.

"Come back!" cried Little Tim. "You'll get drowned there. You're going into the flume."

The girl turned on her side as she swam, calling out:

"Tell 'em to come on. They'll beat the others. I've been through once before."

Again she turned, while Little Tim stood with knees shaking. Henry Burns and Harvey, seeing the girl's apparent peril, uttered each an exclamation of alarm, and headed out once more into the stream.

But they were helpless. A moment more, and they saw the girl caught by the swift rush of the water. Waving an arm just as she went over the edge of the incline, she straightened out and lay at full length, so as to keep as nearly as she could at the surface. She disappeared, and they waited what seemed an age, but was scarcely more than two minutes. Then, all at once, there came up to their ears, from far below, the clear, yodelling cry of Bess Thornton. She had gone safely through.

It was a serious moment for Tim Reardon. There wasn't a better swimmer of his size in all Benton. Only a few of the larger lads dared to dive with him from the very top of Pulpit Rock, a high point on the bank of the stream, some miles below. Now he was stumped by a girl no bigger than himself, and he felt his knees wabbling in uncertain fashion at the thought of attempting the flume. And there was his big friend, Harvey, and Henry Burns, waiting out on the water, uncertain as to what they should do. He might aid them to win the race. Or he might hang back, be beaten, himself, by a girl, and Harvey and Henry Burns would lose.

Little Tim gazed for one moment out into midstream, to where the water, black and gleaming, rushed smoothly and swiftly into the opening of the sluice-way. Then he got his voice under control as best he could, waved toward the canoe and shouted:

"Come on, Jack. I'll show yer. It's e-e-asy."

Little Tim shut his eyes, swallowed a lump in his throat, dived from the boom and made a long swim under water. When he reappeared, he was near the swift current, a little way below where the canoe lay.

"Come on, fellers," he cried again—and the next moment Henry Burns and Harvey saw him disappear over the edge of the dam. It seemed as though there

had been hardly time for him to be borne down to the foot of the descent before they heard his voice, calling triumphantly back to them.

Henry Burns turned and gave one quick, inquiring glance at his companion. In return, Harvey gave a whistle that denoted his surprise at the odd turn of affairs, and said shortly, "Got to do it now. We can go through if they can. Hang that girl! Get a good brace now. Gimminy, look at that water run!"

They were on the very brink, as he spoke; and, even as he muttered the last exclamation, the canoe dipped to the incline of the chute and went darting down its smooth surface. They hardly saw the sides of the flume as they shot by. Almost instantly, it seemed, they were in the tumbling, boiling waters at the foot of it, Henry Burns crouching low in the bow, so as not to be pitched overboard; Harvey bracing for one moment with his paddle and striking the water furiously the next, to keep it on its course.

The canoe shipped water, and they feared it would be swamped; but they kept on. Then, as they swept past a jutting of ledge that bordered the lower shore, two figures standing together waved to them and cried out joyously:

"Paddle hard! Go it, Jack! Give it to her, Henry! You're way ahead. They're not half 'round the bank yet. Hooray!"

Spurred by the cries, the two canoeists plied their paddles with renewed zeal. So on they emerged into smooth water. Away up the bank, Tom and Bob, dismayed, saw their rivals take the lead in the long race—a lead that could not be overcome.

Sitting up proudly, Henry Burns and Harvey raced past the familiar shores, saw the old camp come into view, shot across the finishing line, and the race was won. Standing on the bank, they watched the others come trailing in: Tom and Bob not far behind; the Warren boys third, and the Ellisons last.

"Yes," said Tom Harris, good-naturedly, as they sat outside the camp a little later, "but you had to get a girl to show you how to beat us."

"How'd you know you could go through there, anyway?" he added, turning to the girl who, with Little Tim had come down the shore to see the finish.

"Did it to get away from gran' once," replied Bess Thornton, her eyes twinkling. "My, but wasn't she scared. It's easy, though, isn't it, Tim?"

"Easy! It's nothin'," said Little Tim.

CHAPTER X

HENRY BURNS MAKES A GIFT

It was evening, and the streets of Benton's shopping section were lighted; the illumination of windows serving to display the attractions arranged therein to best advantage. The night was warm and pleasant, and the passers-by moved leisurely, enjoying the sights, or pausing now and then to gaze in, as some object caught their eye.

Three boys, sauntering along one of the principal thoroughfares, stopped abruptly as one of their number called them to a halt and pointed on ahead. The object to which he pointed was a fourth youth, who was standing, with hands in his pockets, intently absorbed in the display in one of the shop windows.

"Sh-h-h!" whispered young Joe Warren to his companions, his brother George and Bob White, "look at Henry Burns. My, but that's rich. We've got one on him, all right. Hold on, let's come up on him easy."

The boys drew a little nearer to Henry Burns, grinning broadly. Henry Burns, all unmindful of such concerted observation, continued to gaze in at the brilliantly lighted window.

The contents of the window-case were, indeed, such as one would hardly have supposed to be of interest to a youth of his age. The shop was one of Benton's largest dry-goods establishments, and the particular window was devoted wholly to an assortment of women's and misses' dresses. Several more or less life-like figures, arrayed in garments of the season, occupied prominent positions in the display.

Directly in line with Henry Burns's vision was one of these: the figure of a girl, dressed in a neat summer sailor suit, the yellow curls of the head surmounted with a dashing sailor hat; its waxen cheeks tinted a most decided pink; its blue, staring eyes apparently returning the gaze of Henry Burns, unabashed at his admiration.

There was no mistaking Henry Burns's desire to form a closer acquaintance with the wax figure, for presently he approached closer to the window and stood

studying it with undisguised interest.

"Seems to like the looks of her, don't he?" chuckled Young Joe, nudging Bob White and doubling up with laughter. "Wish Jack Harvey was here now to see him. Come on, let's wake him up."

Approaching softly, the three neared the unsuspecting admirer of the yellow-haired, waxen miss.

Still lost in contemplation of her, Henry Burns was suddenly greeted by a series of yells and hoots of derision that would have done credit to a wild west performance. Then roars of laughter followed, as he turned and faced them.

It was not in the nature of Henry Burns to be startled or easily disconcerted, however, and, although taken by surprise, he turned slowly and faced the three.

"Hello," he said coolly.

"Hello, Henry," snickered Young Joe. "Say, what's her name?"

"Yes, who is she?" echoed the other two; whereupon all three went off again into mingled roars of laughter and yells of delight.

"Dunno," responded Henry Burns. "I'll go in and ask, though, if you want."

"Isn't she sweet?" said Bob White. "How long have you known her?"

"Oh, not so long as you've known Kitty Clark," replied Henry Burns.

"Ow! wow!" squealed Young Joe; an exclamation which began in great satisfaction and terminated in a howl, as he felt the force of a punch from Bob's vigorous right arm.

It wasn't so easy getting the best of Henry Burns, in spite of his disadvantage.

"Seen Jack?" he inquired.

"No—yes, there he comes now," answered George Warren, pointing back in the direction whence they had come.

Henry Burns left them abruptly, and they went along, calling back at him mockingly. But he paid little heed. Anyone familiar with the youth would have known that he had something particular in mind; and in such case, Henry Burns was not to be turned aside by bantering.

Some five minutes later, Henry Burns and Harvey stood looking in at the very same shop window, whither Henry Burns had conducted his companion.

"Say—er—Jack, what do you think of that?" inquired Henry Burns, pointing in at the wax figure.

Harvey looked at his companion and grinned.

"Think of what!" he exclaimed. "The curls?"

"No, hang the curls!" said Henry Burns. "The dress."

Harvey stared at him, open-mouthed.

"Oh, yes," he said at length, as though endeavouring to grasp the meaning of so extraordinary an inquiry; "looks like Bob White's sister. What of it?"

"Oh, nothing," replied Henry Burns, "only you and I are going to buy it."

Harvey's grin expanded.

"Sure," he responded. "You'd look nice in it, Henry. Only you need the curls, too —"

"And give it to Bess Thornton," continued Henry Burns, unmindful of his comrade's remark.

Harvey whistled.

"Well, I'll be skinned if I don't think you're in earnest!" he exclaimed.

"I am," said Henry Burns. "It's eight dollars and eighty-seven cents—marked down—they always are, ain't they? Half of that's four dollars and something or other apiece. Come in with me?"

"Not much!" cried Harvey, turning red at the very thought of it. "I'll pay half, though, if you'll get somebody to buy it. It's worth more than that to me, to win that race. Well, if you don't beat all thinking up queer things. What put it into your head?"

"Why, she spoiled hers, showing us how to come through that sluice, didn't she?" said Henry Burns.

"Guess not," replied Harvey. "Spoiled long before that, I reckon. They're poor

enough. Get somebody to buy the dress, and I'll pay for half, all right."

"I'm going to buy it now," said Henry Burns, coolly; "that is, if you've got any money. I've got five dollars."

Harvey produced his pocket-book and the necessary bills.

"Gee!" he exclaimed. "I wouldn't do it for a hundred dollars. Go on; I'll watch you through the window."

In no wise daunted, Henry Burns, whose critical study of the model and the garment through the window had satisfied him that the figure was of Bess Thornton's size, boldly entered the store, calmly made the purchase, ignored the inquiry of the clerk if he was thinking of getting married, and returned with it to his companion.

"Say," exclaimed Harvey, "I don't wonder you learned to sail the *Viking* quick as you did. You've got the nerve."

"Now we've got to take it up there," said Henry Burns.

Harvey stopped short.

"Take that dress and give it to a girl?" he asked.

"No, we won't give it to her," replied his comrade. "She might not like to have us —and I wouldn't know what to say, would you?"

"Would I!" exclaimed Harvey.

"We'll just leave it and cut and run," explained Henry Burns. "Then she won't know who sent it, and she'll have to keep it. See?"

"It's most nine o'clock," remarked Harvey.

"I'm going," said Henry Burns.

"Oh, well, I'll stand by," said Harvey. "Let's be off, then. It's a good two miles and a half, nearer three."

Shortly after, one might have seen the two comrades trudging along the road leading out of Benton, in the direction of Ellison's mill.

They walked briskly, and in a little less than three quarters of an hour a light

from a window on a hill-top warned them that they were approaching the farmhouse of Farmer Ellison. They turned in from the road that ran along the bank of the stream, and made their way through his field on the hillside, in the direction of the brook.

"Does Ellison keep any dog?" asked Harvey, once.

"I don't know, any more than you do," replied his companion. "Never saw any. We'll keep well down near the brook, though, so they can't see us from the house."

They passed through some clumps of small cedars and thin birches, stumbling now and then over cradle-knolls and pitching into little depressions. It was a clear night and starlit, but the shadows in the half darkness were confusing. A lamp gleamed in the kitchen window, above them, and they could see someone moving past the window from time to time.

"Ellison hasn't gone to bed," remarked Harvey.

"Well, what of it?" replied Henry Burns. "Not scared of him, are you?"

"No," answered Harvey. "But he's touchy about this brook. Ever since he caught Willie Dodd setting a net there one night he's been crazy for fear he'd lose some of these trout."

"I know what's the matter with you," said Henry Burns. "It's this dress. You wouldn't have anyone catch us with it for a million dollars."

"You bet I wouldn't," answered Harvey.

Harvey's nerves, usually the steadiest, were not proof against even a slight alarm; for when, a few moments later, his companion touched him lightly on an arm and motioned for him to be still, he waited, keyed up to a high point of excitement and ready for a dash across the fields.

"What is it?" he whispered.

"Sh-h!" replied Henry Burns, clutching his bundle tight under one arm, and peering through the scattered alders, into which they had penetrated. "I heard a step."

They waited, anxiously.

It was Harvey's turn, however, to enjoy a laugh at the expense of his comrade, as the steps that the quick ear of Henry Burns had heard were continued, this time with an unmistakable crackling of undergrowth.

"There's your prowler, Henry," he said, laughing softly and slapping his friend between the shoulders. "She's got two horns, but I guess she won't hook, unless she sees through that box and gets a sight of that dress."

A look of relief overspread Henry Burns's face, as a Jersey cow stalked slowly through the brush and stood gazing inquiringly at the two boys. But, observing her for a moment, it did not escape Henry Burns that the animal suddenly gave a spring and turned and faced the other way, as though some noise behind had surprised her.

Henry Burns clutched his comrade and pointed back past the cow. Harvey's eyes followed where he pointed.

The figure of a man was plainly to be seen, stealing along in the shadows of the clumps of bushes.

They paused not another instant, but dashed forward, heedless now of the noise they made, thrusting branches aside and leaping from one knoll to another where the soil was boggy. At the same moment Farmer Ellison, brandishing a club, emerged into plain view and darted after them, crying out as he ran.

"Stop there!" he shouted. "I'll shoot yer if yer don't stop. I'll have no nets set in this stream. Just let me lay this club on your backs."

They only fled the faster.

"He won't shoot," gasped Henry Burns. "Make for the foot of the dam. We'll cross the brook."

As for Harvey, threats of a fire of infantry wouldn't have stopped him. He followed his slighter companion, who led the way, despite the incumbrance of the box he carried.

Through pasture and swamp the chase continued. The boys were fleeter of foot, but Farmer Ellison knew the ground. And once he skirted a boggy piece of land and nearly headed them off. They turned toward the brook, gained its shore and sped along to the foot of the dam. There the water, diminished by the obstruction, flowed from a little basin out on to shallower bottom, from which

here and there a rock protruded.

Springing from one to another of these, slipping and splashing to their knees, aided here and there by a bit of half decayed log or drift-wood, they got across and scrambled up the opposite bank just as Farmer Ellison, out of breath, appeared on the nearer shore.

"You poachers!" he cried, "Ye've got away this time. But look out for the next. Remember, it's a shotgun full of rock salt and sore legs for yer if yer come again."

He seated himself by the foot of the dam, nursing a bruised shin, and watched them disappear through the fields.

"Scared 'em some, anyway, I reckon," he remarked. And was most assuredly correct in that. The two boys had not stopped in their flight, and were a mile above the crossing before Farmer Ellison turned himself homeward.

Safe from pursuit at last, Henry Burns threw himself down at the foot of a tree and laughed till he nearly choked for want of breath.

"How we did scoot," he said. "Did you see old Ellison slip once and go into the bog?"

"I didn't see anything," replied Harvey, "but a pair of legs in front of me, cutting it through the mud and brush. How's the dress?"

"Oh, it's all right," said Henry Burns. "Come out if you've got your wind. We'll leave it and get home."

They were at a point above Grannie Thornton's cottage, and they proceeded now cautiously, making a circuit to bring them to the brook some way above the house, pausing now and then to look and to listen. But no one disturbed them. Farmer Ellison had had enough of the chase and had gone home to nurse his shin.

They came down to the old house. It was dark, and all was still. Harvey waited on watch near the gate, while Henry Burns stole up to the door and laid the box down carefully against the front door. Then they sped away.

"Go back the way we came?" inquired Henry Burns, slyly.

"Not much," said Harvey. "Straight out to the main road. No more swamps for

me."

They went out that way, then; took the main road, passed down by the old inn and the mill, and swung into a rapid stride for home. It was half past eleven o'clock when they turned into their beds.

Two days following this adventure, toward the latter part of the afternoon, Henry Burns was walking up the same road by the stream, in the direction of the camp, where he was to meet Tom Harris for a spin in the canoe. He had heard no footsteps near, and was therefore not a little surprised when a hand touched his arm and a laugh that was familiar sounded close by his side.

He turned quickly, and there was Bess Thornton.

"Hullo," she said, "I hoped I'd see somebody on the road. I'll walk along with you."

Henry Burns said "all right" in a tone that was not over-cordial; for, though not easily abashed, he was, to tell the truth, just a bit shy with girls, and wondered what Tom Harris would say if he saw him coming up the road with Bess.

Perhaps the girl's quick intuitiveness perceived this, for a mischievous light danced in her black eyes as she said, "I thought perhaps you'd like to have company. You would, wouldn't you?"

"Yes—oh, yes," responded Henry Burns. "Going home from school?"

"Yes," she answered. "But I didn't want to go this morning, a bit. Gran' made me, though."

"What's the matter?" asked Henry Burns.

"Well," said the girl, "I had to wear this new dress, you see. And when you wear a new dress they always say things, don't you know? Danny Davis hollered 'stuck up' once, but I punched him."

"Good for you," said Henry Burns, laughing. "I'd like to have seen you—that a new dress?"

"Course it is," she answered, with a touch of half-offended pride. "Can't you see it is?"

Henry Burns made a quick survey of the trim little figure, clad in the dress that

had cost him and Harvey the hard scramble of the recent night. It was surprising what a difference the pretty suit made in the appearance of the girl. He made a mental note of the fact that it seemed just the right size for her, and that she certainly looked very nice in it. Its dark red set off the black of her glossy hair, and she wore a neat straw hat that went well with the dress. At least, it looked all right to Henry Burns.

"You don't look stuck up," he ventured. "You look first rate."

He felt the colour come into his cheeks as he said it. It was the first time in his life that he had ever complimented a girl. They were passing a dingy little store, with its windows filled with farming tools, odds and ends of household stuff and some fishing tackle, and he thought it a good chance to get away.

"Got an errand in here," he said. "Good-bye."

Some ten minutes later he emerged, looked sharply up the road and pursued his journey. He had gone scarcely a rod or two, however, when the girl's voice brought him to a halt, much taken aback. She was seated by the stream, close to the water.

"I thought you'd be along," she said. "I've been watching the pickerel. There's one sunning himself close to the top of water now, just by the lily pads. See me hit him."

She picked up a stone as she spoke, and threw it with surprising ease and accuracy. It struck the water about six inches from the dark object to which she had pointed. Henry Burns's chagrin at this second meeting was lost in admiration.

"Good shot!" he exclaimed. "How'd you know 'twas a pickerel?"

"Oh I catch 'em," she answered. "And once in a while I show one to Benny Ellison so he can shoot it. I don't like him much, though. He's mean and—fat."

Henry Burns chuckled.

"He can't help that," he said.

"No, but he's always stuffing himself with candy and things," said the girl. "And he won't ever give you any. I like people that give away things once in a while, don't you?"

Henry Burns came the nearest to blushing that he ever had, as he answered that he guessed he did. There was something in the girl's voice and manner and in her beaming countenance, telling of her happiness in the possession of her new finery—though she had feared the ordeal of wearing it to school, perhaps because of the contrast it made to her usual garment—that he felt a queer feeling in his throat. But relief was at hand for him in his embarrassment, for the path that led down to the camp was in sight, and he bade her good-bye.

He struck off along the path, through the bushes and thin growth of woods; but had gone only a little way when the sound of voices, one sharp and angry, made him pause. He retraced his steps, hurrying as he recognized the voice of Bess Thornton, the tone of which indicated grief.

He emerged into the road in time to see the girl scramble out of a clump of brakes and burdock plants by the roadside, the tears standing in her eyes as she picked the burs from the latter out of the new dress. Just in front of her, noting her distress with satisfaction, stood Benny Ellison.

"That's what you get for being so proud," he said bluntly. "You needn't get so mad, though. I was only in fun."

The girl's eyes blazed, angrily; but it was not the Bess Thornton of every day that now faced the youth. Some of her fearlessness and dash seemed to have departed, with the taking off of the old dress.

"Let me past," she said, stepping forward; but the boy blocked her way.

"Let me look at the new dress," he demanded. "Where'd you get so much?"

He caught her by an arm, as she attempted to brush past him. Greatly to his surprise, however, he felt his hand cast off and, at the same time, he was nearly upset by a vigorous push. The youth who had done this, apparently not the least excited, stood facing him as he recovered himself.

"Let the girl alone," said Henry Burns. "Let her go past."

One could hardly have noted a trace of anger in his voice, but there was a warning in his eye that Benny Ellison might have heeded. The latter, however, was no longer in a mood to stop at any warning. His flabby face reddened and his fist clenched.

"You'll not stop me!" he cried, taking a step toward the girl. "I'll push both of

you in there, if you don't get out."

"Just try it," said Henry Burns, quietly.

Benny Ellison, larger and heavier than the youth who thus dared him, hesitated only a moment. Then he rushed at Henry Burns and they clinched. The struggle seemed over before it had hardly begun, however, for the next moment Benny Ellison found himself lying on his back in the road, with Henry Burns firmly holding him there.

"Let me up!" he cried, squirming and kicking. "You don't dare let me up."

By way of answer, Henry Burns relinquished his hold and allowed his antagonist to regain his feet. Again Benny Ellison, wild with anger, made a rush for Henry Burns, aiming a blow at him as he came on. Dodging it, and without deigning to attempt to return it, Henry Burns closed with him once more, and they reeled together to and fro for a moment.

If Benny Ellison had but known it, he had met with one whom Tom Harris and Bob White, who prided themselves on their athletics, and even stalwart Jack Harvey, had often found to be their match in wrestling. Slight in build, but with well-knit muscles, Henry Burns was surprisingly strong. And, above all, he never lost his head.

The contest this time was a moment more prolonged; but again Benny Ellison felt his feet going from under him, and again he went down—but this time harder—to the ground. He lay for a moment, with the breath knocked out of him.

"Want another?" inquired Henry Burns, calmly. He had not even offered to strike a blow.

Benny Ellison, picking himself up slowly from the dust, hesitated a moment; then backed away.

"I'll have it out with you again some time," he muttered. "I'll get square with you for this."

Henry Burns's eyes twinkled.

"Why not now?" he asked.

Benny Ellison made no reply, but went on up the road.

Bess Thornton's face, radiant with delight as Henry Burns turned to her, suddenly clouded.

"Guess I'll have to look out now," she said. "He'll give it to me, if he catches me."

Henry Burns's face wore an expression of mingled perplexity and embarrassment. Then, as one resolved to see the thing through, he replied, "Come on, I'll get you home all right."

CHAPTER XI

COL. WITHAM GETS THE MILL

It was the evening before the glorious Fourth of July, and Tim Reardon was dragging an iron cannon along the street, by a small rope. It was a curious, clumsy piece of iron-mongery, about a foot and a half long, with a heavily moulded barrel mounted on a block of wood that ran on four wheels; a product of the local machine shop, designed for the purpose of being indestructible rather than for show.

Tim Reardon, smudgy-faced, but wearing an expression of deep satisfaction, paused for a moment before a gate where stood a boy somewhat younger than himself, who eyed the cannon admiringly.

"Hello, Willie," said Tim. "Comin' out, ain't yer?"

The boy shook his head, disconsolately.

"What's the matter?"

"Can't," said the boy. "Father won't let me."

Tim looked at him pityingly.

"Won't let you come out the night before the Fourth!" he exclaimed. "Gee! I'd like to see anybody stop me. What's he 'fraid of?"

"He isn't afraid," replied the boy. "He's mad because they make so much noise he can't sleep. He says they haven't any right to fire off guns and things on the Fourth."

"Hm!" sniffed Tim. "Henry Burns says you have, and I guess he knows. He's read all about it. He says there was a man named Adams who was a president once, and he said everybody ought to make all the noise they could; get out and fire guns, and blow horns, and beat on pans and yell like everything, and build bonfires and fire off firecrackers."

"Did he?" said the boy. "And did he say anything about getting out the night

before?"

"Well, I dunno about that," answered Tim Reardon; "but of course the patrioticker you are, why, the sooner you begin. It's the Fourth of July the minute the clock strikes twelve—and, cracky, won't we make a racket then? Henry Burns, he's got a cannon; and so's Jack Harvey and Tom Harris and Bob White, and the Warren fellers they've got three, and a lot of other fellers have got 'em. Just you wait till the clock strikes, and there'll be some fun."

"I wish I could come out," said the boy, earnestly.

"Too bad you can't. You miss all the fun," said Little Tim. "I'll bet George Washington was out the first of any of 'em on the Fourth of July, when he was a boy."

Tim's knowledge of history was not quite so ample as his patriotic ardour.

"Why don't you come, anyway?" he ventured. "Just tie a string around your big toe, and hang the string out the window, and I'll come around and wake you up. I'm going to wake George Baker that way. I don't go to bed at all the night before the Fourth."

The boy shook his head.

"No, I guess not," he replied. "But say," he added quickly, "come around in front of the house and make all the racket you can, will you? I'd like to hear it, if I can't get out."

"You bet we will," responded Tim, heartily. "Sammy Willis, his father won't let him come out, and we're going 'round there; and Joe Turner, his father won't let him come out, and we're going there, too. There's where we go to, most."

Tim did not explain whether this was from patriotic motives or otherwise. But the small boy looked pleased.

"Be sure and come around," he said.

"Oh, you'll hear from us, all right," replied Tim.

It was quite evident that something would be heard when, some hours later, about a quarter of an hour before midnight, a group of boys had gathered in the square in front of Willie Perkins's house. There was an array of small cannon ranged about that would have sent joy to the heart of a youthful Knox or

Steuben. The boys were engaged in the act of loading these with blasting powder, purchased at a reduced price from the rock blasters in the valley below.

"Here you, don't put in so much powder, young fellow," cautioned Harvey to a smaller youth, who was about to pour a handful into a chunky firearm. "Don't you know that it's little powder and lots of wadding that makes her speak? I'll show you."

Harvey measured out a small handful of the coarse, black grains, poured them down the barrel, stuffed in some newspaper and rammed it home with a hickory stick. Then he stuffed in a handful of grass and some more newspaper, hammering on the ram-rod with a brick, regardless of any danger of premature explosion. The coarse powder was not "lively," however, and had always stood such handling. The process was continued until the cannon was stuffed to the muzzle. Then a few grains were dropped over the touch-hole, a long strip of paper laid over this, weighted down with a small pebble, and was ready for lighting.

"There," said Harvey, relinquishing the ram-rod to the youth, "that'll speak. If you fill 'em full of powder they don't make half the noise."

Simultaneously, Henry Burns, the Warren boys, Tom Harris, Bob White and a dozen other lads had been loading and priming their respective pieces; and presently they stood awaiting the striking of the town clocks.

Willie Perkins's father, who had been hard at work all the evening with a congenial party in his office, at a game of euchre, was just getting his first nap, having congratulated himself on retiring, that, if the neighbourhood's rest was disturbed, his son at least would not contribute toward it. Willie Perkins, having extended a cordial invitation to the boys to come around and visit his esteemed parent, was himself fast asleep.

Clang! The first town clock to take cognizance of the arrival of the glorious Fourth struck a lusty note, that rang out loudly on the clear night air. But there was no response from the eager gunners. It was not yet Fourth of July. It would have gone hard with the boy that had fired.

Clang and clang again. The twelfth call was still ringing in the iron throat of the old bell, high in its steeple, when Harvey shouted, "Now give it to her!"

There was a hasty scratching of matches. The strips of paper began to burn;

slowly at first, while the boys scattered; then quickly, sputtering as the flame caught the first few grains of powder.

A moment later, it seemed to Willie Perkins's father as though he had been lifted completely out of his bed by some violent concussion, while a roar like the blast of battle shook the house. The glorious Fourth had begun in Benton.

Springing to his feet, Mr. Perkins uttered a denunciation of the day that would have made the signers of the Declaration of Independence turn in their graves, while he rushed to the window. Throwing it open, he peered out into the square. There was not a boy in sight. Retreat had already begun, ignominiously, from the field.

"If they come around again—" muttered Mr. Perkins. He did not finish the sentence, but went along a hallway and looked into his son's room. "Are you there, William?" he inquired sternly.

"Yes; can I get up now? Must be most morning."

"Get up!" replied the elder Perkins. "Just let me catch you getting up before daylight! If I had my way, there wouldn't be any firing guns or firecrackers on Fourth of July. It's barbarism—not patriotism.

"Willie," he added, "do you know any of those boys out there to-night?"

"How can I tell, if you won't let me go out?" whined Willie.

"I'd like to know who put it into people's heads to fire off guns on the Fourth," exclaimed Mr. Perkins. "He must have been a rowdy."

Willie Perkins made a mental note that he would look up President Adams next morning, for his father's benefit.

Mr. Perkins returned to his bed-room and closed his eyes once more. His was not a sweet and peaceful sleep, however. Benton was awakening to the Fourth in divers localities, and sounds from afar, of fish-horns and giant crackers, of bells and barking dogs, came in, in tumultuous confusion.

"Confound the Fourth of July!" muttered Mr. Perkins. "I didn't disturb people this way when I was a boy."

But perhaps Mr. Perkins forgot.

There came by, shortly, a party of intensely patriotic youth from the mill settlement under the hill. Their particular brand of patriotism manifested itself in beating with small bars of iron on a large circular saw, suspended on a stick thrust through the hole in its centre and borne triumphantly between two youths. The reverberation, the deafening clangour of this, cannot possibly be described, or appreciated by one that has never heard it. Suffice it to say, that the fish-horns, even the cannon, were insignificant by comparison.

Mr. Perkins groaned and half arose. But the party went along past, without offering to stop—perhaps because they had received no invitation from Willie. Moreover, it seemed as though half the town was astir by this time and giving vent to its enthusiasm. Benton had a remarkable way of getting boyish on the morning of the Fourth, which the elder Perkins could not understand.

When, however, an hour later, another shock of cannon shook his chamber, followed immediately by what sounded to him like a derisive blast of fish-horns, there was no more irresolution left in him. Hastily arising and throwing a coat over his shoulders, and dashing a hat over his eyes—the first one that came to hand, and which happened to be a tall beaver—Mr. Perkins, barefoot and in his night-clothes, a not imposing guardian of the peace, sped down the front stairs and out into the street.

A cry of alarm, the rumble of cannon dragged by ropes over the shoulders of a squad of youths in full flight, and the exclamations of the indignant Mr. Perkins, marked the occasion.

Fear lent its wings to the pursued; wrath served to lighten the bare heels of Mr. Perkins. He was gaining, when one of the youth, cumbered in flight by his artillery piece, let go the string. The cannon remaining in the path of Mr. Perkins, he stumbled over it, and it hurt his toe. He paused and picked up the cannon, but relinquished it to grasp his toe, which demanded all his attention. He decided, then and there, that the pursuit, which had extended about three blocks, was useless, and abandoned it. Limping slightly, he started homeward.

Somewhat like the British retreat from Concord and Lexington, was the return of Mr. Perkins to his home. A piece of burning punk lay in the road, and presently he stepped on that. The fleeing forces had doubled on their tracks, also, and a fire-cracker exploded near him. Then a torpedo. And there was no enemy in sight to take revenge on. Mr. Perkins hastened his steps and was soon, himself, in full retreat.

Then, when presently he was conscious of the raising of curtains in near-by windows, and felt the eyes of several of his neighbours directed toward his weird costume, Mr. Perkins no longed walked. He ran. As he closed the door behind him and tramped wearily up the stairs, the voice of his son greeted him.

"Say, pa, is it time to get up now?"

Mr. Perkins's reply was most decidedly unpatriotic.

The hours went by, and a rapid fire of small artillery ran throughout Benton and along its whole frontier line. Even the bells in the steeples, no longer solemn, clanged forth their defiance to authority—which was the only thing that slumbered in the town on this occasion.

But Benton had other observances for its boisterous display of spirits, the origin of which no one seemed to know, but which were participated in each year by the new generation of youths, with careful observance of tradition.

There were the "Horribles," for example, not to have ridden in which at some time of one's life was to have left one page blank. The procession of "Horribles," otherwise known as "Ragamuffins," usually started at about six in the morning, marching through the streets until nine;—by which time the endurance of a youth who had been out all night usually came to an end.

Now, as the hour of three was passed, certain eager and impatient aspirants for first place in the line began to make their appearance on horseback in the streets of Benton, clattering about on steeds that had never before known a saddle; weird figures, masked uncouthly in pasteboard representations of Indians, animals and what-not, and clad in every sort of costume, from rags to ancient uniforms—a noisy, tatterdemalion band, blowing horns and discharging firearms.

There was Tim Reardon, mounted on an aged truck horse, that drooped its head and ambled with half-closed eyes, as though it might at any moment fall off to sleep again. Sticking like a monkey to its bare back was Tim, his face hidden behind a monstrous mask, his head surmounted by a battered silk hat, extracted from a convenient refuse heap; a fish-horn slung about his neck by a string.

There was Henry Burns, with face blackened and a huge wooden tomahawk at his belt; he, likewise, astride, on one of Mr. Harris's work horses. A more mettlesome steed upheld Jack Harvey, but not at all willingly, since it had an

uncertain way of backing without warning into fences and trees, to the detriment of its rider's shins. The firing of a huge horse-pistol by Harvey seemed to aggravate rather than soothe the animal's feelings.

The Warren brothers had contrived a sort of float, consisting of an express wagon, gorgeously covered with coloured cloths, even interwoven in the spokes of the wheels, and wound around the body of the horse that drew it. A wash-boiler, its legitimate usefulness long over, set up in the wagon, was beaten on by Arthur and Joe Warren, while their elder brother drove.

Tom Harris, Bob White and a scattering of other grotesque horsemen came along presently.

"Where'll we go?" queried Harvey, as the squadron paused to rest after a preliminary round of some of the streets.

"Past Perkins's house again," suggested young Joe Warren.

"No, we've been by there twice already," answered Henry Burns. "He won't like Fourth of July if we give him too much of it."

Young Joe grinned behind his mask.

"I'll tell you," he said, excitedly. "We've got time to do it, too, before the parade begins—Witham's! Bet he's sound asleep—what do you say?"

"Come on," cried Henry Burns. "Will you go, fellows?"

A whoop of delight gave acquiescence. The procession clattered out of Benton and started up the valley road by the stream.

They went along noisily at first, beating their battered tinware, setting off giant firecrackers, blowing horns and whooping lustily. Farmers along the road opened a sleepy eye as they passed, remembered it was the morning of the Fourth, and turned over for another nap. Pickerel in the stream dived their noses into the soft mud at the lowest depths. Night-hawks, high above, swooped after their prey and added their weird noise to the din. Yellow-hammers and thrushes, rudely roused, darted from their nests and took flight silently into the thicker screen of the woods.

But, as the riders neared the Ellison dam, and heard the first sound of the falling water, they subsided, planning to take the neighbourhood, and particularly the

occupants of the Half Way House, above, by surprise. Thus silently going along, they were aware of a light wagon, drawn by a lively stepping horse, turning from the road that led up to the Ellison farm and coming on toward them.

"Hello!" exclaimed George Warren; "it's Doctor Wells. Something's up. Wonder what's the matter."

Doctor Wells, coming up to the leaders, reined in his horse and regarded the procession with a mingled expression of good humour and anxiety.

"Pretty early to start the Fourth, isn't it?" he asked. "What's that you say? Going to wake up Colonel Witham—and Ellison?"

His face assumed a serious expression.

"Wake Jim Ellison," he repeated, as though he was speaking more to himself than to them. "I wish you could. 'Twould stop lots of trouble, I'm thinking. No man can wake poor Jim Ellison. He's dead. Went off quick not a half hour ago. Got a shock, and that was the end of him. You'll have to turn back, boys."

Quietly and soberly, the procession turned about and headed for Benton. The parade that morning was minus a good part of its expected members.

One week later, Lawyer James Estes of Benton, carrying some transcripts of legal papers under his arm, walked up the driveway to the Ellison farm and knocked at the front door. A woman, sad-eyed and anxious, opened to his knock and ushered him into the front parlour.

"I'm afraid I've got bad news for you, Mrs. Ellison," he said, in response to her look of inquiry. "I'm sorry to say it looks as though your husband's affairs were much involved at the time of his death. I find those deeds were given to Colonel Witham. They're on record, and I suppose Witham has the original papers, duly signed. We'll know all about it as soon as he returns. He went out of town, you say, the day Mr. Ellison died?"

"Yes," she replied; "never came near us, nor sent us word of sympathy. I'm afraid he didn't want to see us. I never wanted James to have business dealings with him. Does the mill go, too?"

"I'm afraid it does," answered Lawyer Estes. "Why, didn't you know about it? Your name is signed, too, you know, else the deeds are not good."

"Oh, yes, I suppose I did sign them, if they're on record," said Mrs. Ellison. "I was always signing papers for James. He said everything would be all right. I didn't know anything about the business—dear, dear—I thought the boys would have the mill when James was too old to work it. It's good property, if it does look shabby."

"Well, we'll make the best of it and do all we can," said Lawyer Estes. "Perhaps Witham can straighten it out when he returns. If he can't, there seems to be no doubt that the mill and some of the farm belong to him. We've hunted everywhere about your home and about the mill, and there are no papers that save us. We must wait for Colonel Witham."

It was a little more than two weeks before Colonel Witham did return to his hotel. Had he gotten out of the way, thus hurriedly, to see what turn James Ellison's affairs might take? Had he hopes that the deeds he knew of might by some chance not be found? Was his absence carefully timed, to allow of whatever search was bound to be made to be done and gotten over with, ere he should presume to lay claim to the property? It would not do to declare himself owner, should the chance arise, and then have the deeds that he had given back secretly to Ellison turn up. It were safer surely to remain away and see what would happen.

At all events, when on a certain day the droning of the mill told that its wheels had resumed their interrupted grinding, there might have been seen, within, the burly form of Colonel Witham, moving about as one with authority. Short, curt were his answers. There was little to be made out of him by Lawyer Estes or anyone else. What was his business was his—and nobody else's. There were the deeds, duly signed. If anyone had a better claim to the property, let him show it. As for the Ellison boys—and all other boys—they could keep away, unless they had corn to be ground. The mill was no place for them.

And yet, as the days went by, one might have fancied, if he had observed, that all was not easy in the mind of the new owner of the mill. They might have noted in his manner a continual restlessness; a wandering about the mill from room to room; prying into odd corners here and there; pounding upon the beams and partitions; poking under stair-ways; rummaging into long unused chutes and bins; for ever hunting, anxious-eyed; as though the mill had an evil and troublous influence over his spirits.

And now and then, pausing in the midst of his searching, the new owner might

have been heard to exclaim, "Well, if I can't find them, nobody else can. That's sure."

But Colonel Witham did not discontinue his searching. And the mill gave up no secrets.

CHAPTER XII

THE GOLDEN COIN

Mill stream, coming down from afar up the country, on its way to Samoset river and bay, flowed in many moods. Now it glided deep and smooth, almost imperceptibly, along steep banks that went up wooded to the sky line. Again it hurled itself recklessly down rocky inclines, frothing and foaming and fighting its way by sheer force through barriers of reefs. Now it went swiftly and pleasantly over sand shallows, rippling and seeming almost to sing a tune as it ran; again it turned back on its course in little eddies, backing its waters into shaded, still pools, where the pickerel loved to hide.

They were lazy fellows, the pickerel. One might, if he were a lucky and persevering fisherman, take a trout in the swift waters of the brook; but for the pickerel, theirs was not the joy of such exertion. In the dark, silent places along Mill stream, where never a ripple disturbed their seclusion, you might see one, now and then, lying motionless in the shadow of an overhanging branch, at the surface of the water, as though asleep.

They were not eager to bite then, in the warmth of the day. You might troll by the edges of the lily pads for half an hour, and the pickerel that made his haunt there would scarce wink a sleepy eye, or flicker a fin. At morn and evening they were ready for you; and a quick, sudden whirl in the glassy, black water often gave invitation then to cast a line.

In the early hours of a July morning, a little way up from Ellison's dam, a youth stood up to his middle among the lily pads, wielding a long, jointed bamboo pole, and trolling a spoon-hook past the outer fringe of the flat, green leaves. He was whistling, softly—an indication that he was happy. He was sunburned, freckle-faced, hatless, coatless. He wore only a thin and faded cotton blouse, the sleeves of it rolled up, and a pair of trousers, rolled up above his knees—for convenience rather than to protect them, for he had waded in, waist deep.

Tied about him was a piece of tarred rope, from which there dangled the luckless victims of his skill, three pickerel. That they were freshly caught was evidenced by their flopping vigorously now and then, as the boy entered the deeper water,

and opening their big, savage looking mouths as though they would like to swallow their captor.

A splash out yonder, just beside the clump of arrow-shaped pickerel weed! Tim Reardon's heart beat joyfully, as he turned and saw the ripples receding from the spot where the fish had jumped. He swung his long rod, dropped the troll skilfully near the blue blossoms that adorned the clump of weed, and drew it temptingly past. The spoon revolved rapidly, gleaming with alternate red and silver, the bright feathers that clothed the gang of hooks at the end trailing after.

Another splash, and a harder one. Tim Reardon "struck" and the fish was fast. Now it lashed the water furiously, fighting for its life. But it was not a big fish, and Tim Reardon lifted it clear of the water so that it swung in where he could clutch it with eager hands. Grasping it just back of the gills, he disengaged the hook cautiously, avoiding the sharp rows of teeth that lined the long jaws. He slung the pickerel on the line, and whistled gleefully.

It was a royal day for fishing; with just a thin shading of clouds to shield the water from the glare of sun; the water still and smooth; the shadows very black in the shady places.

It is safe to say, no one in all Benton knew the old stream like Tim Reardon. He fished it day after day from morn till evening, before and after school hours, and now in the vacation at all times. Tom Harris and Bob White knew it as canoeists; but Tim Reardon, following the ins and outs of its shores for miles above the Ellison dam, knew every little turn and twist in its shore.

He knew the places where the pickerel hid; where the water was swift, or shallow, or choked with weeds, and where to leave the shore and make a detour through the grain fields past these places. There were deep pools where the pickerel seldom rose to the troll, but asked to have their dinner sent down to them in the form of a fresh shiner; and Tim Reardon knew these pools, and when to remove the troll and put on his sinker and live bait.

He could have told you every inch of the country between Ellison's dam and the falls four miles above; where you would find buckwheat fields; where the corn patches were; where apple orchards bordered them; where the groves of beech-trees were, with the red squirrel colonies in the stumps near-by; and where the best place was to pause for noon luncheon, in the shade of some pines, where there was a spring bubbling up cool on the hottest days, in which you could set a bottle of coffee and have it icy cold in a half-hour.

There were big hemlocks along the way, in the rotted parts of which the yellow-hammers built their nests and laid their white eggs; hard trees to climb, with their huge trunks. He knew the time to scale the tall pines where the crows built, to find the scrawny young birds, with wide-open mouths and skinny bodies, that looked like birds visited by famine. He knew where the red columbines blossomed on the face of some tall cliffs, where the stream flowed through a rocky gorge; and how to crawl painfully down a zigzag course from the top to gather these, at the risk of falling seventy feet to the rocks below.

There were a thousand and one delights of the old stream that were a joy to his heart—though one would not have expected to find sentiment lodged in the breast of Little Tim. As for the boy, he only knew that it was all very dear to him, and that the whole valley of the stream was a source of perpetual happiness.

He waded ashore now and went on, his pole over his shoulder, whistling, filled with an enjoyment that he could not for the world have described; but which was born amid the singing of the stream, the droning of bees, the noises of birds and insects, in a lazy murmur that filled all the quiet valley.

It was rare fun following the winding of that stream; among little hills, by the edges of meadows and through groves of mingled cedars and birches. Now and then he would rest and watch its noiseless flowing, past some spot where the branches hung close over the water; where the stream flowed so smoothly and quietly that the shadows asleep on its surface were never disturbed.

The noon hour came, and Little Tim seated himself for his luncheon on a knoll carpeted with thick, tufted grass. A kingfisher, disturbed by his arrival, went rattling on his way upstream. And as the boy drew from his dingy blouse a scrap of brown paper, enclosing a bit of bread and cheese, and laid it down beside him, the stream seemed to be dancing just before him at the tune he whistled; a swinging, whirling dance from shore to shore; a butterfly dance, through a setting of buttercups and daisies; with here and there a shaft of sunlight thrown upon it, where the thin clouds parted.

Afternoon came, and the shadows of the low hills were thrown far across the stream. Here and there a splash denoted that the fish were waking from their midday torpor and were ready for prey. Little Tim resumed his rod, and slowly retraced his steps along the shore in the direction of Ellison dam and Benton.

It was about four o'clock as he neared a point in the stream a half-mile above the dam, where the water flowed very quietly past the edge of some thick alders.

There were pickerel in that water. Tim knew the place of old; and he drew near softly, to make a cast. The bright troll fell with a tinkle on the still surface, and he drew it temptingly past the thicket.

A quick whirl—and how the line did tauten and the rod bend! The whole tip of it went under water. He had struck a big fish. He brought him to the surface with some effort; but the fish was not to be easily subdued. A sudden dart and he was away again, diving deep and straining the rod to its utmost.

Seeing he had a fish of unusual size, the boy played him carefully; let him have the line and tire himself for a moment, then reeled in as the line slackened.

"He's a four pounder; giminy, how he fights!" exclaimed Little Tim. And he gave a sudden yell of triumph as he saw that the fish was firmly hooked, with the troll far down its distended jaws.

Then his impatience got the better of him, and he gave a great lift on the rod, with the line reeled up short. Just at that moment too, it seemed the fish had tired; for, as Tim strained, the big pickerel came out of water as with a leap. The stout rod straightened with a jerk that yanked the fish out, sent it flying through the air and lodged it away up in the top of some thick alders that bordered the shore. There, the line tangling, it hung suspended, twisting and doubling in vain effort to free itself.

Little Tim laughed joyfully.

"Got to shin for that fellow," he said, stepping ashore and eying the prize that dangled above his head.

But, as he stooped to lay down his pole, the discharge of a shotgun close at hand made him jump with astonishment. Still more amazed was he to see the dangling fish fall between the alder branches to the ground. Then, before he had recovered from his astonishment, a youth dashed forward and seized it.

The youth was Benny Ellison.

Little Tim's blood was up.

"Think you're smart, don't you," he cried, "shooting my fish. Here, gimme that. What do you think you're doing?"

But Benny Ellison, holding the big pickerel away from Tim, showed no intention

of giving it up.

"Who told you it was your fish?" he replied, sneeringly. "I shot it. It's mine."

"Give me back that fish!" repeated Little Tim. "I'll tell Harvey on you. You'll get another ducking."

He seized Benny Ellison by an arm, but the other, bigger and stronger, pushed him back roughly.

"Go on," he said, and added, while a grin overspread his fat face, "That's no fish, anyway. Whoever heard of catching fish in trees? That's a bird, Timmy, and I shot it. See its tail-feathers?"

He swung the fish and gave Little Tim a slap over the head with the tail of it, that brought the tears to Tim's eyes.

"Go on, tell Harvey," he said. "This bird's mine."

Dangling the pickerel by the gills, and shouldering his gun, he pushed on upstream through the alders, leaving Little Tim angry and smarting.

"I'll get even with you, Benny Ellison," called Tim; but the other only laughed and went on.

Tim slowly unjointed his rod, tied the pieces together in a compact bundle, gathered up his string of remaining fish and started homeward. When he had gone on about a quarter of a mile, however, he suddenly paused and stood for a moment, considering something. Then he looked about him, stepped into a little thicket where he hid his pole and fish carefully from sight, then retraced his steps upstream.

He went on through the alders and brush, till presently he heard the report of the gun. Guided by the sound, he continued on for a little way, then shinned into the branches of a tall cedar, heavily wooded, and from there got a view upstream. Several rods away, he could see the alders move, thrust aside by Benny Ellison. Little Tim seated himself amid the branches, safely hidden, and waited.

Some ten or fifteen minutes passed, and then the snapping of underbrush told of the approach of Benny Ellison, on his return. That his shot had told was evidenced by another pickerel which he carried, hung by the gills on the crotch of an alder branch, together with the big fellow that Little Tim had caught. Tim's

eyes snapped as he saw the fish.

Benny Ellison, chuckling to himself, passed the tree where Tim crouched, high above him. Almost within the shadow of it, he stopped and laughed heartily, as he glanced down at the big pickerel.

"It's a bird," he cried. "Shot it in a tree—what luck!"

Not until he had gone some distance did Little Tim emerge from hiding, scramble to the ground and follow. Dodging from tree to tree, and pausing frequently, he saw Benny Ellison finally seat himself on a log beside the stream. Tim waited. Then a smile of satisfaction crossed his freckled face as Benny Ellison began stripping off his clothes for a swim.

Little Tim, crouching low, almost crawling, crept closer.

Benny Ellison stood on a bank by the edge of a deep pool, a favourite swimming-place, where he and his cousins, and Little Tim, too, had had many a swim. The water was inviting, with the sultriness of the afternoon. Tim's heart beat high as he saw Benny Ellison plunge headforemost into the pool.

Then Tim's hopes were realized. Benny Ellison, a good swimmer, struck out into midstream toward a reef that protruded a few feet above water.

Crawling on hands and knees, Tim quickly gained the shelter of the log where the other had thrown his clothes, with the fish dropped just alongside. Tim made sure of his fish, first. He pulled it hastily from the stick, leaving the one that Benny Ellison had shot, afterwards, unmolested for the moment.

Then he dragged Benny Ellison's cotton shirt down behind the log. Seizing the sleeves, he proceeded to tie the thin garment into hard knots. It was the old schoolboy trick. He had had it played on him many a time in swimming—and done the same by others; but he had never entered into the prank with half the zest as now. He tugged at the knots and drew them hard.

"That shirt's a bird," he said softly, eying the shapeless bundle, with a grin. Then he served the trousers and the "galluses" the same way; likewise Benny Ellison's socks. Finally, having it all dona to suit him, he stood erect upon the log and called out to the swimmer.

"Say, Benny," he cried, "here's your bird." And, stooping and picking up Benny Ellison's pickerel, he hurled the dead fish far out into the stream. The fish struck

the water with a splash, as Benny Ellison, turning in dismay and wrath, started back with vigorous strokes.

"There's another bird on the log for you, Benny," called Tim. Then, picking up his own fish, he scampered. Benny Ellison's slower steps could not have equalled the pace set by those bare feet, had he been ashore. By the time he was on land again, Little Tim, his pole and string of fish regained, was half-way to the Ellison dam.

A voice stopped him as he was emerging on to the main road, just below Witham's Half Way House. He turned and saw Bess Thornton.

"Hello, Tim," she called, "what's the matter? Anybody after you? My, but I guess you've been running fast."

Tim Reardon, wiping his face with his sleeves, told her what had happened. The girl danced with glee, while her bright eyes sparkled.

"Oh, goody!" she exclaimed. "Wouldn't I just like to have seen that fat old Benny Ellison try to catch you. My, but you always have the luck, don't you? That's a grand string of fish."

Tim Reardon, unstringing two of the pickerel from the rope, transferred them to a twig of alder that he cut from a near by bush, and handed them to her.

"I've got more'n I want," he said.

"Thanks," said the girl, and added, "Say, Tim, I'll tell you something. I saw four trout in the brook this morning, and one of them was that long."

She measured with her hands, held a little more than a foot apart.

"Where was it—about a mile above your house?" queried Tim.

The girl nodded.

"In the pool where the big tree's fallen across," she said.

"I guess he's the big one I've tried to get, a lot of times," said Tim. "But I haven't seen him lately. I thought he'd gone down into Ellison's pool. I'd like to see him."

He was a fisherman by nature, was Little Tim, and the very mention of the big trout made his eyes twinkle.

"Come on up," said Bess Thornton.

Tim hesitated. "It's most too late," he replied. "I'll be late to supper now, if I don't run."

"Oh, never mind," she urged. "I'll show you just where I saw him. I just as lieve you'd catch him."

The invitation was too much for Tim, and he started off across the fields with Bess Thornton.

"That fish'll never bite," he said, as they went along; "I've tried him with worms and grasshoppers and wasps and crickets, and that fly made of feathers that Jack gave me. He knows a whole lot, that old trout. Guess he's a school-teacher, he knows so much."

"I'm going to catch him, anyway, if you don't," said the girl. "I know what I'm going to do."

"What's that?" asked Tim, in a tone that indicated he had no great faith in her success.

"I'm going to bait up two hooks with a whole lot of worms, and I'm not going to put 'em into the pool till after it gets dark," replied Bess Thornton. "And I'm going to let 'em stay there all night. He's such a sly old thing you can't get near the bank without he knows it. Then when it gets morning, and he's hungry, perhaps he'll see all those worms and just go and catch himself."

"Yes, and get away again long before you get back," said Tim Reardon. "He'll just take and tangle that line all up around the rocks and sticks at the bottom, and break it."

"I'm going to try, anyway," she insisted. They turned in at the path leading to the girl's home presently, and she went in with the pickerel.

"I'll dig some bait for you while you're gone," called Tim.

"I can do it," she said.

"Oh, you're all dressed up," said Tim, who had noted her unusual appearance, clad as she was in her new bright sailor-suit.

"Going to change it," she said, "Had to put it on to go to Benton in."

She went into the house, and Tim Reardon, seizing a spade that he found leaning against the shed, made his way to a corner of the house, where an old water-spout came down, from the gutter that caught the rain on the roof. He was turning up the soil there when the girl reappeared.

"Oh, that isn't the place to dig," she said. "I never dig for worms there."

"Well, here's the place to find 'em," asserted Tim. "I'm getting some. You always find angleworms where the ground's moist. They like it, because the rain comes down off the roof here. There you are, grab that fat fellow."

The girl made a grab at a bit of the soft earth, where a worm was wriggling back into its hole.

"Ugh! he got away," she said, opening her hand and letting the dirt drop through her fingers. The next moment she uttered a little cry of surprise.

"I've got something, though," she exclaimed. "Look, Tim, it's money—it's a coin. Where do you suppose it came from? Perhaps it's good yet. If I can spend it, I'll go halves."

The boy took the piece of money from her fingers. It was dull and tarnished; a little larger in size than a ten cent piece, but it was not silver.

Tim Reardon looked at it intently and rubbed its sides on his trousers leg.

"Say, Bess," he said earnestly, "do you know what I think—I guess it's gold. Yes, I do. 'Tisn't American money, though. It's got a queer head on it, see, a man with some sort of a thing on his head like a wreath. Oh, my, but that's too bad. Look, Bess, there's a hole been bored in it. P'raps you can't spend it."

Near the edge, there was, in truth, a tiny depression, nearly obscured by dirt and corrosion, which seemed to indicate that the coin had at some time been pierced, as though it might have been worn by someone as an ornament.

"Let's scrub it," said the girl. "Perhaps it'll brighten up, so we can see it better."

They went in with it to the kitchen sink, where Bess Thornton, getting a basin of warm water and soap, proceeded to polish the coin with a small brush. It soon brightened sufficiently to reveal the unmistakable gleam of gold, and was a foreign coin of some sort, possibly of Austrian coinage; but the letters which it had borne, and the figures, had been worn much away; and one side was worn

quite smooth, so as to give no clew to what had been stamped there.

"Well, I can wear it, if I can't spend it," said Bess Thornton. "There's the hole to hang it by. Isn't it pretty?"

"Isn't what pretty?" said a voice, suddenly interrupting them. Old Granny Thornton was peering over the girl's shoulder. "What are you two doing? What have you got there?"

"See, gran'," replied the girl. "Look what we found. It's money, gran', and it's gold."

The old woman took the coin in her thin fingers and held it up close to her eyes. Then she started and her hand shook tremulously. A pallor overspread her face. She sank back into a chair, staring at the coin, which she clutched tight as though it had some strange fascination that held her gaze.

"Where did you get that?" she cried hoarsely. "Where was it?"

"We dug it up just now, gran', out in the yard. Why, what's the matter? Can't I keep it? What makes you act so queer, gran'?"

The old woman hesitated for a moment and seemed lost for a reply. Then she said, hurriedly:

"No, girl—no, not now. You shall have it some day. You can't have it yet. It isn't time. You wore it once when you were little—but it was lost. Oh, how I've hunted for it! You'll get it again. I'll keep it safe, this time."

She was strangely agitated and spoke in broken tones. Then, to their surprise, she arose and hurried from the room, waving the girl back and bidding her go and play. They heard her go stumbling up the stairs to the floor above.

"Mean old thing!" exclaimed Bess. "Well, I don't care. Let her keep it. I'll find where she hides it, see if I don't. Come on, let's go out doors."

Granny Thornton, peering out an attic window at the boy and girl, going up along the brook, turned and felt along a dusty beam until her fingers rested on a key. With this she unlocked a drawer of an old bureau, that stood in a dark, out-of-the-way corner. There were some odds and ends of clothing there, and some boxes and papers. From out the stuff, she drew, with trembling fingers, a small gold chain, such as children wear. Fumbling over this, she unclasped a tiny clasp

and affixed the golden coin. Then, holding it up to her eyes, she gazed at it long and earnestly; replaced it in the drawer, locked this, hid the key again and stole down the stairs.

CHAPTER XIII

A SAILING ADVENTURE

John Ellison, a youth of about fifteen, but of a sturdy build and manner that might lead one to suppose him older, stood by the gateway of the Ellison farm, looking down across the fields towards the mill. It was busy grinding and, as its monotonous tones came up to him, the boy shook his head sadly. An expression as of anger overspread his manly young face, and his cheeks flushed.

"It's wrong," he exclaimed, speaking his thoughts aloud; "I'll bet there's some trick about it. Father always said we should run the mill some day. It makes me mad to see old Witham sneaking about, afraid to look any of us in the face; but I suppose there's no help for it."

He went up the driveway to the house, got an axe from the woodshed and began splitting some pieces of sawed oak and hickory from a great pile in the yard. It was a relief to his pent-up feelings, and he drove the axe home with powerful blows. He was a strong, handsome youth, with face and arms healthily bronzed with work in the open air. He laid a big junk of the oak across the chopping-block, swung the axe, and cleft the stick with a single blow that sent the halves flying in either direction.

"That was a good stroke—a corker," exclaimed a youth who had entered the yard and come up quietly behind him. John Ellison turned quickly.

"Hello, Henry," he said. "Where'd you come from?"

"Just had a swim," replied Henry Burns. "I see where you get all that muscle, now. That's good as canoeing, I guess."

"Well," responded John Ellison, looking rather serious, "I reckon I'll do more of it from now on than canoeing; though I've done my share of work all along. I'm running the farm now—that is, what we've got left. Witham's got a good part of it. I suppose you know, don't you?"

Henry Burns nodded. "It's a shame," he said. "But perhaps it'll come out right in the end."

"I don't see how," said John Ellison. "Witham's got the mill, and the big wood lot where we used to cut most of the wood we sold every fall, and the great meadow up opposite old Granny Thornton's, with the hayfield in it. We've got enough left close by here to keep us from starving, all right; but it isn't what it ought to be. We've had to sell half the cows, because we can't feed them."

Henry Burns whistled. "It's tough," he said, and added, doubtfully, "How about that week up at the pond? Can you go?"

John Ellison looked downcast. "I'd forgotten all about that," he said. "We did plan for a week at Old Whitecap, didn't we? I'm afraid it's all up for me, though. There's haying to be done, a lot of wood to be cut, and chores. I guess you'll have to count me out. I might let Jim go for a couple of days, though," he added, speaking as though he were a dozen years older than his brother, instead of only one.

"No, you're the one that was going," responded Henry Burns; "you could go if the work were done, couldn't you?"

"Perhaps," replied John Ellison; "but there's enough there to take us more than a fortnight. Benny don't count for much; he's too lazy."

"Well, we'll get the work done, all right," said Henry Burns; "and then we'll take you with us."

John Ellison laughed. "You city fellows wouldn't like farm work, much, I guess," he said.

He hardly took Henry Burns seriously, especially as the latter spoke but little more about the project; but, the next day, looking up from his work, at the sound of wagon wheels, he saw a cart coming up the hill, laden with baggage and a party of boys. Tom Harris was driving, and beside him on the seat were Bob White and Henry Burns. In the body of the cart were Jack Harvey and Tim Reardon. These two were seated amidst a pile of camp stuff.

"Well, we're here," said Henry Burns, laughing, as the boys piled out of the cart. "Hope you've got something for us all to do. You'll find us green, but we won't shirk."

John Ellison stared at them in amazement. "You better go on out to the pond," he said. "I don't want to keep you fellows. Perhaps Jim and I can get out for a couple of days before you come in. Besides, you want to look out for Benny," he

added, winking at Henry Burns. "He says he's going to thrash you some day."

"Oh, I'm all right," laughed Henry Burns. "I've got Jack here to help me out now. What'll we do, John? Come on, we're losing time."

"Well, if you really want to," replied John Ellison, somewhat reluctantly, "two of you can go down in the haying field and help Jim; and there's this wood's got to be split, and the corn and potatoes to be hoed." He pointed, as he spoke, to two great fields of the latter. "We'll set Tim catching potato bugs," he added, smiling.

"I'll catch 'em," responded Tim, heartily. "I wonder what kind of bait they'd make for trout."

They divided up then, Tom and Bob, equipped with pitchforks, starting off for the haying field; Henry Burns and Tim following John Ellison into the garden; while Harvey, his waist stripped to a faded sleeveless jersey, attacked the woodpile with a strength and energy that made up for his lack of familiarity with the work.

He was busily engaged when Mrs. Ellison looked out at the kitchen door.

"Why," she said, in surprise, "I didn't know we had a new hand. Oh, I see, you're one of the boys' friends."

Harvey explained.

"Well, I call that good of you," exclaimed Mrs. Ellison, her pleasant, motherly face beaming. "Let the boys go after it's done? Why, of course. They can both go. Benny will help me through the week, all right, won't you, Benny?"

The youth thus addressed, who had just put in an appearance, his gun over his shoulder, assented, though not with much heartiness. He scowled at Harvey, and made no offer to be friendly.

"I suppose you want to go on the pond, too," said Mrs. Ellison, sympathetically.

Benny Ellison glanced sullenly at Harvey. "Not with those city chaps," he replied.

The "city chaps," sneeringly referred to by Benny Ellison, proved themselves good workmen, however. Unused to farm labour, as they were, their muscles were, however, far from being soft and easily tired. Tom and Bob, who excelled at athletics, surprised Jim Ellison with the amount of hay they could stack up

into cocks, or, again, the amount they could spread and scatter; and they were tireless in following him through all the broad field. Henry Burns and Little Tim were of the wiry sort that never seemed to weary; while Harvey made the pile of split wood grow in a way that made Mrs. Ellison's eyes stick out.

Then, at noon, when the big farm dinner-bell rang, there was a great table spread for them in the long dining-room, fairly creaking with an array of good things to eat; with plenty of rich milk and doughnuts and home-made gingerbread to finish up with. Little Tim's thin face seemed to be almost bulging when he had done; and he ate his sixth doughnut in gallant style.

He was nearly wild with delight, too, late that afternoon, when he got permission to fish the famous Ellison trout pool; and he came back in time for supper with a fine string of the fish, brilliantly spotted fellows, which Mrs. Ellison fried to a crisp for the crew of boy farmers when their day's work was over.

There came a little knock at the door when they were eating supper, and Bess Thornton, come for a pitcher of milk, looked in at the group of merry youngsters.

"My, what fun!" she exclaimed, and speaking half to herself added, "I wish I lived here too. Gran' said—"

"What's that? Why, I wish you did live here," exclaimed Mrs. Ellison, stepping back with the pitcher in her hands at the girl's words, and looking into her bright, eager face with eyes that suddenly moistened. "I wish you did," she repeated. "Why don't you ever come in, when you come for the milk? Come in now and have some supper with the boys?"

But the girl started back, almost timidly.

"Oh, I can't," she said, "I didn't think what I was saying. Gran' says never to stay —to hurry back. She doesn't like to have me come for the milk, but she can't come, herself."

And, true to her instructions, she departed promptly, when she had received the pitcher, well filled—almost double what the money she had brought would usually buy.

"She's a queer little sprite," was Mrs. Ellison's comment, as she watched her go down the path; "but there's something fine and brave about her. Who wouldn't be queer, living all alone with old Granny Thornton?"

The two weeks' farming that John Ellison had reckoned on was through with in five days, thanks to the energy of the volunteer crew. They enjoyed it, too; the work in the bright fields; the jolly meals at the Ellison table; the nights in the big hay-barn, with blankets spread in the mow; the evening's swim in the stream just before supper.

And, on the sixth day, John and James Ellison went away on the wagon, with clear consciences and light hearts, and with Mrs. Ellison waving a farewell to them from the door of the shed. It was cramped quarters for them all in the wagon, with the camping equipment, jolting along the country roads; and they walked most of the hills. But the journey was a jubilant one, and they welcomed the first gleaming of Whitecap pond with whoops of delight.

Whitecap pond seemed to return the welcome, too; for it twinkled all over in the light of an afternoon sun, as they set up the two tents that were to house them; and it sent in its light ripples dancing merrily almost to the very door of the tents; a splash now and then in the still waters told them of fishing delights to come. The white, fine sand of its shores was soft as carpet to their feet, as they ran races along the shore, and took a swim by moonlight before they turned in for the night's rest.

They liked the wildness of the loon's weird hullo, coming in at the open flaps of the tents from afar; and the clumsy fluttering and flapping of great beetles against the canvas, attracted by the lantern light that shone through. The cawing of crows just above their heads awoke them early next morning.

They were out for perch and bass before the sun was high, and were in luck, for the fish were plenty; and the perch chowder that Bob, who was an old and experienced camper, made for the noon meal was a wonderful achievement, and reminded them of old times in Samoset Bay.

But there was one drawback—at least, for Henry Burns and Harvey, who were hankering for the grip of a tiller and the thrill of a boat under sail. There wasn't a sailboat to be hired on the pond. There were not many, and they were all engaged. Coombs, who owned the slip and the boats, said he hadn't done such a business in years. He could only let them have two rowboats. Yet they came into the use of one, two days later, through an adventure.

It was early in the afternoon, and Henry Burns and Harvey and Little Tim stood on the float at Coombs's landing, looking at a sailboat that lay at its berth alongside. It was not exactly a handsome craft; with too great length for its

beam, and its lines drawn out so fine astern that it bade fair to be somewhat cranky. It had no cabin, and there was seating room for a large party—a design calculated more for profit than safety.

The boat was in evident poor condition, lacking paint, and its rigging frayed, a not uncommon condition with boats to let in small waters of this sort. Somewhat crude lettering on the stern spelled the name, *Flyaway*.

"Looks as though she might fly away with somebody, all right, if he didn't look out," remarked Harvey, grinning at his companions. "Wish we had her, though, for a week. We'd take a chance, eh, Henry?"

Henry Burns nodded. "Let's see 'em start off in her," he said.

They waited about, and presently there appeared on the landing the present claimant of the *Flyaway*. He was a big, bluff, hearty man, florid face, loud of voice, a free and easy manner, and he was dressed for the occasion in yachting clothes of unmistakable newness. He eyed the *Flyaway* with an assumption of nautical wisdom and experience.

"That's a good-looking boat, Captain Coombs," he said, in tones that could be heard far away. "She's all right; just what I want. I like a boat with plenty of room for the ladies to be comfortable."

"Well, I reckon she's the best boat on Whitecap pond," responded the man, while his small eyes twinkled shrewdly. "Just humour her a bit, and I reckon she'll go where anything of her size will. She's seen some rough times on this pond."

The appearance of the *Flyaway* seemed to bear out this statement.

"Sure you can handle her all right, are you, Mr. Bangs?" added Captain Coombs, eying his customer with a quick, sidelong glance.

"Well, I reckon," was the bluff reply.

Captain Coombs, possibly not all assured, gave an inquiring look toward a man who was busy cleaning a rowboat close by, and who seemed to be an interested party of some sort, probably a partner. The man drew his right eye down in an unmistakable wink, and glanced up at the sky. Then he nodded, shrugging his shoulders at the same time, as though he might have said, "There's no wind; we'll take a chance."

There was, indeed, scarcely a breath of wind blowing, and there was no present prospect of any.

Mr. Bangs's party began now to arrive: a somewhat fleshy, and withal nervous and agitated lady, who proved to be Mrs. Bangs; two young girls, an angular lady carrying a fat pug dog in her arms, and a small boy.

"Aha, we're all here," cried Mr. Bangs, joyfully. "Let's get aboard and be off. Splendid day for a sail, eh, Captain Coombs?"

"Couldn't be better," replied Coombs, dryly. "Are those oars in her, Dan?"

"Why, you don't suppose I'm going to row her, do you?" laughed Mr. Bangs.

"We sometimes has to, when we doesn't want to," said Coombs laconically. "No fun staying out all night if the wind dies out."

"Oh, yes, of course," responded Mr. Bangs. "Get aboard, ladies."

"I don't believe you know how to sail a boat, Augustus," said Mrs. Bangs, eying her husband doubtfully. "Are you sure you do?"

"Nonsense!" snorted Mr. Bangs. "Don't be getting nervous, now. Don't you know I was elected commodore of the Green Pond Fishing Club only two weeks ago?"

Mr. Bangs refrained from communicating the fact that the principal occupation of the members of the Green Pond Fishing Club was the mixing of certain refreshing liquids in tall glasses, and sipping them on the verandah of a clubhouse.

The party therefore embarked. Mrs. Bangs was not wholly at ease, however.

"Supposing there isn't any wind by and by, Augustus, and you have to row. Why don't you take somebody along, to help? We've got lots to eat."

This idea, at least, seemed to strike Mr. Bangs favourably. He glanced to where Henry Burns and his companions stood.

"Hello," he called, "want to go out for a sail? Got room enough. Take you along."

The three boys stepped toward the boat.

"Not scared of the water, are you?" queried Mr. Bangs.

"Not unless it gets rough," replied Henry Burns, with a sly wink at Harvey.

The three jumped aboard, and Coombs, with something like a grin at his partner, shoved the boat's head off. He had got the jib and mainsail up, and they caught what little breeze there was stirring. The *Flyaway* drew away from the landing. To Bangs's embarrassment, however, the boom suddenly swung inboard, swiped across the stern, causing him to duck hastily, and almost knocking the bonnet off the lady with the pug dog. Mr. Bangs had jibed the boat, greatly to his surprise. But no harm had been done, as the wind was light.

Mr. Bangs laughed loudly. "Meant to tell you that was coming," he said. "She'll sail better this way. Ever been on the water before, boys?"

Harvey nodded. "A little," he said.

"Well, the more you are used to it, the better you'll like it," said Mr. Bangs. "Don't mind if she tips a little, if we get any wind. She sails that way. Funny that jib flutters so. Better haul in on that rope there and—and trim it."

Henry Burns, soberly following orders, did as requested. But it was noticeable that the trimming did not seem to accomplish the result desired by Mr. Bangs. In fact, as the *Flyaway* was going dead before the wind, it was quite apparent that no amount of trimming would make the jib draw.

"It keeps on fluttering just the same, Augustus," said Mrs. Bangs, eying the offending sail suspiciously. "Hadn't you better tie it some way?"

"Of course not," responded Mr. Bangs, loftily. "They will act that way sometimes. Isn't that so, my lads?"

"Oh yes," replied Henry Burns. "I've seen 'em do it, haven't you, Jack?"

But Harvey was looking the other way.

They went slowly up the pond, with Mr. Bangs holding the tiller and watching the sail critically. He was in buoyant spirits, and entertained them with stories of the thrilling adventures of the Green Pond Fishing Club, in which he seemed to have figured prominently.

The wind freshened a little and the *Flyaway* drew ahead somewhat faster. There was just the suspicion of a ripple along the sides, and it was pleasant sailing. Two miles up the pond they dropped the sail and anchored; got out the fish lines

and tried for bass. After which, Mr. Bangs, a generous host, opened up a huge hamper and spread out a luncheon that made Little Tim's mouth water.

"Nothing like sailing to give one an appetite," exclaimed Mr. Bangs, heartily. "Pitch in, boys. There's plenty of grub. I believe in having enough to eat, I do."

He was so busily and pleasantly engaged in eating that he paid no heed to the aspect of the sky. Nor, indeed, was there anything of very serious import in its changes. But Henry Burns, alert as ever, saw certain signs of wind in some light banks of cloud that began to gather in the western sky, in the direction of Coombs's landing.

"We won't have to row home," he said presently, addressing the skipper of the *Flyaway*, who was absorbed in the enjoyment of a huge slice of meat pie.

"Eh, what's that?" he inquired. "What do you mean?"

"We're going to have some wind," replied Henry Burns.

"Well, that's what we want, for sailing," laughed Mr. Bangs. "You aren't anxious to row, are you?"

"Not particularly," replied Henry Burns. "We won't have to, anyway. It's going to blow some. We'll take some spray in over the bows beating back—"

"What's that?" exclaimed Mrs. Bangs. "Augustus, do you hear? Let's start right away. We don't want to get wet."

"Ho!" sniffed Mr. Bangs. But just then a quick gust of wind swept over them, such as comes without warning in pond waters, bordered by hills. Mr. Bangs seemed to take the hint it conveyed. "Guess we'd better start," he said.

The boys sprang to the halyards; the sails were hoisted and the anchor got aboard. With Mr. Bangs at the tiller, the *Flyaway* started on the beat of two miles down the pond. The wind continued to freshen, coming now and then in flaws, as the light clouds overspread the sky.

Henry Burns, noting the style of Mr. Bangs's yachtsmanship, and observing the freshening of the wind, and the fact that the craft was not being worked to windward anywhere near what it would go, slipped astern beside Mr. Bangs.

"Like to have me tend that sheet for you?" he asked, carelessly.

Mr. Bangs waved him back. "Don't touch that, my lad," he cried. "You might upset us in a minute. Never let a boy fool with a sheet—hello!"

A sharper and heavier flaw caught the big mainsail with full force; and then, as Mr. Bangs in his excitement threw the tiller over and headed the yacht farther off the wind, instead of up into it, the *Flyaway* heeled dangerously, taking water over the side and causing the pug dog, which got a drenching, to howl dolorously. Mrs. Bangs gave a slight scream.

"Oh, it's all right. Don't be alarmed," said Mr. Bangs, assuringly. He failed to notice that prompt action on the part of Henry Burns, who had started the sheet at the critical moment, had saved them from a spill; and seemed to think that somehow he had righted things himself. However, as he observed that youth calmly trimming the sail again, despite his admonition to let the sheet alone, he seemed to have undergone a change of heart.

"That's right," he said, in a tone of not quite so much confidence, "you just run that thing, while I do the steering."

It began to get rough now, and the *Flyaway* did not seem to justify it's owner's praise. It threw the water heavily—partly by reason of its clumsy build and partly because Mr. Bangs did not meet the waves with the tiller. One might have observed, moreover, that Mr. Bangs wore an anxious expression, and his hand shook slightly as he pressed the tiller.

A moment more, and he seemed almost dazed as the tiller was snatched from his grasp by Henry Burns, who put the *Flyaway* hard up into the wind, just in time to meet a squall that threw the lee rail under again. The craft stood still, almost, with the sail shivering. Then Henry Burns eased her off gently, getting her under headway again. Mr. Bangs was deathly pale. The spray had dashed aboard freely and drenched him.

"We've got to reef, and be quick about it," said Henry Burns, addressing the shivering skipper. "What do you say? It's your boat."

"What's that—eh, do you think so?" stammered Mr. Bangs. "Reef her? Yes, that'll stop her tipping, won't it? Oh my! can you do it?"

His knees were wabbling, and he allowed himself to be pushed aside, sinking down, pale and trembling on the seat.

"Here, you take her, Jack," said Henry Burns. "Tim and I'll reef her. We can do it

quick."

He relinquished the tiller to Harvey, who threw the boat up into the wind, while Henry Burns and Tim seized the halyards and lowered the sail sufficiently to take in a double reef. Henry Burns had the tack tied down in a jiffy; whereupon Harvey drew the sail aft, hauled out on the pendant and passed a lashing. Henry Burns and Little Tim had the reef points tied in no time. Before Mr. Bangs's wondering eyes the sail was hoisted, the topping lift set up, and the boat got under way again before he had had hardly time to think what had happened.

It was surprising to see how easily the craft went along under competent management. The spray flew some and the water came aboard, wetting the party to the skin and causing alarm; but there was little danger. The *Flyaway* no longer took the brunt of the waves, but headed into them a little, keeping good headway on. What was better, she was making time, going to windward and approaching the landing.

Mr. Bangs gradually regained his colour, and took courage.

"Guess you've sailed some before," he said, with a sickly smile. "You go at it like old hands."

"We've got a boat of our own," replied Harvey. "She's down in Samoset bay. We got a big price for her for the summer, so we let her."

Mr. Bangs looked a bit sheepish.

"I'm glad you came along," he said; and added with a glance at Mrs. Bangs, and in a lower tone, "I haven't sailed very much, to tell the truth. We do—er—mostly rowing in the Green Pond Fishing Club."

They came up to the landing in sailor fashion, and the party stepped out.

"Glad to see yer back," remarked Coombs. "Got just a bit worried about you. You came in nicely, though."

Mr. Bangs smiled good-naturedly.

"Well," he said, "the fact is, I've got a crew. They are old sailors. You ought to have seen them reef her quicker'n scat. They're going along with me after this, for the rest of their stay—and their friends, too. My wife says she's got enough sailing."

"I should say I had," said Mrs. Bangs.

CHAPTER XIV

THE FORTUNE-TELLER

Mr. Bangs proved to be a genial companion in the days that followed. Nothing suited him better than to fill up the *Flyaway* with the crew of campers and go sailing on the pond. No longer seeking to support a fallen dignity as skipper, he was pleased to receive instruction from Henry Burns and Harvey, and even occasionally from Little Tim, in the art of sailing.

They showed him how to sail the craft nicely to windward, without the sail shaking; how to run off the wind, with no danger of jibing her; how to reef with safety, and how to watch the water for signs of squalls. He, in turn, told them good stories of the Fishing Club; and, as he really did know how to fish, he returned their instruction with lessons in this art.

It was certainly a pretty piece of sport, when Mr. Bangs would take his light, split-bamboo fly-rod and send fifty feet of line, straightening out its turns through the air, and dropping a tiny fly on the water as easily as though it had fallen there in actual flight. Even Harvey, and Tom and Bob, who had done some little fly fishing, found Mr. Bangs an expert who could teach them more than they had ever dreamed, of its possibilities. Little Tim, who had threshed brook waters with an alder stick, using a ragged fly, was an apt pupil, when Mr. Bangs entrusted to him his fine rod, and showed him how to make a real cast.

"There, you're catching it, now," exclaimed Mr. Bangs to Tim, one morning, as they floated on the still surface of the pond, about a half mile above the camps. "Don't let your arm go too far back on that back cast. Don't use your shoulder. You're not chopping wood. Just use the wrist on the forward stroke, when you get the line moving forward."

Tim, enthusiastic, tried again and again, striving to remember all points at once, and now and then making a fair cast.

It was only practice work; but, somehow or other, a big black bass failed to understand that, and suddenly Tim's quick eye saw the water in a whirl about his fly. He struck, and the fish was fast.

"Well, by Jove!" exclaimed Mr. Bangs. "One never knows what's going to happen when he's fishing. I didn't think they'd take the fly here at this time of year. Let him have the line now, when he rushes. That's it. Now hold him a little."

The light fly-rod was bending nearly double. Intermittently, the reel would sing as the fish made a dash for freedom and the line ran out.

"Look out now; he's turned. Reel in," shouted Mr. Bangs, more excited even than Little Tim. He wouldn't have had that fish get away for anything. "Here he comes to the top," he continued. "Reel in on him. Hold him. There, he's going to jump. Hold him. Don't let him shake the hook out."

The black bass, a strong active fish, made a leap out of water, shook his jaws as though he would tear the hook loose, then shot downward again.

"Give him a little on the rod when he hits the water," cried Mr. Bangs. "That's right. Keep him working now. Don't give him any slack."

Little Tim, alternately reeling in and lifting on the road, and letting the fish have the line in his angry-rushes, was playing him well. Mr. Bangs applauded. Gradually the struggles of the big bass grew weaker. His rushes, still sharp and fierce, were soon over. By and by he turned on his side.

"Careful now," cautioned Mr. Bangs. "Many a good bass is lost in the landing. Draw him in easy."

Little Tim followed instructions, and Mr. Bangs deftly slid the landing net under the prize. He dipped the bass into the boat, took out a small pair of pocket-scales and weighed him.

"It's a five-pounder!" he exclaimed. "You've beat the record on Whitecap this year. Well, fisherman's luck is a great thing. You're a born lucky fisherman."

"Now," he added, "we'll just row down to your camp and I'll cook a chowder that'll make your eyes stick out, and have it all ready when the boys return. Save them getting a breakfast."

They went back along shore to the empty camp, deserted by the boys, who were out for early morning fishing.

"What do you say?" inquired Mr. Bangs, "Think they'll care if I go ahead and

cook up a chowder? Guess I can do it all right. Oh, I've seen 'em made, a thousand times, up at the Fishing Club."

"They'll be glad of it," said Little Tim. "Go ahead."

Mr. Bangs, rummaging through the campers' stores, proceeded to construct his chowder; while Tim busied himself about the camp, after building a fire.

Mr. Bangs, stirring the mess in a big iron kettle suspended above the blaze, waved a welcome to the boys, as they came in.

"Thought you'd like to have breakfast all ready," he cried. "The *Flyaway's* waiting for us all to get through."

They thanked him warmly.

"Oh, I'm having as much fun as you are out of it," he responded. "Get your plates and I'll fill 'em up."

He ladled out a heaping plate of the chowder for each, and they seated themselves on two great logs. Henry Burns tasted his mess first, and then he stopped, looked slyly at his comrades and didn't eat any more. Harvey got a mouthful, and he gave an exclamation of surprise. Little Tim swallowed some, and said "Oh, giminy!" Tom and Bob and the Ellison brothers were each satisfied with one taste. They waited, expectantly, for Mr. Bangs to get his.

Mr. Bangs, helping himself liberally, started in hungrily. Then he stopped and looked around. They were watching him, interestedly. Mr. Bangs made a wry face and rinsed his mouth out with a big swallow of water.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" he exclaimed. "If it isn't sweet. Sweet chowder! Oh dear, isn't it awful? What did it?"

Henry Burns, looking about him, pointed to a tell-tale tin can which, emptied of its contents, lay beside the fire.

Mr. Bangs had made his chowder of condensed milk, sweet and sticky.

"I say," he exclaimed, "just throw that stuff away and we'll go up to the landing for breakfast. I thought milk was milk. I never thought about it's being sweetened."

They liked Mr. Bangs, in spite of his mistakes; and he wasn't abashed for long,

when he had pretended to be able to do something that he didn't know how to do, and had been found out. He had a hearty way of laughing about it, as though it were the best joke in all the world—and there was one thing he could really do; he could cast a fly, and they admired his skill in that. And when it came time for them to leave, and bid him good-bye, they were heartily sorry to take leave of him, and hoped they should meet him again.

But Mr. Bangs was not to be gotten free from abruptly. There was bottled soda and there were stale peanuts over at the landing, where Coombs kept a small hotel a little way up from the shore; and Mr. Bangs insisted that they should go over and have a treat at his expense.

"You don't have to start till four o'clock," he urged. "You've got plenty of time." And they needed no great amount of persuasion.

"Funny old place Coombs keeps," he remarked, as they walked from the camps over to the landing. "All sorts of queer people drop in there over night. Last night, there were some show people in some of the rooms next to mine—they're going to leave to-morrow, for the fair up at Newbury—and they kept me awake half the night, with their racket.

"They've got a fortune-teller among them, too," he continued. "Say, she's a shrewd one. Of course, she's one of the fakers, but she's downright smart—told me a lot of things about myself that were true. Suppose she looked me over sharp. Say, I tell you what I'll do; I'll get her to tell your fortunes. How'd you like to have your fortunes told? I'll pay."

As matter of fact, they were not so enthusiastic over it as was Mr. Bangs; but they didn't like to say so, since he seemed to take it for granted that they did. So, after they had had the soda and peanuts, Mr. Bangs ushered them, one by one, into a room, where the fortune-teller awaited them.

Perhaps she flattered most of them over-much; perhaps she even hinted at certain bright-eyed, yellow-haired young misses, whom some of them might fancy, but were not of an age to admit it. At all events, as they came forth, one by one, they made a great mystery of what she had said to them. Little Tim didn't take kindly to the idea at all, in fact; and, when it came his turn, Henry Burns and Harvey had to take him and shove him into the room.

He was inclined to be a bit abashed when he found himself in the presence of a tall, dark, thin-faced woman, whose keen, black eyes seemed to pierce him

through and through. In fact, those shrewd, quick eyes were about all anyone might need, to discover a good deal about Little Tim, whose small but wiry figure, tanned face, bare feet and dress indicated much of his condition in life.

"Come over here and sit down," said the woman, as Tim stood, eying her somewhat doubtfully. The boy complied.

"So you want your fortune told, do you?" she asked.

"I dunno as I care much about it," answered Tim, bluntly.

The woman smiled a little. "No?" she said. "Let's see your hand."

Tim extended a grimy fist across the table, the lines of which were so obscured with the soil of Coombs's landing that it might have puzzled more than a wizard to read them. But the woman, her keen eyes twinkling, remarked quickly, "That's a fisherman's hand. You're the best fisherman on the pond."

Tim began to take more interest. "I've caught the biggest bass of the year," he said.

"That's it; what did I tell you?" exclaimed the woman. "I think you're going to have a lot of money left to you some day," she added, noting at a glance Tim's poor attire. Little Tim grinned.

"You have some courage, too," continued the woman, who had not failed to observe the boy's features and the glance of his eye. But at this moment Little Tim gave an exclamation of surprise. Surveying the room he had espied the lettering on a partly unrolled banner in one corner, where the words, "Lorelei, the Sorceress," were inscribed.

"Why, I've seen you before," he said. "That is, I haven't seen you, either; but I've seen your picture on that canvas—and you don't look like that at all."

The woman laughed heartily. "You're sure you don't think it looks like me?" she added, and laughed harder than ever. "Well, I should hope not," she said; "but I fix up like that some, for the show. Where'd you see me?"

"Why, it was down at Benton," answered Tim. "You were with the circus."

Then, as the full remembrance of the occasion came to him, Tim became of a sudden excited. "Say," he asked, "what did Old Witham want?"

The woman looked at him in surprise.

"Old Witham," she repeated, "I don't know who you mean. I don't know any Old Witham."

"Oh, yes you do," urged Tim; and he described the unmistakable figure and appearance of the corpulent colonel, together with the time and night of his visit. The woman's eyes lit with amusement. She remembered how the colonel had parted with his money painfully.

"Oh, he didn't want much," she said. "Somebody had hidden some papers in a factory or mill of some sort—that's what I thought, anyway—and he wanted me to tell him where they were."

"Oh," replied Tim, in a tone of disappointment. "Is that all?" He had really fancied the colonel might have a love affair, and that it would be great fun to reveal it to the boys.

"Why, what business is it of yours, what he wanted?" inquired the woman.

"It ain't any," answered Tim. "Guess I'll go now;" and he made his escape through the door.

"Oh, she didn't tell me anything," said Little Tim, as the boys surrounded him a moment later. "Said I could catch fish, though. How do you suppose she knew that?"

Mr. Bangs seemed much amused. "She's a real witch," he exclaimed. "Well, good-bye, boys. Come again next year."

They said good-bye and started off.

"Say, Jack," said Little Tim, as they walked along together, "that's the fortune-teller that was down to Benton with the circus. Remember I told you we caught Witham coming out of the tent? Well, I asked her what he was there for, and it wasn't anything at all. He was only hunting for some papers that somebody had hidden—"

"What's that—tell me about that?"

Henry Burns, who had been walking close by, but who had been not greatly interested up to this point, had suddenly interrupted. "What did Witham want?" he repeated.

Little Tim repeated the fortune-teller's words.

Henry Burns, hurrying ahead to where the others were walking, caught John Ellison by an arm and drew him away. "Come back here a minute," he said. "Here, Tim, tell John what the fortune-teller said about Witham."

John Ellison, listening to Tim Reardon, grew pale and clenched his fist.

"That's it," he cried. "There *are* some other papers, don't you suppose? Lawyer Estes said there might be; but they couldn't find them, though they hunted through the mill. I just know there are some. Witham knew it, too. That's what he was after. Tim, you've found out something big, I tell you. We've just got to get into that mill again and go through it. Don't you say a word to anybody, Tim."

Tim's eyes opened wide with astonishment—but he promised.

All through the work of striking and packing the two tents, and stowing the stuff into the wagon, Henry Burns and John Ellison discussed this new discovery; what it might mean and what use could be made of it. And all the way home, on the long, dusty road, they talked it over. They were late getting started, and it was eight o'clock when they turned in at the Ellison farm.

The mill had ceased grinding for two hours, and night had settled down. But, as they got out of the wagon, John Ellison called to Henry Burns and pointed over the hill toward the mill.

"Do you see?" he said softly, but in excited tones. "Do you see? That's what I see night after night, sometimes as late as nine o'clock."

There was somebody in the old mill, evidently, for the light as from a lantern was discernible now and again through one of the old, cobwebbed windows; a light that flickered fitfully first from one floor, then from another.

"It's Witham," said John Ellison. "He's always in the mill now, early and late. I'll bet he's hunted through it a hundred times since he's had it. It gets on his mind, I guess; for I've seen him come back down the road many a night, after the day's work was over, and he'd had supper, and go through the rooms with the lantern."

"Well," said Henry Burns, quietly, "we'll go through them, too. We'll do it, some way."

CHAPTER XV

A HUNT THROUGH THE MILL

"Say, Henry, guess what I'm going to do," said John Ellison, as he met Henry Burns in the road leading from Benton, a few days following the return from camp.

Henry Burns, leaning on the paddle he was carrying, looked at his friend for a moment and then answered, with surprising assurance, "You're going to work for Witham."

John Ellison stared at his friend in amazement.

"You ought to be a fortune-teller," he exclaimed. "You can't have heard about it, because I haven't told anybody—not even the folks at home. How'd you know?"

"I didn't," replied Henry Burns, smiling at the other's evident surprise. "I only guessed. I knew by the way you looked that it was something unusual; and I know what you're thinking of all the time; it's about those papers. So I've been thinking what I'd do, if I wanted a chance to look for them, and I said to myself that I'd try to go to work in the mill, and keep my eyes open."

"Well, you've hit it," responded John Ellison. "I know he needs a man, and I'm big enough to do the work. Say, come on in with me to-morrow, will you? I hate to go ask Old Witham for work. You don't mind. Come in and see what he says."

"I'll do it," replied Henry Burns. "I'll meet you at the foot of the hill to-morrow forenoon at ten o'clock. Perhaps he'll hire me, too."

"You! you don't have to work," exclaimed John Ellison.

"No, but I will, if he'll take me," said Henry Burns. "I'll stay until I get one good chance to go through the mill, and then I'll leave."

"You're a brick," said John Ellison. "I'm going to tell mother about the scheme now. She won't like it, either. She'd feel bad to have me go to work there for somebody else, when we ought to be running it ourselves. Where are you going —canoeing?"

"Yes; come along?" replied Henry Burns. But John Ellison was too full of his plan to admit of sport, and they separated, with the agreement to meet on the following day.

John Ellison was correct in his surmise that Mrs. Ellison would oppose his intention to work for Colonel Witham. Indeed, Mrs. Ellison wouldn't hear of it at all, at first. It seemed to her a disgrace, almost, to ask favour at the hands of one who, she firmly believed, had somehow tricked them out of their own. But John Ellison was firm.

It would be only for a little time, at most; only that he might, at opportune moments, look about in hope of making some discovery.

"But what can it possibly accomplish?" urged Mrs. Ellison. "Lawyer Estes has had the mill searched a dozen times, and there has been nothing found. How can you expect to find anything? Colonel Witham wouldn't give you the chance, anyway. He's always around the mill now, and he's been over it a hundred times, himself, I dare say. Remember how we've seen his light there night after night?"

But John Ellison was not to be convinced nor thwarted. "I want to hunt for myself," he insisted. "You kept it from me, before, when the lawyers had the searches made."

"I know it," sighed Mrs. Ellison. "I hated to tell you that we were in danger of losing the mill."

"Well, I'm going," declared John Ellison, and Mrs. Ellison gave reluctant consent.

Still, she might have saved herself the trouble of objecting, and let Colonel Witham settle the matter—which he did, summarily.

It was warm, and miller Witham, uncomfortable at all times in summer sultriness, was doubly so in the hot, dusty atmosphere of the mill. The dust from the meal settled on his perspiring face and distressed him; the dull grinding of the huge stones and the whirr of the shaftings and drums somehow did not sound in his ears so agreeably as he had once fancied they would. There was something oppressive about the place—or something in the air that caused him an unexplainable uneasiness—and he stood in the doorway, looking unhappy and out of sorts.

He saw two boys come briskly down the road from the Ellison farm and turn up

the main road in the direction of the mill. As they approached, he recognized them, and retired within the doorway. To his surprise, they entered.

"Well, what is it?" he demanded shortly as John Ellison and Henry Burns stood confronting him. "What do you want? I won't have boys around the mill, you know. Always in the way, and I'm busy here."

"Why, you see," replied John Ellison, turning colour a bit but speaking firmly, "we don't want to bother you nor get in the way; but I—I want to get some work to do. I'm big enough and strong enough to work, now, and I heard you wanted a man. I came to see if you wouldn't hire me."

Colonel Witham's face was a study. Taken all by surprise, he seemed to know scarcely what to say. He shifted uneasily and the drops of perspiration rolled from his forehead. He mopped his face with a big, red handkerchief, and looked shiftily from one boyish face to the other.

"Why, I did say I wanted help," he admitted; "but,"—and he glanced at the youth who had spoken,—"I didn't say I wanted a boy. No, you won't do."

"Why, I'm big enough to do the haying," urged John Ellison. "You've got the mill now. You might give me a job, I think."

Possibly some thought of this kind might have found fleeting lodgment in the colonel's brain; of Jim Ellison, who used to sit at the desk in the corner; of the son that now asked him for work. Then a crafty, suspicious light came into his eyes, and he glanced quickly at John Ellison's companion.

"What do you want here, Henry Burns?" he demanded. "I had you in my hotel at Samoset Bay once, and you brought me bad luck. You get out. I don't want you around here. Get out, I say."

He moved threateningly toward Henry Burns, and the boy, seeing it was useless to try to remain, stepped outside.

"No, I don't want you, either," said Colonel Witham, turning abruptly now to John Ellison. "No boys around this mill. I don't care if your father did own it. You can't work here. I've no place for you."

Despite his blustering and almost threatening manner, however, Colonel Witham did not offer to thrust John Ellison from the mill. He seemed on the point of doing it, but something stopped him. He couldn't have told what. But he merely

repeated his refusal, and turned away.

It was only boyish impulse on John Ellison's part, and an innocent purchaser of the mill would have laughed at him; but he stepped nearer to Colonel Witham and said, earnestly, "You'll have to let me in here some day, Colonel Witham. The mill isn't yours, and you know it." And he added, quickly, as the thought occurred to him, "Perhaps the fortune-teller you saw at the circus will tell me more than she told you. Perhaps she'll tell me where the papers are."

For a moment Colonel Witham's heavy face turned deathly pale, and he leaned for support against one of the beams of the mill. Then the colour came back into his face with a rush, and he stamped angrily on the floor.

"Confound you!" he cried. "You clear out, too. I don't know anything about your fortune-tellers, and I don't care. I've got no time to fool away with boys. Now get out."

John Ellison walked slowly to the door, leaving the colonel mopping his face and turning alternately white and red; and as he stepped outside Colonel Witham dropped into a chair.

Then, as the boys went on together up the hill to the Ellison farm, Colonel Witham, recovering in a measure from the shock he had received, arose from his chair, somewhat unsteady on his legs, and began, for the hundredth and more time, a weary, fruitless search of the old mill, from the garret to the very surface of the water flowing under it.

And as Colonel Witham groped here and there, in dusty corners, he muttered, "What on earth did he mean? The fortune-teller—how could he know of that? There's witchcraft at work somewhere. But there aren't any papers in this mill. I know it. I know it. I know it."

And still he kept up his search until it was long past the time for shutting down.

Three days after this, Lawyer Estes was talking to John Ellison at the farmhouse.

"Well, I've run down your witch," he said, smiling; "and there isn't anything to be made out of her. I've been clear to the fair-grounds at Newbury to see her. She's a shrewd one; didn't take her long to see that something was up. Sized me up for a lawyer, I guess, and shut up tighter than a clam. I told her what I knew, but she swore Tim Reardon was mistaken.

"Those people have a fear of getting mixed up with the courts; naturally suspicious, I suppose. She declared she had said that the man she talked with asked about some letters he had lost, himself; and that was all she knew about it. No use in my talking, either. I didn't get anything more out of her. We're right where we were before."

"Well, I'm going to get into that mill and look around, just the same," exclaimed John Ellison. "I'll do it some way."

"Then you'll be committing trespass," said Lawyer Estes, cautiously.

"I don't care," insisted the boy. "I won't be doing any harm. I'm not going to touch anything that isn't ours. But I'm going to look."

"Then don't tell me about it," said the lawyer. "I couldn't be a party to a proceeding like that."

"No, but I know who will," said John Ellison. "It's Henry Burns. He won't be afraid of looking through an old mill at night—and he'll know a way to do it, too."

John Ellison tramped into town, that afternoon, and hunted up his friend.

"Why, of course," responded Henry Burns; "it's easy. Jack and I'll go with you. It won't do any harm, just to walk through a mill." And he added, laughing, "You know we've been in there once before. Remember the night we told you of?"

John Ellison looked serious.

"Yes," he replied, "and there was something queer about that, too, wasn't there? You said father went through the mill, upstairs and down, just the same as Witham does often now."

"He did, sure enough," said Henry Burns, thoughtfully. "I wish I'd known what trouble was coming some day; I'd have tried to follow him. Well, we'll go through all right—but what about Witham?"

"That's just what I've been thinking," said John Ellison.

"Well," replied Henry Burns, after some moments' reflection, "leave it to me. I'll fix that part of it. And supposing the worst should happen and he catch us all in there, what could he do? We'll get Jack and Tom and Bob—yes, and Tim, too; he's got sharp eyes. Witham can't lick us all. If he catches us, we'll just have to

get out. He wouldn't make any trouble; he knows what people think about him and the mill."

So John Ellison left it to Henry Burns; and the latter set about his plans in his own peculiar and individual way. The scheme had only to be mentioned to Jack and the others, to meet with their approval. They were ready for anything that Henry Burns might suggest. The idea that a night search, of premises which had already been hunted over scores of times by daylight, did not offer much hope of success, had little weight with them. If Henry Burns led, they would follow.

The night finally selected by Henry Burns and John Ellison would have made a gloomy companion picture to the one when Harvey and Henry Burns first made their entry into the mill, under the guidance of Bess Thornton, except that it did not rain. Henry Burns and John Ellison had noted the favourable signs of the weather all afternoon; how the heavy clouds were gathering; how the gusts whipped the dust into little whirlwinds and blew flaws upon the surface of the stream; how the waning daylight went dim earlier than usual; and they had voted it favourable for the enterprise.

Wherefore, there appeared on the surface of Mill stream, not long after sundown, two canoes that held, respectively, Henry Burns and Harvey and Tim Reardon, and Tom Harris and Bob White. These two canoes, not racing now, but going along side by side in friendly manner, sped quietly and swiftly upstream in the direction of the Ellison dam. Then, arriving within sight of it, they waited on the water silently for a time, until two figures crept along the shore and hailed them. These were John and James Ellison.

"It's all right," said John Ellison, in answer to an inquiry; "Witham's at home, and the place is deserted. And who do you suppose is on watch up near the Half Way House, to let us know if Witham comes out? Bess Thornton. I let her in on the secret, because I knew she'd help. She knows what Old Witham is."

"Have you got it?" inquired Henry Burns, mysteriously.

"Sure," responded John Ellison. "It's up close by the mill. Come on."

They paddled up close to the white foam that ran from the foot of the dam, where the falling water of the stream struck the basin below, and turned the canoes inshore. There, up the bank, John Ellison produced the mysterious object of Henry Burns's inquiry. It proved to be an old wash-boiler.

Harvey and the others eyed it with astonishment.

"What are you going to do with that old thing?" asked Harvey. "This isn't Fourth of July."

"That's my fiddle," replied Henry Burns, coolly. "I've got the string in my pocket."

With which reply, he took hold of one handle of the wash-boiler and John Ellison the other; and they proceeded up the bank. The others followed, grinning.

"Play us a tune," suggested young Tim.

"Not unless I have to," replied Henry Burns. "You may hear it, and perhaps you won't."

All was desolate and deserted, as they made a circuit of the surroundings of the mill. It certainly offered no attractions to visitors, after nightfall. The crazy old structure, unpainted and blackened with age, made a dark, dismal picture against the dull sky. The water fell with a monotonous roar over the dam; the cold dripping of water sounded within the shell of the mill. The wind, by fits and starts, rattled loose boards and set stray shingles tattooing here and there. Dust blew down from the roadway.

"He'll not be out to-night," remarked Harvey, as they looked up the road in the direction of the Half Way House.

"You can't tell," replied John Ellison. "We've seen the light in here some nights that were as bad as this. What say, shall we go in?"

They followed his lead, around by the way Henry Burns and Harvey had once before entered, and, one by one, went in through the window. Then they paused, huddled on a plank, while John Ellison scratched a match and lighted a sputtering lantern, the wick of which had become dampened. Across the planking they picked their way, and entered the main room on the first floor.

Then Henry Burns and John Ellison made another trip and brought in Henry Burns's "fiddle," greatly to the amusement of the others.

"That goes on the top floor," said Henry Burns, and they ascended the two flights of stairs with it, depositing it upside down, in a corner of the garret that was

boarded up as a separate room, or large closet. Then Henry Burns, producing from his pocket a piece of closely woven cotton rope, skilfully tossed one end over a beam above his head; seized the end as it fell, quickly tied a running knot and hauled it snug. The rope, made fast thus at one end to the beam, drew taut as he pulled down on it.

"That's the fiddle-string, eh Jack?" laughed Henry Burns. "We've made a horse-fiddle before now, haven't we? that rope's got so much resin on it that it squeaks if you just look at it."

He passed the free end of the resined rope through a hole in the bottom of the upturned wash-boiler, and knotted it so it would not pull out again.

"Now where's the fiddle-bow, John?" he asked.

John Ellison forthwith produced a long bent bow of alder, strung with pieces of tied horse-hair.

"Listen," said Henry Burns; and he drew the bow gently across the resined rope. The sound that issued forth—the combined agony of the vibrating wash-boiler and the shrill squeak of the rope—was one hardly to be described. It was like a wail of some unworldly creature, ending with a shuddering twang that grated even on the nerves of Henry Burns's companions. Then Henry Burns laid the bow aside and was ready for the search.

"That sounds nice on Fourth of July night," he remarked, "but not in here. Let's see what we can find, John."

They lighted two more lanterns that they had brought and began their search. Strangely enough, however, the possibilities that had seemed so real to John Ellison, as he had gazed day by day upon the old mill he knew so well, seemed to vanish now that he was within. He had thought of a hundred and one odd corners where he would search; but now they offered obviously so little chance of secreting anything that he felt his hopes begin to wane.

Still, they went at it earnestly and thoroughly. Through the garret, with their lanterns lighted, they hunted; lifting aside boxes and barrels; opening dingy closets; peering into long unused bins. Hoppers that had been once a part of the mill's equipment, but which had been displaced by others, were carefully examined; even the rafters overhead were scrutinized, lest some overlooked box might be found hidden thereon.

They went to the floor below, where the great grinding stones were; and where a tangle of belting and shaftings half filled one room. There were hiding places a-plenty here; but not one of them yielded anything. Then, on the main floor, where there was a great safe hidden in one corner, and the desk. Here they were on forbidden ground. The property was clearly Witham's, and they would not touch that. They could only search about the nooks and corners, and sound the boards for secret hiding-places.

So on, up and down, in and out; even through the outer room of the mill, where all was rough and unfinished, and only a plank thrown across here and there to walk on. There were places enough where a box or package might be hidden—but where nothing was.

Yet they continued industriously, and were so absorbed in their search that they failed to notice that Little Tim had vanished, until Harvey called to him for something, and he was nowhere to be found.

They were half frightened for a moment, fearing lest he had slipped and fallen somewhere; but Harvey laughed at their fears.

"You can't hurt that little monkey," he said. "He can swim like a fish, and he's a regular cat on climbing. No, he's up to some trick or other."

They were aware of this presently—and just a bit startled—at the sound of a low whistle coming from the outer mill; then Tim Reardon darted in from the darkness, into the circle of lanterns.

"He's coming!" he gasped. "I just met Bess Thornton up the road. Cracky, how I did run! Look out the window; you'll see his lantern. Better turn ours down, quick."

They lost no time in following this advice; then crept to the window that looked on the road and peered out. The swinging and swaying of a lantern could be seen, indistinctly in the distance. Colonel Witham was coming. The boys sped quickly up two flights of stairs into the garret.

What should bring Colonel Witham, night after night, to the old mill, where he had hunted long and fruitlessly? He, himself, could hardly have told. Possibly he felt somehow a sense as of security; that, so long as he was there, there could be nobody else on hand, to search; that he was guarding his property—against, he knew not what. And, if ever the thought came to him, that perhaps it had been

better for his peace of mind never to have come into possession of the old mill at all, why, he did not allow his mind to dwell upon it. That usually set him to hunting.

Now the door opened, and Colonel Witham stepped within the mill. And for all his being there voluntarily, one might have seen by the pallor of his face that he was half afraid. There, in the shadow, just beyond the rim of his own lantern light, was the desk where Jim Ellison used to sit—and sneer at him. Did Colonel Witham recall that? Perhaps. He lifted the lantern and let the light fall on the spot. The place was certainly empty.

For all the relief of that, Colonel Witham uttered a cry very much like a frightened man, the next moment. Then he was angry, as he felt the goose-flesh prickling all over him. The sharp night wind had slammed the little door leading to the outer mill, with a bang, and the noise had echoed through all the rooms.

There was nothing in that to be afraid of, and Colonel Witham seated himself in a chair by the desk, with the lantern beside him on the floor. Now that he was here, he scarce knew why he had come.

What was that? Was that a foot-fall on some floor above? Colonel Witham sat bolt upright in his seat and listened. He took out his handkerchief and mopped his brow. Then he was angry with himself again. He was certainly nervous to-night.

Nervous indeed; for he came out of his chair with a bound, as the wind suddenly swooped down on the old mill, shrieked past one corner, with a cry that was almost like a voice, and went on up the stream, crackling the dead branches of trees and moaning through the pines.

Colonel Witham started for the door. It was no use; nature was against him—conspiring to fill him with alarm. He was foolish to have come. He would go back to the inn.

But then his natural stubbornness asserted itself. Should a wild night drive him out of his own mill—when the law couldn't? He turned resolutely and went slowly back. Nor did he pause on the main floor, but started up the first flight of stairs.

Another shriek of the wind, that rattled the loose window panes on the floor above, as though by a hundred unseen hands. The colonel crouched down on the

stairs for a moment—and then, oh, what a hideous sound was that!

Somewhere, from the vague spaces of the upper part of the mill, there was wafted down to him such a noise as he had never heard; it squeaked and it thrummed; it moaned deep, and it wailed with an unearthly, piercing sound. There was the sorrow and the agony of a thousand voices in it. It blended now with the wind, and added to the cry of that; again it rose above the wind, and pierced the colonel's very soul.

Colonel Witham, clutching his lantern with desperation, fairly slid down the stairs, his legs wabbling weakly as he tried to stay himself. He landed in a heap at the foot. Then, rising with a mighty effort, he fled from the mill, up the road to the Half Way House.

Some moments later, seven boys, shaking with laughter, emerged from the garret room and resumed their search.

Colonel Witham had heard the strains of Henry Burns's horse-fiddle.

CHAPTER XVI

THE GOLDEN COIN LOST AGAIN

"Let's look, Tim! Let me see. Say, where'd you find it? Bring it here to the light."

The crowd of boys, much excited, was jostling Little Tim, plying him with more questions than he could answer, and each one trying to grasp at something that he held in his hand.

Proceeding into the main room of the mill, Tim held his prize close to the light of three lanterns. It was a small box, tied with cords, and contained apparently something like coin, by the clinking sound that came from within.

"I found it out in the mill, where the water comes in and where the big wheels are," said Tim, breathlessly. "Sounds as though there was money in it, don't it? It was just where one of the shafts goes through part of a beam. The beam is cut away there, and room enough left for this, right under the shafting. Nobody'd ever think of going near it when the mill was running; but I climbed up there and took hold of the shaft, and I spied it."

He was tearing off the cords as he spoke; and now, as he opened the cover, sure enough, there was disclosed a handful or two of small coin: some quarters and dimes and pennies—but nothing of great value. These were intermingled with some papers, folded small.

John Ellison snatched at these and quickly unfolded them. But they read disappointment for him. They were nothing more than a lot of receipted bills, for supplies brought to the miller. Then they counted the coin. There was a dollar and eighty odd cents in cash.

Tim Reardon was elated enough, and evidently thought the discovery justified any amount of laborious searching; but the faces of John Ellison and Henry Burns were eloquent of disappointment.

"Too bad, John," remarked Henry Burns, putting his hand on the other's shoulder. "I thought we'd struck it at last. Want to hunt any more?"

John Ellison shook his head. "I've got enough," he said. "I give it up. We've

looked everywhere I can think of."

"And who gets the money?" inquired Tim, eagerly.

"I don't know," replied John Ellison, "and I don't care much. But I don't know as we've got any right to it—though these bills aren't Witham's, and I suppose the money isn't. The mill is his now, and I guess we haven't any right to come in here and take this."

"Well," suggested Henry Burns, "why not ask Witham about it?"

"Ask Witham!" exclaimed John Ellison. "I won't. I don't want ever to speak to him again. You can, though, if you want to."

"All right," said Henry Burns. "I'll ask him. And I'll get the money for you."

"I don't want it," exclaimed John Ellison, whose disappointment was evident in his tone of bitterness. "Give it to Tim—if you get it."

"All right," said Henry Burns.

Tim's eyes twinkled.

It was evening of the following day, and Colonel Witham sat on the porch of the Half Way House, smoking his pipe. It had been a puzzling day for him, and he was thinking it over. Going through the mill, along in the afternoon, he had come upon an extraordinary looking object in the garret—an old wash-boiler, inverted, with a resined cord running from the bottom of it up to a beam. And near by lay a sort of bow, strung with horse-hair.

What on earth could that be, and how had it come there? Colonel Witham, at first, had thought it might be some sort of an infernal machine, put there to destroy the mill. But he had investigated, cautiously, and demonstrated its harmlessness. And about the floor were a few half burned matches. Somebody had been in the mill. A faint perception began to dawn upon him, as the day passed, that it might have been the boys; but he couldn't wholly figure it out, and it bothered him not a little.

He thought of notifying the police—but he didn't want them hunting about the mill—or anybody else. The best thing, he decided, was to keep quiet, and watch out sharper than ever.

He was not in a friendly mood, therefore, when, gazing down the road, he espied

Henry Burns approaching on a bicycle, followed closely by Jack Harvey and Tim Reardon. Moreover, his suspicions were aroused. He was somewhat surprised, however, when the boys dismounted at a little distance, leaned their wheels against some bushes and approached the porch.

Greater still was the colonel's surprise—indeed, he was fairly taken aback—when Henry Burns, having bade him good-evening, broached his subject abruptly, without any preliminaries.

"Colonel Witham," said Henry Burns, coolly, "we were up in the mill last night."

The colonel's eyes stuck out, and he glared at Henry Burns with mingled astonishment and wrath.

"Eh, what's that?" he exclaimed, "you were in my mill! Why, you young rascals, don't you know I could have you all arrested as burglars?"

"No," replied Henry Burns, "we didn't go to take anything of yours. We were after some papers that belonged to John Ellison's father. We weren't going to keep them either, if we found them; just turn them over to Lawyer Estes."

"Well, then, it was trespass," cried Colonel Witham, wrathfully. "Who told you there were papers in the mill. Lawyer Estes didn't—he knows better."

"No," replied Henry Burns, "but you told the fortune-teller so."

"I didn't say that," bellowed Colonel Witham, rising from his chair. But it was plain the suggestion of the fortune-teller worried him. "What did you do in there?" he added. "If you did any harm, you'll suffer for it."

"We didn't," said Henry Burns. "We only played on a horse-fiddle once or twice. You know there are rats in the mill, colonel. I guess they scampered when they heard that."

Colonel Witham had been about to burst forth with an angry exclamation; but the thought of his own ignominious flight made him pause. Rats, indeed! He knew there wasn't a rat in the whole mill that had been half so terrified as he.

"Now see here," he said, shaking his fist for emphasis, "I know you didn't do any harm in the mill. It was one of your crazy pranks. But don't you ever go in there again, or I'll make trouble for you."

"We're not going to," said Henry Burns.

"There isn't anything in there, anyway," urged Colonel Witham. "I've heard that talk, around Benton, and it's all nonsense. You couldn't find anything in there, if you hunted a hundred years."

"But we did find something," said Henry Burns, in a matter-of-fact way.

Colonel Witham's jaw dropped, and he looked at Henry Burns almost helplessly. He couldn't speak for a moment. Then he asked, huskily, "What was it you found? None of your pranks now; what did you find?"

"A small box, with some coins in it," replied Henry Burns; and he described the hiding place. "There was a dollar and eighty-six cents."

Colonel Witham looked relieved. "Give them to me," he cried. "You've got no right to the stuff."

"Wasn't it Ellison's?" inquired Henry Burns.

"Never you mind whose it was," cried Colonel Witham. "It was in my mill. Give it to me, or I'll have the law on you."

"There were some papers, too," continued Henry Burns.

Colonel Witham staggered again. The hand that held his pipe shook. Then his eyes twinkled craftily.

"Well, you're right smart boys," he said. "Keep the money, if you want it, or give it to John Ellison. Yes, it was Jim Ellison's—the money was. But the papers are mine. Have you got them? Give me the papers, and keep the money. I don't claim the money."

"Yes, I've got the papers," replied Henry Burns. "Here they are. There's all there were."

He handed the package to Colonel Witham, who took it with trembling hand. Then Henry Burns and his friends made a hurried departure. By the time the colonel had made an examination of the papers, and had turned, white with anger, to vent his rage upon them, they were spinning down the road.

"Tim," said Henry Burns, as they rode along, "you get the money."

It was a day or two later, on a sultry afternoon, and Bess Thornton stood in the doorway of the old house where she and Granny Thornton lived, looking forth at

the sky. A passing shower was sprinkling the doorsteps with a few big drops, and the girl drew back with a look of disappointment on her face.

"It always rains when you don't want it to," she said. "Wish there was somebody to play with. It's pokey here, with gran' gone to Witham's. I don't know what to do."

Something suggested itself to her mind, however, for presently she opened the door leading to the attic and went up the stairs. It was dark and silent in the attic, but she threw open a window at either end, unfastened the blinds, and the daylight entered. It disclosed a clutter of old household stuff: some strings of pop-corn and dried apples and herbs hanging from the rafters, and a lot of faded garments, suspended from nails.

She tried on an old-fashioned poke-bonnet, looked at herself in a bit of cracked mirror that leaned against a wash-stand, and laughed at the odd picture she made. Then, by turns, she arrayed herself in some of the antiquated garments. She rummaged here and there, until she came to the old bureau.

"Gran' always keeps that locked," she said. "I guess nobody'd want to steal anything from this old place, though. She needn't be so particular. I wonder where she keeps the key."

There was no great difficulty in finding that, either, once she had set about it; for soon her hand rested on the key, as she felt along the tops of the beams, and came to the one where Granny Thornton had laid it.

"I'm going to have a look," said the girl softly to herself. "Gran's always telling me to keep out of here." Then, as the thought struck her, she exclaimed, "I'll bet here's where she put the coin."

The lock of the upper drawer of the bureau yielded readily to the pressure of the key; she drew the drawer out, and looked within. There was a mixture of curious odds and ends, from which she picked up a tiny white dress.

"That's funny," she exclaimed. "It's a baby's dress. I wonder what gran' keeps it for; perhaps 'twas mine. It's small, though. Wonder if I was ever as little as that."

She took the tiny garment by the sleeves, and held it up against herself. Then she laughed merrily. "I wish I could ask gran' about it," she said.

A small box attracted her eye and she seized that. She got a surprise then. She

had thought that perhaps it might contain the coin. But it contained that and more. There, indeed, was the golden coin; but, strangely enough, it was not as she and Tim Reardon had found it, but affixed to a small golden chain.

"Oh!" she exclaimed; "Gran' was right, then. It did belong to us, after all. My, it's pretty, too. Gran' ought to let me wear it."

She tried to hang it about her neck, but the chain was too short. She remedied that, however, by piecing it out with two bits of ribbon which she found in the drawer. These she knotted in a bow at the back of her neck, and danced over to the mirror, to note the effect of the chain with its ornament. It was a rare piece of finery in her eyes, and she gazed upon it long and wistfully.

"I'm going to wear it awhile," she exclaimed. "It won't hurt it any. Gran' said I wore it once, when I was little. It's mine, I guess, anyway."

She continued her rummaging through the drawer, but it yielded nothing more to her fancy. She shut the drawer and locked it, and went to look at herself once more in the piece of mirror. The sun came out from behind the passing clouds, and, as it streamed in at one of the windows, it shone on the chain and the coin and on the girl's face.

"I just can't take it off yet," she said; and, closing the blinds, tripped down the stairs. But, as she looked out the door, she espied Granny Thornton coming in at the gate. She thought of the chain and its coin; and, realizing it was too late to regain the attic and replace it, slipped quietly out at the shed door and ran down through the fields to the brook, before Granny Thornton had espied her.

As she came to the edge of the brook, a small boy, that had been lying face down on the turf, with an arm deep in the water, rose up and greeted her.

"Why, hello, Tim," she said, surprised; "what are you doing?"

"Trying to tickle that big trout," replied Tim Reardon. "I've been here half an hour, without moving, but I can't find him. There's where he lies, though; I've seen him often. But he won't come near; he's too smart. I'm going to try the pickerel. See here, look what I've got."

He put a hand into his trousers pocket, and drew forth an object wrapped in a piece of newspaper. It proved to be a new spoon hook, bright and shiny, with gleaming red and silver, and a bunch of bright feathers covering the hooks at the end.

"Isn't that a beauty!" he exclaimed. "Cost a quarter. I bought it. John Ellison gave me that money I found in the mill."

"It's fine," replied the girl. "Going to try it?"

"Sure," answered Tim. "My rod's hid down by the stream. I wanted to try to tickle a trout when the shower ruffled the water here. Ever tickle a trout?"

Bess Thornton laughed. "No," said she; "nor you, either, I guess."

"Honest injun, I have," asserted Tim, warmly. "You just put your hand down in the water, and keep it still for an awful while; and by and by perhaps a fish'll brush against it. Then he'll keep doing it, and then you just move your hand and your fingers easy like, and the trout, he kind er likes it. Then, when you get a good chance, you just grab quick and throw him out on shore."

"Hm!" exclaimed the girl; "I'd like to see you do it."

They went along the brook to the road, passed up the road to a point some way above the dam, when Tim Reardon presently disappeared in a clump of bushes; from this he soon emerged, with his bamboo fish-pole. They went down through the field to the shore.

Jointing up the rod and affixing the reel, Tim Reardon ran out his line, tied on the bright spoon-hook and began trolling. The allurement proved enticing, and presently he hooked a fish. Tim gallantly handed the rod to Bess Thornton.

"Pull him in," he said. "I've caught lots of 'em. You can land this one."

The girl seized the rod, with a little cry of delight, and lifted the fish out of water. Then she swung it in on shore, where it lay, with its green body twisting about in the grass, and its great jaws distended, showing its sharp teeth.

"My, isn't he ugly looking!" she exclaimed. "You take the hook out, will you, Tim?"

Tim, grasping the squirming fish tightly behind the gills, disengaged the hook and threw the fish down in the grass again. "That one's yours," he said.

The girl still held the pole.

"Let me try just a minute, will you?" she asked. "If I get another, you can have it."

Tim assented readily, and she swung the pole and cast the hook far out upon the water. She drew it back and forth past a clump of lily pads, and then cast again. She was not as skilful with the long rod as the boy had been, however; and once, as she cast, the line did not have time to straighten out behind her, and the hook fell in the water close by the shore. She jerked it out and tried to cast again.

The hook swung in, almost striking her in the face; and both she and Tim Reardon dodged. The next moment, she made a sweep with the rod, to throw the hook back toward the water. Something caught, and she felt a slight tug at her neck. She dropped the rod and uttered a cry of dismay.

"What's the matter?" cried Little Tim. "Did you get hooked?"

But the girl made no answer. She stood, holding the ends of the broken chain in either hand, anxiously looking all about her.

"The coin!" she gasped. "Tim, I've lost the coin. Oh, won't gran' give it to me if I've lost that again!"

They hunted everywhere about them, parting the tufts of grass carefully and poking about on hands and knees. But the coin was nowhere to be seen.

"I tell you what," suggested Tim, "it's gone into the water. Never mind, though; I can get it. I'll dive for it."

They were at the edge of a little bank, from which the water went off deep at a sharp angle. They gazed down into the water, but there was not light enough within its depths, nor was it sufficiently clear to enable them to see the bottom.

"I'm going in after it, too," exclaimed Bess Thornton; "but I can't in this dress." She glanced at the sailor-suit she wore. "I'm going back to the house and put on the old one. You try for it while I'm gone, won't you, Tim?"

The boy nodded; and Bess Thornton, half in tears, started off on a smart run to the old house. In her dismay, she had forgotten that Granny Thornton had returned from the inn; but she was speedily aware of that fact as she darted in at the kitchen door. There stood Granny Thornton, with mingled anger and alarm depicted on her countenance.

"Oh," she cried, "I'd just like to shake you, good. Give me back that chain and the coin. Don't say you didn't take it. I found it gone. What do you mean by going into that drawer? Don't you ever—"

She stopped abruptly, for Bess Thornton was facing her, the tears standing in her eyes, and she held in her hand the broken chain.

"Oh, gran'," she cried, "don't scold. I didn't mean any harm. I just wanted to wear it a little while. But it's—it's gone."

And she told the story of the loss of the coin.

Granny Thornton stared at the girl in amazement. Then she burst forth in querulous tones, seemingly as though she were addressing the girl and soliloquizing at the same time.

"It's gone!" she gasped. "Gone again—and sure there's a fate in it. Plenty of chains like that to be had, but never another coin of the kind seen about these parts. Oh, but you've gone and done it. Don't you know that coin meant luck for you, girl? You might have gone to the big house to live some day; but you'll never go now. You've lost the luck. You're bad—bad. There's no making you mind. Give me the chain."

Her voice grew more harsh and angry. "Let the coin go," she said. "You've lost it, and you can suffer for it. You'll not go out of this house again to-day."

Puzzled at her strange words, and hurt at the scolding, Bess Thornton sat sullenly. "I'll get it back to-morrow, if I can't to-day," she said. "I'm going to dive for it."

"You keep away from the water, do you hear?" replied Granny Thornton; but, a half-hour later, she seemed to have changed her mind. "Go and get it, if you can," she said, shortly. "Change that dress—and don't get drowned."

But Little Tim, in the mean time, had not been idle. Hastily throwing off his clothing, he dived again and again into the deep pool, swimming to the bottom and groping about there. He brought up handfuls of sticks and small stones, and the debris of the water's bed. A dozen times he was unsuccessful—and then, at last, as he clung to the bank and opened his fist for the water to thin the mud and ooze that he had clutched, there lay the golden coin, bright and shining in his palm.

He scrambled out, had his clothes on in a twinkling, dropped the coin into one of his pockets, and started off on a run down the road.

Perhaps old Granny Thornton had been right, however, when she exclaimed that

there was a fate in the mysterious foreign piece; for when Tim Reardon reached his hand into his pocket presently, to see that the coin was safe—lo, it had once more disappeared. Little Tim, with a look of chagrin, turned his pocket inside out. A tell-tale hole in one corner accounted for the disappearance. Tim, muttering his disgust, slowly retraced his steps, kicking away the dust with his bare feet.

He was still searching for the coin when Bess Thornton returned. They were both searching for it an hour later. But the coin was lost.

"I'm awful sorry," said Tim, as they finally relinquished the search. "I'll tell you what, though. It's my fault, and I've got a dollar and sixty cents left at home, and I'll give you that."

The girl shook her head sadly. "I wouldn't take it," she replied.

Two hours later, Benny Ellison, strolling homeward, with gun over shoulder, and two pickerel dangling from a crotched stick, espied something gleaming in the grass by the roadside. He stooped and picked up a golden coin.

"What luck!" he exclaimed. He put the coin in his pocket and carried it home. He had a collection of curiosities there, in an old cabinet, that he valued highly: coins, stamps, birds' nests, queer bits of stone and odds and ends of stuff. Seeing that the coin was punched, and foreign, and not available for spending money, he placed it among his treasures. He was a curiously unsocial youth; had few pleasures that he shared with his cousins, but gloated over his own acquisitions quietly like a miser. He rejoiced silently in this new addition to his hoard, and said nothing about it.

CHAPTER XVII

A STRANGE ADMISSION

The days went by, and summer was near its end. Then, with the vacation drawing to a close, there came a surprise for Henry Burns, in the form of a letter from his aunt. It was she with whom he lived, in a Massachusetts town; but now she wrote that she had decided to spend the winter in Benton, and that he must enter school there at the fall term, along with Tom Harris and Bob White. "Then I stay, too," exclaimed Jack Harvey, when he had read the important news—and he did. The elder Harvey, communicated with, had no objection; and, indeed, there was a most satisfactory arrangement made, later, that Jack Harvey should board with Henry Burns and his aunt; an arrangement highly pleasing to the two boys, if it added later to the concern and worry of the worthy Miss Matilda Burns.

The days grew shorter and the nights cool; and, by and by, with much reluctance, the canoes were hauled ashore for the last time, of an afternoon, and stored away in a corner of the barn back of the camp; and fishing tackle for summer use was put carefully aside, also. There were lessons to be learned, and fewer half-days to be devoted to the sport for which they cared most.

The pickerel in the stream and the trout in the brook sought deeper waters, in anticipation of winter. The boys spent less and less of their time in the vicinity of the old Ellison farm.

Tim and Young Joe Warren stuck mostly by the camp, and drew the others there on certain select occasions. For Little Tim, by reason of long roving, had a wonderful knowledge of the resources of the country around the old stream. He had a beechnut grove that he had discovered, three miles back from the water, on the farther shore; likewise a place where the hazel bushes were loaded with nuts, and where a few butternut trees yielded a rich harvest. Young Joe and he gathered a great store of these, as the nights of early frost came on; and they spread a feast for the others now and then, with late corn, roasted in questionable fashion over a smoky box-stove that heated the camp stifling hot.

October came in, with the leaves growing scarlet in the woods and sharp winds

whistling through the corn and bean stacks. Henry Burns and his friends had seen but little of the Ellisons, who were out of school for the winter, caring for the farm; but now the night of the 31st of October found Henry Burns and Jack Harvey, George Warren, Bob White and Tom Harris seated in the big kitchen of the Ellison farmhouse.

It was plainly to be seen that, although the Ellisons had been reduced in circumstances through the loss of the mill, there was still an abundance of its kind yielded by the farm. On a table were dishes of apples and fall pears; two pumpkin pies of vast circumference squatted near by, close to a platter of honey and a huge pitcher of milk.

It was dark already, though only half-past seven o'clock, and the lights of two kerosene lamps gleamed through the kitchen windows.

As hosts on this occasion, John and James Ellison presently proceeded to introduce their city friends to the delights of milk and honey; a dish composed of the dripping sweet submerged in a bowl of creamy milk, and eaten therewith, comb and all.

"Never hurt anybody eaten that way," explained John Ellison, "and this is the real thing. The milk is from the Jersey cows in the barn, and the honey's from the garret, where there's five swarms of bees been working all summer."

They need no urging, however.

"Poor Joe! He'll die of grief when I tell him about this," remarked George Warren, smacking his lips over a mouthful.

"Why didn't you bring him along?" asked John Ellison. "I wanted you all to come."

"Arthur's off down town, and Joe's gone to the camp with Tim Reardon," explained the eldest of the Warren brothers. "Tim and Joe'll be sky-larking around somewhere later. They're great on Hallowe'en night, you know. They've got a supply of cabbage-stumps to deliver at the doors."

And thus the talk drifted to Hallowe'en, the night when, if old romances could only be believed, there are witches and evil spirits abroad, alive to all sorts of pranks and mischief.

In the midst of which, and most timely, there came suddenly a sharp tap at one of

the windows. They paused and turned quickly in that direction. James Ellison sprang to the window and peered out.

"Nothing there," he said; "one of those big beetles, I guess, attracted by the light."

They fell to eating again, when presently another smart rap at the window startled them.

John Ellison laughed. "It's some of fat old Benny's nonsense," he said. "He wouldn't come in, because you city chaps were coming. He's rigged a tick-tack; I can see the string of it. Wait a minute and I'll just steal 'round the other door and catch him at it. You fellows go on eating, and don't pay any attention. I'll catch him."

They resumed the feast; and again the sharp rap sounded upon the window pane, caused by the clicking of a heavy nail—suspended from the window sash by a pin and string, and yanked by somebody at the end of a longer string attached—swinging in against the glass.

There came a yell of surprise shortly; and, in a moment, there appeared John Ellison clutching the culprit by the collar. Which culprit, to their astonishment, proved to be, not Benny Ellison but Young Joe.

"Here he is," laughed John Ellison, dragging in his prisoner. "What'll we do with him?"

"Clean him," suggested George Warren, winking at the others. "He's got a dirty face."

True enough, Young Joe had, in the course of his evening's adventures, acquired a streak of smut across one cheek.

Roaring at the suggestion, they seized the struggling captive, lifted him up bodily to the sink, where they held him face upward under a stream of water, pumped with a vigour. When they had done with him, Young Joe's face was most assuredly clean.

"Now," said John Ellison, as they set Joe on his feet again, "there's a towel. Dry up and come and have some honey."

Young Joe, grinning, and with a joyous vision of honey and pumpkin pie before

him, obeyed with alacrity.

"Say," he said, cramming a spoonful of the mess into his mouth, and gulping it with huge satisfaction, "can Tim come in? He's out there."

"Sure, bring him in," assented John Ellison.

A few shrill whistles from Young Joe brought his companion to the door; and Tim Reardon was soon likewise equipped with bowl and spoon—but not before he had got his ducking at the kitchen pump, which he took with Spartan fortitude.

Honey and milk, pies and fruit soon disappeared rapidly at the renewed attack. A fresh pie, added largely for the benefit of Young Joe and Tim, went the way of the others. Young Joe gave a murmur of surfeited delight as the last piece of crust disappeared; while Little Tim was gorged to the point almost of speechlessness, and could hardly shake his head at the proffer of more.

"Well," said George Warren, at length, "what are you two chaps doing around here, anyway—I'll bet Joe smelled the food, clear down to the camp."

Young Joe, in reply, turned to John Ellison, and motioned toward the farmyard. "Give us one of those pumpkins?" he asked.

The pumpkins referred to lay in a great golden heap beside one of the barns; and there were a few scattered ones lying out in the corn-field beyond.

"Why, sure," responded John Ellison. "Have as many as you want." And he added, with a sly wink at George Warren, "We give a lot of them to the pigs. You're welcome."

Young Joe, lifting himself out of his chair with some effort, due to the weight of pie and honey stowed within, disappeared through the door. He returned, shortly, carrying a large handsome pumpkin on his shoulder.

"What are you going to do with it?" asked John Ellison.

Young Joe grinned. "Going to give it to Witham," he said.

In preparation for this act of generosity, Young Joe proceeded to carve upon one side of the pumpkin a huge, grinning face. Having finished which, with due satisfaction to artistic details, he stood off and admired his own handiwork.

"Looks a little like Witham," he said. "Only it looks better-natured than he does."

"You'd better let Witham alone," said George Warren, assuming the patronizing tone of an elder brother. "He's in a bad humour these days."

"Not going to do any harm," replied Young Joe. "Going to put it up on the flag-pole, eh Tim? Come along with us?"

"Why, if it's got to be done," said Henry Burns, speaking with the utmost gravity, "I suppose we might as well go along and see that it's done right and shipshape;" and he arose from his chair. So, too, the others, save John Ellison.

"You fellows go ahead," he said, "and then come back. I don't feel like playing a joke on Witham. I'm too much in earnest about him."

"That's so," returned Henry Burns. "I don't blame you. We'll be back in no time."

They went down the hill, soon after, carrying the pumpkin between them by turns. They cut across the field on the hill slope, crossed the old bridge over the brook, and went on up the road toward the Half Way House.

"Look out for Bess Thornton," said Jim Ellison, who had accompanied them. "She and the old woman are here now for the winter, keeping house for Witham."

"She won't let on, if she comes out," said Tim.

But they saw nothing of her. Tired out with her day's work, the girl had gone to bed and was soundly sleeping.

They arrived presently at a little plot of grass in front of the inn, from the centre of which there rose up a lofty flag-pole. It had been erected by some former proprietor, for the patriotic purpose of flying the American flag; but, to Colonel Witham's thrifty mind, it had offered an excellent vantage for displaying a dingy banner, with the advertisement of the Half Way House lettered thereon. This fluttered now in a mournful way, half way up the mast, as though it were a sign of mourning for the quality of food and lodging one might expect at the hands of Colonel Witham.

A dim light shone in the two front office windows of the inn, but the shades were drawn so that they could not see within. Other than the lamplight, there seemed to be a flickering, uncertain, intermittent gleam, or variation of the light, indicating probably a fire in the open hearth.

The boys waited now for a moment, till Henry Burns, who had volunteered, went quietly up toward the hotel, to reconnoitre. He came back presently, saying that there was a side window, shaded only by a blind, half-closed on the outside, through which he had been able to make out old Granny Thornton and Colonel Witham seated by the fire.

"Run up the pumpkin," he said; "I'll go back there again and keep watch. If Witham starts to come out, I'll whistle, and we'll cut and run."

He went back to the window, and took up his place there.

"Cracky!" exclaimed Young Joe; "who's going to shin that pole? It's a high one. Wish I hadn't eaten that last piece of pie. How about you, Tim?"

"I can do it," asserted Tim, stoutly.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Harvey. "There's the halyards. What more do you want? You cut a hole through the pumpkin, George, clear through the middle, so we

can pass an end of the rope, and I'll see that it goes up, and stays."

The pumpkin being duly pierced, one free end of the halyard was passed through the hole. Then Harvey proceeded to tie a running knot, through which he passed the other free end of rope. They took hold with a will, and hoisted. Quickly, the golden pumpkin was borne aloft; when it brought up at the top of the pole, the running knot drew tight, and the pumpkin was fast—with the difficulty presenting itself to whomever should seek to get it down, that the harder one pulled on the loose end of rope, the tighter he would draw the knot that held the thing high in air.

Now it shone forth in the darkness like an evil sort of beacon, its silly grotesque face grinning like a true hobgoblin of Hallowe'en; for, having scooped out its pulp and seeds, they had set a candle therein and lighted it just before they sent it aloft.

"Great, isn't it?" chuckled Young Joe. "Now let's get Henry Burns, and give Colonel Witham notice." But, strangely enough, Henry Burns did not respond to their whistles, low at first, then repeated with louder insistence.

"That's funny," said George Warren. "Wait here a minute and I'll go and get him." But, to his surprise, when he had approached the corner of the inn, where he could see Henry Burns, still crouching by the half-opened blind, the latter youth turned for a moment and motioned energetically for him to keep away.

"Come on," whispered George Warren, "the thing's up; we want to get Witham out to see it."

But Henry Burns only turned again and uttered a warning "sh-h-h," then resumed his place at the window.

George Warren crept up, softly.

It was not surprising that Henry Burns had been interested by what he saw in the old room of the inn, and by what he at length came to hear. At first glance, there was Colonel Witham, fat and red-faced, strangely aroused, evidently labouring under some excitement, addressing himself vigorously to the old woman who sat close by. His heavy fist came down, now and then, with a thump on the arm of the chair in which he sat; and each time this happened poor old Granny Thornton jumped nervously as though she had been struck a blow. Her thin, peaked face was drawn and anxious; her eyes were fixed and staring; and she shook as

though her feeble old frame would collapse.

Henry Burns, surprised at this queer pantomine, gazed for a moment, unable to hear what was being said. Then, the voice of Colonel Witham, raised to a high pitch, could be clearly distinguished. What he said surprised Henry Burns still more.

"I tell you I'll have her," cried Colonel Witham; "you've got to give her to me. What are you afraid of? I won't starve her. Where'll she go when you die, if you don't? Let her go to the poorhouse, will you?"

And he added, heartlessly, "You can't live much longer; don't you know that?"

Old Granny Thornton, half lifting herself from her chair, shook her head and made a reply to Colonel Witham, which Henry Burns could not hear. But what she said was perhaps indicated by Colonel Witham's reply.

"Yes, I do like her," he said. "She's a flyaway and up to tricks, but I'll take that out of her. I'll bring her up better than you could. I need her to help take care of the place."

Again the woman appeared to remonstrate. She pointed a bony finger at Colonel Witham and spoke excitedly. Colonel Witham's face flushed with anger.

"I tell you you've got to give her to me," he cried. "I'll swear you put her in my charge. I'll take her. It's that, or I'll pack you both off to the poorhouse. I'll make out the papers for you to sign. You'll do it; you've got to."

Old Granny Thornton sprang from her chair with a vigour excited by her agitation. She clutched an arm of the chair with one hand, while she raised the other impressively, like a witness swearing to an oath in court. And now, her voice keyed high with excitement, these words fell upon the ears of Henry Burns:

"You'll never get her, Dan Witham. You can't have her. She's been here too long already. She's going back, now. I can't give her away, because—because she's not mine to give. She's not mine, I tell you. She's not mine!"

Then, her strength exhausted by the utterance, she sank back once more into her seat.

Colonel Witham, his face blank with amazement, sought now to rouse her once

more. He arose and grasped her by an arm. He shook her.

"Whose is she, then, if she's not yours?" he asked. "Whom does she belong to?"

What answer Granny Thornton made—if any—to this inquiry, was lost to Henry Burns; for, at this moment, George Warren, stealing to the window, tripped over a running vine and fell with a crash, amid a row of milk pans that Henry Burns had carefully avoided.

Henry Burns got one fleeting glimpse of the two by the fire springing up in alarm, as he and George Warren fled from the spot. A moment more, the others had joined them in flight, whooping and yelling to bring Colonel Witham to the door.

Looking back, as they ran, they saw presently a square patch of light against the dark background of the house, where Colonel Witham had thrown wide the front door; and, in the light that streamed forth from within, the figure of the colonel stood disclosed in full relief. He was gesticulating wildly, with angry gaze directed toward the grinning face of the pumpkin.

Colonel Witham strode down from the piazza and walked rapidly to the foot of the flag-staff. He seized the one end of the halyards that dangled within reach, and jerked hard upon it, endeavouring to shake the pumpkin from its lofty position. But it was of no avail. Every tug upon the rope served only to tighten the knot. The colonel glared helplessly for a moment, and then returned into the inn.

Again he emerged, bearing something in his hand, which he raised and aimed directly at the gleaming face. A report rang out. The echoes of the sound of Colonel Witham's shotgun startled the crows in all the nests around. But the pumpkin stayed. The shot had only buried itself within its soft shell. The colonel would not give up so easily, however. Again and again he fired, hoping to shatter the pumpkin, or to sever the rope that held it.

Presently a shot extinguished the light within; and it was no longer an easy mark to see. Breathing vengeance upon all the boys for miles around, Colonel Witham finally gave it up, and retired, vanquished, to the inn, to await another day. The pumpkin was still aloft.

"Say, Henry," asked George Warren, as they started off up the hill again, "what did you see in there, anyway? What did you want me to keep away for?"

Henry Burns, sober-faced and puzzled, gave a groan of disappointment. "Oh, if you'd only kept away for a moment," he exclaimed. "I can't tell you now; wait till by and by."

"Jack," he added, addressing his friend, "I'm going down to Benton. Tell John I couldn't come back. I've got something to do." And, to the surprise of his companions, Henry Burns left them abruptly, and went down the road at a rapid pace.

He had something to think over, and he wanted to be alone. What he had heard puzzled and astounded him. There was a mystery in the old inn, of which he had caught a fleeting hint. What could it all mean? He turned it over in his mind a hundred different ways as he walked along; as to what he had best do; whom he should tell of his strange discovery—what was the mystery of Bess Thornton's existence?

Certainly the air was full of mystery and strange surprises, this Hallowe'en night; and the old Ellison house up on the hill was not free from it. An odd thing happened, also, there. For, passing by the old cabinet where Benny Ellison hoarded his treasures, something impelled Mrs. Ellison to pause for a moment, open the doors and look within.

She smiled as she glanced over the shelves, with the odds and ends of boyish valuables arranged there; a book of stamps; some queer old coloured prints of Indian wars; birds' nests; fishing tackle; a collection of birds' eggs and coins. There were some two score of these last, set up endwise in small wooden racks. She glanced them over—and one, bright and shiny, attracted her attention. She took it up and held it to the light. Then she uttered a cry and sank down on the floor.

Strangely enough, when John and Benny Ellison rushed in, at the sound of her voice, she was sitting there, sobbing over the thing; and they thought her taken suddenly ill. But she started up, at the sight of Benny Ellison, and asked, in a broken voice, how he had come by it. And when he had told her, she seemed amazed and strangely troubled.

"Then someone must have dropped it there recently," she exclaimed. "How could that be? It must be the same. I never saw another like it. Oh, what can it mean?"

Strangest of all to Benny Ellison, she would not return the coin to his collection; but held it fast, and only promised that she would recompense him for it. He

went to bed, sullen and surly over the loss of his treasure. Mrs. Ellison held the coin in her hand, gazing upon it as though it had some curious power of fascination, as she went to her room and shut the door.

CHAPTER XVIII

GRANNY THORNTON'S SECRET

The second day following these happenings, Tim Reardon sat on a bank of the stream, a short distance above the Ellison dam, fishing. There was no off-season in the matter of fishing, for Little Tim. Nobody else thought of trying for the pickerel now. But Tim Reardon fished the stream from early spring until the ice came; and, in the winter, he chopped through the ice, and fished that way, in the deep holes that he knew.

He was no longer barefoot, for the days were chilly. A stout pair of shoes protected his feet, which he kicked together as he dangled a long pole out from the shore. He was fishing in deep water now, with a lead sinker attached to his line; and, beside him, was a milk-can filled with water and containing live shiners for bait. These he had caught in the brook.

The fish weren't biting, but Little Tim was a patient fisherman. He was so absorbed, in fact, in the thought that every next minute to come he must surely get the longed-for bite, that he failed to note the approach of a man from the road. And when, all at once, a big hand closed upon his coat collar, he was so surprised and gave such a jump that he would have lost his balance and gone into the stream, if the hand had not held him fast. Squirming about, in the firm grasp of the person who held him, Tim turned and faced Colonel Witham.

"Well, I reckon I've got yer," was Colonel Witham's comment. "No use in your trying to wriggle away."

The fact was quite evident, and Tim's face clouded.

"I haven't done anything to hurt," he said. "Lemme go."

"Who said you had," replied Colonel Witham, grimly. "I didn't say you had—and I didn't say you hadn't. I wouldn't take chances on saying that you hadn't done a whole lot of things you oughtn't to. You've got to come along with me, though. I'm not going to hurt yer. You needn't be scared."

He changed his grip on the boy, from the latter's collar to one wrist, which he

held firmly.

"Pick up your stuff," he said, "and come along with me. No use jumping that way. I've got you, all right."

Little Tim, thinking over his sins, reached down and picked up the can of bait.

"I haven't done anything to hurt," he repeated.

"Hm!" exclaimed the colonel. "Reckon you've done a lot of things to hurt, if people only knew it. Here, I'll take that can. You carry your pole. Now come along."

"What for?" asked Tim, obeying the colonel's command to "come along" with him.

"I'll show you what I want," replied Colonel Witham. "You know well enough, I guess, without any of my telling. Oh, I know you'll say you don't; but I don't care anything about that. Just come along."

They proceeded out to the road, whence they turned and went in the direction of the inn. Tim thought of the pumpkin, and his heart sank. He was going to "catch it" for that, he thought.

They came up to the flag-staff presently, and Tim repressed a chuckle with difficulty; for there, as on the night they had sent it aloft, hung the big pumpkin, grinning down on them both.

"There," said Colonel Witham, "you didn't have any hand in that—oh, no! You wouldn't do it, of course. You never did nothing to hurt. I know you. But see here, youngster"—and he gave a twist to Tim's wrist—"you've got to get it down, do you understand?"

Tim gave a sigh of relief. It wasn't a "whaling," after all.

"Now," continued Colonel Witham, eying him sharply, "perhaps you had a hand in that, and perhaps you didn't. I don't know and I don't care. What I want is, to get it down. You needn't say you didn't do it, because I wouldn't believe any of you boys, anyway. But I'm going to do the right thing." The colonel hesitated a moment. "I'm going to be handsome about it. You get that down and I'll give you a quarter—twenty-five cents, do you hear?"

Little Tim nodded.

"Well," Colonel Witham went on, "you give me that fish-pole. I'm not going to have you cut and run. I'm too smart for that."

So saying, the colonel seized the boy's fish-pole, and relinquished his grasp of his wrist.

"Reckon you won't run away long as I've got this," he said. "Now can you shin that pole?"

"Sure," replied Tim. He glanced up at the lofty peak of the flag-staff, then began removing his shoes and stockings. He was up the pole the next moment like a squirrel, clinging fast with arms and bare toes. Half-way up he rested, by clutching the halyard and twisting it about his arm.

"Little monkey!" ejaculated Colonel Witham; "I'd give a dollar to know if he put it up there. Well, reckon I've got to give him that quarter, though, as long as I said I would."

Tim did the topmost length of the pole cautiously. It was a high one, with a slim topmast spliced on with iron bands. He knew how to climb this like a sailor; careful to hold himself close in to the slender stick, and not throw his weight out, so as to put a strain on it that might cause it to snap and let him fall; careful not to get it to swaying.

Then, almost at the very top, he rested again for a moment, sustaining part of his weight by the halyards, as before. When he had got his breath, he drew himself up close to where the big pumpkin hung, on the opposite side; dug his toes in hard, and held on with them and one hand. He reached his other hand into a trousers' pocket, and drew forth a knife that he had opened before he began the ascent.

Holding fast to the pole, he cut the rope that held the pumpkin. It fell, grazing one of his knees, and would have dislodged him had he not guarded against it. The next moment, it landed with a crash at the base and was shattered into fragments.

Little Tim laboriously loosened the knot Harvey had tied, and let the halyard run free. A moment more, and he was on the ground with Colonel Witham.

The colonel eyed the wreck of the hobgoblin with satisfaction. Then he turned to Tim.

"You're a smart little rascal," he said, "and a plucky one. I'll say that for you. There's your fish-pole and your can."

Colonel Witham paused, and reluctantly put his hand in his trousers pocket. With still greater reluctance, he drew forth a twenty-five cent piece and tendered it to the boy.

"Here," he said, "it's a lot of money, but I won't say as you haven't earned it."

To Colonel Witham's astonishment, however, the boy shook his head.

"I don't want any money," he said. "I wouldn't take it for that."

Another moment, he had slipped into shoes and stockings, snatched up his pole and can, and was walking quickly down the road.

Little Tim had a conscience.

"Well, if that don't beat me!" exclaimed the amazed Colonel Witham, as he stood staring at the boy. "Who'd ever have thought it?"

But soon a great light dawned upon him.

"Aha!" he exclaimed. "The little rascal! He stuck it up there, or my name's not Witham. That's why he wouldn't take the money for getting it down. Reckon I ought to have given him a taste of that stick, instead of offering him a quarter."

But even Colonel Witham, when he came to think upon it, knew deep down in his heart that he had a sort of admiration for Little Tim.

In the meantime, Henry Burns, turning over in his mind the secret that had been partly revealed to him, through the words of Grannie Thornton, could not make up his mind just what to do about it. He had almost decided to entrust what he knew to Lawyer Estes, for him to unravel, when the lawyer was called out of town for several weeks, on an important case. Again, another event intervened to cause delay. Miss Matilda Burns made a visit to her home in Massachusetts, and took Henry Burns with her; and it was well into November, close upon Thanksgiving, in fact, when they returned to Benton. By this time early winter had set in, and some heavy snow falls had buried all the country around and about Benton deep under drifts.

"You're just in time," said Harvey, as he and Tom Harris greeted Henry Burns on the latter's return. "We've got a week's holiday, and look what I've made for us."

Harvey proudly displayed a big toboggan, some seven feet in length, in the making of which he had expended the surplus time and energy of the last two weeks. "No easy job steaming those ends and making 'em curl up together even," he added; "but she'll go some. Say, you ought to see the slide we've got, down the mountain above Ellison's. Well go up this afternoon, if you like."

They were up there, all of them, early in the afternoon, George and Young Joe Warren driving one of the Warren horses hitched to a sleigh, and drawing a string of toboggans after. Blanketing the horse some distance above the Ellison dam, they proceeded up the surface of the frozen stream to the slide.

It was, as Henry Burns said, enough to make the hair on one's fur cap stand on end, to look at it. From the summit of what might almost be termed a small mountain—certainly, a tremendous hill—to the base, down a precipitous incline, the boys had constructed a chute, by banking the snow on either side. This chute led down on to the frozen stream, where a similar chute had been formed for a half-mile or more down stream.

Moreover, a temporary thaw, with a fall of sleet, had coated the bed of the chute with a glassy surface, like polished steel, or glare ice. Henry Burns, standing beside the slide, half-way up the mountain, saw a toboggan with four youths dash down the steep incline, presently. Little Tim sat in front, yelling like an Indian at a war-dance. They fairly took Henry Burns's breath away as they shot past him. He looked at Harvey and shrugged his shoulders.

"Guess that's pretty near as exciting as cruising in Samoset bay, isn't it?" he remarked. "Well, you hold the tiller, Jack, and I'm game; though it's new sport to me. I never spent a winter in Maine before."

"Oh, there isn't much steering to do here," replied Harvey; "you only have to keep her in the chute, and not let her get to swerving. It's easy. You'll like it."

It certainly did seem a risky undertaking, to a novice, standing at the very summit of the mountain and looking along down the icy plunge of the chute, far below to the stream. It took all of Henry Burns's nerve, to seat himself at the front end of the toboggan, while Jack Harvey gave a shove off. For the first moment, it was almost like falling off a steeple. Then he caught the exhilaration of the sport, as the toboggan gathered speed and shot down the incline at lightning speed.

Henry Burns had hardly time to gather his thoughts, and to glory in the

excitement, when they were at the foot of the descent, and gliding swiftly along the surface of the stream.

"My, but that's great!" he exclaimed. "It's next to sailing, if it isn't as good. Come on, let's try it again."

The mountain was admirably situated for such a sport; for it rose up from the shore where the stream made a sharp bend in its course, forming a promontory that overlooked the surrounding land. Thus the chute, after leaving the base of it, continued in a straight line down stream.

The sport, thrilling as it was, however, grew tame for Young Joe. He wanted something different. He had brought along, also, a steel-shod sled, known to the boys as a "pointer," because its forward ends ran out to sharp points, protected by the turning up of the steel runners. He declared himself ready to make the descent on that.

"Don't be a fool, Joe," remonstrated his elder brother; "you can't handle that here. You'll go so fast you can't steer it."

If Young Joe had had any misgivings and doubts upon the matter before, however, this remonstrance settled them. A little opposition was all that was needed to set him off. Modestly calling the attention of all the others to the fact that he was about to attempt a feat never before tried, Young Joe lay at full length upon the sled and pushed off.

Certainly, never before had any object shot down the mountain side at the speed Young Joe was travelling. Fortunately for him, the sides of the chute were sufficiently high to keep the sled within bounds, and on its course. The sled made the descent in safety and darted out across the surface of the stream, still within the chute. Then something unexpected happened.

The chute had been designed for toboggans, and continued only as far as the fastest one of them would travel. Watching Young Joe's daring feat, the boys saw him make the descent and speed along the level, until he reached the spot where the toboggans usually stopped. And there, also, Young Joe's sled did stop, its sharp points digging into the crust and sticking fast.

But not Young Joe. Like an arrow fired from a crossbow, he left the sled and continued on over the icy surface of the crust downstream. It was a smooth, glare surface, and he slid as though it were greased. Far down stream, they saw him

finally come to a stop—the most astonished youth that ever slid down a hill. He ended in a little drift of snow blown against a projecting log, and arose, sputtering.

Strangely enough, thanks to thick mittens, and a cap drawn down to cover his face, he was not even scratched. He picked himself up, looked about him, dazed for a moment, and then walked slowly back.

And after all, the upshot of Young Joe's experiment was, that sleds became popular on the chute, and almost came to exclude the toboggan; only the boys continued the chute for fully a mile down stream, shovelling away to the glare ice. Young Joe had introduced a new and more exciting form of sport.

The next two days afforded rare enjoyment, for the slide was at its best, and the weather clear and bracing. But the afternoon of the third day was not so propitious. It began to grow cloudy at midday, and some light flakes of snow fell, as they ate their luncheon and drank their coffee, beside a fire of spruce and birch at the summit of the mountain, near the head of the slide.

They continued till about five in the afternoon, however, when the snow began falling steadily, and they took their last slide. A party of three of them, Harvey and Henry Burns and George Warren, had proceeded nearly to the Ellison dam, on their way to Benton, when Henry Burns suddenly stopped, with an exclamation of annoyance.

"I've got to go back," he said; "I've left my buckskin gloves and Tom's hatchet up by the fire."

"Oh, let 'em go till to-morrow," said Harvey, who was feeling hungry.

"No, it won't do," replied Henry Burns, looking back wearily to where the faint smoke of the day's fire still showed through the light snow-fall. "You fellows needn't wait, though. Keep on, and perhaps I'll catch up."

He started back, plodding slowly, for he was tired with the frequent climbing of the mountain throughout the day. The others, thinking of the supper awaiting them, continued on the way home.

It was a little more than a mile that Henry Burns had to go; and, by the time he was half-way there, it was snowing hard. The storm had increased perceptibly; and, moreover, the wind was rising, and it blew the snow into his eyes so that he could hardly see. He kept on stubbornly, however.

Presently, there came a gust that reminded him of a quick squall on the water. It seemed to gather a cloud of the driving snow and fairly bury him under it. He staggered for a moment and stood still, holding his hands to his face for protection.

"That's a three-reef blow, all right," he muttered, and went on again, finally beginning the ascent of the mountain. But there he found himself suddenly assailed by a succession of gusts that made it impossible to try to climb. Moreover, the air was rapidly becoming so thick with snow that he saw he was in danger of being lost.

He made up his mind quickly, realizing the danger he was in, and started back down stream. He must gain shelter soon, or he would be unable to find his way. He was not any too hasty in his decision. In a few minutes the outlines of the stream and its banks were blended into a blurred white mass. Then he could no longer see the shore at any distance, and even the path was being blotted out.

He found, too, it was with difficulty that he could breathe, for the incessant flying of the snow into his nostrils. Estimating, as best he could, where the Half Way House must lie, he struck off from the stream and headed for that. He stumbled on blindly, till his progress was suddenly arrested by his bumping into an object that proved, most fortunately, to be Colonel Witham's flag-pole. Even at that short distance, the inn was now hidden; but he knew where it must be, and presently stood safe upon its piazza.

It was an odd situation for Henry Burns. Once before, had Colonel Witham refused him shelter under this roof, and that, too, in a storm. But he knew there was no help for it now. He had got to enter—and he had got to stay. No human being could go on to-night. He hesitated only for a moment, and then opened the door and stepped within.

The office was vacant, and the air was chilly. The remains of a wood fire smouldered, rather than burned, in the fireplace. There was no lamp lighted, although it was quite dark, with the storm and approaching evening. The place seemed deserted.

Henry Burns stepped to the desk, took a match from a box and lighted the lamp that hung there. It cast a dismal glow, and added little to the cheer of the place, although it enabled him to distinguish objects better. He turned to the hearth, raked the embers together, blew up a tiny blaze and replenished the fire from the wood-box. He threw off his outer garments, and drew a chair toward the blaze.

But now, from an adjoining room, the door of which was slightly ajar, there came unexpectedly a thin, querulous voice that startled him. He recognized, the next moment, the tones of old Granny Thornton.

"Is that you, Dan?" she asked.

Henry Burns opened the door and answered. She seemed afraid, until he had told her who he was, begging him to go away from the place and not harm a poor, lone woman. But she recognized him, when he had spoken again, and had lighted another lamp and held it for her to look at him.

She sat in an arm-chair, in which she had been evidently sleeping, propped up with pillows; and looked ill and feeble.

"I'm cold," she said, and shivered.

Henry Burns dragged her chair out into the office, by the fire, while she clung to the arms of it, as though in terror of tumbling out on to the floor. And, in that brief journey from room to room, it flashed over Henry Burns that the time and opportunity had come for him to know the secret she possessed.

"Dan won't like to find you here," she muttered. "He ought to be here—leaving me all alone. My, how it blows! How'd you get here, anyway? Don't mind what Dan says; you'll have to stay."

"He'll not be here to-night, with this storm keeping up," answered Henry Burns, "Where is he?"

"He went to town with Bess," said she. "Why don't she come? I'm lonesome without her. I'm hungry, too. She ought to make me a cup of tea."

"I'll make it," said Henry Burns; "and I'll get something for myself, too. I'll pay for it, so Witham won't lose by it."

He made his way to the kitchen and the pantry; lighted a fire in the kitchen stove, and made tea for himself and Granny Thornton; and toasted some bread for her. Then he foraged for himself and ate a hearty meal, for he was ravenously hungry. And, all the while, he was thinking what he should do and say to the old woman, nodding in the chair out in the office.

He returned there, and put more wood on the fire, so that it blazed up brightly, and the sparks shot up the flue with a roar. The roar was more than answered by

the wind outside. It rattled the glass in the windows, and dashed the snow against them as though it would break them in. It found a hundred cracks and crevices about the old inn, to moan and shriek through, and blew a thin film of snow under the door.

Old Granny Thornton shook and quivered, as some of the sharper blasts cried about the corners of the house. She seemed frightened; and once she spoke up in a half whisper, and asked Henry Burns if he believed there were ever spirits out on such a night as this. He would have laughed away her fears, under ordinary circumstances; but it suited his purpose better now to shake his head, and answer, truthfully enough, that he didn't know.

Presently, the old woman started up in her chair and stared anxiously at one of the snow-covered windows.

"They might be lost!" she cried, hoarsely. "They could be lost to-night in this storm, like folks were in the great blizzard twenty years ago. Oh, Bess"—she uttered the girl's name with a sob—"I hope you're safe. You'd die in this snow. Say, boy, do you suppose they've got shelter? It's not Dan Witham I care for, whether he's dead or not, but Little Bess."

Henry Burns stepped in front of the old woman, and looked into her eyes.

"What do you care whether Bess is lost or not?" he asked. "She don't belong to you. She's not yours. You're not her grandmother."

At the words, so quick and unexpected, Granny Thornton shrank back as though she had received a blow. Her eyes rolled in her head, and she seemed to be trying to reply; but the words would not come. She gasped and choked, and clutched at her throat with her shrunken hands.

Henry Burns spoke again, grasping one of her hands, and compelling her to listen.

"Somebody else wants her home more than you do," he said. "Why don't you give her back? She's too smart and bright to go to the poorhouse, when you die. Why do you keep her here?"

He spoke at random, knowing not whether he was near the secret or not, but determined that he would make her speak out.

But she sank down in her chair, huddled into an almost shapeless, half-lifeless

heap. Her head was buried in her hands. She rocked feebly to and fro. Once she roused herself a bit, and strove to ask a question, but seemed to be overcome with weakness. Henry Burns thought he divined what she would ask, and answered.

"I know it's so," he said. "You can't hide it any longer. I've found it out."

It seemed as though she would not speak again. The minutes went by, ticked off in clamorous sound, by a big clock on the wall. Granny Thornton still crouched all in a heap in her chair, moaning to herself. Henry Burns remained silent and waited.

Then when, all at once, the old woman brought herself upright, with a jerk, and spoke to him, the sound of her voice amazed him. It was not unlike the tone in which she had answered Colonel Witham, the night Henry Burns overheard her. It was shrill and sharp, though with a whining intonation. What she said was most unexpected.

"Have you been to school?" she queried.

Henry Burns stared hard. He thought her mind wandering. But she continued.

"Don't stare that way—haven't you any wit? Can you write? Hurry—I'm afeared Dan will be here."

Henry Burns understood, in a flash. He sprang to the desk, got the pen and ink there and a block of coarse paper, the top sheet of which had some figuring on it. He returned to the old woman's side and sat down, with the paper on his knees. She stared at him blankly for a few moments—then said abruptly:

"Write it down just as I tell you. I'm going to die soon—Don't stare like that—write it down. Dan Witham can't harm me then, and I'm going to tell. Her name isn't Bess Thornton—it's Bess Ellison."

Henry Burns's hand almost refused to write. But he controlled himself, and followed her.

"Dan shan't have her," she continued. "I'll give her up, first. Twelve years ago last June she was born. And she weren't as pretty as my girl's baby, that was born the same day—though they looked alike, too.

"My girl's name was Elizabeth, but she's dead. She was a sight prettier than

Lizzie Anderson that married Jim Ellison. But my girl married Tom Howland, and he ran away and left her, and that just before the baby was born. And her baby, Elizabeth Howland, was born the same day, I tell you, as Lizzie Ellison's baby. That one was named Elizabeth, too—Elizabeth Ellison. That's Bess.

"And when the two babies were born, why we were poor and Jim Ellison was well-to-do. The Thorntons got in debt, and he bought up the mortgages. And when Bess Ellison was born, her mother was so ill she didn't see the baby for many weeks; and my girl went up to the house in about three weeks to nurse both babies, we being poor. And I went up, too, to look after things.

"I guess my girl was wild, too, though I won't blame her now. One day she went to town and didn't come back; and she left me a note, saying she wouldn't ever come back, anyway. And I could bring up the baby—which I didn't like to do, because I'd brought up one, and now she'd run away.

"So I was getting ready to go back to the house and take the baby with me; and I took care of both babies for a day or two. And just as I was planning to go back, there lay the two, side by side in the bed; and I could hardly tell which was which—they looked so much alike.

"Then what put it into my head, I don't know. But I thought that, if I changed the two, nobody'd know, because Bess Ellison's mother hadn't seen her. And I thought of how the property would come back to the Thorntons that way, if I put my girl's Bess in the other's place. And I up and did it, quick.

"Then, when I got home with Lizzie Ellison's baby, why I found I'd been so hasty I'd brought away a chain and bit of money, that they'd put about her neck. It was an old coin that had been in the family for years, and was thought to carry good luck—so I learned afterwards. I meant to take it back, but I couldn't, right away, and then I lost the coin. Oh, how I hunted for it! But I never could find it.

"Now are you putting it all down? Be quick, or Dan might come in. It was all for nothing—what I did—for my girl's baby died two years later. Let me look what you've got there. I know school-writing. I went to school once. Give me the pen. I'll put my name down to that. Hold my hand, so it won't shake. That's my name. It don't look like much, I guess. But that's it."

Tremblingly, the old woman took the pen and, guided by Henry Burns, subscribed her name to what he had written. Then she spoke again:

"Go into that bed-room and look in the top drawer. There's a key there. That's the key to the old house."

Henry Burns followed her instructions, and brought forth the key. She bade him keep it, and go the next day and get the stuff in the attic: the chain, minus its locket; the little dress, and a pair of shoes. She mourned the loss of the coin, lest her strange story might not be believed by Mrs. Ellison, without that evidence—not knowing that the coin had even now come into Mrs. Ellison's own hands.

She sank into a doze not long after; and Henry Burns also slept, on a couch in the office, with a buffalo robe over him. He woke early next day, waded through the drifts to the old house, and got the things from the drawer. Then he went down the road.

Below the old mill, near the road that ran up to the Ellison farm, a horse and sledge came in sight, travelling slowly. Henry Burns's pulse beat quicker as he recognized Colonel Witham and Bess coming up from Benton, where they had passed the night. Colonel Witham scowled upon him, but the girl smiled.

"Hello," she said. "Isn't everything pretty, all covered with snow? Where'd you come from so early?"

Henry Burns could hardly answer her. He faced Colonel Witham.

"Granny Thornton's got an errand up at the Ellisons' for Bess," he said. "I just came from the inn, I left the money for my lodging, too. Mrs. Ellison wants to see Bess."

Colonel Witham grumbled. "I won't wait for her," he said. "She'll have to foot it up through the snow."

"I don't care," exclaimed the girl, and sprang lightly out.

Henry Burns never did remember what was said on that walk up to the farm. His mind was taken up with one subject. He had a vague remembrance, after it was all over, of knocking at the door, and of their being both admitted; of his almost ignoring the greeting of the brothers; of his finding himself and Bess somehow in the parlour with Mrs. Ellison.

He remembered, afterward, of handing the writing he had done, at old Granny Thornton's bidding, to Mrs. Ellison, and of her starting to read it and breaking down suddenly; of her asking him many questions about it, and of his answering

them almost in a daze. He remembered that Mrs. Ellison resumed the reading, the tears streaming down her cheeks; of how he laid down the little bundle of stuff he had brought from the attic, and pointed it out to Mrs. Ellison.

He remembered that Mrs. Ellison sprang up and seized the child in her arms—and just about that time Henry Burns stole out and left the two together; so that he never did know just what happened next.

CHAPTER XIX

THE MYSTERY OF THE MILL

Henry Burns, slipping quietly away from the farmhouse on the hill, tramped joyously through the snowdrifts to the highway, "caught a ride" on a sledge going in to Benton and started homeward. He had not ridden far, however, when a double-seated sleigh appeared in sight, which seemed even at a distance to be familiar. It became more so when, at length, he made out clearly a white horse belonging to Tom Harris's father, and, occupying the two seats, his friends Tom and Bob, Jack Harvey and George Warren.

Perhaps they didn't give three cheers and a tiger when they espied Henry Burns! Jack Harvey and George Warren, struggling down the road through the storm of the afternoon before, had worried not a little about him, and would have gone back to his aid, if they could have done so. But the wind and snow had been too fierce; and they could only plod on, hoping that his usual luck and cleverness would not desert him, and that he would gain shelter in time.

They seized Henry Burns now and tumbled him into the sleigh, in rough and hearty fashion; and they turned about and drove back to Benton at the very best pace that the big horse could make through the snow. Henry Burns told the story of the night, as they proceeded.

"Say, that's like a story out of the library," remarked George Warren. "Just think of it! Little Bess a sister of the Ellison fellows. What did they say, Henry, when you told them?"

"Nothing," replied Henry Burns. "I didn't give 'em a chance. I got out quick."

"Well, I'm mighty glad for her," exclaimed Jack Harvey, heartily. "She's the pluckiest little thing I ever saw. I'm glad she's got a good home at last."

It was some time before Henry Burns spoke again. He seemed to be considering something soberly. Finally he said, "Yes, and they need the mill now, more than ever, with her to care for. I wonder if they'll ever get it."

The mill passed out of mind, however, for some time, when there fell still

another great snow on the following day, heavier than the preceding storm. It piled drift upon drift, and made the roads about Benton, for miles in every direction, impassible. It shut each farmhouse in upon itself; the Ellisons in their home; Colonel Witham and Granny Thornton alone in the Half Way House. The old mill was silent for a whole week.

Then there came a magazine to Tom Harris, bringing a timely suggestion to the boys of Benton. It told of the snowshoe of the Norwegians, the ski, with which a runner could travel through the deep drifts of loose snow, and coast down the steep hills, as easily as on a toboggan. Soon, working in spare hours, each youth had fashioned himself a pair. They got the long, thin strips of hard wood, steamed the ends and curled them like sled runners, sand-papered and polished them, and put on the straps of leather to hold the toe.

They learned how to go through the drifts with these, sliding the shoe along through the loose snow, instead of lifting the foot, as with the Canadian snowshoe. They got each a long pole, to steady one's self with, and practised sliding down the terraces of Tom Harris's garden, standing erect and doing their best to keep on their feet.

When they had had their preliminary tumbles, and were proficient in the sport, they started off one day and went along up stream; tried the steep banks that led down on to that, and found it more exciting than tobogganning.

Tim Reardon used his skis to get up above the dams, where the spring-holes in the stream were. And, through the Christmas holidays, he made his headquarters at the cabin that belonged to the canoeists, which he kept hot by a rousing fire. Day after day, he set out from there, skiing his way up stream, dragging after him a toboggan on which was loaded a pail half filled with water. In this swam his live bait, winnows that he had caught through the ice in the brook. Also he carried an axe, a borrowed ice chisel, some lines and other stuff.

One might have seen him there, through the afternoons, watching sharply the five lines that he tended, and varying the monotony of waiting by an occasional ski slide down the neighbouring bank.

He had five holes chopped through the ice, and a line set in each, baited with a live minnow. This line was attached to a strong, limber switch of birch, set up slant-wise over the hole, with the butt stuck fast in a hole chopped in the ice and banked with snow. And this switch flew a little streamer of coloured calico; so that Tim had only to see the streamer bobbing up and down, at any distance, to

know that there was a pickerel fast on the hook.

He had famous sport there for ten days or more, for the fish were hungry, and bigger ones came to the bait than in summer. Every third day he went back in to Benton with his catch, which he had kept packed in snow, sold them at the market, and was fairly rolling in wealth; and when, one afternoon, he hooked and landed an eight-pound fish, and travelled to town with it, and saw it set up in the market, with a sign on it to the effect that it had been caught by Timothy Reardon of Benton, he was the proudest boy to be found anywhere.

Then, just following Christmas, there was a glorious dinner up at the Ellison farm for Henry Burns and his friends, in honour of Little Bess. Tim got an invitation to that, too, through his loyal friends, Henry Burns and Jack Harvey; and he and Joe Warren ate more than any four others, and Young Joe, who had absconded with the most of a huge mince pie, left over from the dinner, was found afterward groaning on the kitchen sofa, and had to be dosed with ginger and peppermint, so that he could partake of cornballs and maple candy later on.

And there was Bess Ellison—Bess Thornton no longer—looking remarkably pretty and uncommonly mischievous, dressed no more in dingy gingham, but in the best Mrs. Ellison could buy and make up for her; and she held out her hand to Henry Burns and took him in to Mrs. Ellison, who said something to him that made him come very near blushing, and nearly lose his customary self-control.

There was Benny Ellison, also, who was dragged in by Bess, and made to shake hands with Henry Burns, and call old scores off; so that even he warmed into enthusiasm, and enjoyed himself with the others.

Then, somewhere about that time, there was a lawyer's visit to the Half Way House, where there were certain papers drawn up, and signed by Granny Thornton, with a trembling hand; which made it sure that Little Bess would no more be uncertain of her home and her parentage, but would remain where she belonged, up at the big farmhouse.

So the winter passed and the spring came in. Its days of thaw made the old stream groan and crack, as the great ice fields split here and there, and seams opened. There were nights when the water, that had overflowed at the edge of the ice fields, close by the shore, and formed a narrow stream on either side, froze fast again; so that there was a glare thoroughfare for miles and miles up the stream into the country, of ice just thick enough to bear the boys of Benton.

They made excursions far up along shore this way, skating at furious speed; pausing now and then to set fire to the bunches of tall dried grasses and reeds, that protruded through the ice in the midst of the stream. These flamed fiercely at the mere touch of a match.

Then, as it grew later, this overflow at the edges of the ice field froze no more; but lay, several feet deep of clear water, over that part of the ice. They could get on to the stream then only at certain points, where the ledges made out, or by throwing planks across. Soon the water began to pour with a louder and louder roar over the old Ellison dam, and a stretch of clear, swift-flowing water opened up for some distance back of it.

It became rare and dangerous sport, in these days, to get out on the ice field and work at a seam with planks and poles, prying loose a great sheet of the still thick ice, and watch it go over the dam. It had a most spectacular and awe-inspiring way of making the plunge. A great block of the ice, several yards square, would drift swiftly down, shoot far over the edge, then break apart of its own weight, the huge chunks falling with a mighty splash and commotion into the boiling pool below. Down they would go, like monsters of the sea, borne by the momentum of their plunge from the height. Then they would shoot upward, lift themselves out with a dull roar amid the seething mass of water and smaller ice, rise above the surface, fall again, and, caught in the embrace of the swift current, go tossing and crunching down toward Benton.

Little Tim's sheer delight in this sport exceeded that of all others. He displayed a recklessness that brought upon him the assertion by Jack Harvey that he was "a double-dyed little idiot;" and Henry Burns gave him solemn warning that some day he would go over the dam, if he didn't stop taking chances. But they couldn't check Tim's ardour. He was the hardest worker, with ice-chisel or pole, and the last to leave a sheet of ice that had broken loose and started down stream. For, not always did the ice sever at the point where they were working, but sometimes above them; so that a sharp watch had to be kept against the danger of being caught on an ice patch, and carried along with it.

Then, through the days of working thus at the field, and by the natural wearing away with the spring thaw, the water gained its freedom more and more; so that there was now a quarter of a mile of black open water between the dam and the edge of the ice.

There came, then, a memorable afternoon, which had been preceded by a day of

rain, loosening up the bands of winter far and wide, raising the water in the stream by the inrush of countless little brooks all along its course; whereby the whole ice jam, and in some places, fields of logs that had been stored shingle-fashion for the winter, creaked and groaned and snapped, and the whole valley of the stream was filled with the noise of the dissolution. Farmers and mill men eyed the scene with some apprehension, and talked of freshet. Tim Reardon eyed it with delight, forecasting days of warmth and fishing in store.

The boys from Benton were upon the stream, that afternoon, though they knew, deep in their hearts, they had no business there; that it was dangerous; that the whole ice field was shaky. They worked at the ice with might and main, and cheered lustily when some great cake went tumbling over the dam.

Then, of a sudden, there came a cry, that started somewhere on shore, ran all along the banks of the stream and came down to the boys at their play—a cry of alarm and warning. They looked about quickly. What was the danger? Persons on shore were pointing far up stream. The next instant, they discerned the whole great ice field, as far as they could see, in motion; crumbling about the shores and heaving up into hummocks here and there. Then they felt the ice beneath their feet moving. The deliverance of the stream from winter was at hand. The ice was going out.

The wild scramble for shore was a thing not to be forgotten. Some of the boys had travelled away up beyond the vicinity of the dam, where the logs were stored within a boom. It was perilous footing across these, for the few moments that it took to regain the shore. The water opened here and there, in which the logs churned and slipped dangerously.

It was every one for himself, then, and lucky to gain the bank without bruises, or a ducking—or worse. It was all so sudden, so terrifying, so confusing, that no one paused to see who else was in danger.

But when Henry Burns and Jack Harvey and George Warren, Tom and Bob and John Ellison had gained the shore, a cry came in that turned them. Away over toward the other shore, they espied Little Tim and Bess Ellison scrambling desperately. Where the girl had come from, they did not know—only that she was there now, and in peril.

There was no hope of their regaining the farther shore. Already the ice had opened up to such an extent that a great gap of running water lay between the two and that bank. Would they be able to make the flight across?

A cry of horror went up from shore now; for, even as the boy and girl seemed to be nearing safety, a part of the field on which they stood separated from the rest, and began its journey down stream. But, with this, there was added to the dread and dismay of those who gazed the fact that the sheet of ice held two more captives. Henry Burns and Harvey had rushed across the ice to the rescue, only in time to be trapped with Tim and Bess.

They could all swim, but the attempt must have been fatal. The open water that now lay between them and the shore was filled with small blocks of ice, ground by the larger masses. One could not make headway through that. Was there any chance? Little Tim saw one.

Grasping Harvey by an arm, he pointed to a seam in the ice. "Chop there, Jack!" he cried. "Here, Henry, take my ice-chisel; you're stronger than I am. If we can cut loose, perhaps we can work in shore on the small piece."

They saw the chance—a desperate one—and took it. Holding in his hands the chisel he had been working with, Harvey began chopping furiously at the seam in the ice. Henry Burns, with Tim's chisel, did likewise. A few moments' work sufficed. The section on which they stood, already half broken away, yielded to the efforts of the two. It cracked, severed from the larger part, teetered dangerously and drifted away. The four were floating on a junk of ice that would just support them.

The cry went up to get a rope; and John Ellison and George Warren darted down along shore toward the mill. Using the blades of the heavy long-handled chisels, as best they could, for paddles, Henry Burns and Harvey strove to force the heavy block of ice toward shore. They succeeded in a measure, but they were going steadily and surely down stream.

It seemed ages before John Ellison and George Warren emerged from the mill. They had encountered Colonel Witham there, just as they had gathered up a long coil of light rope. He, anxious for the fate of his mill in the impending freshet, had not heard the cries farther up shore, and knew nothing of what was going on. He darted after them, as he saw them hurrying toward the door, demanding to know what they would do with his rope. They had no time to explain. Colonel Witham found himself shouldered out of the way, and sent spinning, by John Ellison; and when he caught himself they were rods away.

Standing now upon the shore, opposite the drifting cake, John Ellison handed one end of the rope to George Warren. Taking the other end, he separated the

line into two coils, whirled one about his head and threw it far out. It fell short, splashing into the water. He tried again, and failed.

"HE SEPARATED THE LINE INTO TWO COILS, WHIRLED ONE ABOUT HIS HEAD AND THREW IT FAR OUT."

The ice raft, with its four prisoners, was driving faster now, caught by the swifter water. It was nearing the dam.

"Let me try once," said George Warren, as they shifted their places farther down shore, following the ice.

He went at it more carefully; took time to arrange the coils so they would run free through the air; gave a hard swing to the coil in his right hand and let it fly. Henry Burns, reaching far forward to meet the rope, was almost on the point of grasping it; but it seemed to recede as it fell, losing force and splashing into the water a few feet away. The next moment, Henry Burns was overboard, in the icy water, seizing the end before it sank, upborne as it was by floating ice.

He fought his way back, and Harvey and Tim dragged him to safety, chilled, and his teeth chattering. Then the four grasped the rope and held hard. George Warren, with a sailor's instinct, had found a stout bush by the bank and taken a few turns of the rope about that.

The cake of ice, arrested in its course, brought up, while the swift running current overflowed it. The four were ankle deep in water. But the rope held. Slowly, but surely, the ice raft yielded to the strain. It came in, out of the rush of the current, into quieter water. It touched the shore—and the yawning brink of the dam was only a few rods away.

They were ashore now and running for the mill, where there was a fire that would warm them. They were half frozen, with the chilling of the water and with the fright. Even Colonel Witham, mindful now of the situation, was there to let them in and allow them the warmth of the fire.

"You're soaking wet," he said to Henry Burns. "There's some old clothes that Jim Ellison left, hanging in that closet on the floor above. They'll swallow you, but they're dry."

Henry Burns darted up the stairs.

As he did so, the stairs trembled and shook beneath his feet. The whole mill seemed to be quivering on its foundations. At the same moment, a cry went up from the outside that the dam had given way. The crowd gathered on the bank saw a piece of the dam suddenly collapse, through which aperture a mass of logs, grinding blocks of ice and debris from up stream tore its way.

Then screams came from the mill. Terrified, the crowd, gazing, saw one side of it totter and sway. The sound of wrenching timbers, collapsing frame-work and the twisting of iron filled the air.

Henry Burns, clutching a window frame, saw the panorama of the stream in tumult, of the shattered dam, and of the distant shore, suddenly open up before his eyes, as a great mass of the mill, its foundations torn away, sagged off and plunged into the waters. He, on the upper floor, and his companions on the floor below, found themselves at once upon the brink of the swift-running waters of the stream, saved, as by a miracle, by the other half of the mill remaining firm.

Looking now upon the wreck, Henry Burns espied a strange thing. Three pair of the huge grinding stones had gone with the destruction of that part of the mill. One pair alone remained, just before him. It was that pair upon which, on one occasion, James Ellison had placed his foot, in satisfaction, and remarked that all was safe; stones that had ground no grist for years before James Ellison's death, but which had been disconnected from the shafting.

Now they were half upset, and one lay wrenched from the steel thread that had held it down close to the lower one. Thus there was disclosed a space cut in the lower stone, that held a small tin box, such as merchants use for papers.

Henry Burns stared, for one brief moment, in amazement. Then, crawling cautiously over, he seized the box and darted back to the window. He swung himself out on to a small roof that covered the door below; hung from that for a moment, and dropped into a heap of snow that had been shovelled into a pile there. At the same moment, the little party on the lower floor rushed forth into safety.

What they found in this box, a half-hour later, when it was opened before all, in the Ellison dining-room, fairly took their breaths away; fairly made the old house creak with the whoops that filled it; made Mrs. Ellison weep a flood of

joyous tears; nearly set John and James Ellison clear out of their wits.

The old mill—wrecked to be sure, but valuable still, and easily to be restored, with the rebuilding of the dam—the old mill was theirs. There was the deed from Colonel Witham back to James Ellison, to prove it. There were the deeds to the lands—all theirs now; no longer Colonel Witham's. And more, and greater still the surprise. The old inn, the Half Way House, was not Colonel Witham's, at all. It had been James Ellison's, and there were the papers to show that. It was theirs now, and all the land for acres around it. They were no longer poor. James Ellison's bank had been found at last. The old mill's secret had been torn from hiding by the freshet.

Some days later, following a protracted visit on the part of Lawyer Estes to the Half Way House, there emerged from the doorway of the same, at evening, a portly person that could not be mistaken. He brought out the horse from the barn, harnessed it to a carriage, and drove away down the road at a furious pace.

The next day, Colonel Witham was missing from the inn and from Benton.

"Have him arrested?" responded John Ellison, in answer to his brother's query; "I don't care about that. He's gone, and good riddance. Hello, there come Henry Burns and Jack Harvey. Let's all go down and take a look at what's left of the mill."

"Poor gran'," said Bess to Mrs. Ellison, half timidly, "what will become of her now?"

"We'll bring her up here, dear," said that motherly woman, "and take care of her during the little life she has left. We can't leave her all alone down there." And Bess danced gaily away to join the boys, her last trouble gone and nothing but joy ahead.

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