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ALBERT WALTER TOLMAN



TREDITION CLASSICS

Jim Spurling, Fisherman or Making Good

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Inconsistent hyphenation in the original document has been preserved.
Obvious typographical errors have been corrected.

JIM SPURLING, FISHERMAN



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**HE PLUNGED INTO THE SEA AND DRAGGED HIMSELF TOWARD T
ROCK TO WHICH HIS FATHER WAS FASTENED**

JIM SPURLING

FISHERMAN

or Making Good

BY

ALBERT W. TOLMAN

ILLUSTRATED



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TO MY BOYS
ALBERT AND EDWARD

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JIM SPURLING FISHERMAN

I

SMASHED UP

"Here comes J. P. Whittington, Junior, Esquire, in his new Norman! Some speed—what?"

The three Graffam Academy seniors, Jim Spurling, Roger Lane, and Winthrop Stevens, who were sitting on the low, wooden fence before the campus, earnestly discussing the one thing that had engrossed their minds for the past two weeks, stopped talking and leaned forward.

On the broad, elm-lined street beyond the Mall suddenly appeared a cloud of dust, out of which shot a gray automobile. Its high speed soon brought it to

the academy grounds, and it came to an abrupt stop before the fence.

"Pile in, fellows!" shouted the driver, a bareheaded youth in white flannels, "and I'll take you on a little spin."

He was a slim, sallow lad of seventeen, with a straw-colored pompadour crowning his freckled forehead. The sleeves of his outing shirt were rolled up above his elbows, revealing his bony, sunburnt arms. He wore a gay red tie, and a tennis blazer, striped black and white, lay on the seat beside him.

"No, thanks, Percy," replied Lane. "Sorry we can't go; but we're too busy."

Spurling and Stevens nodded as Whittington's light-blue eyes traveled inquiringly from one to the other.

"Ah, come on!" he invited. "Be sports! Let's celebrate the end of the course. Just to show how good I feel, I'm going to scorch a three-mile hole through the atmosphere between here and Mount Barlow faster than it was ever done before. Tumble aboard and help hold this barouche down on the pike while I burn the top off it for the last time."

Pulling out a book of tissue wrappers and a sack of tobacco, he began to roll a cigarette with twitching, yellowed fingers.

"Anybody got a match? No? Then I'll have to dig one up myself."

He fumbled in his pocket and brought out a lucifer. Soon he was inhaling the smoke and talking rapidly.

"I'm so glad this is my last week here I feel like kicking my head off. Once I shake the dust of this

dump off my tires, you can bet you'll never catch me here again. Say, do you know what this Main Street reminds me of? An avenue in Metairie Cemetery in New Orleans, with a row of white tombs on each side. I saw it last Christmas. They bury 'em aboveground there, too. The Rubes in this burg are just as dead, only they don't know it."

Drawing a final, long, luxurious whiff, he tossed the half-smoked cigarette away.

"Well, so long! My dad's coming on the five-ten to see his only son graduate *cum laude*. And me loaded down with conditions a truck-horse couldn't haul! Wouldn't that jar you? Guess I'll have to do my road-burning before he gets here. Hold a watch on me, will you? I'm out for the record."

"Careful, or you'll get pinched for over-speeding," cautioned Stevens.

Whittington spat contemptuously.

"Pinch your grandmother!" he jeered. "I've been pinched too many times to mind a little thing like that."

Off darted the gray car. The three gazed after it in silence. Then Spurling spoke.

"Must seem rather pleasant to have a bank-account you can't touch the bottom of, mustn't it? They say his father's all sorts of a millionaire. Hope he doesn't get smashed up or run over somebody."

"He's a good-natured fool," commented Lane. "But you can't help liking him, after all. Now let's get back to business."

It was Commencement week in mid-June at the old

country academy nestled among the New England hills. The lawns before the substantial white houses were emerald with the fresh, unrivaled green of spring. Fragrant lilacs sweetened the soft air. The walks under the thick-leafed elms were thronged with talking, laughing groups. Bright-colored dresses dotted the campus before the dingy brick buildings. Tennis-courts and ball-field were alive with active figures. A few days more and students and strangers would be gone, and the old town would sink into the drowsy quiet of the long summer vacation.

Lounging on the notched, whittled fence, Lane, Spurling, and Stevens fell once more into earnest conversation.

Spurling came from a Maine coast town. He was nineteen, tall, broad-shouldered, dark-complexioned, deliberate in speech and movements. Physically very strong, he had caught on the academy ball team and played guard in football. Mentally he was a trifle slow; but in the whole school there was no squarer, more solid fellow. So far as finances went, he was dependent on his own resources; whatever education he got he must earn himself.

Lane afforded in many respects a decided contrast to Spurling. Reared on a New Hampshire farm in the shadow of the White Mountains, he was of medium build, wiry and active, a practical joker, full of life and spirit. He had red hair and the quick temper that goes with it. Though not much of a student, he had at eighteen a keen, clear business head. Like Spurling, he had been obliged to make his own way; and, like Spurling, he was abundantly able to make it.

Winthrop Stevens, or "Throppy," as his friends

nicknamed him, claimed a small Massachusetts city as his home. He was the best scholar of the three, dark, quiet, studious, with a decided trend toward mechanics and electricity. Though not obliged to work for his schooling, he had always chummed with the other two, and with them had been a waiter at a shore hotel the previous season.

The trio were endeavoring to decide what they should do the coming summer.

"Well," said Lane, "what shall it be? Juggling food again at the Beachmont?"

"Not for me," answered Spurling, decidedly. "I'm sick of hanging round a table, pretending to do as many unnecessary things as you can, wondering whether the man you've waited on is going to give up a half-dollar or a nickel, knowing that the more uncomfortable you can make him feel the bigger fee you'll pull down. No more tipping for me! I'd rather earn my money, even if I don't get so much."

"Hits me, Jim," assented Stevens. "What do you say, Budge?"

"Same here," agreed Roger.

The long-drawn shriek of a locomotive rose from the valley-bottom.

"There's the five-ten!" ejaculated Lane. "I pity Whittington when his dad finds how things have gone."

"Percy isn't the only one who needs sympathy," said Spurling, soberly. "What about his father?"

"I'm sorry for 'em both," was Lane's comment. "But the Whittington family'll have to handle its own

troubles. Now, fellow-members, to the question before the house! Unless I raise at least two hundred dollars in the next three months, it's no college for me in September."

A short silence followed. Spurling took out his knife and deliberately slithered a long, splintery shaving off the fence-top.

"I've an idea," he said, slowly. "Give me till evening and I'll tell you about it. What d'you say to a last game of tennis?"

The others agreed and slipped off the fence. Lane glanced up the road.

"Here comes Whittington, scorching like a blue streak! And there's Bill Sanders's old auto crawling up May Street hill from the railroad station! If Percy should hit him—good-night!"

The gray machine rapidly grew larger. The people on the sidewalks stood still and watched.

May Street crossed Main at right angles, and a high cedar hedge before the corner house made it impossible for the two drivers to see each other until they were close together. On sped the gray car.

"Isn't he humming!"

Suddenly Whittington thrust out his left arm.

"He's going to turn down May Street!" shouted Lane. "Bound to the station after his father. He'll hit Sanders, sure as fate! Hi! Hi there, Percy!"

Heedless of the warning, Whittington whirled round into May Street and plunged full tilt into the hotel bus, striking it a glancing blow back of its front

wheel. There was a tremendous crash.

"Come on, fellows!" cried Lane.

They ran at top speed toward the wreck. Through the clearing dust three figures were visible, extricating themselves from the ruins. Sanders, the hotel chauffeur, was groaning and rubbing his ankle. His only passenger, a bald, thick-set man, with smooth face and bulldog jaw, had a bleeding scratch down his right cheek and a badly torn coat. Whittington, apparently unharmed, was chalky and stuttering from fright.

Spurling, for all his slowness, was the first to reach the wreck. He helped the stout stranger to his feet, and the man turned angrily toward Whittington. An exclamation of surprise burst from both.

"Dad!"

"Percy!"

Understanding struggled with indignation on the older man's face.

"Well," he growled, "so you've done it again!"

For a moment the lad stood in shamefaced alarm, shaking from head to foot.

"Are you much hurt, Dad?" he stammered.

"Only a scratch," returned Whittington, senior. "But it's no thanks to you that I wasn't killed."

He turned to Sanders, who was still chafing his ankle.

"Anything broken?"

"No, sir; only a sprain."

"I'm glad it's no worse. Have this mess cleared away and I'll fix up with you later at the hotel; and get my suit-case over to my room, will you?"

To his son he said:

"We'll go to your dormitory."

He limped grimly ahead; Percy followed. As he passed the three seniors he pulled a face of mock repentance. The boys resumed their way to the tennis-court.

"Pretty poor stick, isn't he?" commented Lane, disgustedly. "Almost kills his father, and then laughs at it. Throws away in a few seconds more than enough to put the three of us half-way through our freshman year in college. No, I've no use for Whittington."

"If he'd had to earn his own money," remarked Spurling, "he'd look on things differently. He's got a good streak in him."

"Maybe so; but it'll take mighty hard work to bring it out. Well, here's the court. How'll we play?"

In Whittington's room father and son silently removed the traces of the disaster. Then the father pointed to a chair.

"Sit there! I've something to say to you."

Percy took the indicated seat. Whittington, senior's, jaw stiffened.

"Well!" he snapped. "Seems to me excuses are in order. You've smashed a thousand-dollar machine,

ruined a five-hundred-dollar one, and just missed killing yourself and me in the bargain. Pretty afternoon's work, isn't it?"

Percy looked injured, almost defiant.

"You must know I'm mighty sorry to have dragged you into this scrape. I was half frightened to death when I thought you were hurt. But what odds does it make about the cars?"

A twinkle appeared in his eye.

"You've got the cash, Dad. Who'll spend it, if I don't?"

Taking out his book, he began rolling a cigarette.

"Stop that!" exclaimed his father, angrily, "and listen to me. It isn't the money I mind so much as it is the fool style in which you've thrown it away. Where's the thing going to end? That's what I want to know. If you'd only get mad when I talk to you, there'd be some hope for you. But you haven't backbone enough left to get mad. You've smoked it all away."

"Oh, come now, Dad!"

"You ask who'll spend the money. I know mighty well who won't, unless he strikes a new gait. There's plenty of colleges and hospitals to endow, and enough other ways of putting all I've got where it'll do some good. I've worked too hard and too long for my fortune to have a fool scatter it to the winds. You can come down to the hotel with me for supper. After that I'll foot the bills for your little excursion, and then go over alone to see Principal Blodgett. And let me say right now that it'll be a pretty important interview for you."

Lane, Spurling, and Stevens, their tennis over, were

starting for their boarding-house. Crossing the campus, they met Percy and his father. The former nodded soberly. Whittington, senior, a cross of court-plaster on his right cheek, passed them without a glance.

"Percy doesn't look very happy," remarked Stevens, when they were at a safe distance.

"Just a passing cloud," grinned Lane. "It takes more than a little thing like junking a thousand-dollar auto to bother Percy. He'll forget all about it before to-morrow."

"See that dreadnought jaw on his father? If I was Percy I'd be kind of scary of that jaw. John P. Whittington isn't a man to stand much monkeying, or I miss my guess."

"Well, we've got troubles of our own, and no dad with a fat bank-account to foot the bills. Why so still, Jim? Something on your mind, eh?"

Jim's forehead was wrinkled.

"Wait!" was all he deigned.

Back in his room, after supper, he unbosomed himself: "A week ago I had a letter from Uncle Tom Sprowl. He lives in Stonington, on Deer Isle, east of Penobscot Bay; but most of the time he fishes and lobsters from Tarpaulin Island, ten miles south of Isle au Haut. Last month, just after he had started the season in good shape, he was taken down with rheumatism, and the doctor has ordered him to keep off the water for three months. Now that island is one of the best stands for fish and lobsters on the Maine coast. Somebody's going to use it this summer. Why shouldn't we? If we have reasonably good luck,

we can clear up two hundred and fifty dollars apiece for the season's work. I've talked the thing over with Mr. Blodgett, and he thinks it's all right. Of course we'd be in for a lot of good hard work; but it's healthy, and we're all in first-class trim. We'd soon get hardened to it. Now, boys, it's up to you."

Lane hesitated.

"Do you think that two such farmers as Throppy and I could make much of a fist at fishing?"

"Sure thing! I can show you how. I've fished since I was ten years old."

"Where did you say the island is?" asked Stevens.

"Right out in the Atlantic Ocean, a good twenty-five miles from the mainland. It's about a half-mile long and a quarter broad, partly covered with scrub evergreen, and has fifty acres of pasture. Uncle Tom's got some sheep there, too. He's afraid they'll be stolen; so he wants somebody there the earliest minute possible. He'll furnish all the gear and go halves with us on the season's catch. What do you say, Budge?"

"I'm with you, if Throppy is."

"It's a go," was Stevens's verdict.

Somebody knocked on the door.

"Come in!" called Spurling.

To their great surprise, in came Mr. Whittington.

Removing his Panama, he took the chair Spurling offered him. An unlighted cigar was gripped between his short, stubby fingers. There were dark circles

under his steel-gray eyes, and his jaw had, if possible, more of a bulldog set than ever. His square, sturdy build, without fat or softness, suggested a freight locomotive with a driving power to go through anything. He was not a handsome man, but he was undeniably a strong one.

He plunged at once into the purpose of his visit.

"I guess you know I'm Whittington's father. I've just been over to Principal Blodgett's, having a talk about Percy. I don't need to tell you how he's spent his year here, so I'll come right to the point."

He leaned forward and fastened his keen eyes on Spurling.

"The principal says you plan to spend the summer fishing from an island on the Maine coast. I want Percy to go with you."

The three exchanged glances of amazement. Lane swallowed a grin. Nobody spoke for a half-minute; then Spurling broke the silence.

"I don't want to hurt your feelings, Mr. Whittington, but, honestly, the thing isn't possible. That island is ten miles from the nearest other land. We're not out for a pleasure junket, but for three months of the hardest kind of hard work. There'll be no automobiling, no pool or cards or moving pictures. It means being up at midnight, and not getting to bed until the fish have been taken care of. It means sore fingers and lame backs and aching joints. It means standing wind and cold and fog and rain until you're tired and wet and chilled to the bone. It's a dead-earnest business out there, one hundred days of it, and every day has got to count. A college year for

the three of us hangs on this summer, and we can't risk having it spoiled. You'll have to think up some other place for Percy."

Mr. Whittington's chin set a trifle more firmly. He pulled out his cigar-case and proffered it to each of the boys in turn.

"Have a perfecto? No? Guess it's as well for you not to, after all. Wish Percy was taken that way. Excuse me if I light up. I can talk better."

Soon he was smoking hard.

"I want to have a little talk with you about my boy. Come, now, just between ourselves, what kind of a fellow is he? You probably know him better than I do. I've had my business; and he's been under tutors and away at school so long that I haven't seen much of him since his mother died, eight years ago."

The boys glanced at one another and hesitated. Young Whittington was a hard topic to discuss before his father. The millionaire misunderstood their silence. His face grew gloomy.

"Oh, well, if he's as bad as all that, no matter! I hoped he might have *some* good points."

"Don't misunderstand us, Mr. Whittington," said Spurling, quietly. "Percy isn't a bad fellow. He isn't dishonest. He doesn't cheat or crib. He's flunked honestly, and that counts for something. He's a good sprinter, and plays a rattling game of tennis, and he'd be a very fair baseball-player if he'd only let cigarettes alone. But he's soft and he's lazy. He's had too much money and taken things too easy. He's probably never earned a single cent or done a stroke of real work in his life. He's been in the habit of

letting his pocketbook take the place of his brain and muscles; and he's got the idea that a check, if it's only large enough, can buy anything on earth. That's why he wouldn't be any good to himself or anybody else out on Tarpaulin Island. He'd simply be underfoot. It'd be cruel to take him there. Excuse me if I hurt your feelings. You've asked a straight question, and I've tried to give you a straight answer."

The man chewed the butt of his cigar for a few seconds. Then he removed it from his mouth and blew a smoke-ring.

"I don't believe," he said, reflectively, "that either of you three had any tougher time than I had when I was a boy. No school after fourteen. No college. Just work, work, work, and then some more work. But it hardened me up, made a man of me; perhaps it hardened me too much. Guess some of the men I've done business with have thought so. After I made my first million—"

He broke off abruptly.

"But let's get back to Percy. I've done everything in the world for that boy, and now I'm at the end of my rope. Tutors, private schools, summer camps, trainers, travel, automobiles—and what have they all amounted to?"

He talked rapidly and nervously, emphasizing with his cigar.

"It's no use to offer him any prize; he's had everything already. I found he was hitting too rapid a pace in the bigger schools, so I sent him down here. Thought he might do better in a quiet place.

But his reports didn't show it, and the talk I've just had with the principal has pretty near discouraged me. I've bucked up against a good many tough propositions, but I'm free to say that he's the toughest. I don't see where he ever got that cigarette habit. I never smoked one in my life."

Again he began puffing furiously.

"He ought to have the stuff in him somewhere; and I believe a summer with you fellows'd bring it out. If it didn't, I don't know what would. Come, boys! Strain a point to oblige me! I'll pay you anything in reason. How large a check shall I write?"

He reached for his inside pocket. Spurling flushed and held up his hand.

"No, Mr. Whittington," said he, decidedly, "we can't do business that way. We're not running any reform school and we're not asking anybody to give us a cent. We're going out there to earn money for our first year in college, and we're going to take it out of the sea, every last copper! I don't say it to boast, but since I was ten I've had to shift for myself. I know where every cent in my pocket and every ounce of muscle on my body has come from. If Percy should go with us he'd have to take his medicine with the rest of us and pay his own way by working. Give us a little time alone to talk the matter over, and we'll soon tell you whether he can go or not."

Whittington heaved his square bulk erect and crushed on his hat.

"I'll be back in ten minutes."

Almost to the second he was at the door again. Stepping inside, he awaited their verdict, not trying

to conceal his anxiety. A great relief overspread his face at Spurling's first words.

"All right, Mr. Whittington! Percy can come—on trial. He can stop with us a month. Then if we don't hitch together he'll have to leave. But if he likes it, and we like him, he can stay the rest of the summer. If the bunch earns anything over and above what it would have gotten if he hadn't been with us, he'll get it. If it doesn't, he won't."

Five minutes later the millionaire entered Percy's room. The latter was smoking a cigarette and playing solitaire. He glanced up expectantly, a couple of cards in his hand. As he sat down opposite his son, John Whittington had never looked grimmer. The vein swelled blue on his flushed temples, and the lines on his face were deeply drawn.

"Now, Percy, you and I are going to talk business. Put down those cards and chuck that coffin-nail into the stove. Why can't you use a man's smoke if you're going to smoke at all? I've been talking with Mr. Blodgett, and I find it's the same old story. You've wound up your preparatory course with a worse smash than you had this afternoon. You haven't made good. I'm beginning to doubt if you *can* make good. You've done worse every year. You're nothing now, and if you keep on like this you'll soon be worse than nothing. You can put down one thing good and solid—I won't stand for your going the pace like Chauncey Pike or George Brimmer's son. I'd give half my money—yes, the whole of it, if you had the stuff in you that young Spurling has. I mean it."

He stopped, then began again:

"I'm going to give you one chance more, and only

one. It's quicksilver, kill or cure, and a stiff dose at that. I've just been talking with Spurling and his two friends. They're to spend the summer fishing from an island off the Maine coast, to earn money to start their college course. And you're going with them!"

"What! Me! I rather guess not! Nailed to the mast three months out on a rock like that? Not for a minute! Besides, I'm booked for Bar Harbor day after to-morrow. Got my ticket already."

"Let's look at it!"

Percy pulled out the slip of pasteboard and passed it over.

His father thrust it into his pocket.

"I can get the money on it. The agent'll take it back."

"But I don't want him to take it back."

"*I* do."

The bulldog jaws clamped together.

"Oh, I say, Dad! Come, now! That isn't using me right!"

"Isn't using you right? Why not? Don't be a fool, Percy! Whose money bought that ticket?"

"Mi— Why—er—yours, of course!"

"Well, will you go to the island?"

"No, I will not."

"Then you don't get a cent more from me. You've overdrawn your bank-account already."

"How do you know? You haven't been down to the

bank."

"You don't suppose I'd have a monthly check deposited to your account without arranging to know something about it, do you? Mighty poor business man if I did! Now, Percy, use what little brain you have! You've no money, and you can't earn any. Nobody would be fool enough to hire you. There's nothing on earth you can do. I'm going to give you one last chance to make a man of yourself. You've three months to make good in and I expect you to do it. You've got to make up those conditions and earn your salt to show there's some excuse for your being alive. Your whole life hangs on the way you spend the next hundred days. I start for the West Coast to-morrow, and won't be back till fall. I want you to write me—if you feel like it. Will you go?"

The strains of a violin came floating in through the open window. The academy bell struck ten long, lingering strokes.

"Well, what do you say? I'm waiting."

Percy swallowed hard.

"I'll go."

II

A FRESH START

Two mornings later Percy Whittington was

awakened in his room at the Thorndike in Rockland by a bell-boy hammering on his door.

"What's the matter?" he inquired, stupidly.

"Five o'clock! Five o'clock! Your call!"

"Is that all?" exclaimed Percy, relieved. "I didn't know but the hotel might be on fire."

He rolled over for another nap. Half an hour later he was roused by a lively tattoo beaten on the panels by two sets of vigorous knuckles.

"Inside there, Whittington!" exhorted Lane's voice. "Wake up! This isn't any rest-cure. The Stonington boat starts in twenty minutes. You've lost your breakfast, and unless you hustle you'll make us miss the steamer. Better let us in to help you pack!"

Percy bounded out of bed and admitted Lane and Spurling. While he dressed hastily they jammed his scattered belongings into two suit-cases. Stevens joined them in the hotel office and they made a lively spurt for Tillson's Wharf, reaching the *Governor Bodwell* just before her plank was pulled aboard.

The party had arrived in Rockland on the late train the night before, and were to start for Stonington early that morning. Percy's drowsiness had almost thwarted their plans.

"You'll have to revise your sleeping schedule, Whittington, when we get to Tarpaulin," said Spurling.

Percy was too much interested in the view opening before him to take offense at this remark.

It was a calm, beautiful June morning. A gentle

breeze barely rippled the smooth, blue water as the *Governor Bodwell* headed eastward out of the harbor. Behind lay the city, fringed with lazily smoking lime-kilns, each contributing its quota to the dim haze that obscured the shore-line. Leaving on their left the little light on the tip of the long granite breakwater, and presently on their right the white tower on the hummock of Owl's Head, marking the entrance of rocky Muscle Ridge Channel, they were soon plowing across the blue floor of West Penobscot Bay. Due north, Rockport Harbor opened between wooded shores, while beyond it rose the Camden Hills, monarchs of the rolling line of mountains stretching up toward Belfast.

A five-mile sail, and they were threading their way through narrow, winding Fox Island Thoroughfare, to the wharf at North Haven. Thence across East Penobscot Bay, by Deer Island Thoroughfare, to the granite wharf at Stonington, the rockiest town in the United States. Here they disembarked, and a short walk up a side-street brought them to the house of Spurling's uncle, Mr. Thomas Sprowl.

Uncle Tom was at home, confined by his rheumatism and the doctor's orders. He greeted the boys gladly.

"Got your letter last night, Jim," said he, "and I can tell you it took a weight off my mind. Since I've been sick I've nigh fretted myself to death about Tarpaulin."

He groaned, and shifted himself painfully in his chair.

"Those twinges take me unexpected," he explained. "You see," returning to his subject, "all my gear's on the island, besides those fifty sheep. Quite a risk for a

man with so little as I've got. You don't know how pleased I am that you fellows are going to be on deck there this summer. You're a good, husky lot—at least most of ye." He scanned Percy a trifle dubiously. "You'll have a fine time the next three months, and you'll make some money. Wish I could go down with ye!"

He winced and stifled another groan.

"When do you plan to start?"

"Just as soon as we can arrange for our boats and stores," replied Jim.

"Good enough! You can be there to-night, slick as a whistle. Remember the *Barracouta*, that old power-sloop we've taken so many trips in? I've had her overhauled this spring and a new seven-and-a-half-horse engine put in her; her jibs and mainsail are in first-class shape. You'll find her at my mooring near the steamboat wharf. My Bucksport dory has just been pulled up on the ledges and painted. You'll need another boat besides, so I've arranged with Sammy Stinson to let you have his pea-pod. She'll do to lobster in. Now as to gear. You'll find over a hundred lobster-traps piled up on the sea-wall near my cabin, and there's six tubs of trawl in the fish-shed. Keep an account of whatever stuff you have to buy for repairs, and we can settle at the end of the season."

"What's the best way of handling our catch?"

"The fish you can split and salt and take over to Matinicus once a week. Your lobsters will sell easy to some smackman. Captain Ben Higgins comes east from Portland every week in the *Calista*; he's been in

the habit of making Tarpaulin his next port of call after York Island. You'll find him square as a brick. Better buy your supplies at Matinicus; it's a strong twelve miles off, but that isn't a bad run in decent weather."

The boys rose to go.

"Well, Uncle Tom," said Jim, "the next time we see each other, I hope you'll be feeling fit as a fiddle."

"You can't wish that any harder than I do, my boy. Oh, by the way, I nearly forgot one thing. Here, Nemo!"

A fox-terrier, lying on a rug, sprang up alertly. He was white, except for two brown ears and a diamond of the same color on the top of his head.

"Better take this dog along. The mate of a St. John coaster gave him to me last fall. I call him Captain Nemo. He's death on rats; and there's some on the island this year. Must have come ashore from a schooner wrecked there in the winter. Another thing! Got any gun?"

"No."

"Then there's my ten-gauge." He indicated a double-barreled shot-gun standing in the corner. "You'll find a couple of boxes of loaded shells in that table drawer. You may want to kill some ducks in the fall. Only don't shoot Oso!"

"Oso?"

"Yes. My tame crow. I had a Spanish fellow with me a few weeks last summer, and he found the bird in a nest. Clipped one wing, so he couldn't get away from the island. Named him 'Oso'; said it meant 'The Bear.'

He'll pester ye to death round the fish-house, after he gets acquainted."

Putting Nemo on a leash and taking the gun, the boys filed out. Uncle Tom called Jim back.

"I almost forgot to tell you to go to Parker's for your outfit. He'll use you right. Who's that pale-faced fellow with the tow head?"

Spurling told him briefly about Percy. Uncle Tom grunted.

"Needs salting, doesn't he? Well, he'll get it out there."

Down in Parker's general store on the main street the boys purchased their supplies. They laid in a generous stock of provisions of all sorts, and under Jim's expert direction reinforced the weak spots in their wardrobes to adapt them to the demands of the next three months. Oil-clothes, heavy under-clothing, hip boots of red rubber, white, doughnut-shaped woolen "nippers" for pulling trawls, and various other articles for convenience and comfort were added to their outfits.

Percy regarded it all in the light of a huge lark. Dressing himself in oilskins and rubber boots, he paraded up and down the store, much to the proprietor's disgust.

"Pretty fresh, isn't he?" remarked Parker to Jim. "After he's been out in two or three storms he'll find those clothes aren't so much of a joke."

The party's purchases were sent down to the steamboat wharf, to be added to the baggage already there. The boys followed, Percy swaggering

superciliously along after the others, with his eternal cigarette.

Captain Nemo, towing behind Spurling on his leash, got in Percy's way, and the boy stepped on his foot. Nemo yelped, then growled and bristled.

"Get out, you cur!" exclaimed Percy, launching a kick at the beast.

"Easy, Whittington!" warned Spurling. "A dog doesn't forget. You don't want to make an enemy of him at the start."

"Enemy?" sneered Percy. "What do I care for that mangy cur! It'll teach him to keep out of my way."

Jim bit his lip, but said nothing. In a few minutes they were on the wharf.

A wiry, dark-complexioned lad of perhaps fifteen stood near the steamboat slip. He wore a faded suit of blue serge, a gray-flannel shirt with red neckerchief, and a soft black hat. His olive face and black eyes bespoke the Italian. Spurling and the others glanced at him casually; their interest was centered on assembling and loading their flotilla.

"There's the *Barracouta!*" said Jim, pointing to a sloop moored a hundred yards away. "And there's Stinson's pea-pod tied to her stern. That yellow dory up on the ledge must be Uncle Tom's. He said we'd find her oars and fittings at Haskell's boatshop."

Soon pea-pod and dory were being loaded beside the wharf. The young Italian had come to the string-piece, and was watching the embarkation. Jim saw that tears were trickling down his cheeks.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

The boy turned away, his breast heaving. Jim tossed the painter to Lane.

"Look out for the boat a minute, Budge! I want to find what the trouble is with that young fellow."

The lad had stepped across the wharf and was gazing sadly down into the water. Jim touched his shoulder.

"Don't you feel well, son?"

The kindly words had a surprising effect—the lad burst into tears. Jim tried to soothe him.

"There, there! It can't be so bad as all that! Tell me about it."

Little by little the boy's story came out. He was a Sicilian from a little village (*un villaggio*) not far from Messina. His name was Filippo Canamelli. His father was a mason (*un muratore*). Filippo and his older brother Frank had decided to seek their fortunes in America. Frank had gone over the year before, promising to send money back to pay for Filippo's passage. He had done so that winter, in *Febbrajo*. Filippo had sailed from Naples the next month, and had landed in New York in April. There he chanced upon a friend with whom his brother had left word for him to come to a certain address in Boston. But in that city he had lost all track of Frank. Searching aimlessly for him, he had drifted down to Stonington and had gone to work in the granite quarries. But he found the labor too hard and he was desperately homesick. He had given up his job the day before. What he should do and where he should go next he did not know. He talked rapidly between his sobs, while Jim listened.

When he had finished, Spurling stepped across the

wharf to his waiting friends. Very briefly he rehearsed the Italian's story.

"Boys," he concluded, "what do you say to asking him to come down with us to Tarpaulin? I believe he's a clean, straight little fellow, and he can more than make up for his board by cooking and doing odd jobs. We can afford to pay him something to boot."

Before either Budge or Throppy had a chance to express an opinion Percy spoke out decidedly:

"Take that little Dago with us? I say no. You can't trust his kind. I know 'em. They're a thieving, treacherous lot, smooth to your face, but ready to stab you the minute your back's turned. I'll bet you a five-dollar bill he's got a knife hid somewhere about him. He might take a notion some night to cut all our throats."

"Whittington," said Spurling, bluntly, "under the circumstances it might be better taste for you not to speak until you've heard from the rest of us. My throat's worth just as much to me as yours is to you, and I don't feel I'd be running any great risk by inviting that boy to come along with us."

Lane and Stevens agreed.

"It's three against one, Whittington," said Jim.

He walked over to the Italian and said a few words to him. The lad's face lighted up with gratitude. Impulsively he bent and kissed Spurling's hand. Jim flushed with embarrassment as he and the stranger came back to the others.

"He'll be glad to go with us, fellows. Now let's get a move on and hustle this stuff aboard. We want to be

settled at Tarpaulin before dark."

Soon all their goods were on the sloop. The dory was made fast to her stern and the pea-pod's painter tied to the dory. The expedition was ready to start. On board the *Barracouta* Lane and Stevens, standing side by side, faced Jim and brought their palms to their foreheads.

"Attention!" ordered Lane. "Spurling & Company! Salute!"

Jim returned the compliment with a sweep of his hand. He threw on the switch and rocked the wheel; the engine started—click-click-click.... Gathering headway, the *Barracouta* nosed south, dory and pea-pod trailing behind her. Before them lay an archipelago of granite islands.

"This is an old stamping-ground of mine," said Jim. "I've fished and lobstered round here so much that I know every rock and shoal for miles. That's Crotch Island on our west, with the derricks and quarries; they've taken no end of granite off it."

He held up his hand.

"Breezing up from the southwest. That'd be dead ahead if we went west of Isle au Haut as I'd planned. Guess we'll go east of it; then we can use our canvas to help us along. Steer for me, Budge, while I get sail on her!"

Soon outer jib, jumbo and mainsail were set and trimmed close, and Spurling again took the helm. The *Barracouta* ran southeast through Merchant's Row, a procession of rugged islets slipping by on either side; then south past Fog and York islands, with the long, high ridge of Isle au Haut walling the

western horizon; down between Great Spoon and Little Spoon, past White Horse and Black Horse, toward the heaving blue of the open ocean.

A grum, melancholy note came floating over the long sea swells—Oo-oo-oo-ooh! And again, Oo-oo-oo-ooh!

"What's that!" exclaimed Percy.

"Whistling buoy south of Roaring Bull Ledge. One of our nearest neighbors. We'll hear that voice pretty often, when the wind's from the north."

They passed two miles east of the whistler, and gradually its warning blast grew fainter and fainter. On the horizon straight ahead a little black mound was slowly rising above the breaking waves. Jim swung his hand toward it.

"There's Tarpaulin! Our home for the next three months! Looks kind of small and lonesome when you're running offshore for it; but it's pretty good to make after an all-day fishing-trip. What's the matter, Whittington?"

Percy's face was somewhat white; for the last half-hour he had been strangely subdued.

"I don't feel very good," said he.

Spurling eyed him critically, then scanned the faces of the others. The *Barracouta* was rising and falling on the long swells in a manner decidedly disconcerting to weak stomachs. Stevens and the young Italian did not look much happier than Percy. Jim could not help smiling a little.

"Good seasick weather!" he observed, judicially. "Excuse me for laughing, boys! It's a mean thing to do, but I can't help it. I've been there myself—years

ago. You'll be worse before you're better."

They were, considerably, all three, Percy in particular. For the next hour conversation dragged; but all the while Tarpaulin loomed larger and larger. To Jim it wore the aspect of an old friend, and he dilated on its features for the benefit of the others.

"You see that western end is fifty acres of pasture, sloping north; those gray dots are sheep grazing. The eastern half is just scrub evergreen. That little cove on the northeast corner's the Sly Hole; you mightn't think it, but a good-sized schooner can ride there at low tide. Pretty rocky all round. Always a surf breaking on one side or the other. Our landing-place is on the south."

Before long the *Barracouta* and her tow were skirting the eastern ledges. Under the island it was comparatively calm, and the seasick three felt better. Then, as they rounded a wooded promontory and turned west, it grew rough again, but only for a few minutes. Spurling steered the sloop into calm water behind the protecting elbow of another point, off which lay the half-submerged hulk of a wrecked vessel.

"Sprawl's Cove!" exclaimed Jim. "How do you like the looks of your hotel, Whittington?"

III

TARPAULIN ISLAND

Curiosity dispelled the last vestiges of Percy's seasickness. For a little while he gazed without speaking.

A cove four hundred feet wide opened toward the south between two rocky points. At its head a pebbly beach sloped up to a sea-wall, behind which a growth of cattails bespoke a stagnant lagoon. Still farther back a steep bank of dirt rose to the overhanging sod of the pasture.

From the western point a spur extended into the cove, forming a little haven amply large enough for a modest fleet of fishing-boats. Near by on the sea-wall stood two structures, one low, oblong, flat-roofed, with a rusty iron stovepipe projecting from its farther end; the other a small, paintless shed with a large door. Percy gave them only a casual glance.

"You said we were going to live in a camp. Where is it?"

Jim pointed to the first structure.

"There! It's the cabin of an old vessel that came ashore here in a southerly gale years ago. Uncle Tom jacked it up a foot, put in a good floor, and made it into a first-rate camp. It's got bunks for half a dozen, and at a pinch could hold more. The roof's a bit leaky, but we'll soon fix that. There's a good stove, and always plenty of driftwood on the beach. It's a mighty snug place on a stormy day."

Percy turned up his nose at this list of good points.

"What's that pile of chicken-coops near it?"

"Lobster-traps."

"And that big box with its top just above water?"

"A lobster-car. All that we catch in the traps we put in there until the smack comes."

The mooring-buoy was now alongside. Making the *Barracouta* fast, the boys went ashore in the dory and pea-pod. Percy became conscious that he was thirsty.

"Where can I get a drink?"

"There's the spring at the foot of that bank."

Opening a trap-door in a rude wooden cover, Percy looked down into a shallow well. The only cup at hand was an empty tin can. Rather disdainfully he dipped it full and tasted, then spat with a wry face.

"It's brackish!" he called out, indignantly. "I can't drink that."

Spurling and the others were hard at work unloading the boats. Percy repeated his complaint:

"I can't drink that stuff."

Jim was staggering up the beach, a heavy box of groceries in his arms.

"Sorry!" he replied, indifferently. "That's what all the rest of us'll have to drink. It isn't Poland water, but I've tasted worse."

Percy slammed down the cover and tossed away the can in a huff. Lane was passing boxes and bundles ashore from the dory to Stevens and Filippo.

"Catch hold here, Whittington, and help tote some of this stuff up to the cabin," exhorted Budge.

Percy complied ungraciously; but he was careful not to tackle anything very heavy.

"I didn't come out here to make a pack-mule of myself," was his mental remark.

Jim unfastened the rusty padlock on the cabin door and stepped inside. Percy followed him, eager to get a glimpse of his new home.

The camp had not been opened for some weeks; it smelled close and stuffy. As Percy crossed its threshold his nostrils were greeted by a mingled odor of salt, tarred rope, and decaying wood, flavored with a faint suggestion of fish. Mastering his repugnance, he looked about.

He saw a single, low room, nine by fifteen, dimly lighted by three small windows, one in the farther end directly opposite the door, the remaining two facing each other in the middle of the long sides. Along the right wall on each side of the central window was built a tier of two bunks. On Percy's left, over a wooden sink in the corner near the door, was a rough cupboard. Next came a small, rusty stove with an oven for baking; then, under the window, an unpainted table; and on the wall beyond, a series of hooks from which were suspended various articles of clothing and coils of rope. Empty soap-boxes supplied the place of chairs.

With nose uplifted and a growing disgust on his features, Percy surveyed the cramped, dingy room.

"How do you like it?" asked Spurling.

"You don't mean to say that five of us have got to live in this hole?"

"Nowhere else, unless you want to stay out on the beach or in the fish-house."

"But where do we sleep?"

"There!" Jim gestured toward the wooden framework on the right wall.

Percy thrust his hand into one of the bunks.

"Why, there's no mattress or spring here! It's only a bare box!"

"That's just what it is, Whittington! You've hit the nail on the head this time. You'll have to spread your blanket on the soft side of a pine board. If you want something real luxurious you can go into the woods and cut an armful of spruce boughs to strew under you."

Percy disregarded this badinage. From his view-point the situation was too serious for jesting. It was outrageous that he, the son of John P. Whittington, should be expected to shift for himself like an ordinary fisherman.

"I'm not used to living in a pigpen!" he snapped. "This cabin's too dark to be healthy; besides, it isn't clean."

A spark of temper flashed in Spurling's eyes.

"Stop right there, Whittington! This is my uncle Tom's cabin. Any place that's been shut up for weeks seems stuffy when it's first opened. You'll find that there are things a good deal worse than salt and tar and fish and a few cobwebs. I want to tell you a story I read some time ago. Once in the winter a party of Highlanders were out on a foray. Night overtook them beside a river in the mountains, and they prepared to camp in the open. Each drenched his

plaid in the stream, rolled it round his body, and lay down to rest in the snow, knowing that the outside layers of cloth would soon freeze hard and form a sleeping-bag. In the party were an old chieftain and his grandson of eighteen. The boy wet his plaid like the others, but before he lay down he rolled up a snowball for a pillow. The old chief kicked it out from under the lad's head. He didn't propose to have his grandson be so effeminate as to indulge himself in the luxury of a pillow when everybody else was lying flat on the ground."

Whittington grunted. "I don't see how that applies to me."

"In this way. You've lived too soft. You need something to wake you up to the real hardships that men have to go through. Then you won't be so fussy over little things. Perhaps I've talked plainer to you than I should; but I believe in going after a fellow with a club before his face rather than a knife behind his back. Now let's open those windows so the fresh air can blow through, build a fire in the stove to dry out the damp, and get everything shipshape. After supper we'll go up on top of the island and take a look about."

It was nearly seven when the sloop was finally unloaded and everything stowed under cover. Filippo had collected plenty of driftwood, and a fire crackling merrily in the rusty stove soon made the cabin dry and warm.

Jim, in his shirt-sleeves, superintended the preparation of supper. The wall cupboard yielded a supply of ordinary dishes, cups, and saucers. There were old-fashioned iron knives and forks, iron spoons of different sizes, and thick, yellow, earthenware

mugs. Despite Percy's slur, everything was clean.

"Make us a pan of biscuit, Budge; and I'll fry some potatoes and broil the steak," volunteered Jim. "After to-night we'll have to break in somebody else to do the cooking. You and I'll be too busy outside."

Percy heard and registered a silent vow that the cook should not be himself. Pricked by Spurling's earlier remarks, he had taken an active part in unloading the boats, and he had been glad to throw himself into one of the despised bunks to rest.

At last supper was ready. The steak, potatoes, and hot biscuit diffused a pleasant aroma through the cabin.

"Pull up your soap-boxes, all hands!" invited Spurling. "Don't be afraid of that steak! There's plenty of it for everybody. It's liable to be the last meat we'll have for some time. The butcher doesn't go by here very often."

The boys made a hearty meal. Even Percy's fastidiousness did not prevent him from eating his full share. But he took no part in the jokes flying round the table. Jim's sermon had left him rather glum. Lane noticed it.

"Why so distant, Whittington?" he inquired.

Before Percy could open his mouth to reply a black body shot with a squawk through the open door and alighted on the corner of the table close to Percy's elbow.

"Hullo! This must be Oso!" exclaimed Jim.

The crow croaked hoarsely. On Percy's plate lay a single morsel of steak, the choicest of his helping,

reserved till the last. Seeing the bird's beady black eyes fasten upon it he made a quick movement to impale it with his fork. But Oso was quicker still. Down darted his sharp beak and snatched the titbit from under the very points of the tines. A single gulp and the meat was gone.



A roar of laughter went round the table. Starting up furiously, Percy aimed a blow at the crow. But the bird eluded him and scaled out of the door with a triumphant screech. Budge proffered mock consolation.

"Percy," said he, "that was the best piece in the whole steak. I saw you saving it until the last. Too bad, old man! Now you'll have to eat crow to get it."

"I'll wring that thief's neck if I can catch him," vowed the angry Whittington.

"Guess we can trust Oso not to leave his neck lying round where you can get hold of it," observed Lane. "Come on! Let's you and I wash the dishes!"

"Dishes nothing!" snarled Percy.

Stalking out, he gathered a handful of convenient pebbles and lay in wait for the culprit. But the crow had disappeared.

"I'll get even with him later," muttered Whittington.

He remained sulkily outside, taking no part in clearing away the supper-table. At half past seven the others joined him.

"Feeling better, old man?" queried Lane, solicitously.

"Fall in, Whittington," said Jim. "We're going on a tour of inspection."

"Wait a minute," remarked Lane. "We've had our house-warming. The next thing is to christen the place."

Dragging out a soap-box, he mounted it, produced from his pocket a piece of red chalk, and traced in large letters over the door, "CAMP SPURLING."

"Now we're off!" said he. "Welcome to our city! Watch us grow!"

"Come on!" urged Jim. "We want to look the island over before dark."

The party walked west along the sea-wall and proceeded in single file up a steep path to the highest part of the promontory.

"Brimstone Point," said Jim. "Best view on the island from here."

He began pointing out its different features.

"That little nubble almost west, sticking up so black

against the sunset's Seal Island. Matinicus is right behind it. Up there on the horizon, just a trifle west of north, are the Camden Hills; you look exactly over Vinalhaven to see them. North across the pasture is Isle au Haut that we came by this afternoon. Beyond is Stonington. About time the lights were lit—Yes, there's Saddleback! See it twinkling west of Isle au Haut. Now look sharp a little south of west and you'll see Matinicus Rock glimmering; two lights, but they seem like one from here. Wouldn't think they were almost a hundred feet above water, would you? They look pretty good to a man when he's running in from outside on a dark night."

It was a magnificent evening, the air clear as crystal, the sky without a cloud. Gulls were wheeling and screaming about the promontory, their cries mingling with the rote of surf at its base. Sheep bleated from the pasture. A hawk sailed slowly in from the ocean and disappeared in the woods behind the eastern point. From under the boys' feet rose the fragrance of sweet grass and pennyroyal. Tall mullein stalks reared their spires on the hillside; and here and there were little plats white with thick strawberry blossoms.

The boys gazed their fill. Gradually the red sky darkened and the stars began to come out. Saddleback and Matinicus Rock gleamed more brightly. A cool breeze from the south sprang up. Jim roused himself.

"Guess we won't have time to look about any more to-night. Never mind! There are evenings enough ahead of us before September. One thing out here—no matter how hot the day may be, it's always cool after dark. Let's be getting back to camp!"

Two small kerosene-lamps from the cupboard made the cabin seem actually cheerful. Percy dug into one of his suit-cases and produced a pack of cards.

"Let's have a game, fellows! What shall it be?"

"Might as well put those up, Whittington," said Spurling. "We're going to turn in as soon as we get things arranged. We've a busy to-morrow before us."

Somewhat disappointed, Percy put the cards back. Taking four wooden toothpicks, Jim broke them into uneven lengths. He grasped them in his right hand so that the tops formed a straight line.

"Now we'll draw lots for bunks! Filippo's going to sleep in the hammock across that corner beyond the table, so he won't be in this. Longest stick is lower bunk next the door; second longest, lower bunk back; third, upper bunk near door; shortest, other upper. Draw, Throppy!"

Stevens drew; then Budge and Percy followed him. They matched sticks. Percy got the lower near the door, with Budge over him; while Spurling drew the back lower, and Stevens the one above that.

"Percy and I are the lucky ones," said Jim. "We can try this a month, then have a shake-up to give you top men a chance nearer the floor."

Percy pulled out his wrappers and tobacco. Spurling nipped his preparations in the bud.

"No cigarettes in here!"

"Can't I smoke just one?"

"Not inside this cabin. It's too close. We might as well make that a permanent rule."

"All right! You're the doctor! But I thought it might help kill this smell of tarred rope."

"I like the tarred rope better than I do the cigarettes."

Percy went outside and burned his coffin-nail unsociably. When he came back the cabin was shipshape for the night. Jim was setting the alarm-clock. Percy, watching him, thought he detected a mistake.

"You've got the V on the wrong side of the I," he said. "IV doesn't stand for six."

"But I didn't mean six," retorted Spurling. "I meant four. Now you see why we haven't any time for card-playing. And as soon as we're really at work we'll be getting up a good deal earlier than that. Turn in, fellows!"

He extinguished one of the small lamps.

"You can put out the other one, when you're ready," said he as he crept into his bunk.

Following the example of his associates, Percy draped his clothing over his soap-box and the lower end of his bunk, then blew out the lamp and turned in, barking his shins as he did so. He found his couch anything but comfortable. A single blanket between one's body and a board does not make the board much softer. Neither is a tightly rolled sweater an exact equivalent for a feather pillow. Further, the comforter over him was none too warm, as two windows, opened for ventilation, allowed the cool ocean breeze to circulate freely through the cabin. They also admitted numerous mosquitoes, which sung and stung industriously.

The hours of darkness dragged on miserably. Percy dozed and woke, only to doze and wake again. An occasional creaking board or muttered exclamation told that, like himself, his mates were not finding their first night one of unalloyed comfort.

Bare feet struck the floor. A match scraped, and Percy saw Jim gazing at the alarm-clock.

"What time is it?" groaned Budge from above.

"Only ten minutes to twelve."

"Gee! I wish it was morning."

"Me too!" complained Stevens from the darkness aloft.

Percy echoed the wish, silently but fervently. And then in an instant all their discomfort was forgotten. Bursting through the open window, a sudden sound shattered the midnight stillness.

Spang!

IV

MIDNIGHT MARAUDERS

There was no mistaking that sharp, whip-like report. It was the crack of a revolver!

Breaking the silence at a time when they had felt certain that the nearest human being was miles

away, the sound had a startling effect on the five boys. Not one but felt a thrill of apprehension, almost of dread. Who besides themselves was astir at so late an hour on that lonely island? Why? The weapon that produced the report must have been aimed at something. What? For a moment they remained silent, breathless.

Spang!

A second shot, distant but distinct, rang out from beyond the brow of the bank behind the cabin. Spurling sprang from his bunk.

"Boys!" he shouted. "Somebody's after those sheep! Turn out!"

Hurriedly he began dressing. The other four followed his example, fumbling with clumsy fingers in the darkness. Nemo gave a short, sharp bark.

"Quiet, boy!" ordered Jim; and the dog subsided, growling.

Percy experienced a peculiar shakiness; but he dressed with the others. Out here were no policemen or other officers to enforce the laws. Whatever was done they must do themselves.

Jim, his first excitement over, was cool as usual.

"All dressed, fellows?" he inquired, as calmly as if the pursuit of midnight thieves was a common incident.

Everybody was ready.

"Going to take the dog?" asked Throppy.

"No! Leave him here! He might bark when we didn't want him to."

"Here's the gun!" volunteered Lane.

"Don't want it! If we had it with us, we might lose our heads and shoot somebody. Whoever they are, they haven't the least idea there's any one on the island besides themselves. They've probably landed at the Sly Hole from some vessel that's approached the north shore since it came dark. Hungry for a little lamb or mutton! But those sheep have stood Uncle Tom a good many dollars and he can't afford to lose any of 'em. Where's that flash-light?"

"Here 'tis!" said Budge, passing him the electric lantern.

Jim snapped it quickly on and off again.

"Righto!" was his verdict. "All ready? Then come on! But first tie that dog to the stove-leg, so he won't bolt out the second we open the door."

Throppy fastened Nemo.

"Quiet now!" cautioned Jim.

He opened the door carefully, and the five filed out into damp, cool, midnight air.

Stars filled the sky. A gentle wind was blowing from the southwest. Nothing broke the stillness save the low murmur of the sea on the ledges. Without hesitation Jim led his party at a dog-trot eastward along the beach. When he reached the rocks he halted.

"We'll go straight across to the Sly Hole," he said. "I know a short cut through the woods. Either they've killed a sheep already and are carrying it down to their boat or they've frightened the animals so that it'll take some time to get near enough to 'em again

to shoot. What sticks me is why they don't use a shotgun instead of a revolver. Now, boys! Right up over the rocks!"

It was a rough climb, but soon they were on the top of the bluff. Unerringly Jim led them to the entrance of a narrow trail penetrating the scrubby growth.

"Look out for your eyes! Don't follow too close!"

The pliant, whipping branches emphasized his caution. By the time the party gained the north shore their hands and faces were badly scratched.

The little basin of the Sly Hole lay below. Looking down, they could make out a dark object at the water's edge.

"There's their boat!" whispered Jim. "They're still on the island."

Spang!

Another report from the pasture beyond the evergreens echoed emphatic confirmation to his statement. Jim took two steps toward the sound, then stopped.

"Not yet! I know a better way. Stay here and keep watch."

He scrambled down to the beach. There was a slight grating of gravel, and presently the boat was afloat. Noiselessly, under Spurling's skilful sculling, it slipped out of the cove and vanished behind the ledges to the east. Before long Jim was back with his companions.

"I've made their dory fast in a little gulch among the rockweed," said he. "They'd have a hard time to find

it unless somebody told 'em where it is. They can't get away without having a reckoning with us."

Spang-spang-spang!

Three reports in quick succession. Jim laughed.

"Wasting a lot of cartridges! Must want that mutton pretty bad! Either they're awful poor shots or they've made the sheep so wild they can't get anywhere near 'em. There's their vessel!"

The boys' eyes followed his pointing finger. Not far offshore were the vague outlines of a schooner.

"All black!" said Jim. "Not a light of any sort! That looks bad. Besides being against the law, it shows there's some reason why they don't want to be recognized. I don't know what kind of scalawags we're up against, but we've got to be mighty careful."

Percy felt a strange sinking at the pit of his stomach. To be plunged into an encounter with a gang of unknown ruffians on his first night offshore was more than he had bargained for. For a minute Jim stood thinking.

"I'm almost sorry we didn't take that shot-gun!" he muttered. "No, I'm not, either! We might be tempted to use it, and that'd be worse than losing every sheep on the island. Hold on! I've got an idea."

The boys gathered closely round him.

"Listen!" he whispered. "Budge and I will go ahead through the woods to the pasture. You three follow close behind. If there's any shooting, throw yourselves flat. No use taking chances with such fellows as those!"

Crouching low, sometimes actually creeping, the party, Jim and Lane in the lead, made their way under the close boughs toward the open. Suddenly Jim sank to the ground. Warned by his whisper, the others did the same.

Footsteps were approaching. Then voices in heated argument reached their ears.

"Aw, come on, Cap!" expostulated one unseen speaker. "What's the use chasin' round over this pasture all night? Here we've wasted an hour already. I've fired away all my cartridges, and we haven't nailed a single bleater. We've got 'em so wild we can't sneak up within half a mile of 'em. Let's quit it for a bad job, go aboard, and turn in!"

"Cut it out, Dolph!" impatiently retorted another voice. "You've got a backbone like a rope! Guess if you were footing the grub bill aboard the *Silicon* you wouldn't be so fussy about being broken of your beauty sleep. I've paid out all the good dollars for stores that I intend to on this trip. You know we've plenty of ice aboard, and a couple of these sheep'll furnish enough fresh meat to last us to the Bay of Fundy and back. That ought to hit you in a tender spot. You're always the first man down at the table and the last to leave it."

"You needn't twit me on my appetite, Bart Brittler!" exclaimed the other, angrily. "If you weren't so stingy with the grub on board your old catamaran I wouldn't be hungry all the time. A man who makes as much money as you do, runnin' in—"

"Stop right there! You know there's some things that were never to be mentioned."

"What's the harm? There's nobody within miles!"

"That may be. But we can't be too careful in our business. Now what about the sheep?"

"I'll stop here half an hour longer. Then I'm goin' aboard."

"Well, I'll tell you what we'll do. You hide in the edge of the woods, and I'll make a circuit and drive 'em down to you. Here, take these cartridges and my revolver! That'll give you two to work with. You'll have to shoot quick when they come."

There was a sound of breaking branches. The boys flattened themselves on the carpet of needles as a man's body crashed toward them through the underbrush.

"All right!" announced Dolph. "I've found a good place, close to a sheep-path. Now drive down your mutton, and I'll butcher it as it goes by. Will two be enough?"

"Sure! And that's two more than I'm afraid you'll get, unless you shoot straighter than we've done so far to-night. It may be twenty minutes before they come, for I'm going to make a wide circle to the west, so as to get behind 'em."

The captain's footsteps died hollowly away on the turf and Dolph settled himself comfortably in his chosen ambush, almost within reach of Jim's hand. Five minutes of silence passed. Jim was debating what he should do. Budge lay close to him, and not far back were Throppy, Percy, and Filippo, hardly daring to breathe. Circumstances had placed one of the marauders so nearly within their grasp that a sudden, well-planned attack could hardly fail to

make him their prisoner. But there must be no bungling. A man with two loaded revolvers, and desperate from panic, would be a dangerous customer unless he were overpowered at once.

It would not do to let too much time go by. Brittler would soon be returning, driving the sheep ahead of him; then they would have two lawless men to contend with, instead of one, unless they chose to be quiet and tamely allow the spoilers to make off with their booty.

Jim came to his decision like the snapping of the jaws of a steel trap.

Reaching back, he pressed Budge's hand, as a signal for him to be ready. Budge returned the pressure. Dolph stirred and drew a long breath. There was a moment of suspense. Overhead, a crow cawed harshly.

Noiselessly Jim rose to his hands and knees and crept forward. The small twigs and needles, crackling under his weight, sounded in his ears like exploding fireworks. He stopped; went on again; stopped; went on again. How could Dolph fail to hear him coming? The distance was less than two yards, but to the crawling lad it seemed far longer.

Now he was close behind the unconscious bandit. He straightened up, setting his right foot squarely on the ground. As he did so a little branch snapped. Dolph, startled, turned his head. Before he could lift a finger Jim was upon him like a panther.

There was an indistinct cry of alarm.

Spang!

Off went a revolver, discharged at random, and the two were struggling in a confused heap under the low boughs.

It was a short fight. A third figure launched itself into the mêlée. Though not nearly so strong as Jim, Budge alone would have been a good match for any average man, and the two of them together speedily vanquished Dolph. A firm hand was pressed over his mouth and he was relieved of his automatics. Finding that his captors were not disposed to injure him, he soon ceased his struggles.

Silence again. One of the would-be plunderers and the weapons of both were in the boys' hands. What should they do next?

"Hi! Hi! Scat, you brutes! Get a move on!"

Brittler's voice shattered the midnight stillness as he came, driving the sheep before him. From their covert the boys could look across the pasture and see the black, leaping shapes fast drawing nearer. It was high time to prepare to meet their second foe.

"Throppy, Whittington, Filippo! Come here! Quick!"

They came, Percy in the rear, his knees shaking.

"Budge, can the four of you handle this man if I let go?"

"Easy!"

"Keep his mouth shut till I tell you he can open it!"

"All right!"

Lane's hand replaced Jim's over Dolph's lips. The other three grasped him wherever they could find a

chance. It would not have taken much to shake off Percy's trembling grip, but the prisoner was content to remain quiet.

There was a patter of hoofs; the sheep were coming. Soon they were flitting by the ambush, shying off as their keen senses warned them of possible danger. Again they scattered toward the northwest end of the island. After them danced Brittler, roaring with anger.

"What are you waiting for, you numskull?" he cried. "Why didn't you shoot? I heard you fire once some minutes ago, and thought you might have been aiming at a stray one. I had almost the whole flock bunched right before me. You couldn't get a better chance if you waited a week. Now I've got to waste another half-hour chasing 'em round again. What's the matter with you, anyway? Why don't you speak?"

He was within five yards of the silent group under the spruces when Spurling's voice rang sharply out:

"Halt there!"

At the same instant he flashed the ray from his electric lantern straight into the captain's face.

Brittler stopped short, as if struck by lightning. His jaw dropped, and a ludicrous look of alarm and bewilderment overspread his features.

"Take your hand off his mouth, Budge," ordered Jim, "and let him tell the captain what's happened."

Thus adjured, Dolph spoke:

"I've been taken prisoner, Captain. They jumped on me in the dark and I had a chance to fire only one shot. I think there's at least half a dozen of 'em, and

they've got both our revolvers, so we haven't a chance. That's all there is to it."

Brittler had recovered from his first panic. He bristled up with pretended indignation.

"What do you mean, whoever you are, by jumping on us this way? And take that light off my face! I don't like it."

Spurting did not remove the steady ray from the features of the irate captain. He waited a moment before replying.

"Captain Brittler," he said, "you and Dolph came to steal sheep, and it isn't your fault that you haven't been able to do it. You thought there was nobody on this island and that you could kill and take to suit yourselves. You've been caught red-handed. By good rights you ought to be turned over to the sheriff. We'll let you go this time, but if we catch you here on such an errand again you'll have a chance to tell your story before a jury."

"How'd you come to know my name?" blustered the captain. "I s'pose you've been pumping that mealy-mouthed landlubber of a Dolph."

"Dolph hasn't said a word till he spoke to you just now. He couldn't. I guess we understand each other, so you and he had better start for the *Silicon*. You'll find your dory in the rockweed about fifty feet east of the cove. I'll keep your revolvers a few days, and then mail them to you at the Rockland post-office. You can get 'em there. Better go now! Turn that man loose, Budge!"

Muttering vengeance, Dolph and the captain disappeared in the direction of the Sly Hole. After

giving them ample time to find the dory, the boys quietly made their way to the north shore.

A boat with two men was visible, rowing out to the *Silicon*. As soon as it reached its destination the schooner got under way and proceeded eastward.

"I don't like the looks of that craft," said Spurling. "There's something suspicious about her. Did you hear what Dolph said to the captain about making money? They're engaged in some kind of smuggling, or I'll eat my hat! But what it can be I haven't any idea. Well, we're lucky to be rid of 'em so easily. Guess they'll give Tarpaulin Island a wide berth after this. And it's dollars to doughnuts the captain never inquires after those revolvers at the Rockland office. I didn't feel it was quite safe to give 'em back to him just now, but I didn't want to take 'em away for good. He can do as he pleases about sending for 'em."

He yawned.

"It's past one, and we'd better be getting back to camp, or we won't be in condition for our busy day to-morrow. Come on, boys!"

Slowly, and a trifle weariedly, the five made their way across the island. Even though the fire in the stove had gone out long since, the warmth of the cabin felt good to them.

"Well, Whittington," remarked Spurling as they once more crept into their bunks, "how do you like your first night on Tarpaulin? Some life out here, after all, eh?"

Percy had recovered his assurance. Now that the experience was over he rather enjoyed it.

"Not so bad," he replied.

Before he went to sleep he lay for some time thinking.

V

GETTING READY

A persistent metallic whirring broke rudely in upon the dreams of the heavy sleepers in Camp Spurling. It was four o'clock. It seemed to Percy as if he had never before found so much trouble in getting his eyes open.

"Choke that clock off, somebody!" shouted Lane from overhead. "I'm not deaf, but I shall be if this hullabaloo keeps on much longer."

Spurling, who was already half-dressed, checked the alarm. The red rays of the morning sun, striking through the eastern window, bathed everything in crimson. The minds of the boys turned naturally to the foiled thieves.

"Where do you think the *Silicon* is?" asked Throppy.

"Twenty-five miles east, and making for Fundy as fast as sail and gasolene'll take her," replied Jim. "She can't go any too far or fast to suit me."

A hearty breakfast of fried bacon, hot biscuits, and coffee made the drowsy crowd feel better.

"Now," said Spurling, "we've got a big day's work ahead of us, and the sooner we start on it the better. We want to begin as quick as we can to round up some of those dollars that are finning and crawling in to us, so we mustn't waste any time in getting our trawls and traps overboard. First of all, we need bait. We can buy hake heads for our lobster-traps from the fish-wharf at Matinicus, and herring for the trawls from one of the weirs at Vinalhaven. That means traveling over forty miles; but it's fine weather, and we ought to do it easily. Besides, it'll give you fellows a good chance to learn how to handle a power-sloop. We'll take the trawls with us, and bait 'em on the way back, so as not to lose any time; and we'll set most of those lobster-traps this afternoon."

They all went over to the fish-house, and Jim swung the door wide open. Five great hogsheads inside caught Percy's eye.

"What're those for?" he asked.

"Holding fish. Each one'll take care of what two thousand pounds of round fish'll make after they're dressed and salted."

"What do you mean by round fish?"

"Just as they come out of the water, before they're cleaned."

"What're those half-barrels, full of small rope?"

"Trawl-tubs; and those coils inside are the trawls. Each tub holds about five hundred fathoms of ground-line, with a thirty-eight-inch ganging, or short line with a hook on its end, tied every five feet; so there're between five hundred and six hundred hooks to every tub. One man alone can bait and

handle four tubs of trawl. Two of us are going to fish together, so we ought to be able to swing six tubs without any trouble."

Percy looked about the house. Other barrels stood there; a net was draped over the beams; many coils of small rope were hung along the walls or piled on the floor. His attention was attracted by a large heap of peculiarly shaped pieces of wood. Each was eighteen inches long, five inches square at one end, and tapered almost to a point at the other, near which a hole was bored; they were painted white, encircled by a single green stripe, and bore the brand "SP."

"Cedar lobster-buoys," said Jim. "SP's my Uncle Tom's brand. Every man has a different kind, so his floats won't get mixed with anybody else's. Now let's take these tubs of trawl aboard the sloop."

At six the *Barracouta*, carrying the five boys and towing the dory, started from Sprowl's Cove for Matinicus. It was so calm that the sails were of little assistance, and they had to depend almost entirely on the engine. Rounding Brimstone Point, they headed slightly north of west for Seal Island, about six miles away.

Everybody took his turn at steering, Jim acting as instructor.

"Any one of you may be called on to handle this boat alone some time in the next three months, and you can't begin learning how any too early."

Percy's experience with automobiles stood him in good stead. He was naturally interested in machinery, and soon mastered the details of the

Barracouta's engine. The others also showed themselves apt pupils.

At half past seven the high cliffs of Seal Island lay to the north. Passing for a mile along its rocky shores, they kept on toward Matinicus, now rising into view. Jim pointed to a breaker a little south of their course.

"Malcolm's Ledges! A bad bunch of rocks. Years ago a fishing-schooner struck there in the night. Crew thought at first they'd reached safety, but they soon found it was only a half-tide ledge. The vessel heaved over it when the water rose, and sunk, so that only her topmast stuck out. One man, the sole survivor, hung to that. He was taken off in the morning, but his arm was worn almost to the bone by the swaying of the mast."

Farther on they passed the long, treeless, granite hump of Wooden Ball, with its few lobstering-shacks, and sheep grazing in its grassy valleys. Ledge after ledge went by, until at last they entered the little rocky haven of Matinicus, crammed with moored sloops and power-boats, and ran in beside the high, granite fish-pier at its head.

Percy found everything new and strange—the stilted wharves on the ledges, heaped with lobster-traps and festooned with buoys of all shapes and colors; the fish-pier with its open shed, sheltering the dark, discolored hogsheads rounded up with salted fish; the men in oilskin "petticoats," busy with splitting-knives on hake and cod and pollock and haddock, brought in by the noisy power-boats; the lighthouse-keepers from Matinicus Rock, five miles south, in military caps, oilskins, and red rubber boots, towing a dory to be dumped full of slimy hake heads for

lobster bait; the post-office and general store above the cove, and the spruce-crowned rocks beyond it.



THE CAMP AT SPROWL'S COVE

Jim pointed out a bronze tablet on a slanting ledge.

"In memory of Ebenezer Hall, first English settler on Matinicus. He lived with his family in a log house at the head of this cove. In 1757 some Indians were camped on one of the Green Islands, six miles or so

northwest, living on the eggs of seabirds. Hall went over to the island one day and set fire to the grass, destroying the nests and eggs. Next morning five Indians in two canoes came over to Matinicus to take revenge. They landed on this beach, built a fire, and began cooking their breakfast. Hall had barricaded himself indoors, but he could put his head up through a little lookout in the top of his cabin. He wanted to shoot the Indians, but his wife wouldn't let him. After they had eaten they scattered and opened fire on the house from different points. Hall replied. Finally the Indians were reduced to their last half-bullet. One of them lay flat in that little hollow, while the others pretended to launch their canoes. Hall stuck his head up through the lookout to see what was going on, and the ambushed Indian sent the half-bullet through his brain. He dropped back inside. They wouldn't have known he was hit if his wife hadn't cried out for quarter. They burst open the door and carried her off, with her daughter and one son. Another boy escaped out of a back window and hid in the swamp, and they couldn't find him. Afterward he settled on an island close to Vinalhaven, where Heron's Neck Light is now."

"Hall had better not have burned that grass," said Percy.

"Yes," replied Jim. "If he had minded his own business and let the Indians alone he wouldn't have stopped that last half-bullet."

The fish-pier was in charge of a superintendent, employed by a large Gloucester concern. Jim arranged to sell here whatever fish they might catch during the summer. He also bought several bushels of salt, as well as two barrels of hake heads to start

them in lobstering. The *Barracouta's* tank was filled with twenty-five gallons of gasolene, and six five-gallon cans were purchased besides. The boat would require about seven gallons a day for ordinary fishing, so this would supply them for more than a week.

"How often do you get the mail?" asked Jim of the storekeeper, who was also postmaster.

"Three times a week by steamer from Rockland—Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays."

As Spurling had decided to bring his fish over every Friday, they would thus be enabled to keep in fairly close touch with the outside world. Percy, however, was somewhat disgusted. He had gotten into the habit of thinking he could not live without a daily paper. While the others were purchasing various supplies, including some mosquito netting, he replenished his stock of cigarettes.

"Anybody here got a wireless?" inquired Throppy.

"No, but there's one on Criehaven, three miles south."

Throppy had planned to install an outfit on Tarpaulin, and had already written home to have his plant there dismantled by his brother, and its parts forwarded by express to Matinicus. For an amateur he was an expert operator.

The *Barracouta* was already well loaded when, with the dory towing behind, she rounded the granite breakwater and started for Vinalhaven, twelve miles away. At noon they ran in alongside Hardy's weir on the eastern shore of the island. Several bushels of glittering herring were dipped aboard, and the heavily freighted sloop at once swung away on her

fifteen-mile jaunt to Tarpaulin.

"Now," said Jim, as soon as they were well clear of the island, "I'll teach you how to bait up. Take the tiller, Filippo."

Emptying out the ground-line from one of the tubs, he took a small herring in his left hand, and with his right grasped the shank of the hook on the first ganging; he forced the sharp point into the fish until the barb had gone clean through and the herring was impaled firmly. Then he dropped the hook into the empty tub, giving the ganging a deft swing, so that it fell in a smooth coil. He repeated the process swiftly, while the others watched him with interest.

"How many hooks can you bait in a minute?" asked Budge.

"Time me."

Budge followed the second-hand of his watch while the coil in the tub grew larger.

"Better than ten a minute," he announced. "That's going some."

"It's slow to what some fishermen can do. It means about an hour to a tub. Catch hold, you fellows, and see how fast you can do it. Might as well make a beginning. You'll have plenty of experience before the summer's ended. I'll take her awhile, Filippo."

The other boys, Percy included, were soon hard at work, each on his own tub. At first they made a slow, awkward business of it. Impatient exclamations rose as the sharp hooks were stuck into clumsy fingers. Finally Percy threw down his trawl in a fit of anger.

"I've had enough of this! I didn't come out here to

butcher myself."

"You can steer," said Jim, quietly. "I'll take your place."

Percy stepped to the helm, and Jim began baiting again. The others stuck to their unfamiliar task, despite its discouragements, and were soon making fair headway. Percy eyed them sulkily. His pricked fingers smarted. The boat rolled and pitched on the old swell, making him a trifle seasick. A wave of disgust swept over him. This was no place for the son of a millionaire. He wished himself back on the land.

By the time they reached Tarpaulin, at about half past four, all the six trawls were baited.

"We won't set them till day after to-morrow," determined Jim. "Guess we can find enough work to keep us busy ashore till then."

There was no doubt about that. Until supper-time various odd jobs kept everybody occupied. Most important of all, the mosquito netting was cut and tacked over the three windows.

"Now we can have plenty of fresh air with the mosquitoes strained out of it," said Jim.

Boughs of spruce and fir were brought from the woods and strewn in the bunks under the blankets. That night the boys turned in early and slept like the dead. Even Percy could find little fault with his pillow and mattress of fragrant needles.

In the morning he took a swim. The water was too cold for comfort, and inadvertently he ran into a school of jellyfish, from which he emerged feeling as if he were on fire all over. He dressed hurriedly,

shivering and disgruntled. The novelty of Tarpaulin was wearing off, and he hoped heartily that he would soon be in a more interesting place. A month there would drag horribly.

That forenoon the inside of the cabin was put to rights. The spring was cleaned out and stoned up. Under Jim's direction the boys gathered a heap of driftwood and dragged it up to the highest part of Brimstone Point. There a beacon was built, and kindling placed beneath it.

"That'll serve as a lighthouse in case any of us get caught out at night and lose our way," said Jim.

The remainder of the morning was spent in fitting up the lobster-traps with warps, toggles, and buoys.

During dinner the summer's work was discussed and the boys were allotted their respective duties. To Jim fell naturally the oversight of the fishing and lobstering. Lane was to receive and disburse all moneys, and have general charge of the business matters of the concern. Throppy, because of his mechanical and inventive turn of mind, was intrusted with the duty of seeing that the cabin, the boats, and all the gear were kept in first-class shape.

"Now," concluded Jim, "so far the most important position of all has gone begging. Who'll be cook? Whittington, it lies between you and Filippo."

"You can strike my name from the ballot at the go-off," stated Percy, promptly. "I never even boiled an egg in my life, and I don't intend to begin now."



"That narrows it down to Filippo," said Jim. "What do you say? Will you cook for us?"

The Italian's melancholy olive face lighted up with pleasure.

"*Si, si!*" he exclaimed, gladly. "I will cook."

"Good enough! You're elected, then! We'll all tell you everything we know. Here's an old cook-book on the shelf, and well teach you the recipes. That leaves Whittington for general-utility man. He'll be our hewer of wood and drawer of water, to say nothing of washing the dishes. We'll all feel free to call on him whenever any of us gets into a tight place. How does that hit you, Whittington?"

"Never touched me! I'm no servant."

"What will you do, then?" inquired Jim, pointedly.

"Just what I please, and not a thing besides," replied Percy, with equal directness.

The others exchanged looks, but Jim said no more.

The greater part of the afternoon was devoted to

setting the lobster-traps. They were loaded on the sloop, dory, and pea-pod, taken out, and dropped overboard around the island, brown bottles, of which there was a generous supply in the shed, being fastened to the warps for "toggles," to hold them off the bottom, so that they might not catch on the rocks. By five all the traps were set.

"You and Throppy can pull these to-morrow morning, Budge," said Jim, and he gave them brief directions. "I'll make a trip with you myself the next day. But to-morrow Whittington and I are going to see what we can get on the trawl."

After an early supper they climbed the eastern point. The sheep, which were feeding on its top, scampered off at their approach, their retreat covered by the ram, with shaking head. Nemo rushed, barking, after the flock, only to be butted ignominiously head over heels and to retreat, yelping, to the beach.

"Bully for Aries!" laughed Throppy.

"Who's Aries?" asked Percy.

"The ram, of course! Where's your Latin?"

"Never heard the word. Where do these sheep drink, anyway? Out of the spring?"

"No," replied Jim. "The dew on the grass gives them all the moisture they need."

Sandpeeps were teetering along the ledges below. Two seals bobbed their round, black heads in the surf at the promontory's foot. A mile to the south rose the spout of a whale.

"Many craft go by here?" inquired Budge.

"Plenty. Fishing-schooners, tugs with their tows, yachts, tramp steamers, sailing-vessels from the Bay of Fundy for Boston, and every little while a smack or power-boat. The ocean liners to Portland pass about fifteen miles south. So we oughtn't to be lonesome."

On the highest part of the point Throppy found a dead spruce about twenty feet tall, which he picked as a mast for his wireless. Its top would be at least sixty feet above the cabin, so he could talk over twenty-five miles. He had brought with him four hundred feet of copper bell-wire and a dozen or so cleat insulators. He cut two spruce spreaders, and strung his antennæ. Then he made a hole through the cabin wall, improvised an insulator out of a broken bottle, and a rough table out of a spare box, and was ready to install his batteries and instruments as soon as they should arrive.

The boys returned to the cabin.

"How about those conditions, Whittington?" asked Budge. "Going to begin making 'em up?"

"No hurry about that," responded Percy, indifferently.

He went outside to smoke a cigarette. The bull-frogs were singing in the marsh. Inside, Roger was making a start on teaching Filippo English, and learning a little Italian in return. Throppy was tuning his violin. He played a short selection, and then the boys turned in.

"To-morrow we start fishing in dead earnest," said Jim. "Whittington and I'll get up at midnight, and Filippo'll have to give us breakfast. You other fellows won't need to turn out till four. Here's hoping for

good luck all round!"

Percy made a wry face. The hour for rising did not sound good to him, but there was no harm in trying it once. After that he would see. Soon all were sound asleep, lulled by the murmur of the surf.

VI

TRAWLING FOR HAKE

"Turn out, Whittington! All aboard for the fishing-grounds!"

Spurling's voice, reinforcing the last echoes of the alarm-clock, dispelled Percy's inclination to roll over for another nap. Jim's strong tones carried a suggestion of authority which the younger lad was half minded to resent. He swallowed his pride, however, rolled out, and dressed. It was only a half-hour after midnight when he sat down with Jim to a breakfast of warmed-over beans, corn-bread, and coffee, prepared by Filippo. Budge and Throppy were sleeping soundly. They would not get up until three hours later. Percy envied them, but he ate a good meal.

"Now," directed Jim, "pull on those rubber boots and get into your oil-clothes. You'll see before long why they're useful. Trawling's a cold, wet, dirty business, and you want to be well prepared for it. And don't forget those nippers! They'll protect your hands from

the chafe of the line."

Taking buoys, anchors, and other gear from the fish-house, they got into the dory and rowed out to the *Barracouta*. The six tubs of trawl, baited two afternoons before, were already on board. They stowed everything in its place, then headed out of the cove, towing the dory.

It was a clear, cool night. A light wind was blowing from the north, but the sea was fairly smooth.

"Guess we'll run down to Clay Bank," said Spurling. "It's only six miles to the southward. We ought to get a good set there."

Steadily they plowed on. It was Percy's first experience in a small boat on the midnight ocean, and he felt something akin to awe as they breasted the long swells, heaving in slowly and gently, yet resistlessly. Down to the horizon all around arched the deep blue firmament, spangled with stars. Matinicus Rock glittered in the west, while just beyond the shoulder of Brimstone Point, Saddleback Light, almost level with the sea, kept vanishing and reappearing.

As the *Barracouta* forged forward her prow started two diverging lines of phosphorescent bubbles and her wake resembled a trail of boiling flame. Percy called Jim's attention to the display.

"Yes," remarked the latter, "the water's firing in good shape to-night."

There was a sudden splash to starboard. A gleaming body several feet long rolled up above the surface; a grunting sigh broke the silence; and the apparition disappeared.

"What's that?" demanded the startled Percy.

"Porpoise! 'Puffing pig.'"

For over an hour Jim held the sloop to an exact course by means of his compass. At half past two he stopped the engine.

"Well, I guess we're here!"

"We're here, fast enough!" assented Percy, staring about. "But where's here? Doesn't look any different to me from anywhere else."

"Clay Bank."

With his sounding-lead Jim tried the depth of the water.

"Thought so! Fifty fathoms!"

He prepared at once to set the trawl. Dropping the outer jib and mainsail, he jogged slowly before the wind under the jumbo, or inner jib.

"Now let her go!"

Over splashed the buoy, an empty pickle-keg, painted red, and drifted astern. Next, down went the light anchor. As soon as it reached bottom Jim lifted the first tub of trawl to the wash-board. Then with the heaving-stick, eighteen inches long and whittled to a point, he began to flirt overboard the coils lying in the tub.

Percy, holding the lantern, watched the steady stream of gangings and herring-baited hooks follow one another over the side and sink astern. In a surprisingly short time the tub was empty, and the five hundred fathoms of trawl, with more than a

hook to a fathom, lay in a long, straight line on the muddy bottom, three hundred feet below.

A second tub trailed after the first, its trawl being attached to the end of the other. The four remaining tubs followed in order. At the junction of the second and third a buoy was fastened, and another between the fourth and fifth. To the end of the trawl from the sixth and last tub was tied another anchor, and as soon as it had reached bottom the last buoy was cast over. They had set almost three and a half miles of trawl, bearing more than thirty-one hundred short, baited lines.

"And there's a good job done!" exclaimed Jim, as the last buoy floated astern. "Here's to a ten-pound hake on every hook!"

"Do you often catch as many as that?" inquired Percy, innocently.

Jim laughed.

"Hardly! We'll be more than lucky if we get a tenth of that number."

Day was now breaking. The night wind had died out and, save for the long, oily swells, the sea was absolutely calm. Jim started the engine and swung the *Barracouta* round, and they ran leisurely back to the other end of the trawl, meanwhile eating the lunch Filippo had put up for them. Soon they were close to the first red buoy.

"Now for business!" said Jim.

He stepped into the dory.

"Guess you know enough about automobiles, Whittington, to handle this engine. Keep the sloop

close by and watch me haul. You can take your turn when I get tired."

Gaffing the buoy aboard, he pulled up the anchor, and soon was hauling in the trawl over the wooden roller on the starboard bow. Percy watched with all his eyes. This was real fishing.

As the line came in Jim coiled it smoothly down into an empty tub on a stand in the bow. The first three hooks were skinned clean.

"Something down there, at any rate," he commented.

The trawl sagged heavily.

"First fish, and a good-sized one! Pretty logy, though! Feels like a hake!"

Percy stared down into the blackish-green water. Out of its gloomy depths rose an indistinct shadow, gradually assuming definite shape. A blunt, lumpy head with big, staring eyes broke the surface; two long streamers hung from beneath the lower jaw.

Jim reached for his gaff.

"Hake! And a good one, too!"

Striking the sharp iron hook through the fish's gills, he lifted the slimy gray body over the gunwale, unhooked it, and slung it, floundering, over the kid-board into the empty space amidships.

"Fifteen-pounder! Wish we could get a hundred more like him! Hullo! Who's next?"

The newcomer had a huge reddish-brown head with bulging cheeks; his blotched body, adorned with wicked spines, tapered slimly off to an inconspicuous

tail.

"Horn-pout! Toad sculpin! Bah! Get out!"

Jim slat the fish disgustedly off, and he sculled slowly downward. Two more bare hooks. Then three hake in succession, the largest not over five pounds. On the next line hung a writhing, twisting shape about eighteen inches long. With a wry face Jim held the thing up for Percy's inspection.

"Slime eel! He's tied the ganging into knots and thrown off his jacket. Look here!"

He stripped from the line a handful of tough, stringy slime like a mass of soft soap.

"How's that for an overcoat! They always throw it off when they get hung up on a trawl."

Flinging the stuff away with a grimace, he rinsed his hand and cut off the ganging with his knife.

"No use trying to unhook that fellow!"

Fathom after fathom of trawl came in over the roller. The flapping, dying heap in the center of the dory enlarged steadily. Jim was spattered with scales from head to foot, and drenched with water from the splashing tails. He stopped for a moment to rest.



"Now you see what oil-clothes are good for," said he. "I'll give you your chance in a little while."

Percy had kept the *Barracouta* near by as Jim pulled the dory along the trawl. He could watch the process very well from the sloop, and he was by no means anxious for a personal experience with it. It looked too much like hard work. He made no reply to Jim's offer.

Refreshed by his rest, the latter resumed hauling. Up came a little cluster of yellow plums, as large as small walnuts, each on a stem six inches long, attached to a brownish bunch of roots.

"Nigger-heads! Always grow on rocky bottom; nicest kind of place for fish. Trawl must have run over a patch of ledge. We're likely to pick up something here besides hake. What's this?"

A heavy fish appeared, hanging motionless on the next ganging. Jim gave a shout.

"Haddock! Twelve-pounder. Swallowed the hook and worried himself to death. Drowned!"

"Drown a fish!" jeered Percy.

"Sure you can, any kind of fish, if you only keep his mouth open. If this fellow hadn't taken the bait in so deep he'd have been liable to break away. Fishermen call 'em 'butter-mouths,' their flesh is so tender; under jaw's the only place where a hook will hold to lift 'em by. See his red lips, and that black streak down each side. And look at these two black spots, big as silver dollars, on his shoulders; that's where they say the devil got him between his thumb and forefinger, but couldn't hold on."

It was now not far from four o'clock. The sun, rising straight from the water, lifted his fiery red disk above the eastern horizon. It was a strange sight to Percy. The sunrises he had seen could almost be numbered on the fingers of one hand. He yawned. The novelty of trawling was wearing off; he wished himself back in his hard bunk.

A heavy, chunky fish of an old-gold color, with an almost continuous line of fins, was the next habitant of the sea to cross the dory gunwale. Jim held him up to show Percy.

"Look at this cusk! He likes rocky bottom as well as a haddock. He's used to deep water, and if you start him up quick his stomach will blow out of his mouth like a bladder. I've seen 'em so plenty that they floated a trawl on top of water for half a mile."

Seven or eight small haddock and cusk, and then

once more the trawl began to yield hake.

"Back again on muddy bottom," said Jim. "What d'you say to trying your hand at it?"

Percy agreed, but without enthusiasm. He had seen enough to realize that pulling a trawl was no sinecure. By means of a fish-fork Jim pitched his catch aboard the sloop. The first tub of trawl was now full. He transferred it to the *Barracouta* and set an empty tub in its place.

"You'll find fishing is no bed of roses," he remarked as he dropped down into the standing-room.

"I believe you," answered Percy, with conviction.

He started to get aboard the dory.

"Not there!" warned Jim. "Forward of the kid-board!"

The caution came too late. Percy stepped into the slippery pen from which the fish had just been pitched; unluckily, too, he was not careful to plant his weight amidships. The dory, overbalanced to starboard, careened suddenly, and he fell sprawling on the slimy bottom. Jim could not repress an exclamation of impatience.

"Why didn't you step where I told you?"

"I didn't think she'd tip so easy," retorted Percy, angrily.

In bad humor with himself and things in general, he scrambled up and took his place back of the empty tub. Jim sheered the *Barracouta* off.

"Put on your nippers! If you don't your hands will be raw in a little while."

Percy thrust his fingers through the white woolen doughnuts, grasped the trawl, and began dragging it in over the roller. He made slow, awkward work of it. Jim watched him with ill-suppressed impatience, keeping up a constant stream of necessary counsel.

"Careful! Don't jerk so, or you'll catch your hooks in the gunwale. There's a good-sized one! Don't try to lift him aboard without the gaff. Press your hook down and back! Don't yank it sideways like that; you'll only hook him harder. Coil that line away more evenly, or we'll have a bad mess when we come to bait up. Don't lose that fellow! There he goes! Be more careful of the next one!"

Needful though it was, this quickfire of advice rasped on Percy's temper. The unaccustomed work tired him badly. He was soon conscious of a pain in his shoulders and across the back of his neck; his wrists ached. Every now and then the hard, wiry line slipped off the nippers and sawed across his smarting fingers or palms. But pride kept him doggedly pulling.

A dozen hake of various sizes lay behind him in the pen when a flat, kite-shaped fish, four feet long, with a caricature of a human face beneath its head, came scaling up through the water.

"What's that?" he gasped in amazement.

"Skate!"

"Shall I keep him?"

"Keep him? No! Unless you want to eat him yourself."

Bunglingly Percy tried to dismiss his unwelcome catch, but he made slow work of extricating the

deeply swallowed hook. Jim had stopped the *Barracouta* a few feet off. With the agony that an expert feels at the unskilful butchery of a task by an amateur, he watched his mate's awkward attempts. At last he could stand it no longer.

"Come aboard the sloop, Whittington," he ordered. "I'll finish pulling the trawl."

Percy obeyed sullenly. He had almost reached his limit of physical endurance, and he was only too glad of relief for his smarting skin and aching muscles. Fishing was a miserable business, and he wanted no part of it; on that he was fully decided. But even if a job is unpleasant, a man would rather resign than be discharged. Jim's abruptness hurt his pride; the slight rankled.

From the *Barracouta* he somewhat enviously watched Spurling deftly unhook the skate. The remainder of the trawl was pulled in in silence. Percy kept the sloop at a distance that discouraged speech, closing the gap only when Jim signaled that he wished to discharge his cargo. By ten o'clock the last hook was reached, anchor and buoy taken aboard, and the *Barracouta*, with two thousand pounds of fish heaped in her kids and towing astern in the dory, headed for Tarpaulin Island.

The trip home was a glum one. Two or three times Jim tried to open a conversation, but Percy responded only in monosyllables. He was tired and sleepy, and felt generally out-of-sorts. So Jim gave it up and let him alone.

They reached Sprowl's Cove at noon. Budge and Throppy had returned some time before from pulling the lobster-traps; Jim inspected their catch.

"About forty pounds," was his estimate. "Rather slim; but then the traps were down only about twelve hours. We'll do better after we get fairly started. I'm not going trawling to-morrow; so the whole crowd can make a lobstering trip in the *Barracouta*. Now let's have dinner. This afternoon we'll all turn to and dress fish."

Percy filed a mental negative to the last statement. He had decided that, so far at least as Tarpaulin Island was concerned, his fishing days were over. Nevertheless, he ate a good dinner.

At one o'clock the four academy boys rowed out to the *Barracouta*. All but Percy had on their oilskin aprons, or "petticoats."

"Where's your regimentals, Whittington?" asked Lane.

"I'm only going to look on this afternoon," replied Percy.

The other three exchanged surprised glances, but made no comments. On board the sloop Jim was soon busily engaged in demonstrating the process of dressing fish. Budge and Throppy learned quickly. Percy's refusal to take part in the work did not prevent him from watching it with interest from the cabin roof.

The fish were split and cleaned. Their heads were cut off and thrown into a barrel, to serve later as lobster bait, and the livers tossed into pails. Their "sounds," the membrane running along the backbone, were removed and placed in a box. After the bodies had been rinsed in a tub of water, and the backbones cut out, they were flung into the dory, taken ashore and plunged into another tub of water, and then salted

down in hogsheads. Three pairs of hands made speedy work.

"What do you do with those?"

Percy pointed to the pails containing the livers.

"Leave 'em in a barrel in the sun to be tried out," responded Jim. "The oil is worth more than sixty cents a gallon."

"And those?"

He indicated the box of "sounds."

"Cut 'em open with a pair of shears, press out the blood, and spread 'em on wire netting to dry for three days; then sew 'em up in sacks, to be shipped to some glue-factory. Four pounds of 'em'll bring a dollar. These things and some others are the by-products of the fishing business. They're worth too much to throw away."

Percy's eye dwelt on the knives and aprons of his three associates.

"I'm glad I don't have to fish for a living," he said.

VII

SHORTS AND COUNTERS

Percy slept soundly that night. To be sure, the alarm routed out the Spurlingites at the unseemly hour of four, but that was far better than twelve. After

breakfast he enjoyed a cigarette on the beach while the others were helping Filippo clear away. It was a calm, beautiful morning, and as young Whittington gazed over the smooth, blue sea he felt that even a fisherman's life might have its redeeming features.

At six they all started to make the round of the lobster-traps, on the *Barracouta*. The first string of white buoys, striped with green, was encountered off Brimstone Point.

"Here's where we make a killing," said Jim.

As he approached the first buoy he opened his switch, stopping the engine. Putting on his woolen mittens, he picked up the gaff. Close under the starboard quarter bobbed the brown bottle that served as a toggle. Reaching out with his gaff, he hooked this aboard, and began hauling in the warp. At last the heavily weighted trap started off bottom and began to ascend. In a half-minute its end, draped with marine growths, broke the surface.

Holding the trap against the side, Jim tore off its incumbrances. The trailing mass was composed principally of irregular, brownish-black, leathery sheets at the end of long stems.

"Kelp!" answered Jim to Percy's inquiry. "Devil's aprons! They grow on rocky bottom. I've seen a trap so loaded with 'em that you could hardly stir it."

He dragged the lath coop up on the side. It contained a miscellaneous assortment, the most interesting objects in which were four or five black, scorpion-like shell-fish clinging to the netted heads and sprawling on the bottom. Unbuttoning the door at the top, Jim darted in his hand and seized one of

these by its back. Round came the claws, wide open, and snapped shut close to his fingers; but he had grasped his prize at the one spot where the brandishing pincers could not reach him.

"He's a 'counter,' fast enough! No need of measuring him! Must weigh at least two pounds."

Jim dropped the snapping shell-fish into a tub in the standing-room.

"I thought lobsters were red," remarked Percy.

"They are—after you boil 'em."

Spurling's hand went into the trap again. This time the result was not so satisfactory. Out came a little fellow, full of fight. Jim tested his length by pressing his back between the turned-up ends of a brass measure screwed against the side of the standing-room.

"Thought so! He's a 'short'!"

He tossed the lobster overboard.

"What did you throw him away for?" asked Percy. "Isn't he good to eat?"

"Nothing better! But it's the State law. Everything that comes short of four and three-fourths inches, solid bone measure, from the tip of the nose to the end of the back, has to be thrown over where it's caught."

"Why's that?"

"To keep 'em from being exterminated. It's based on the same principle as the law on trout or any other game-fish. Lobsters are growing scarcer every year,

and something has to be done to preserve 'em."

"Does everybody throw the little ones away?"

"No! If they did there'd be more of legal size. The Massachusetts law allows the sale there of lobsters an inch and a half shorter than the length specified here; so their smacks come down, lie outside the three-mile limit, and buy 'shorts' of every fisherman who's willing to break the Maine law to sell 'em. Besides that, most of the summer cottagers along the coast buy and catch all the 'shorts' they can. So it's no wonder the lobster's running out."

While Jim talked he was emptying the trap. Another "counter" went into the tub, and two more "shorts" splashed overboard. The financial side of the question interested Percy.

"How many 'shorts' will you probably get a week?"

"Five hundred or more."

"And how much would a Massachusetts smack pay you for 'em?"

"Ten or twelve cents apiece."

"Then you expect to throw more than fifty dollars a week over the side, just to obey the law?"

"That's what!"

Percy lapsed into silence. The lobsters disposed of, Jim began to clear the trap of its other contents. A big brown sculpin was floundering on the laths. Taking him out gingerly, Jim tossed him into the bait-tub upon the hake heads.

"He'll do for bait in a few days."

He picked out and threw over three or four large starfish, or "five-fingers." The hake head stuck on the bait-spear in the center was almost gone; Jim replaced it with a fresh head from the bait-tub. Then he seized a mottled, purplish crab that had been aimlessly scuttling to and fro across the bottom of the pot, and impaled him, back down, on the barb of the spear. Shutting and buttoning the door, he slid the trap overboard, started his engine, and headed for the next buoy.

Its trap was caught among the rocks on the bottom, and Jim, unable to start it by hand, was obliged to make the warp fast and have recourse to towing. Just as it looked as if the line were about to part, the trap let go. It yielded one "counter" and three "shorts." Also, it contained more than a dozen brown, unhealthy-looking, membranous things, shaped like long coin-purses, lined with rows of suckers, and with mouths at one end.

"Sea-cucumbers! I've seen a trap full of 'em, almost to the door. They're after the bait, like everything else."

Trap after trap was pulled, with varying success. Occasionally from a single one three or four good-sized lobsters would be taken; occasionally one would yield nothing at all. But the majority averaged one "counter." Percy could not accustom himself to the seeming waste of throwing over the "shorts."

"I should think you might sell those little fellows to the Massachusetts boats, and nobody be the wiser for it."

"I could; but I won't. I'll make clean money or I won't make any at all."

There was a finality in Jim's tones that closed the subject for good. Half the traps had now been hauled and there were about seventy-five pounds of lobsters in the tub. Spiny, egg-like sea-urchins, green wrinkles, and an occasional flounder or lamper-eel gave variety to the catch. There was always the hope that the next trap might yield five or six big fellows.

"Now and then," said Jim, "you get one so large he can't crawl into a pot. He'll be on the head, just as you start pulling, and he'll hang to the netting until he comes to the top. After they take hold of anything, they hate to let go."

"What's the biggest one you ever saw?" asked Lane.

"One day when I was in Rockland, a smack brought in a fifteen-pounder she'd bought at Seal Island. But of course they grow a good deal larger than that. The big ones don't taste nearly so good as the little ones. After they get to be a certain age, seven or eight years, the fishermen think, they don't 'shed.' Then you find 'em covered with barnacles, their claws cracked into squares, all wrinkled up. Those old grubbers belong to the offshore school; they stay outside, and never come in on the rocks."

Percy was listening with all his ears.

"What do you mean by saying they don't 'shed'?" he asked.

"Harken to the lecture on lobsters by Professor James Spurling!" announced Lane in stentorian tones.

The next group of traps was some distance off, so Jim had a chance to talk without interruption.

"In the spring a lobster that is growing begins to find

his shell too tight, so he has to get out of it. Some time after the first of July he crawls in under the rocks or kelp, where the fish can't trouble him. His shell splits down the back and he pulls himself out. He stays there for a week or ten days while a new and larger shell is forming. When he begins to crawl again, he's raving hungry. One queer thing I almost forgot. Fishermen say that, while he is lying under cover, all soft and unprotected, a hard-shell lobster, active and ugly, generally stands guard outside the hole, ready to fight off any enemy that may come along."

By the time the last trap was pulled the lobster question had been pretty thoroughly canvassed.

"Guess I've told you all I know, and more, too," said Jim.

They were back in Sprowl's Cove at half past ten, and put their lobsters into the car with the others. Hardly had they finished when a motor-sloop came round the eastern point.

"Here's a smack!" exclaimed Jim. "On time to the minute! Shouldn't wonder if it was Captain Higgins in the *Calista!*"

The boat swept into the cove in a broad circle, and ranged alongside the car. At the helm stood a tall, grizzled man of perhaps sixty, with gray beard and twinkling blue eyes. A lanky, freckled boy stuck his head up out of the cabin.

"Any lobsters to sell, boys?" inquired the man.

"Isn't this Captain Higgins?" asked Jim.



"That's my name—Benjamin B. Higgins, of the smack *Calista*, buying lobsters from Cranberry Island to Portland, and this is my son Brad, my first mate and crew. I own this boat from garboard to main truck, bowsprit-tip to boom-end, and I don't wear any man's dog-collar. I'll give you a square deal on weight and pay you as much as any smackman, neither more nor less. Do we trade?"

"We do," answered Jim. "Let's have your dip-net!"

Stepping upon the car, he was soon bailing out the lobsters. Captain Higgins placed them in a tub on his deck scale.

"Going to be here long, boys?"

"We've taken the island for the season from my Uncle Tom Sprowl."

"So you're Cap'n Tom's nephew? Must be Ezra Spurling's boy."

Jim nodded.

"Glad to meet you! Made a trip once to the Grand Banks with Ezra; must be all of thirty years ago. Well, time flies! If you'll save your lobsters for me, I'll look in here every Thursday. How does that hit you?"

"Right between the eyes."

After the lobsters were bailed out, Jim and Budge went on board the smack. Captain Higgins weighed the heaping tub of shell-fish.

"One hundred and seventy pounds. Market price 's twenty-five."

He glanced inquiringly at Jim.

"All right!" agreed the latter.

"Then we'll put 'em in the well."

He lifted off a hatch aft of the scale, opening into a compartment containing something over three feet of water; it was twelve feet long and thirteen wide, and divided into two parts by a low partition running lengthwise of the sloop. Two water-tight bulkheads separated it from the rest of the boat, and several hundred inch-and-a-quarter holes, bored through its bottom to allow free access to the water outside, gave it the appearance of a pepper-box. It already contained hundreds of live lobsters.

Picking the shell-fish carefully from the tub, Jim and the captain dropped them, one by one, into the well. Soon all were safely transferred to their new quarters, and the hatch was replaced. Captain

Higgins invited Jim and Budge down into his little den of a cabin. Unlocking an iron box, he took from it a wallet and began counting out bills.

"Forty-two dollars and a half!"

He passed the amount over to Jim.

"You carry quite a sum of ready money, Captain," said Lane.

"Yes; I have to. This business is cash on the nail. My boat can take over twelve thousand pounds of lobsters, and sometimes she's almost filled. I've started out with three thousand dollars in that box, and I rarely go with less than two thousand. It'd surprise you to figure up the amount of cash these smacks spread along the coast. They say that one winter, when lobsters were specially high, a Portland dealer paid a smackman over fifty-five hundred dollars for a single trip."

"Somebody must make a big profit. Think what a lobster costs in a market!"

"Somebody does—sometimes. But it isn't the smackmen. Lobsters ought not to be kept in a well longer than a few days. A friend of mine started out from Halifax with ten thousand pounds of Cape Breton lobsters. He got caught in a gale of wind and lost forty-seven hundred pounds before he landed in Boston. Some years ago a Maine dealer put one hundred and five thousand lobsters in a pound during May and June; he fed them chiefly on herring, and the total cost was over ten thousand dollars. Things went wrong and he took out just two hundred and fifty-four live ones. Not much profit about that!"

Arranging to call near noon the next Thursday, Captain Higgins had soon rounded Brimstone Point and was on his way to Head Harbor on Isle au Haut, his next stopping-place. In the middle of the afternoon, while the boys were baiting trawls on the *Barracouta*, another boat chugged into the cove. It was a smack from Boston.

"Got any lobsters, boys?" asked the captain, a red-faced, smooth-shaven man of forty.

"All sold!" was Jim's reply. "And we've arranged to let the *Calista* have what we get."

"What do you do with your 'shorts'?"

"Heave 'em overboard."

"Save 'em for me and I'll give you ten cents apiece for 'em."

"Nothing doing!"

"You and your crowd could clean up fifty dollars more a week here just as well as not. What are you afraid of? The warden can't get out here once in a dog's age."

"The State of Maine doesn't have to hire any warden to keep me honest."

"You're a fool, young fellow!" said the man, heatedly.

"That may be," retorted Jim, "but your saying so doesn't make me one. Besides, I'd rather be a fool than a crook."

The smackman's red face grew redder.

"Don't you get fresh with me!" he warned, threateningly. "Do you mean to say I'd do anything

crooked?"

"You're the best judge about that."

Jim was tiring of the conversation. He turned his back on the stranger and resumed baiting his trawl. Finding that nothing was to be gained by a longer stop, the man, muttering angrily, started his engine and left the cove.

"I'm not saying whether this lobster law's a good thing or not," said Jim to the other boys. "Some fishermen say it isn't. But so long as it's the law it ought to be kept, until we can get a better one. I don't believe in breaking it just for the sake of making a few dollars."

"Then the law doesn't suit everybody," ventured Throppy.

"Not by a long shot! Each session of the Legislature they fight it over, and make some changes, and then a new set of people are dissatisfied. What's meat to one man is poison to another. It's impossible to pass a law somebody wouldn't find fault with."

"What keeps one man from pulling another man's traps?" asked Percy.

"His conscience, if he has any; and, if he hasn't, his dread of being found out. It's a mean kind of thieving, but more or less of it's done alongshore. Sometimes it costs a man dear. I know of two cases, within twenty-five miles of this island, where men have been shot dead for that very thing. About as unhealthy as stealing horses out West, if you're caught. Like everything else, now and then it has its funny side. Once a lobsterman lost his watch, chain and all; for a day or two he was asking everybody he

met if they'd seen it. A neighbor of his went out to pull his own traps. In one of them he found the first man's watch, hanging by its chain to the door, just where it had been caught and twitched out of its owner's pocket when he had slid the trap overboard, after stealing the lobsters in it. It was a long time before he heard the last of that."

"Did he get his watch back?" asked Percy.

"Don't know!" replied Jim. "But if he didn't it served him right."

On the *Barracouta's* next trip to Matinicus she brought back the balance of Throppy's wireless outfit. It did not take him long to get his plant in working order. Almost every evening thereafter he spent a short time picking up messages from passing steamers and the neighboring islands, and sending others in return. The wireless came to fill an important place in the life of the boys on Tarpaulin, furnishing a bond of connection between them and the outside world.

VIII

SALT-WATER GIPSIES

A few mornings after the first call of the *Calista* Budge and Percy were out pulling traps. Percy had told Jim plainly that he did not care to do any more trawling. Jim had smiled and made no reply; but

after that either Throppy or Budge went out with him after hake. What the others said in private about Percy he neither knew nor cared.

On this particular forenoon the lobster-catchers had half circled the island. As they nosed along the northern shore Percy spied some strange-looking floats ahead.

"There's a red buoy!" he exclaimed. "Somebody else must be fishing here!"

Incredulously Budge glanced forward. What he saw left him sober.

"You're right! This'll be unpleasant news for Jim."

They ran up to the strange float. It was a battered wedge, painted a faded brick color. Percy gaffed it aboard.

"What's the brand?" queried Budge.

"Hasn't any."

Lane examined it and found that Percy was correct. The wood bore no marks to reveal its owner.

"Better haul the trap?" asked Percy.

He began heaving in on the warp.

"Stop that!" ordered Budge, sharply. "Throw it over. We don't want to get into any scrape. We'll have to put it up to Jim this noon. He'll know what to do."

They counted nine more of the red buoys before they reached the northeast point of the island.

"Look there!"

Percy pointed toward the landlocked Sly Hole. A thin column of blue smoke was rising above it, as if from the stovepipe of an anchored boat. Budge debated for a moment, then turned the bow of the pea-pod toward the narrow entrance.

"We'll go in and see who's there."

A dozen quick strokes sent the boat through the winding channel into the little harbor. Budge rested on his oars and they looked eagerly about.

In the center of the haven lay anchored a rusty black sloop about forty feet long, a dory swinging at her stern. From her cabin drifted the sound and smell of frying fish, mingled with men's voices.

"Might as well take the bull by the horns," said Budge.

He rowed directly up to the sloop. The sounds on board evidently drowned the dipping of his oars, for it was not until the stem of the pea-pod struck the rusty side that the voices stopped and two startled brown faces popped up out of the companionway. Both men had sharp black eyes, and black shocks of hair badly in need of the barber. One was slightly gray, and a prickly stubble of unshaven beard covered his chin. The younger man had a jet-black mustache with long, drooping ends. Both



wore red shirts, open at the neck, with sleeves rolled above the elbows. The younger held a half-smoked cigar, while his companion grasped a large fork, which he evidently had been using on the fish. For a few seconds the two couples regarded each other in silence.

Then the man with the black mustache smiled ingratiatingly.

"H'lo, boys!" he invited. "Won't you come 'board?"

"No, thank you," declined Budge. "When did you get here?"

"We come last night, from ... there," with a vague gesture toward the west. "We fish, we lobster. You live on dis island ... yes? We stay here, too. We be

good friend. Wait!"

Diving below, he brought up a long-necked black bottle.

"You have drink?"

"No!" refused Budge, decidedly.

The man looked disappointed. He muttered a few words to his companion. The latter scowled. Then they drank from the bottle and replaced it below. The younger man began talking again.

"Disa good harbor! We build camp there."

He gestured toward the beach.

"We plenty lath on board. We make one ... two hundred trap. We stop all summer. Good friend, eh?"

"I guess so," returned Budge.

The program announced had taken him somewhat aback. He hardly knew what to reply. Pushing the pea-pod off, he turned her toward the channel.

"You livea 'cross dis island ... yes?" shouted the man after him. "We come see you to-night!"

Budge made no response to this advance. Steady, rapid pulling soon brought the boys again into open water.

"Well, what do you think now?" asked Percy.

"Wait till we hear what Jim says," was Lane's reply.

The remaining traps were hauled in double-quick time and they made a bee-line for Sprowl's Cove. Spurling and Throppy came in at noon on the

Barracouta. Jim's brows knitted when he heard of their new neighbors.

"What should you say they were?" he inquired.

"Don't know," answered Lane. "Only I'm sure they're not Yankees."

"And they had no brand on their buoys?"

"Not a letter!"

"That's against the law. Suspicious, too. So they intend to build a camp here and spend the summer?"

"That's what they said."

The anxious furrows in Jim's forehead deepened. He brought his fist down hard on the *Barracouta's* cabin.

"Boys," he said, firmly, "they can't stop here. There aren't lobsters enough on these ledges for them and for us. What they get we won't. They've got to pull up those traps and get out just as quick as we can make 'em."

The others exchanged looks of surprise. Though they knew Jim's absolute fairness and sense of right, they could not help feeling that his decision was a harsh one. Jim read their faces.

"I know what you're thinking, boys. It seems as if I had no right to drive 'em off. But suppose any one of you owned a piece of woods on the mainland, and a stranger should come and begin to chop the trees down without your permission. How long would you stand it? The same principle holds good here, even if it is twenty-five miles offshore. This is my uncle Tom's island. He's been paying taxes on it for years. His living comes from it and the waters round it. He's

leased it to us on shares, and we've got to look out for his interest as well as our own.

"But how can you stop them from setting traps?" queried Lane. "I thought the sea beyond low-water mark was public property."

"It is. They can set as many traps as they can bring on their sloop, and I never could trouble 'em so long as they lived aboard. If they fished with only the few they've got now I'd never say a word. But when they talk of building a camp ashore, and going into the business wholesale with one or two hundred pots, we must draw the line, and draw it sharp. They can't use any of the shore legally without my permission, and that they'll never get; and if they try to use it illegally they'll find themselves in hot water mighty quick.

"Another thing," he continued, "they're strangers to us, and drinking men. They might pull our traps or accuse us of pulling theirs. There's a chance for all sorts of mix-ups. No, they've got to go, and the sooner the better."

"They're coming across to call to-night," said Lane.

"Not if we can get over there first. We'll go round in the sloop as soon as these hake are dressed and salted."

At four o'clock the last fish was slapped down on the rounded-up tub.

"Now we'll go," announced Jim. "Come on, everybody! You, too, Filippo! Might as well show up our full force. It may help stave off trouble."

"Aren't you going to take the gun?" Percy inquired.

"Gun? No! What'd we want of that? We don't intend

to shoot anybody."

Twenty minutes after the *Barracouta* left Sprowl's Cove she was thudding into the Sly Hole. The sloop still lay at anchor in its center, but the dory was grounded on the beach. From the woods above, ax-strokes echoed faintly.

"Either cutting firewood or beginning on that camp," said Jim.

Presently the chopping ceased. Before long the two men appeared on the top of the bank, dragging a spruce trunk about twenty feet long. On seeing the *Barracouta* they halted in surprise, then dropped the tree and hurried down to their dory.

"Seem to be afraid we've been mousing round aboard their boat," muttered Spurling.

Without responding to his hail the two strangers rowed hastily to their sloop and went below. A minute or two of investigation evidently satisfied them that nothing had been disturbed. As they came up again Jim ran the *Barracouta* alongside.

"Where you from?" he asked.

The younger man again acted as spokesman:

"Way off ... there!"

As when Budge had questioned him, he gestured vaguely toward the west. Then he launched into a repetition of what he had said that forenoon.

"We stay on dis island all summer. Make trap. Build camp. Catch plenty fish, plenty lobster. All friend, eh?"

He laid his left hand on his heart, and with his right made a sweeping gesture that included the whole group.

"You wait!"

Dropping suddenly out of sight, he reappeared with equal quickness, brandishing the black bottle.

"We drink ... all together, eh?"

Jim brushed his proffer aside.

"I've hired this island. You'll have to pay me rent if you stop here."

A shadow of wrath swept over the dark face. Instantly it was gone, and a smile replaced it.

"Rent!" he protested. "No, no! Friend no pay! We sing, we smoke, we drink, we playa cards. All good friend together. No pay money!"

The last very decided. The older man nodded vigorously in confirmation, and for the first time broke silence.

"No pay money!" he repeated. "All friend!"

The two laid their hands on their hearts and stood smiling and bowing. For a moment Jim was nonplussed. He backed the *Barracouta* out of earshot.

"Well, what d'you think of the outlook?" asked Lane.

"Don't like it, and I don't like them. Too much palaver! I've got 'em sized up. They're regular salt-water gipsies; I've heard of 'em before. They drift round from one place to another, fish a little, lobster a little, smoke a good deal, and drink more. They'd be worse than a pestilence on this island. Yes, sir!

They've got to go! They know just as well as I do that they've no right to stop here; but they're going to bluff it through. They'll try to stave me off by pretending not to understand what I mean, but you noticed they were bright enough when money was mentioned."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Tell 'em they've got to go!"

"And if they won't?"

"Send for the sheriff!"

While the boys had been holding their council of war the two men had disappeared into their cabin, where they held an angry, but unintelligible, discussion. As Jim brought the *Barracouta* once more alongside their heads quickly appeared. They were scowling blackly.

"Will you pay rent?" demanded Jim.

"No pay rent," came the defiant reply from both together.

"Pull up your traps, then, and go!"

"No go!" exclaimed the younger. "You go! We stay!"

"That settles it," said Jim. "I'll send for the sheriff to-night, and have him here in the morning."

He leaned over to start his engine. At his first movement the two dropped out of sight, but before he could rock the wheel they were up again, each holding a shot-gun. They leveled these weapons at the *Barracouta*.

"No send for sheriff! No start engine!"

Jim straightened up and the startled boys glanced at one another. The demonstration of hostility had come like a bolt from a clear sky. Things looked ugly. Again the younger man spoke.

"S'pose you go for sheriff. We stay! Cut buoy! Sink boat! Burn cabin! Then go before you get back! How you like that, eh?"

For once Jim was at a loss. What answer could be made to such an argument? The other noted his hesitation, and smiled triumphantly.

"You let us alone, we let you alone! You trouble us, we trouble you. Now you go!"

It was half a permission, half a command, backed by the leveled guns. Jim was on the point of starting the engine when Filippo interrupted him.

"Misser Jim, let me talk to 'em," he begged in a low tone.

Spurling glanced at him in surprise.

"What for, Filippo? Are they countrymen of yours?"

"Don't know! I see!"

"Go ahead, then! It can't do any hurt."

"Hi!" called out Filippo. "Listen! *Ascoltatemi!*"

The two men started as if they had been shot; they fixed their gaze on Filippo. He began talking rapidly to them in Italian, gesturing freely. They replied in the same language. For fully ten minutes the heated dialogue continued. Jim and his mates listened in silence, now and then catching a word they had learned from Filippo, but not comprehending the

drift of the debate.

At last it was clear that some conclusion had been reached. Shaking their heads in disgust, the two sullenly restored their guns to the cabin. Filippo turned to Jim.

"All right! They go to-night, after they pull traps. Now we start—right away!"

Jim looked at the Italian in amazement; but he started the engine and the sloop forged out of the cove. Once in the passage, he broke silence.

"How did you ever manage it, Filippo?"

"I tell them your uncle own island; you hire it of him for summer. You lots of friends. If they no go, you send for sheriff right away. We too many for them. Guard cabin with gun till you get back. Sheriff come in night, while they sleep. Take them, take boat, take trap. Put them in jail. They break rock, work on road rest of summer. They not like that. They go!"

"Good enough, Filippo! Guess you didn't strain the truth much. You certainly have got us out of an unpleasant hole. I'm free to say I was at my wits' end. Good thing for us we ran across you on the wharf at Stonington!"

"Better thing for me!" answered Filippo.

That evening after supper the boys stole silently through the woods to the northeastern end of the island. The Sly Hole was empty! The sloop had gone!

Stepping out of the evergreens, Jim looked westward along the shore.

"There they are!"

The dory towing astern was piled high with traps.

"Shouldn't wonder if they had some of ours among 'em!" exclaimed Jim. "No matter! We're getting rid of 'em cheap, if they scoop a dozen! But look at that! They've got all they want, and now they're cutting away our buoys! Here's where I call a halt!"

He sprang out upon the bank in plain sight.

"Hi, there! Stop that!"

One of the men had just gaffed a buoy. At Jim's hail he glanced up and waved his hand nonchalantly. Then he deliberately cut the warp. The other man dropped into the cabin and reappeared with the two guns. Jim threw himself flat on his face.

"Down, boys!" he cried.

A hail of birdshot peppered the bluff and the woods behind it as both the double-barrels roared out in unison. One leaden pellet drew blood from the back of Jim's hand, while Throppy, a little slow in dropping to cover, was stung on the cheek. The others were untouched. Percy shook with fright and excitement. Lane was boiling with anger.

"Let's take the *Barracouta* and follow 'em!" he proposed.

"Cool off, Budge!" laughed Jim. "That's just a parting salute. Besides, they've got two guns to our one. Let 'em go! And good riddance to bad rubbish! See! They're on their way now!"

The sloop's head swung to the north and she filled away.

"They've done what damage they've dared and

they're gone for good. They'll be up at Isle au Haut to-night, either in Head Harbor or Kimball's Island Thoroughfare. Forget 'em!"

"Lucky my temper isn't hitched up with your strength," said Lane.

IX

FISTS AND FIREWORKS

Late on the afternoon of July 3d, when the morning's catch of eighteen hundred pounds of hake had been split and salted, Spurling called a council of war. Percy attended with the others. He had gone out with Budge in the morning to haul the lobster-traps; the rest of the day he had loafed, lying on the soft turf below the beacon on Brimstone Point and reading *The Three Musketeers*.

Of the work that pleased him he had determined to do only as much as he liked, and not a stroke more. Lobstering was really attractive; there was enough novelty and excitement about it to keep him interested. When a pot came up it might contain no shell-fish or a half-dozen; the element of uncertainty appealed to his sporting instincts. But fishing he had stricken utterly from his list. It was too hard and too dirty. Slogging at the heavy trawls and afterward dressing the catch was too plebeian a business for the son of a millionaire.

So he let the others tire their muscles and soil their hands and clothing while he attended strictly to the business of pleasing himself. He could not help being aware of a growing coolness on the part of his associates, but it gave him no concern. His month of probation was almost up, and he had decided that, come what might, he would leave at its end. Only a few days more, and this hard, monotonous island life would be behind him forever. He would send back a check to cover the expense of his board, and that would permanently close his relations with Spurling & Company.

This resolve to pay for meals and lodging gave him a feeling of independence. Hence, though he knew the others did not care whether he attended or not, he felt himself entitled to a place at the council.

The meeting took place on the beach in front of the cabin. Spurling and Stevens had just come from the *Barracouta*, their oilskin "petticoats" bearing gory evidence of their work for the last two hours.

"Fellows," proposed Jim, "to-morrow let's celebrate! We can't set the trawls, for we haven't anything to bait up with. And even if we had, I don't believe in working on the Fourth. When I was at Matinicus the other day I saw a poster advertising a ball-game and big celebration at Vinalhaven. We'll have an early breakfast and run up there in the *Barracouta*. First, we'll go to Hardy's weir and take in a lot of herring for bait. Then we can slip round to Carver's Harbor and spend the rest of the day ashore. What d'you say?"

There was no doubt regarding the vote.

"The ayes have it!" shouted Spurling. "Now let's get

everything in trim for day after to-morrow! We won't pull the traps again until then."

Filled with enthusiasm at the prospect of a holiday, Budge, Throppy, and Jim dispersed to their various tasks. Yawningly, Percy returned to Brimstone Point and *The Three Musketeers*. After all, doing nothing on an island twenty-five miles out at sea was pretty dull work.

The boys had an early supper and were soon asleep. Turning out at daybreak, they despatched a hearty meal of corn-bread and bacon. Everybody but Percy took hold with the dishes and helped tidy up the camp. Shortly after sunrise they were sailing out of the cove in the *Barracouta*.

The trip in past Saddleback Light to Vinalhaven was uneventful. By eight o'clock they were lying alongside Hardy's weir, and its owner was dipping bushel after bushel of shining herring into the pen aboard the sloop. Before ten they were anchored off the steamboat wharf at Carver's Harbor.

The town was in gala dress. Bunting streamed everywhere. Torpedoes, firecrackers, bombs, and revolvers rent the air with deafening explosions. The brass guns on two yachts in the harbor contributed an occasional salvo. As the boys rowed in to the shore the strains of "The Star-Spangled Banner" came floating over the water, and round the outer point appeared one of the small bay steamers, loaded with excursionists, including a brass band. On board also was the Camden baseball team, scheduled to play the opening game in the county league series with the home team that afternoon.

Bedlam broke loose as the steamer made fast to the

wharf and the crowd aboard streamed ashore. To Spurling and his friends, after three weeks of Tarpaulin Island, the narrow, winding street with its holiday crowd afforded the bustle and varied interest of a city. Even Percy deigned to allow himself to be tempted out of the sulky dignity which he had assumed since the council of the previous afternoon.

The group scattered. Lane and Stevens wandered about town, taking in the sights and dodging the torpedoes and firecrackers of enthusiastic patriots of a more or less tender age. Spurling found an old 'longshore acquaintance from a visiting boat and went off aboard to inspect his new type of engine. Filippo struck up an eternal friendship with a fellow-countryman from the granite quarries on Hurricane. Percy, left to his own resources, invested in a new brand of cigarettes and promenaded back and forth along the main street, smoking and eying the passers-by superciliously.

Noon found the restaurants packed with hungry excursionists; but the crowds were good-natured and everybody was able to get plenty to eat. At two o'clock there was a grand rush to the baseball-grounds.

Spurling, Lane, and Stevens sat together in the front of the stand; Percy perched at the extreme right of the topmost row; while Filippo lay on the grass back of third base with his new-found, swarthy compatriot.

Evidently there was some hitch about beginning the game. The Vinalhavens had taken the field for practice. The Camden team, bunched close together, were talking earnestly, meanwhile casting anxious glances toward the street that led to the water.

The Vinalhaven scorer passed before the stand with his book.

"What's the trouble?" asked Stevens.

"Camden catcher and third-baseman haven't shown up. They started out with a party in a power-boat before the steamer. Engine must have broken down. Here it is time to call the game, and the visiting team two men short! And the biggest crowd of the season here! Can you beat that for luck?"

The Camden pitcher separated himself from his companions and strolled toward the stand.

"Anybody here want to put on a mitt and stop a few fast ones?" he inquired.

"That means you, Jim!" said Lane. "Come on! Don't be too modest!"

Spurling climbed out over the front of the stand.

"I'll try to hold you for a little while," he volunteered.

Soon he was smoothly receiving the pitcher's curves and lobbing them back. The combination went like clockwork. In the mean time the rest of the Camden team had taken the field and were warming up. The missing members had not yet appeared.

"That'll do for a while," said the pitcher.

The two drew to one side.

"What team have you been catching on?" asked the Camden man, suddenly.

"Graffam Academy."

"I knew you must have traveled with a pretty speedy

bunch. My name's Beverage."

"Mine's Spurling."

"Say, old man, I want you to do us a big favor. Catch this game for Camden, will you?"

"I've been out of practice for over a month," objected Jim.

"Never mind about that! I don't mean to flatter you, but we've got nothing in this league that can touch you. Come, now! As a personal favor to me!"

"All right. I'll do my best."

"Good for you! Now we've got to pick up a third-baseman!"

Jim hesitated.

"Our Academy shortstop is here," he said, slowly. "He can play a mighty good third at a pinch."

"If he's willing, we'll take him on your say-so, and snap at the chance."

Jim walked to the front of the stand.

"You're signed for third for this game, Budge! I'm going to catch."

"We've got a couple of spare suits," said Beverage. "Come on over to the hotel and change."

In fifteen minutes Lane and Spurling were back on the field in Camden uniforms and the game had begun.

The contest was a hot one. The teams were evenly matched, and the result hung in doubt up to the last

inning. The crowd boiled with enthusiasm and the supporters of each team cheered themselves hoarse.

In the middle of the fifth inning, when the excitement was running highest, a slim, bareheaded figure with a tow pompadour sprouting above a fog-burnt face leaped suddenly up at the right end of the top row in the stand.

It was Percy. Exhilarated by the closeness of the game, he had forgotten his grudge against Spurling & Company. He flourished a roll of bills.



"Two to one on Camden!" he shouted in a high-keyed voice.

All heads turned his way. For a moment nobody spoke. Percy mistook the silence. He struck a theatric

attitude.

"Three to one! Are you afraid to support your home team?"

A girl giggled. Two or three boys hooted. Then a short, dark, thick-set man in the second row whirled about and answered the challenger.

"No," he said, deliberately. "We're not afraid to support our nine. If we were, it wouldn't be playing here to-day. We expect it to do its best. If it wins, it wins. If it loses, it loses. And that's all there is to it. Whatever dollars we have to put into baseball will go to meet the regular expenses of the team. We haven't any money to fool away in betting; and we don't care for any more second-hand talk from a half-baked youngster like you! You get me?"

The crowd applauded uproariously. Pursued by the jeers and catcalls of the small fry, Percy sat down, his face, if possible, redder than before.

Spurling caught an errorless game. It was Lane's bat in the last half of the ninth that finally drove in the winning run for Camden. Five to four.

The crowd streamed noisily off the grounds. A knot of the younger element tried to heckle Percy, but he strode loftily by them, puffing his inevitable cigarette. Jim and Budge went to the hotel with the Camden team to change their suits.

Beverage was jubilant over the victory.

"It's a mean thing to say," he remarked; "but I'm glad that power-boat didn't get here. We owe the game to you two fellows. How much shall we pay you?"

"Nothing," answered Jim. "We're paid already. We've

enjoyed winning as much as you have."

"Well, if you ever come to Camden, remember that you own the town."

The boys decided to stop over for the early-evening celebration. The Vinalhavens were good losers, and the excursion steamer was not to start back until nine o'clock, so the town promised to be lively enough for the next few hours.

Before it had grown very dark the streets began to blaze with fireworks. Percy's remarks of the afternoon still rankled in the minds of the junior portion of the residents, and, as he sauntered to and fro, he became the butt of many pointed jests. He ignored them all. Such trivialities were beneath the notice of a scion of the house of Whittington.

It was his air of haughty superiority that got him into trouble. Tempted beyond endurance by his cool, insolent swagger, a small boy on the other side of the street discharged a Roman candle at him point-blank. One of the fiery balls struck his right side and dropped into the open pocket of his coat, starting a lively blaze. The garment got a smart scorching, and Percy's fingers were burnt and his feelings badly ruffled before he succeeded in extinguishing the conflagration.

Singling out the offender among a group of boys dancing delightedly up and down, Percy made a sudden rush and pounced upon him like a hawk on a chicken. Holding him by the collar, he cuffed his ears soundly. The criminal wriggled and twisted, loudly and tearfully protesting his innocence.

A stocky, freckled lad of about eighteen, with a

close-cut head of brown hair, came out of a neighboring house on the run. His snub nose and projecting jaw suggested a human bulldog. He thrust his face close up to Percy's.

"What're you maulin' my brother for?" he demanded, truculently.

Percy dropped his victim, having finished chastising him. The latter rubbed his eyes and howled louder than ever.

"I asked you why you were maulin' my brother," reiterated the newcomer in a still more belligerent tone.

"Because he burned this hole in my coat," replied Percy, exhibiting the damaged garment.

"I didn't do it!" howled the boy.

"You hear that?" exclaimed the freckled lad, angrily. "He says he didn't and I say he didn't."

"Well, I say he did!"

"Do you mean to tell me I lie?"

Percy became suddenly aware that a ring was forming round him. He cast a hasty glance about the lowering faces and recognized some of his would-be hecklers of the afternoon. No Tarpaulin Islanders were there. He was a stranger in a strange land. But the Whittington in him was up, and he did not blench. He faced his questioner.

"If you say he didn't burn that hole—yes!"

An indignant chorus rose from the group.

"Did you hear that, Jabe? He called you a liar. I

wouldn't stand that. Make him eat those words! It's the fresh guy who made the cheap talk at the ball-game. Soak him! Do him up!"

Spurred on by these exhortations, Jabe dropped his head between his shoulders and came at his enemy with the rush of a mad bull.

Percy was a good boxer. He had taken lessons from several first-class sparring-masters, and would have been no mean antagonist for anybody of his age and weight. But Jabe was a year older and fully twenty-five pounds heavier. Evidently, too, he had the abounding health and strength that come from life in the open. The odds against the city boy were heavy, but he stood up gamely.

Jabe rushed in upon him and struck with all his might. Percy side-stepped, and the blow went harmlessly by, while his assailant's rush carried him to the other side of the ring. Whirling about with a cry of rage, he came back, swinging his arms like a windmill.

"Now, Jabe! Now, Jabe!" rose the cry.

Again Percy leaped aside, and his right arm shot out. The blow caught his foe fairly under the left ear, and he went sprawling; but he was down only for a moment. Springing to his feet, he hurled himself into the fray with redoubled fury. Again he was knocked down, and again he renewed the battle, with more strength than before.

The fight could not last long. It was muscle against science, and in the end muscle won. Percy began to tire and to grow short of breath. He had smoked too many cigarettes to be able to keep up such a

whirlwind pace for many minutes. Though he landed five blows to his enemy's one, the latter's one did more damage than his five.

For the first time in the contest Jabe used his head. Hitherto he had struck straight for the mark each time. Now he feinted with his right for his foe's body. Percy dropped his guard somewhat wearily. Before he realized what was happening, Jabe's left, sent in with tremendous force, hit him a smashing blow squarely on the nose, knocking him over backward.

It was the beginning of the end. Percy tottered up, blood spurting from his nose, his head spinning. He saw Jabe preparing for another rush and knew it would be the last one. He stiffened himself to receive the knock-out.

A tall, broad-shouldered figure broke through the circle.

"What's the trouble here?"

It was Spurling's voice. His glance took in the situation.

"That'll be about all," he said. "Come away, Whittington!"

A bullet-headed, shirt-sleeved man bristled up defiantly. It was Jabe's father.

"Guess we'll let 'em fight it out," he observed.

His boy was winning.

"No," said Jim. "It's gone far enough."

"Not looking for trouble, are you?"

"No," remarked Jim, easily. "I don't want any trouble

with you, and you don't want any with me."

The shirt-sleeved man glanced appraisingly at his square shoulders and strongly knit figure.

"Right you are, George!" he laughed. "I don't want any trouble with you. You must be a mind-reader. You call off your dog and I'll call off mine."

He grasped Jabe by the collar and jerked him backward. Jim dropped a compelling hand on Percy's shoulder.

"Come on, Whittington! You ought to have brains enough to know you've been licked. It's time we started for Tarpaulin Island."

X

REBELLION IN CAMP

Conversation lagged on the *Barracouta* as she jogged smoothly over the starlit sea toward Tarpaulin Island. By the dim light of two lanterns, Jim, Throppy, Budge, and Filippo were busy baiting the trawls with herring and coiling them into the tubs in the standing-room. Percy had withdrawn from his companions and lay across the heel of the bowsprit on the decked-over bow.

He had stanched the flow of blood from his nose, but it still pained him, and he was otherwise bruised and badly shaken by the buffets from Jabe's knobby fists.

Judged by Percy's feelings, Jabe must have been all knuckles. Percy had to acknowledge that only Spurling's opportune appearance had saved him from being pounded unmercifully. But his pride had been injured far more than his physical body. It seemed improbable that he would ever see Jabe again, but he determined that some time, somewhere, and somehow the freckled lad should pay dearly for the slight he had put upon the house of Whittington.

It was a few minutes past eleven when the sloop's engine stopped and she glided up to her mooring in Sprowl's Cove. Five sleepy boys tumbled into the dory and paddled ashore. The Fourth was over and the routine of workaday life would begin again for them early the next morning.

Nemo dashed back and forth on the beach, barking a furious welcome and springing upon his masters indiscriminately. Unwittingly he leaped at Percy and in playful mood closed his teeth over the lad's right thumb, sprained and aching from the fight.

"Get out, you cur!" exclaimed Whittington.

He launched an aimless, vindictive kick in the general direction of the gamboling beast. As often happens with random blows, it went too true. Nemo ki-yied up the beach on three legs.

"What are you about, Whittington?" burst out Lane, angrily. Among the entire five he was the fondest of the dog.

Percy was ashamed and sorry that he had hurt the animal, but Lane's eruption of temper smothered his repentant feelings.

"He bit my thumb," he muttered, sullenly.

"You know well enough he was just in sport. Don't you kick him again! You hear me!"

Percy mumbled an indistinct reply. As soon as the cabin was unlocked he turned into his bunk, without a word to anybody. For him the Fourth had been anything but a holiday.

Before going to sleep, Spurling outlined their work for the morrow.

"Throppy, you and I'll try our luck on Martingale Bank. It's only a half-mile northwest of the island, and sometimes you can get a big catch there. I've been saving it for a time like this. Budge, you and Percy ought to get at least a couple of hundred pounds out of those lobster-traps. They'll have been down two days and should yield some good-sized ones. Set the clock at four, Filippo! We'll be lazy for once."

Percy's sleep was broken. He dreamed of being chased along the main street of Vinalhaven by a crowd of small boys shooting at him with Roman candles. He dodged into an open doorway, only to be driven out by a giant with Jabe's face and a half-dozen pairs of arms the fists of which were studded with a double allowance of knuckles. He was fast being pounded to a pulp when the alarm-clock went off. He woke in a cold sweat.

Lying with closed eyes, he pretended to be asleep while Jim and Throppy finished a hasty breakfast. Soon the exhaust of the *Barracouta* proclaimed that they were on their way to Martingale Bank. Percy dozed, but remained conscious of Filippo's culinary operations.

At five Lane turned out, according to schedule. He shook Percy vigorously.

"Wake up, Whittington! Breakfast!"

"Don't care for mine yet."

"Aren't you going out with me to haul those traps?"

"No!" retorted Percy, sourly.

"Suit yourself!" was Lane's brief response.

Percy knew that Budge would rather go without him. He heard him give a whistle as he examined Nemo's leg; the animal cringed and whimpered.

"Poor fellow! Too bad!" sympathized Lane.

The remark was evidently intended for Percy's ears. At least the lad took it so. He felt sorry if Nemo was really hurt. Lane went out, and Percy turned over for another nap. When he next woke it was almost seven and the cabin was empty. He got up and dressed leisurely.

Looking out of the window, he saw Filippo digging clams on the flats across the cove. That meant chowder for dinner, a dish he particularly detested. He made a wry mouth and turned to the larder, but could discover nothing but some cold fish and fried potatoes. The fire had gone out, and he determined to await Filippo's return before breakfasting.

Deliberately scratching a match, he lighted a cigarette, thereby breaking the rule against smoking in the cabin. Then he stretched himself out on his bunk and began reading *The Three Musketeers*. Filippo returned before he had finished his chapter. The Italian's eyes grew round at the tobacco smoke.

"You know Misser Jim say no smoking!"

"Mister Jim isn't here now. You mind your own business and I'll mind mine. Get me some breakfast, will you?"

"Fire gone out while you sleep and everything grow cold. You bring some wood and I build another."

To Percy's still overstrained nerves Filippo's way of putting the matter suggested a condition on which the meal depended rather than a request.

"Bring it yourself!" he growled. "I'm no servant! I don't shag kindling for any Dago!"

At this insult Filippo's olive cheeks became quite pale. Into his eyes flashed a look Whittington had never seen there before. For an instant he almost feared that the young foreigner was about to seize a knife and spring upon him. Then the look passed and Filippo's color came back.

"All right!" he laughed. "No wood, no breakfast!"

Stepping out to the fish-house, he began shelling the clams he had just dug. Percy vacillated between pride and hunger. Hunger won.



"I didn't mean that, Filippo," he repented. "I beg your pardon. I'll get the wood."

He did, and Filippo heated up the fish and potatoes. Percy tried to engage him in conversation, but was able to extract only monosyllables in return. Evidently his hasty words still rankled in the Italian's breast.

Breakfast over, Percy took his book and started for the beacon. It was a beautiful July morning. The sea rippled blue and sparkling to the horizon. Budge was hauling his traps on the ledges around the base of Brimstone. A half-mile farther out Jim and Throppy were busy at their trawls. Conditions for fishing could not have been more ideal.

For a time Percy tried to read; but somehow Dumas's heroes failed to keep his interest. The sense of contrast between his own idleness and his mates' industry took all the pleasure out of his book. He tossed it aside and stood up. A motor-boat was rounding the eastern point. Percy recognized her as the *Calista*. Ordinarily he would have been glad to exchange chaff with Captain Higgins and Brad while they dipped the lobsters out of the car. This morning, however, he felt too much disgruntled to joke with anybody.

A hawk with a flapping fish clutched in its talons scaled in from the south and disappeared among the evergreens. Percy suspected that there was a nest somewhere in the scrub growth. The search for it promised just enough of novelty to keep him interested. Making a detour around the north shore, so as to keep out of sight of Captain Higgins, he began hunting for the nest in the tops of the low trees.

Two hours went by fruitlessly. It was hot and breathless in the close woods. Despite his dislike for clam chowder, Percy found himself growing hungry. At last he gave up the search in disgust, and started back for camp by the shortest route.

As he emerged into the cool breeze on the summit of the high southern shore he saw that the *Calista* still lay at anchor in the cove. Lane was alongside her in the pea-pod, while Jim and Throppy were rounding Brimstone Point in the *Barracouta*, with the dory in tow. The keenness of Percy's appetite made him careless of whether he was seen or not. He took the trail leading along the edge of the pasture. Directly below him the bank broke off in an abrupt dirt slope

seventy-five feet high, overhung by a brow of sagging turf.

Behind and above the cabin the slope was unusually steep. As Percy reached this point his eye was caught by a smoke-feather on the southern horizon. Steamers always interested him. Stopping, and shading his eyes with his hand, he gazed intently at the distant vessel. The *Barracouta* was now just entering the cove; the thudding of her exhaust echoed loudly against the barrier of earth beneath his feet.

The rapid detonations, beating upon Percy's ear-drums, drowned until too late the quick pad-pad of hoofs from the opposite direction. Engrossed in watching the steamer, he had forgotten everything else. A nasal, threatening bleat, rising suddenly behind, roused him to a sense of danger. He whirled about.

Charging straight at him, head down, only a few feet distant, old Aries, the ram, spurned the turf with drumming hoofs.

Behind lay the treeless pasture; in front the bank fell away steeply. Instant flight along the trail was Percy's only resort. He turned to run.

As he jammed his heel down hard to gain momentum for his start, the overhanging sod broke suddenly. His foot slumped, and before he could recover himself his foe was upon him.

Biff!

Struck from behind with the force of a battering-ram, Percy shot over the brink. As he fell he described a partial somersault, landing on hands and knees half-

way down the slope. His momentum carried him heels over head, and he rolled and tumbled the rest of the way, bringing up in a heap at the bottom.



He scrambled to his feet, wild with rage. Peals of mirth from the cove reached his ears. His mates and Captain Higgins, as soon as they saw that he was not seriously hurt, had doubled up with laughter. Their outburst of merriment increased Percy's fury.

A triumphant bleat resounded above. Outlined clearly against a background of blue sky, legs well apart and hoofs braced stoutly, Aries stood on the brink, gazing proudly down upon his overthrown enemy. White with wrath, Percy groped for a stone and launched it viciously. It just grazed the ram's head. The laughter from the cove redoubled.

A new idea struck Percy. Darting into the cabin, he ran out with Uncle Tom's shot-gun.

"None of that, Whittington!" bellowed Spurling.

Heedless of the shouted command, Percy clapped the gun to his shoulder and pulled first one trigger and then the other. Click! Click! Both barrels were empty. He might have remembered that so careful a fellow as Jim would never leave a loaded gun standing about. But there were a half-dozen shells in a box on the shelf. Laying the gun down, he rushed back into

the cabin.

Spurling realized what Percy was after. Springing into the dory, he sculled rapidly to the beach. He had almost reached the shore when Whittington dashed out of the door with the shells in his hands. He crammed two into the breech, while the ram gazed haughtily down upon him.

"Put that gun down!" shouted Jim as the dory grounded and he leaped out on the beach.

Up went the weapon to Percy's shoulder. His finger sought the trigger, but no report followed. The ram had vanished and the sky-line was unbroken.

Before the exasperated lad could decide on his next step Jim was at his side, clutching at stock and barrel with strong hands.

"Give it to me!"

There was a short scuffle, and the gun was wrenched from Percy's grasp.

"Let me alone, Spurling! I'll kill that brute before he's ten minutes older!"

"Oh no, you won't!" replied Jim, coolly.

Breaking open the weapon, he extracted the shells and dropped them into his pocket.

"How many of these did you bring out?"

"Never you mind!"

"Oh, well, I know how many I had. I can count 'em. They're too dangerous to be lying around loose where a hothead like you can get hold of 'em."

He took the gun into the cabin. In half a minute he was out again.

"Two missing! Hand 'em over, Whittington!"

"I won't!"

Three steps, marvelously quick for so deliberate a fellow, brought Spurling to the other's side. An iron grip compressed Percy's shoulder.

"Will you give 'em to me or shall I have to take 'em? Say quick!"

The strong, unwavering grasp brought Whittington to his senses. Thrusting his hand into his pocket, he brought out the shells. "Here they are!"

Jim bestowed them carefully inside his coat. His manner changed instantly.

"Now, Percy," said he, "pull yourself together! I don't wonder you were sore at the ram. What you got was enough to rile anybody; it would have set me hunting rocks myself. But you'll have to draw the line a long way this side of a gun. You can't blame the brute; it's his nature. And you can't blame us for laughing—we couldn't help it; you'd do the same in our place. The thing's over now. Forget it! Let's eat a good dinner, and all take hold on the fish this afternoon. We've made a whopping big catch, not much under three thousand pounds, I should say—enough, at any rate, to keep us all busy till dark. Let's bury the hatchet, handle and all, so deep that it'll never be dug up again! Shake on it!"

Whittington ignored Jim's outstretched hand. Trembling with humiliation and anger, he had all he could do to keep the tears from his eyes. Turning

away without replying, he walked eastward along the beach to the ledges. He clambered over these until he gained a spot out of sight of the cove, then threw himself down to think. His hunger had disappeared; food would have choked him.

There he lay till the middle of the afternoon, smoking moodily. When he returned to camp at three he had decided on his course of action.

All the others were aboard the *Barracouta,* at work on the fish.

Spurling hailed Percy. "Want to lend a hand, Whittington?"

"No!" refused Percy, shortly.

Entering the cabin, he made a dry lunch on cold biscuit and soda-crackers, then threw himself on his bunk and began reading. The afternoon dragged on. At five Filippo came in and began to peel potatoes and slice ham for supper; soon they were frying in the spider. The smell was pleasant in Percy's nostrils.

Half an hour later in came the others, tired and hungry. The fish had been finished. All sat down at the table, Percy, uninvited, drawing up his soap-box with the rest. Nobody said anything to him, but he ate with a relish.

The meal over, Spurling turned to him with a serious face. It was plain he had something of importance on his mind.

"Whittington," said he, "I've been talking matters over with Budge and Throppy, and we're all agreed it's time we came to an understanding. Things can't go on in this way any longer. To put the matter in a

nutshell, we can't afford to have you living off us and not working. You've got to do your share or quit. That's all there is to it."

Percy reddened with wrath. Nobody but John P. Whittington had ever dared to speak like that to him before.

"What do you mean by making such talk to me?" he demanded. "You needn't be afraid but you'll be well paid for every meal I've eaten in this old shack!"

"That isn't the point at all," said Spurling. "I gave your father fair warning what it would be when you came out here. We're not running any Waldorf!"

Percy gave a derisive laugh.

"And that's no dream!" he interjected, sarcastically.

Spurling paid no attention to the interruption.

"We're out here for work," he continued. "That means you as well as everybody else. I didn't count on you for much, but you haven't done even that."

"I've known for the last week you were trying to freeze me out," observed Percy. "It's been cold enough about this camp to make ice."

"Well, whose fault has it been?"

"You treat that little Dago better than you do me!"

"What of it? He's earning his salt, and a good deal more; and that's something your best friend couldn't accuse you of doing."

Percy's temper was fast getting the better of him.

"I'm not going to stop here to be kicked round by a

bunch of Rubes like you," he snarled. "I won't stand for it any longer. I'll give you ten dollars to set me over on Matinicus to-night."

There was a dangerous flicker in Spurling's eyes, but his voice was steady.

"You can go, and welcome, on our next trip, day after to-morrow; but we can't break into our regular work to set you across."

"No? Say twenty, then! And that's nowhere near what it'd be worth to me to be shut of you and your whole gang!"

"I'm beginning to think I did wrong in stopping that fight at Vinalhaven yesterday. Guess you needed all you got and more, too!"

In Percy's wrathful condition the reference to the pummeling he had received from Jabe came like a dash of acid in a raw wound. A flood of fury swept away his judgment.

"You beggar!" he shouted. "You dollar-squeezer! I'll teach you to talk to me, you—!"

He flung himself on Spurling with clenched fists.

So sudden and unexpected was the onslaught that there was but one thing for Jim to do, and he did it, expeditiously and accurately. Percy went over backward and fell like a log. For a moment he lay motionless, then staggered up, feeling of his face.

"What hit me?" he inquired, dazedly.

"I did—right on the point of the jaw. Sorry I had to. Feel better?"

Percy made no reply. Walking unsteadily to his bunk, he lay down. There was no violin-playing in the cabin that night.

XI

TURN OF TIDE

At half past eight that night Camp Spurling was dark and quiet. Everybody was asleep but Percy Whittington. He lay in his bunk, wide awake and thinking hard, and his thoughts were far from pleasant.

His face was still sore as a result of his battle with Jabe. His jaw ached dully from its encounter with Jim Spurling's fist. But worse than any physical pain was the smart of his wounded pride.

Life in that cramped, tarry, fishy cabin was hard enough for a fellow who had lived at the best hotels and had the cream of everything. This painful wrenching of dollars out of the sea told sorely on his tender skin and undeveloped muscles. Yet beneath the surface he had enough of his father's stubbornness to make him stick doggedly to his lot, disagreeable though it was, if only he could have felt that he was receiving the consideration due to the son of John P. Whittington.

Spurling's blow was the straw that had broken the camel's back. Percy had endured it just as long as he

could. He had reached his limit.

"I hate the whole bunch," he thought, bitterly. "Everybody's down on me, even to the dog. I won't stand it any longer. I'm going to get out to-night."

His mind once made up, he promptly began planning. He decided to take one of the boats and row up to Isle au Haut. It was a good ten miles to Head Harbor, but he felt confident he could reach it long before daybreak. Leaving the boat there, he would tramp six miles up the island and catch the early steamer for Stonington. Beyond that his plans did not go.

A flicker of light from the dying fire in the stove fell on the face of the alarm-clock ticking tinnily on the shelf. It was quarter to nine.

Percy woke to the need of acting at once. At midnight Filippo would get up to make coffee and warm the baked beans and corn-bread for Spurling and Stevens, who were to start for the hake-grounds not far from one. By that time he must be miles away —too far, at any rate, to be overtaken. Overtaken? He smiled sardonically. Not one of them, he knew, would lift a finger to prevent him from going. He could just as well set out in the daytime. But his pride shrank from the relieved faces and grudging farewells that would signalize his departure. No; it would be far better to slip away by night, without saying anything to anybody. But his going must be unobserved. It would be humiliating to be detected.

Cautiously he crept out of his bunk and pulled on his clothes, stopping apprehensively to listen for the regular breathing of his sleeping mates. But no one woke. The dying embers snapped in the stove. Nemo,

slumbering on his canvas, stirred uneasily. Yet, so stealthy were Percy's movements, not even the dog's keen ears telegraphed them to his alert brain.

A few minutes sufficed for the deserter to dress and crowd his more valuable belongings into a suit-case. Noiselessly he lifted the latch and stepped outside.

It was a lovely summer night. A southwest breeze barely rippled the sheet of sapphire under the radiant stars. Tiny wavelets broke crisply on the pebbled beach. From the boulders that fringed the point came the drowsy murmur of the surf. A sheep bleated plaintively high above in the pasture; while far over the ocean to the south floated the faint, weird cry of a gull.

The tide was more than half down, and dory and pea-pod lay high and dry on the shingle. The sloop rode at her mooring in the cove. Percy hesitated. Her engine would take him to Head Harbor in less than two hours, and save him a long, hard row. But no. Her absence would interfere seriously with pulling the trawls and lose Spurling & Company a good many dollars. Bitter though his feelings were, he did not wish to cause financial loss. He decided on the pea-pod.

Ten feet of gravel lay between her stern and the water. Grasping her gunwale, Percy dragged her inch by inch gratingly down over the shingle, every sound magnified to his ears by his dread of discovery. He worked with the caution of an escaping convict. Now and then he glanced nervously toward the cabin, but from its gloomy interior came no sign that he was seen or heard. Apparently Spurling and his mates were sleeping the sleep of the dead. At the end of five minutes the pea-pod was afloat.

Percy tossed in his suit-case and clambered hastily aboard. There was no time to waste. He wished to put as much salt water as possible between himself and Tarpaulin Island before midnight.

Shipping his oars, he began to row, using infinite care lest creaking rowlock or splashing blade betray him. Gradually he drew out of the cove, and there was less need of caution. As he rounded Brimstone Point he cast one last, long look at the cabin, square and black and silent.

The remembrance of his discomforts and indignities of the last three weeks surged over him. He shook his fist at his vanishing prison.

"Good riddance!" he muttered. "Hope I'll never set eyes again on you or the bunch inside you!"

He bent to his oars with redoubled vigor, and presently a high boulder shut out the camp. In five minutes more he had rounded the point and was pulling north on the heaving Atlantic swell.

The tide was running out strongly. It came swirling round Brimstone in rips and eddies. Percy had never before realized that its force was so great. He made a hasty calculation, and was very unpleasantly surprised to discover that he would have to pull against it for fully ninety minutes ere it turned to run the other way. He began to feel less sure of reaching Head Harbor before daybreak.

"Guess I've bitten off an all-night job," thought he, disconsolately.

But there was no help for it—unless he desired to slink back to the camp he had just abandoned with such thief-like stealth. Percy set his teeth.

"Not while I've got arms to pull with!"

Before buckling to his task he glanced about. On his left rose the familiar shores of Tarpaulin. Miles to his right and almost due west the twin lights on Matinicus Rock twinkled faintly across the sea; while behind him, a little to the west of north, shone the single star of Saddleback, a good four leagues away. The dark-blue summer sky, unmarred by the slightest cloud-fleck, was brilliant with constellations.

It was a night of nights for an astronomer or a poet, but Percy was neither. He had no eyes for the splendor that overhung him. Ten long, watery miles must be traversed before he could beach his pea-pod in the little haven behind Eastern Head. Would his arms stand the strain?

His muscles were harder and stronger than they had been in the middle of June. Likewise, his grit had strengthened with his physique.

"I'll make Head Harbor before light, if it kills me!"

Turning, he scanned the starry sky, and by means of his scanty knowledge of astronomy identified the Great Dipper. Its pointers located the North Star. Under it he knew lay Isle au Haut, now a low, black ridge on the horizon, east of Saddleback Light.

Percy settled himself on the thwart, steeled his muscles, and gripped the oars harder. Short as his inaction had been, he could see that the tide had swept him back a trifle. It was going to be no picnic, that pull in to Eastern Head!

He threw all his strength into his arms, and again the boat made headway against the tide. By degrees Tarpaulin Island fell back. Before long it lay behind

him—as he planned, forever. His anger still burned hot against Spurling and his associates.

"Treated me like a dog, the beggars! Well, who cares for 'em? Let 'em sweat out their dollars catching fish and lobsters! I'll get my cash some easier way."

The thought of money brought back the memory of his father, and with it a faint uneasiness. Up to this time, engrossed in making his escape, Percy had not troubled to look beyond the immediate future. Isle au Haut had bounded his mental as well as his optical horizon. But after that what?

Stonington ... Rockland ... Boston ... New York ... two months of living on his acquaintances ... and then—John P. Whittington!

Percy could picture the expression on the millionaire's features when he learned that his son had broken his promise and sneaked away from Tarpaulin Island, like a thief in the night. That grim face with its bulldog jaw was one any erring son well might dread, and particularly such a son as he had thus far been. John Whittington had told Percy plainly that the island was his last chance, and, whatever faults the millionaire might have, he was not the man to break his word.

For the young deserter it was liable to be out of the frying-pan and into the fire with a vengeance.

Percy had been in the frying-pan three weeks; life there, though not pleasant, had been endurable.

At any rate, he had seen the worst of it; but for his wounded pride, he could have schooled himself to withstand its hardships, for they would have been only temporary.

What the fire might have in store for him he did not know; but one thing he did know, and that was John P. Whittington!

Not unimaginably, there might be far worse places than Tarpaulin Island.

The lad's elation at his easily earned freedom vanished. The snap and vim went out of his strokes, and his speed slackened perceptibly. Though he still dragged doggedly at the oars, there was no longer any heart in his pulling.

Westward, almost in line with the beacon on Matinicus Rock, grew a fairy pyramid of twinkling lights—the Portland boat, bound for St. John. Larger, higher, brighter, nearer, until they burned, a sparkling triangle of white and red and green. Soon the steamer crossed his bow not far to the north. He could hear the rush of foam and the throbbing of her screw. Gradually she passed eastward and blended again with the horizon.

Slower and weaker fell Percy's blades, until the pea-pod was barely moving. The ebb, still running against the boat with undiminished strength, almost sufficed to hold her stationary. But, though the lad's muscles were relaxed and listless, a fierce battle was being fought out in his troubled brain.

Should he keep on or should he go back?

Go back? Return to two months more of the uncongenial drudgery from which he had been so glad to escape? Besides, he could hardly hope to drag the pea-pod up on the beach and regain his bunk without attracting the notice of somebody in the cabin. He could imagine the talk of the others when

he was out of hearing.

"Started to run away, but got cold feet and sneaked back again. Hadn't the sand to carry it through! We'd better sack him when the four weeks are up."

His futile midnight sally would only result in added humiliation.

But what if he kept on? Already more than an hour had passed. It would not be many minutes now before the tide would turn. The ebb would cease running out, and the flood would set just as strongly the other way, bearing him in toward Isle au Haut. To row with it would be an easy matter.

Head Harbor before daybreak. Boston or New York the morning after. Two months or more of easy living in the same old way. After that the deluge, *alias* John P. Whittington.

Isle au Haut or Tarpaulin Island, which should it be? Beads of sweat started on Percy's face as he wrestled out his problem.

Far more was involved than the mere question of going north or south. He had come to the parting of the ways. His whole life hung in the balance. Floating in that frail skiff on the uneasy swell, he realized that everything depended on the direction in which he swung the prow. His future lay in his oar-blades.

Under the horizon north and west stretched the coast. He closed his eyes and saw a vision of the feverish city life he knew and loved so well—lighted streets thronged with gay crowds, human banks between which flowed rivers of velvet-shod automobiles and clanging cars; hotel lobbies and

theaters and restaurants alive with men and women who had never stooped to toil; all the luxury and glare and glitter that wait upon modern wealth. This was what he was fitting himself for. What did it all amount to?

He opened his eyes and came back to the little boat, rocking gently on the undulating swells; to the lonely glory of the peaceful ocean, arched by the starry sky. A light breeze was beginning to blow from the southwest, dispersing the thin silver mist that overhung the water.

Percy glanced at his watch; it was quarter past ten, almost time for the ebb to cease and the flood to begin.

Should he keep on or go back? He must decide quickly. Already his arms were tired, and he was more than two miles north of the island. The longer he delayed his decision the harder would be his pull against the flood if he turned.

Minutes passed as he pondered, barely dipping his oars. It was slack tide now and the pea-pod just held her own. Down on the breeze floated a distant, melancholy note, the voice of the whistling buoy south of Roaring Bull Ledge, two miles from Isle au Haut. Was it an invitation or a warning?

Slowly at first, then faster, the stern of the boat swung round. The tide had turned. The flood would carry him north with but little effort on his part. Should he let himself go with it?

Percy's indecision vanished. The tide of his own life had turned, like that of the ocean; slow and doubtful though the change had been, the current was at last

setting the other way. Grasping the oar-handles tightly, he whirled the head of the pea-pod southward and started again for Tarpaulin Island.

XII

PULLING TOGETHER

The next hour and a half was anything but fun for young Whittington. His mind was set on reaching Camp Spurling before the hands of the alarm-clock came together at midnight. At any cost he must be in his bunk before the others woke.

It was a long, hard row, a battle every second with the tide running against him with untiring strength. It demanded every ounce of energy Percy possessed. His back complained dully. His arms felt as if they would drop off. Time and again he decided that the next stroke must be his last, that he must lie down in the bottom of the boat and rest; but each time he tapped some hitherto unknown reservoir of power within himself, and kept on pulling.

With the stern demand on his physical forces a change was being wrought in his brain. His foolish pride, his false sense of shame at changing his hasty plan to desert, his bitter feeling toward the others, gradually disappeared. Every oar-stroke brought him not only nearer the island, but also nearer a sane, wholesome view of life itself.

His thoughts turned naturally to the group at the camp, this clean, independent, self-respecting crowd, who cared no more for his money than for the pebbles on the beach; who estimated a fellow, not by what he had, but by what he was. After all, that was the real test; Percy could not help acknowledging it.

Saddleback glimmered astern. The whistle south of Roaring Bull was growing fainter. Percy felt encouraged. He turned his head. Yes, Tarpaulin was certainly nearer. Disheartening though the pull was, he had gained perceptibly. But the southwest breeze had stiffened, adding its opposition to that of the tide.

It was now past eleven. He had decided that he must reach the cabin not later than quarter to twelve. Barely half an hour longer! His hands were blistered, his breath came in sobs, but he dragged fiercely at the oars. At last he was stemming the strong tide-rip off Brimstone Point.

The next ten minutes were worse than all that had gone before. As he surged unevenly backward and forward, the current swung the pea-pod's bow first one way, then the other. Deaf and blind to everything but the work in hand, Percy swayed to and fro. Foot by foot the boat crept round the fringing surf at the base of the bluffs.

Hands seemed to be plucking at her keel, holding her back. It was no use. They were too strong for him. All at once their grasp weakened. He glanced up with swimming eyes. He had passed the eddy, and the entrance of the cove was near. A few strokes more and the pea-pod grounded on the beach. It was twenty minutes to twelve!

Percy staggered up to the cabin. All was dark and quiet. Gently lifting the latch, he slipped inside, pulled the door to again, and stood listening. The regular breathing of his sleeping mates reassured him. Compelling himself to walk noiselessly to his bunk, he crept under his blanket without even taking off his shoes.

He had been gone three hours; and they had been the most momentous hours of his life.

Kling-ng-ng-ng-ng ...

Off went the clock. It was midnight. Muttering drowsily, Filippo slid out of his bunk, checked the alarm, and lighted a lamp. Then he busied himself with his cooking-utensils.

The last thing Percy heard was a spoon clinking against a pan. Dead tired, he turned his face to the wall and fell asleep.

It was eight in the morning before he woke. What had made his arms and back so lame and raised those big blisters on his hands? Percy remembered. He lay for a few minutes, his eyes shut. An unpleasant duty was before him, and he must be sure to do it right.

Aching in every joint, he rolled out at last and stood up stiffly. Filippo, who was washing the breakfast dishes, turned at the sound. His face was neither hostile nor friendly.

"Your breakfast in oven," said he. "Sit down and I get it."

He set before Percy a plate of smothered cod and a half-dozen hot biscuits. It was more thoughtfulness

than Percy had expected.

"Much obliged, Filippo," he said, gratefully.

Filippo made no reply to this acknowledgment; but, as Percy ate, he could feel the young Italian watching him curiously. It was the first time Whittington had ever thanked him, and he did not understand it.

After he had finished eating, Percy took his plate, knife, and fork to the sink.

"Let me wash these, Filippo," he said.

"No," returned the Italian, "I do it."

But a look of surprise crossed his face. What had come over the millionaire's son?

Percy spent the rest of the forenoon on the ledges. At noon he came back to the cabin. He had steeled himself for the task before him, and he was not the fellow to do things half-way. The John P. Whittington in him was coming out.

Everybody else was in camp when he stepped inside. Lane did not look at him at all. Spurling and Stevens nodded coolly. Percy drew a long breath and launched at once into the brief speech he had spent the last three hours dreading.

"Fellows," he stammered, "I've been pretty rotten to all of you. There's no need of wasting any more words about that. Last night I took one of the boats and started to row up to Isle au Haut. But I got to thinking matters over out there on the water, and it changed my mind about a lot of things. So I came back. Jim, I want to apologize to you for what I said last night. I deserved what you gave me, and it's

done me good. I want to stay here with you for the rest of the summer—if you're willing. I'll try to do my full share of the work. You can send me off the first time I shirk."

He ceased and awaited the verdict, looking eagerly from one to the other. There was a moment of silence. Surprise was written large on the faces of the three Academy men. Then Spurling stepped forward and held out his hand.

"Percy," said he, with a break in his voice, "I've always thought you had the right stuff in you, if you'd only give yourself half a chance. For one, I'll be more than pleased to have you stop. What do you say, boys?"

He glanced toward Lane and Stevens.

"Sure!" exclaimed Lane, heartily; and Stevens seconded him.

The boys shook hands all round; and they sat down to the table with good appetites. Everybody enjoyed the meal.

"Boys," said Jim as they got up at its close, "this is the best dinner we've had since we came out here."

Percy's heart warmed toward the speaker. He knew that it was not the food alone that made Jim say what he did.

It had been Percy's habit to smoke three or four cigarettes during the half-hour of rest all were accustomed to take after the noon meal. He went, as usual, to his suit-case, and this time took out, not merely one package, but all he had, including his sack of loose tobacco and two books of wrappers.

"Got a good fire, Filippo?" he inquired, approaching the stove.

A burst of flame answered him as he lifted the cover. In went the whole handful. He watched it burn for a moment before dropping the lid.

"I'm done with you for good," he said.

As Lane and Spurling started for the *Barracouta* to dress the fifteen hundred pounds of hake they had taken off the trawls that morning Percy joined them, clad in oilskins.

"Jim," he petitioned, "I want you to teach me how to split fish."

"Do you mean it, Percy?" asked Spurling.

"You heard what I said this noon about shirking. I'm through with dodging any kind of work just because it's unpleasant. I want to take my part with the rest of you."

"I'll teach you," said Jim.

He did, and found that he had an apt pupil. Percy worked until the last pound of the fifteen hundred was salted down in the hogshead. He discovered that it was not half so bad as it had looked, and felt ashamed that he had not tried his hand at the trick before.

"You've earned your supper to-night," observed Jim.

"Yes; but I'm glad it's something besides fish."

"You'll get so you won't mind it after a while."

That night Throppy played his violin and the boys sang. They passed a pleasant hour before going to

bed.

"I'd like to go out with you to the trawls, Jim, to-morrow morning," said Percy.

"Glad to have you," responded Spurling, heartily.

Two hours before light they were gliding out of the cove in the *Barracouta*, bound for Medrick Shoal, four miles to the eastward.

"Percy," said Jim as the sloop rolled rhythmically on the long Atlantic swells, "I want to tell you something. I was awake the other night when you left camp. I watched you row north and come back; and I saw the hard fight you had round Brimstone. I'm glad you made a clean breast of the whole thing, even when you thought nobody knew anything about it. It showed me you intended to turn over a new leaf and play fair. You'll find that we'll meet you half-way, and more."

Percy was silent for a moment.

"Glad I didn't know you heard me go out," he remarked. "If I had I might not have had the courage to come back. Well, I've learned my lesson. From now on I'll try not to give you fellows any reason to find fault with me."

Medrick Shoal yielded a good harvest. About eighteen hundred pounds of hake lay in the pens on the *Barracouta* when they started for home at ten o'clock. As they took the last of their gear aboard, a schooner with auxiliary power, apparently a fisherman, approached from the eastward.

"The *Cassie J.*," read Spurling, deciphering the letters on the bow. "Somehow she looks natural, but I don't

remember ever hearing that name before. Probably from Gloucester. Wonder what she wants of us."

The vessel slowed down and changed her course until she was running straight toward the *Barracouta*. One of her crew stood in the bow, near the starboard anchor; another held the wheel; but nobody else was visible.

"Where are you from, boys?" hailed the lookout, when the stranger was only a few yards off.

"Tarpaulin Island," answered Spurling.

The man put his hand behind his ear.

"Say that again louder, will you?" he shouted. "I'm a little deaf."

Jim raised his voice.

"I said we were from Tarpaulin Island."

The lookout passed the word back to the helms-man. The latter repeated it, evidently for the benefit of somebody in the cabin. Then the man at the wheel took up the conversation, prompted by the low voice of an unseen speaker below.

"How many fish have you got there?"

"Eighteen hundred of hake."

"What's that?"

Was everybody aboard hard of hearing? Jim raised his voice.

"Eighteen hundred of hake!"

"What'll you take for 'em just as they are? We'll give

you fifty cents a hundred."

"Can't trade with you for any such figure as that."

"Good-by, then!"

The tip of the *Cassie J.'s* bowsprit was less than two yards from the port bow of the *Barracouta*, altogether too near for comfort.

"Keep off!" roared Spurling. "You'll run us down!"

The steersman whirled his wheel swiftly in the apparent endeavor to avert a collision. Unluckily, he whirled it the wrong way. Round swung the schooner's bow, directly toward the sloop. A few seconds more and she would be forced down beneath the larger vessel's cutwater, ridden under.

Only Jim's coolness prevented the catastrophe. The instant he saw the *Cassie J.* turn toward his boat he flung his helm to port. The sloop, under good headway, responded more quickly than the schooner. For a moment the bowsprit of the latter seesawed threateningly along the jibstay of the smaller craft. Then the two drew apart.

Jim was white with anger. It was only by the greatest good fortune that the *Barracouta* had escaped.

"What do you mean, you lubber?" he cried. "Can't you steer?"

"Jingo! but that was a close shave!" responded the man at the wheel. "I must have lost my head for a minute."

The mock concern in his face and voice would have been evident to Spurling without the lurking grin that accompanied his reply. An angry answer was on

the tip of Jim's tongue. He choked it down. Soon the two craft were some distance apart.

On the *Cassie J.* a man's head rose stealthily above the slide of the companionway. He fastened a steady gaze on the sloop. The distance was now too great for the boys to distinguish his features, but a sudden idea struck Jim. He slapped his thigh.

"Percy!" he exclaimed. "Do you remember the two fellows we caught stealing sheep the first night we were on Tarpaulin? I feel sure as ever I was of anything in my life that they're both on board that schooner. That's Captain Bart Brittler, sticking his head out of the companionway; and Dolph's somewhere below."

"But what are they doing on the *Cassie J.*? Their vessel was named the *Silicon.*"

"They're one and the same craft! I'm certain of it. I recognize her rig now, even if it was night when I saw her the first time. As for the name, it's only paint-deep, anyway; you can see that those letters look fresh. Of course it's an offense against the law to make a change, but such a little thing as breaking a law wouldn't trouble a man like Brittler."

"Do you think they tried to run us down?"

"Not a doubt of it! Brittler and Dolph stayed below, afraid we might recognize 'em. They didn't see our faces that night, so they don't know how we look; but they tried to make me talk enough so that they might recognize my voice. Guess that lookout's not so deaf as he pretended to be! Once Brittler felt sure who it was, he gave orders to the wheelman to run over us. He'd have done it, too, if I hadn't seen the

schooner's bow start swinging the wrong way."

The *Cassie J.* slowly outdistanced the sloop. By the time the stranger was a quarter-mile off six or seven men had appeared on her deck.

"Feel it's safe for 'em to come up now," commented Spurling. "Wonder what they're cruising along the coast for, anyway! Something easier and more crooked than fishing, I guess! Here's hoping they steer clear of Tarpaulin!"

At dinner that noon the boys related their narrow escape to the others, and all agreed it would be well to keep a sharp lookout for Brittler and his gang.

"They've got a grudge against us, fast enough," said Lane. "They intend to even matters up if they can find the chance."

That afternoon Percy again wielded the splitting-knife.

"You'll soon get the knack of it," approved Jim. "Don't pitch in too hard at first. Later on, after you grow used to it, you can work twice as fast, and it won't tire you half so much."

In dressing a fifteen-pound hake Percy came upon a mass of feathers in the stomach. He was about to throw them aside, when a silvery glint caught his eye.

"What's that?" he exclaimed.

Rinsing the mass in a pail of water, he picked from it the foot of a bird; round its slender ankle was a little band of German silver or aluminum, bearing the inscription, "U43719." He held it up for the others to inspect.

"That's the foot of a carrier-pigeon!" said Throppy. "I know a fellow at home who makes a specialty of raising 'em. The bird that owned this foot was taking a message to somebody. Perhaps he was shot; or he may have become tired, lost his way, and fallen into the water, and the hake got him."

They looked at the little foot with the white-metal band.

"My uncle Tom was fishing once in eighty fathoms off Monhegan," Spurling remarked, "and pulled up an odd-patterned, blue cup of old English ware. The hook caught in a 'blister,' a brown, soft, toadstool thing, that had grown over the cup. He's got it on his parlor mantel now."

"I'll keep this foot as a souvenir," said Percy.

They finished the hake shortly after four. Percy shed his oil-clothes, went into the camp, and reappeared with his sweater. Going down to the ledges, he pulled off a big armful of rockweed. This he stuffed into the sweater, and tied it together, making a close bundle. The others watched him curiously.

"What are you going to do with that?" inquired Lane.

Percy smiled, but there was a glitter of determination in his eyes.

"I'll tell you some time," was all the reply he vouchsafed.

Taking the bundle, now somewhat larger than a football, he climbed the steep path at the end of the bank, and started for the woods.

"I'll be home before supper," he flung back as he disappeared beyond the crest of the bluff.

In less than an hour he was back, bringing the sweater minus the rockweed. His face was flushed, and streaked with lines where the perspiration had run down it, and he was breathing hard. Evidently he had been through some sort of strenuous physical exercise.

"It's all right, boys," he said, in response to their chaffing. "Just a little secret between me and myself. No, I'm not trying to reduce the size of my head. Later on you'll know all about it."

And with that they had to be content.

XIII

FOG-BOUND

Dog-Days began about the 20th of July. Before that the dwellers in Camp Spurling had experienced occasional spells of fog, but nothing very dense or long-continued. Now they got a taste of the real thing. They were dressing fish on the *Barracouta* one afternoon when a cold wind struck from the southeast.

Spurling held up his hand.

"We're in for it!" said he. "Feel that? Right off the Banks! In less than an hour we'll need a compass to get ashore in the dory."

He was so nearly right that there was no fun in it.

The wind hauled more to the east, and in its wake came driving a gray, impenetrable wall. The ocean vanished. The points on each side of the cove were swallowed up. Quickly disappeared the cove itself, the beach, the camp and fish-house, and the bank beyond them. The sloop was blanketed close in heavy mist.

Jim made a pretense of scooping a handful out of the air and shaping it like a snowball.

"Here you go, Budge!" he exclaimed. "Straight to third! Put it on him! Fresh from the factory in the Bay of Fundy! If this holds on until midnight, we won't be able to see outside our eyelids when we start trawling; there's no moon."

"Will you go, if it's thick as it is now?" inquired Lane.

"Sure! Here's where the compass comes in. If we stayed ashore for every little fog-mull, we wouldn't catch many hake the next six weeks. This isn't a circumstance to what it is sometimes. I've known it to hang on for two weeks at a stretch. Ever hear the story of the Penobscot Bay captain who started out on a voyage round the world? Just as he got outside of Matinicus Rock he shaved the edge of a fog-bank, straight up and down as a wall. He pulled out his jack-knife and pushed it into the fog, clean to the handle. When he came back, two and a half years later, there was his knife, sticking in the same spot. He tried to pull it out, but the blade was so badly rusted that it broke, and he had to leave half of it stuck in the hole."

"Must have had some fog in those days!" was Lane's comment. "Did you say this all comes from the Bay of Fundy?"

"Not all of it. Fog both blows and makes up on the spot. Sometimes it rises out of the water like steam. I've heard my uncle say that Georges Bank makes it as a mill makes meal. It's worst in August. Then the smoke from shore fires mingles with it; and the wind from the land blowing off, and that from the sea blowing in, keep it hazy along the coast all summer."

Jim's predictions proved correct, as they generally did. While there were occasional stretches of fine weather during the next few weeks, the fog either hovered on the horizon or lurked not far below it, ready to bury the island at the slightest provocation in the way of an east or southeast wind. Despite its presence, the routine of trawling and lobstering went on as usual. Every Friday came the regular trip to Matinicus to dispose of the salted fish and procure groceries, gasolene, and salt, as well as newspapers and mail.

On each of these visits Percy always weighed himself on the scales at the general store. Beginning at one hundred and thirty-five, he climbed steadily, pound by pound, toward one hundred and fifty. An active, out-of-door life, combined with regular hours and a simple, wholesome diet, together with the exclusion of cigarettes, resulted inevitably in increasing weight and strength. At the close of each afternoon he climbed the bluff with his sweater stuffed with rockweed. The others joked him considerably about these mysterious trips, but failed to extract any information from him regarding them. When he chose, Percy could be as close-mouthed as his father.

At about this time a letter from the millionaire reached his son through the Matinicus office. It bore the postmark of San Francisco, and ran as follows:

DEAR PERCY,—Stick to
it.
Affectionately,
JOHN P. WHITTINGTON.

It actually surprised Percy to find out how glad he was to receive this laconic epistle from his only living relative. He cast about for a suitable reply.

"I want to send something that'll please him," he thought. "He hasn't had much satisfaction, so far, out of me."

Finally, after mature deliberation, he indited the following:

DEAR DAD,—I'm sticking.
Your affectionate son,
PERCY.

The Three Musketeers gathered dust on the wooden shelf. Percy had faced squarely the fact of his college conditions, and had determined that they must be made up at the opening of the fall term; so his spare time went into Virgil and Cæsar and algebra and geometry, instead of being spent on Dumas. He rarely asked for assistance from the others; they had little leisure, and it was his own fight. He buckled down manfully.

Another task that he set before himself was the establishment of cordial relations with the other members of the party. He realized that his own fault had made this necessary. It had been an easy matter to get on good terms with Jim, Budge, and Throppy. With Filippo it was a little harder; but soon he, too, thawed out when he found that Percy treated him courteously and was willing to do his share of the

camp work. Even Nemo wagged his tail when Percy appeared, and the crow grew tame enough to eat fish out of his hand.

One afternoon, when the fog had lifted sufficiently to make it possible to see a few hundred feet from the island, a motor-boat unexpectedly appeared from the north and swung round Brimstone Point into the cove. She ran up alongside the *Barracouta*, where the boys were baiting their trawl.

"I'm the warden," said one of the two newcomers, a gray-mustached, keen-eyed man. "I've come to look over your car."

Jim took his dip-net and stepped into the motor-boat, and they ran up to the lobster-car. A few minutes' investigation of its contents satisfied the official that it contained no "shorts."

"Glad to be able to give you a clean bill of health," said he as he set Jim back on board the sloop. "I wish some other people I know of did business as clean and aboveboard as you young fellows."

A quarter-hour later the sound of his exhaust had died away in the fog to the northward.

"What would he have done if he'd found any 'shorts'?" asked Percy.

"Fined us a dollar for every one," answered Jim. "Taken the cream off the summer, wouldn't it? Sometimes it pays, even in dollars and cents, to be honest."

The next morning was hot and muggy. The sea about the island was clear of fog for one or two miles. Jim and Budge had started long before light to set the

trawl, and Throppy wished to make some changes on his wireless; so Filippo was glad enough of the chance to go out with Percy to haul the lobster-traps.

The little Italian had lost much of his melancholy. He enjoyed his work and the good-fellowship of the camp. The weeks of association with his new friends had made of him an entirely different fellow from the lonely, homesick lad they had picked up on the steamboat wharf at Stonington.

The two boys started in the pea-pod at six o'clock. A glassy calm overspread the sea. Even the perpetual ocean swell seemed to have lost much of its force.

"I'll row!" volunteered Percy.

He stripped off his oil-coat and sweater and rolled up his shirt-sleeves.

"It'll be hot up in the granite quarries to-day, hey, Filippo? S'pose you're sorry not to be there?"

"*Io sono contento*" ("I am satisfied"), replied the Italian.

Hauling and rebaiting the hundred-odd traps was a good five hours' job and more for the couple, neither of whom had ever handled a small boat or seen a live lobster before the previous month. As the forenoon advanced the air seemed to grow thicker and more breathless. Over the water brooded a languid haze, through which the sun rays burned with a moist, intense heat.

Percy's bare arms began to grow red and painful.

"Feel as if they were being scalded," he complained. "I've heard Jim say a fog-burn was worse than any other kind. Now I know he's right."

Eleven o'clock, and still twenty-five traps to be pulled. Most of these were on the Dog and Pups, a group of ledges more than a mile northeast of the island. It was the best spot for lobsters anywhere about Tarpaulin. Percy hesitated.

"Fog seems to be closing in a little," he observed, "and we haven't any compass. Should hate to get out there and have it shut down thick. Might be hard work to find the island again."

He glanced at the tub of lobsters.

"If the Dog and Pups keep up anywhere near their average, we'll beat the record. What d'you say, Filippo? Shall we take a chance and surprise the rest of 'em?"

Filippo flashed his white teeth.

"I go with you," he smiled.

"Then go it is!" decided Percy.

He headed the pea-pod for the Dog and Pups.

"We'll keep a sharp lookout, and if it starts to grow anyways thick we'll strike back for old Tarpaulin."

A pull of about twenty minutes brought them to the ledges, around which the traps were set in a circle. They began hauling at the point in the circumference nearest to the island, following the buoys west and north. The catch exceeded their hopes.

"We'll need another tub, if this keeps up," chuckled Percy.

Filippo laughed jubilantly. The fog was forgotten. Their entire attention was centered on the contents

of each trap as it was pulled.

Round on the edge of the circle farthest from the island a pot refused to leave bottom. Percy tugged till he was red in the face, but he could not start it.

"Catch hold with me, Filippo!" he puffed.

The Italian joined his strength to Percy's, but to no avail. The slacker still clung to the bottom. The boys straightened up, panting.

"We'll have to leave it," acknowledged Percy, disappointedly. "Probably there's half a dozen two-pound lobsters in it."

He looked about and gave a startled cry.

"Where's the island?"

The wooded bluffs of Tarpaulin had disappeared. While they had been wrestling with the stubborn trap the fog had stolen a march on them. On all sides loomed a horizon of gray mist, not a half-mile distant and steadily drawing nearer. They must locate the island and get back to it at once.

Percy tossed over the buoy and the warp at which they had been pulling. Tarpaulin lay southwest; but which way was southwest? Busied with the trap, he had utterly lost all sense of direction. The sun? He glanced hopefully up. No; that would not help any. The fog was too dense. Ha! The surf?

"Listen hard, Filippo!" he exhorted.

They strained their ears. No sound. The swell was so gentle that it did not break on the ledges of the island loudly enough to be heard a mile and a quarter off. The heaving circle of which they were

the center was contracting fast. Its misty walls were now less than five hundred feet away.

"Guess we'd better take a buoy aboard, and hang to it till Jim comes out to hunt us up. It'd make me feel cheap to do it, but it's the only safe way. But wait! What's that?"

Both listened again. A sound reached their ears, plain and unmistakable, the rote of dashing water.

"There's the surf!" rejoiced Percy. "Don't you hear it?"

"*Si*, I hear it," answered Filippo.

Dropping the buoy he had just gaffed, Percy took the oars and began rowing hard toward the sound, which gradually grew louder. The fog came on with a rush, sliding over them like an avalanche. It was hardly possible to see beyond the tips of the oar-blades.

"Lucky we can hear that surf!" said Percy, comfortably. "But strange it sounds so loud and so near."

Now it was close ahead. He stopped rowing, puzzled. A blast of cold air smote them. Suddenly there was a rushing all around. It was not the surf at all, but waves, breaking before the coming wind. They were lost in the fog!

Percy faced Filippo blankly. For a moment his head went round. With bitter regret he now realized that in dropping the buoy he had given up a certainty for an uncertainty that might cost them dearly. But nothing was to be gained by yielding to discouragement. He reviewed his scanty stock of sea lore.

"That wind is probably blowing from some point

between northeast and southeast. If we turn around, and run straight before it, we'll be likely to hit the island."

He swung the pea-pod stern to the breeze.

"Here goes! Watch out sharp for lobster-buoys, Filippo!"

But no buoys appeared. They might pass within ten feet of one and never see it. Five, ten, twenty, thirty minutes passed; and still no sign of Tarpaulin. The wind was becoming stronger, the waves higher; their rushing was now loud enough to drown the sound of any surf that might be breaking on the ledges of the island. Percy rowed for a quarter-hour longer, dread plucking at his heart-strings. At last he rested on his oars.

"We've missed it," he acknowledged, despondently.

They were lost now in good earnest. It was one o'clock. The fog hung over them like a heavy gray pall, so damp and thick that it was almost stifling. Percy turned the pea-pod bow to the wind and began rowing again.

"We must try to hold our own till it clears up," he observed, with attempted cheerfulness.

But his tones lacked conviction. It might not clear for two or three days. By degrees his strokes lost their force, until the oars were barely dipping. The boat was going astern fast.

Two o'clock. Long ere this Jim and Budge must have returned from trawling and realized that the pea-pod and its occupants were lost. They were probably searching for them now, perhaps miles away on the

other side of the island, wherever it might be.

A gruff bark startled them. A round, black, whiskered head suddenly thrust up out of the water close to the port gunwale. Filippo cried out in alarm, but Percy reassured him.

"Only a seal!"

Abruptly the sea grew rough. All around them tossed and streamed and writhed long, black aprons of kelp. They were passing over a sunken ledge. Soon it lay behind them; the kelp vanished and the waves grew lower.

Three o'clock went by; then four. The afternoon was waning. The thick, woolly gray that surrounded them assumed a more somber shade. Night was coming, pitchy and starless, doubly so for the two lost boys, adrift on the open ocean.

Hark! What was that? They both heard it, far distant, off the port bow! Percy leaped up in excitement.

"The shot-gun!" he cried. "They're signaling!"

Heading the boat toward the sound, he rowed his hardest, while Filippo strained forward, listening. Ten minutes dragged by, and once again—*pouf!*—slightly louder, and slightly to starboard. Percy corrected his course and again threw his whole heart into his rowing.

So it went for an hour, the signals sounding at ten-minute intervals, each louder and nearer than the one before. At last Percy thought it possible that their voices might be heard against the wind. He stopped rowing.

"Now shout, Filippo!"

Their cries pealed out together. They were heard. An answering hail came back. Soon the puff-puff-puff of the *Barracouta's* exhaust was driving rivets through the fog. A little later they were on board the sloop, answering the inquiries of Jim and Budge, while the empty pea-pod towed astern.

"Your seamanship wasn't bad, Perce," was Jim's judgment. "After you dropped the buoy, and then found you'd been rowing into the teeth of the wind, it might have been better to have tried only to hold your own until we came out to look you up. That breeze at first was nearer north than northeast, and when you ran before it you went south past the island. After that you were all at sea. But I might have done just the same thing. I can't tell you, though, how glad we are to see you back, even if it did cost next to our last shell of birdshot. The Gulf of Maine's a pretty homesick place to be kicking round in on a foggy night."

"You aren't any gladder than we are," replied Percy.

He glanced at the pea-pod towing astern.

"But say, Jim! Just cast your eye over that tub. When it comes to catching lobsters, haven't Filippo and I got the rest of the bunch beat to a frazzle?"

XIV

SWORDFISHING

All through July the Tarpaulin Islanders had been troubled with dogfish. Beginning with a few scattering old "ground dogs," which apparently live on the banks the year round, they had become more and more numerous as the month advanced. Bait was stripped from the hooks; fish on the trawl were devoured until only heads and backbones were left; and the robbers themselves were caught in increasing numbers. At last their depredations became unbearable.

Jim and Percy had made a set one foggy morning on Medrick Shoal. When the trawl came up it was a sight to make angels weep. For yards at a stretch the hooks were bare or bitten off. Then came "dogs" of all sizes from "garter-dogs," or "shoe-strings," a foot long, to full-grown ten-pounders of about a yard. Mingled with them was an occasional lonesome skeleton of a haddock, cusk, or hake.

"Look at the pirate!" said Jim.

Grasping a ganging well above the hook, he held the fish up for Percy's inspection. It was two feet long, of a dirty gray color, slim, shark-shaped, with mouth underneath. Before each of the two fins on its back projected a sharp horn.

"Think of buying perfectly good herring at Vinalhaven, and freighting 'em way down here to feed a thing like that!" mourned Jim. "He's the meanest thief that ever grew fins. Swims too slow to catch a fish that's free; but good-by to anything that's hooked, if he's round. He'll gouge out a piece as big as a baseball at every bite. I'd hate to fall overboard in a school of 'em."

"Don't touch him!" he warned, hastily, as Percy

reached out an investigating hand. "He'll stick those horns into you, and they're rank poison."

"Aren't dogfish good for anything?" asked Percy.

"Not a thing! No, I'll take that back. They can be ground up for fertilizer; their livers are full of oil; and their skin makes the finest kind of sandpaper for cleaning or polishing metal without scratching it. They've been canned, too, under the name of grayfish; but no fisherman'd ever eat 'em; he knows 'em too well."

Rod after rod of trawl yielded the same results.

"I'm almost tempted to save my buoys and anchors, and cut all the rest away," announced Jim in disgust. "I've known it to be done. They wear the line out, sawing across it. But I guess the best way is to save what we can and stop fishing for a while. Sometimes they come square-edged, like a stone wall, just as they have this morning; and in a few days they'll have gone somewhere else. Hope it'll be that way this time!"

It was almost noon before the whole trawl was aboard. It had yielded barely two hundred pounds of hake.

"Tell you what!" exclaimed Jim as he looked at his compass and headed the *Barracouta* westward through the fog for home, "we'll put the trawl in the house for a few days, and fit up for swordfishing. There's a good ground fifteen miles south of the island. I've been down there with Uncle Tom. If we could get some fair-sized fish, it'd be worth our while to take 'em into Rockland."

That afternoon they mustered their swordfish gear.

In the house were three or four of the wrecked coaster's mast-hoops. One of these Jim lashed to the sloop's jibstay, about waist-high above the end of the bowsprit.

"That'll do for the pulpit!"

Near the jaws of the gaff he nailed a little board seat, rigged like a bracket on a roof for shingling. On this the lookout could sit, his arm round the mast, watching for fins.

"Now for a harpoon!"

Across the rafters inside the house lay a hard-pine pole eighteen feet long, ending in a tapering two-foot iron. Strung on a fish-line hanging from a spike were a half-dozen swordfish darts. These were sharp, stubby metal arrows, all head and tail and no body, with a socket cast on one side to admit the top of the pole-iron. Back of the arrow-head was a hole, through which was fastened the buoy-line.

"Righto!" exclaimed Jim. "Now when the fog clears we'll be ready to do business."

That very night the mists scaled away before a brisk north wind. Morning showed the sea clear for miles, though a fleecy haze still blurred the southern and eastern horizon.

"We'll take this chance," decided Jim. "May not get a better. Remember it's dog-days!"

At five o'clock they started south. Before eight they were on the swordfish-grounds. The wind, blowing against the long ocean swell, raised a fairly heavy sea. Though the day was clear, they could still feel the fog in the air.

Jim allotted the company their several stations.

"Budge, you swarm up to that seat on the gaff and watch out for fins! Throppy, you steer as Budge tells you! Stand by to take the dory, Perce, and go after any fish I'm lucky enough to iron. Filippo, be ready to throw that buoy and coil of warp off the starboard bow the minute I make a strike. I'll get out in the pulpit with the harpoon. Keep alive, everybody! We're liable to run across something any minute."

Perched aloft, Budge scanned the tossing, glittering sea. His keen eye detected a triangular, black membrane steering leisurely through the waves a hundred yards ahead.

"Fin on the starboard bow! Keep her off, Throppy!"

In a short time the *Barracouta* was close behind the unconscious fish.

From the bowsprit end burst a shout of disgust:

"No good! I can see him plain! Tail's too limber! Only a shark! Swing her off, Throppy!"

"How can I tell a shark from a swordfish?" Budge called down to Jim.

"Shark's back fin is shorter and broader, and he keeps his tail-fluke whacking from side to side. Swordfish has two steady fins, stiff as shingles; front one is long and slender and curves back on a crook; the after one is the upper tail-fluke. Try again!"

Five minutes passed. Then an excited yell:

"Fin to port!"

Following Budge's shouted directions, the sloop gave

chase. Soon they were near their quarry.

"Swordfish!" breathlessly announced Jim. "And a big one! Put me on top of him, Budge!"

Leaning against the mast-hoop that encircled his waist, he lifted the long lance and poised it for the blow. The tail of the fish was almost under his feet when he launched the harpoon with all his strength.

Unluckily, at just that moment the sloop dipped and met a big sea squarely. Her bowsprit dove under, burying Jim almost breast-deep, spoiling his aim. The dart struck the fish a glancing blow on the side of the shoulder. Off darted their frightened game.

Jim gave a cry of disappointment.

"Too bad! Ten feet, if he was an inch! Well, better luck next time!"

A quarter-hour passed. Budge strained his eyes, but no fin! The breeze was shifting to the northeast. Jim cast a practised eye about the horizon.

"If the wind swings round much farther it'll bring the fog again. See anything, Budge?"

"No—yes! Up to starboard! Right, Throppy! Keep her as she is!"

The fish was swimming at a moderate rate, and the sloop had no trouble in catching up with him. The two stiff fins betrayed him.



LEANING AGAINST THE MAST-HOOP THAT ENCIRCLED HIS WAIST LIFTED THE LONG LANCE AND POISED IT FOR THE BLOW

"Swordfish all right!" muttered Jim. "Not quite so big as the other one, but too good to lose! Steady, Throppy!"

Foot by foot the *Barracouta's* bowsprit forged up on their prospective prey. Nobody spoke. Jim's grip on the pine staff tightened; his eye measured the distance to the dull-blue shoulder.

Six inches further ... five ... four ... three ... two ... one ... *now!*

With all his might he drove the harpoon downward, straight for its mark. There was a tremendous flurry, and down went the fish, leaving a trail of blood.

"Got him that time! Right through the shoulder! Over with that warp and barrel, Filippo!"

The Italian obeyed, his eyes wide as saucers. Soon the coils of the fifty-fathom lobster-warp had straightened out in the wake of the terrified fugitive, and the red buoy danced off over the wave-crests.

"He's up to you, Perce!" shouted Jim. "Go after him! Only be sure to remember what I told you coming out. Keep your eye on the barrel! Haul it aboard as soon as you can, and coil in the warp. Don't get snarled up in it if he starts running again."

Percy drew the dory alongside and jumped in. Meanwhile the harpoon staff was dragged aboard by the line attached to it, the pole-iron having pulled out of the socket in the dart when the fish was struck. Jim stuck on a fresh dart, attached to another warp and buoy, and was ready for a second strike.

"Pass Percy that lance, Filippo!" he ordered.

"He may need it to keep off the sharks."

The Italian handed to Whittington a short, stout pole, on its end a two-foot iron rod, flattened to a point shaped like a tablespoon, and filed to razor sharpness. Percy set out in pursuit of the red barrel, now almost two hundred yards to starboard.

"Another fin to port!" hailed Budge; and the *Barracouta* sheered off in quest of a second prize.

For the first few minutes, though Percy rowed his prettiest, he could not hold his own with the moving barrel. Each glance over his shoulder showed that it was farther away. He bent stoutly to his oars. The sloop was heading in the opposite direction, and the distance between them widened rapidly. The wind had veered still further to the east and the fog hung more thickly on the horizon.

The barrel was nearer. At last he had begun to gain on it. He rowed with renewed vigor. Either the fish was tiring out or had stopped swimming altogether. Presently the dory bumped against the keg.

Pulling in his oars and dropping them over the thwarts, he sprang forward and gaffed the buoy. A moment later he had lifted it aboard and was pulling in the warp.

The first ten feet came over the gunwale without any resistance; then he had to surge against the sag of a dead weight. The fish had either given up the ghost or was too exhausted to struggle.

Fifty fathoms is a long distance to drag two hundred pounds. Percy's arms began to ache before he had coiled in half the warp. Then he was treated to a surprise.

Several feet of line jerked through his hands. The fish had come to life again!

Percy closed his grip on the strands, but soon let them slip to avoid being pulled overboard. He started to make the line fast, but remembered Spurling's caution against the danger of tearing the dart out of his prey. So he tossed the barrel over again and began rowing after it.

After traveling a few rods, it stopped. Once more he took it aboard and began coiling in the warp. This time the fish must surely be spent. But no! Thirty fathoms had crossed the gunwale when the rope was whisked from his hands with even more violence than before.

Taken completely by surprise, Percy was wrenched forward. He hung for a moment over the side, twisted himself back in a strong effort to regain his balance, and incautiously planted his foot inside the unlaying coil. A turn whipped round his ankle, and he was snatched overboard, feet first.

Before he could make a motion to free himself he was plowing rapidly along under water. His first panic passed. Unless he wished to drown, he must somehow clear his foot of that vise-like grip. And whatever he did must be done at once.

He tried to reach his ankle, but the rate at which he was traveling straightened out his body, and he could not bend it against the water rushing by him. The warp leading back to the dory trailed across his face. He felt his way down it, hand over hand, to his ankle.

There was a terrible pressure on his chest, a roaring in his ears; he was strangling. He could not hold his breath ten seconds longer.

Bent almost double, he grasped the taut line beyond his foot, first with one hand, then with both, and flung his whole weight suddenly on it in a desperate pull.

The strain round his ankle eased, the rope loosened. Kicking vigorously, he freed himself from the loop.

Then he let go of the warp and quickly rose to the surface.

Percy was a good swimmer. He cleared the water from his mouth and nose, paddled easily while he drew two or three long breaths, then raised himself and looked around.

Twenty yards away the dory bobbed aimlessly, the rope still running at a rapid rate over its gunwale. As Percy rose on a wave he caught a glimpse of the *Barracouta* more than a mile off; engrossed in the chase of the second fish, her crew had probably not observed his mishap. He turned his eyes back to the dory at the very moment that the warp ran out to its full length and the barrel was whirled overboard.

Its red bilge flung the spray aloft as it towed rapidly toward him. Ten yards away it came to a sudden stop. The swordfish was either dead or taking another rest.

It was a matter of no great difficulty for Percy to reach the little cask. He rested on it for a moment, then resumed his swim toward the boat. Presently he was grasping the gunwale.

A month earlier it would have been absolutely impossible for him to scramble into the high-sided, rocking craft. As it was he had a hard fight, and he was all but spent when he tumbled inside and lay panting.

When he raised himself, the first thing he noticed was that the fog was driving nearer. The wind was now due east. It promised to bring the day's fishing to an early end. He must retrieve the barrel and get the fish aboard as soon as possible or he might lose it

altogether.

Shipping his oars, he rowed up to the cask and took it in. A pull on the warp showed that the swordfish was motionless. Percy began hauling again, but this time he was very careful to keep his feet clear of the coil.

A damp breath smote his cheek. He glanced toward the east, and saw the fog blowing over the water in ragged, fleecy masses. The *Barracouta* was momentarily hidden. When she reappeared, fully a mile distant, her crew were hoisting a black body aboard. While he was fighting for life they had succeeded in capturing the second fish. The sight reminded him of his duty. He resumed pulling.

As the fathoms came in there was no sign of life on the other end. The fish sagged like lead. At last the long drag was over and its body floated beside the dory.

"Deader 'n a door-nail!" muttered Percy.

His prize was fully seven feet long. The iron had gone down under the shoulder and out into the gills, causing it to bleed freely. Its sword, which was an extension of the upper jaw, suggesting a duck's bill, was notched and battered, where it had struck against rocks on the bottom.

Following Jim's directions, Percy fastened a bight of the warp securely round the tail of his prize, triced it up over the dory's stem, and made the line fast round a thwart. The fish was so heavy that he could not lift it very high, and most of its body dragged in the water. He began to row slowly toward the sloop.

Thicker and thicker blew the fog. Finally it blotted

out the *Barracouta*; but Percy's last view of her told that she was heading his way. What if she could not find him! The thought gave him an unpleasant chill. He rowed harder.

A splash astern attracted his attention. A violent shock set the dory quivering. He started up just in time to see a large fish dart away, leaving the blood streaming from a gory wound in the head of the swordfish.

A shark! Percy knew he was in for a fight. He seized the lance and sprang into the stern.

A black fin shot alongside. The marauder rolled up for his turn at the banquet. Just as his jaws opened Percy drove the keen steel into his throat.

Mad with fright and pain, the robber flashed off, thrashing the bloody water. Another fin appeared on Percy's left. Again he lunged, and found his mark. The tail of the wounded shark struck the dory a heavy blow. Down it rolled, almost pitching the boy overboard head foremost among the blood-crazed sea-tigers. For a moment he sickened at what might have happened; but he regained his balance and hung to the lance. His fighting blood was roused. He had risked too much already to have the swordfish torn to pieces under his very eyes.

Knees braced tightly against the sides of the stern, hands locked round the stout butt of the lance, he foiled rush after rush of the black-finned, white-bellied pirates. Again and again he lunged and stabbed, until the water round the rocking boat was dyed crimson.



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AFTER RUSH OF THE BLACK-FINNED, WHITE-BELLIED PIRATES**

There seemed to be no end to the sharks. Fins crisscrossed the water all about and cut in toward the swordfish in quick, savage rushes. Percy was becoming exhausted; his arms ached; his breath came short. He could not keep up the fight much longer. Where was the *Barracouta*?

He shouted at the top of his lungs. Unexpectedly, out of the fog to starboard Jim's voice answered him.

"Sharks!" yelled Percy. "This way! Quick!"

"Fight 'em off! We're coming!"

In less than two minutes the sloop was alongside, and oars and harpoon helped beat off the assailants while the prize was being hoisted aboard. Though badly gouged and bitten about the head, the swordfish was but little impaired in value, for its body had hardly been touched. Another of about the same size lay in the standing-room. It had been a good morning's work.

Percy told his story as the *Barracouta* nosed home through the fog. When he had finished, Jim dropped his hand on his shoulder.

"Perce," said he, "you certainly put up a great fight and saved your fish. Nobody could have done any better."

Those few words, Percy felt, amply repaid him for what he had gone through that morning. He had won his spurs and was at last a full-fledged member of Spurling & Company.

XV

MIDSUMMER DAYS

Half past twelve found the *Barracouta* again at her mooring in Sprowl's Cove. Throppy and Filippo were landed, with instructions to haul the lobster-traps the next morning if the fog would allow them to do it

safely. Without waiting for dinner, Jim, Budge, and Percy started in the sloop for Rockland to dispose of their catch. They had no ice, so it was necessary to get the two swordfish to market as soon as possible.

"Thicker 'n a dungeon, isn't it?" said Jim as they rounded Brimstone Point and headed northwest into the fog. "Lucky we've got a good compass! Without it we wouldn't stand the ghost of a show of getting to Rockland. We'd pile up on some ledge before we'd gone half-way."

Shaping their course carefully by the chart, and keeping on the alert to avoid passing vessels and steamers, they drove the *Barracouta* at top speed. Ten miles from Tarpaulin the increased height of the ocean swells told that they were crossing the shoal rocky ground of Snippershan. Five miles farther on they left behind the clanging bell on Bay Ledge and soon passed the red whistler south of Hurricane. A straight course from this brought them at five o'clock to the bell east of Monroe's Island, and before six they were alongside the steamboat wharf at Rockland.

"Look out for her, boys!" directed Jim. "I want to get up-town before the markets close."

He landed, and started on the run for Main Street. In twenty-five minutes he was back.

"Sold 'em!" he announced. "Sixty dollars!"

A little later an express-wagon with two men drove down on the wharf. The swordfish were hoisted from the *Barracouta*, the agreed price paid, and the team hurried away.

"Not a bad day's work," said Budge.

"Fair! Now let's go somewhere and get a good supper!"

They found a restaurant on Main Street, unpretentious but clean, and sat down at one of its small tables. Two months ago Percy would have turned up his nose at the idea of eating in such a place; now he looked forward to a meal there with eager anticipation. Jim winked at him, then scanned the bill of fare, and turned to Budge.

"What'll you have, Roger?" he asked. "I see they've some nice fish here."

"Fish!" almost screamed Lane. "Not on your life! I've eaten so much fish the last two months that I'm ashamed to look a hake or haddock in the face. None for mine! Beefsteak and onions are good enough for me."

Jim glanced at Percy. Percy nodded.

"Three of the same," said Jim to the waiter.

They starved until the viands came on, then turned to. Fifteen minutes later the three orders were duplicated and despatched without undue delay.

"Try it again, Budge?"

"I'd like to," returned Lane, truthfully, "but I can't."

Jim broke a five-dollar bill at the cashier's desk, and they filed out.

"Sorry Throppy and Filippo aren't with us," said Percy.

"So am I; but we'll even it up with 'em somehow, later."

After an evening with Sherlock Holmes at the movies the three went down to the *Barracouta* and turned in. The next morning the fog was not so thick. They started at sunrise, and reached the island before eleven o'clock. At noon Stevens and the Italian came in with a good catch of lobsters.

And now came some of the most enjoyable weeks of the summer. The five boys were thoroughly acquainted and on the best of terms. Their work had been reduced to a frictionless routine that left them more leisure than at first. Lane was treasurer and bookkeeper for the concern, and his reports, made every Saturday night, showed that returns, both from the fish and from the lobsters, were running ahead of their estimates at the beginning of the season.

Percy, in particular, was learning to enjoy the free, out-of-door life, so different from anything to which he had been accustomed. At the close of pleasant afternoons, when a land breeze had driven the fog to sea and the work of the day was finished, he liked to take his Cæsar or Virgil up to the beacon on Brimstone, and lie at ease on the cushion of wiry grass, while he followed the great general through his Gallic campaigns or traced the wanderings of pious Æneas over a sea that could have been no bluer or more sparkling than that which surrounded the island. Sometimes it pleased him to explore the sheep-paths through the scrubby evergreens with gray wool-tags clinging to the branch ends, and to emerge at last from the tangle of dwarfed, twisted trunks on the northeast point. There he would throw himself at full length on the summit of the bluff, with the surf in his ears and the cool, salt breeze on his face, and watch the sun flashing from the brown glass toggles near the white lobster-buoys; or, lifting

his gaze to the horizon beyond the purple deep, he would trace the low, rolling humps of the mainland hills, the cleft range of Isle au Haut, or the heights of Mount Desert. But no studies or scenery caused him to forget his daily trip with sweater and rockweed.

The glades on the southern edge of the woods were overgrown with raspberry-bushes. When Filippo's daily stint about the camp was finished, he visited these spots with his pail; and while the season lasted, heaping bowls of red, dead-ripe fruit or saucers of sweet preserve varied their customary fare. There were blueberries, too, in abundance, and these also made a welcome addition to their table.

"Boys," said Lane, one morning, "I'm meat hungry. I can still taste that beefsteak we got the other night at Rockland. Think of the ton or so of mutton chops running loose on top of this island, while we poor Crusoes are starving to death on the beach!"

"No need of waiting until you're in the last stages, Budge," observed Jim. "Uncle Tom told me we could have a lamb whenever we wanted one. All we've got to do is to kill it."

A silence settled over the camp. The boys looked at one another. Nobody hankered for the job.

"Budge spoke first," suggested Throppy.

"I'm no butcher," returned Lane. "Come to think of it, I don't care much for lamb, after all."

"Now see here!" said Jim. "What's the use of beating round the bush? We're all crazy for fresh meat. The only thing to do is to draw lots to see who'll sacrifice his feelings and do the shooting. We'll settle that now."

He cut four toothpicks into uneven lengths.

"Filippo's not in this."

He had noticed that the Italian's olive face had grown pale.

"Now come up and draw like men!"

The lot fell to Lane.

"You're it, Budge! Don't be a quitter! There's the gun and here's our last shell. Don't miss!"

Lane's lips tightened. But he took the gun, put in the shell, and started up over the bank.

"Don't follow me," he flung back. "I'll do this alone."

Five minutes of silence followed. Then—*bang!*

"He's done it!" exclaimed Throppy.

The boys felt unhappy. In a few minutes Lane came crunching down the gravel slope. His face was sober.

"Where's the lamb?" asked Jim.

"Up there! I didn't agree to bring it down."

"Come on, boys!"

Jim, Percy, and Stevens went up to the pasture; Lane remained in the cabin. A careful search failed to reveal the victim. Jim walked to the edge of the bank.

"Oh, Budge!" he called.

Lane came out of the camp.

"Where's that lamb?"

"Don't know! Running around up there, I s'pose!"

"Didn't you shoot him?"

"No! I couldn't. And I know none of the rest of you could, either. So I fired in the air."

Jim's laugh spoke his relief.

"Well, I guess that's the easiest way out of it for everybody. Next trip to Matinicus I'll order a hind quarter from Rockland. It'll mean a little more wear and tear on the company's pocketbook, but a good deal less on our feelings."

One of the accompaniments of the heat and fog of those August days was a kind of salt-water mirage. Ships and steamers miles away below the horizon were lifted into plain view. Low, distant islands rose to perpendicular bluffs, distorted by the wavering air-currents; other islands appeared directly above the first, and came down to join them. Percy watched these novel moving pictures with great interest.

Every few mornings either the trawl or the lobster-traps would yield something unusual. Now it might be a dozen bream, called by the fishermen "brim," "redfish," or "all-eyes"; again up would come a catfish, savage and sharp-toothed, able to dent an ash oar; and rarely a small halibut would appear, drowned on the trawl. Sometimes the lobstermen would capture a monkfish, whose undiscriminating appetite had led him to try to swallow a glass float; or a trap would come to the surface freighted with huge five-fingers or containing a short, ribbon-shaped eel, blood-red from nose to tail-tip.

Spurling & Company were dressing a big catch of

hake on the *Barracouta* early one afternoon when a rockety report resounded close to the island. Percy, who was wielding his splitting-knife with good effect, as his oilskins showed, glanced up quickly.

"That's a yacht's gun!"

Sixty seconds revealed that he was right. Into the mouth of the cove shot a keen-pro wed steam-yacht, resplendent with brass fittings and fresh, white paint. Five or six flanneled figures lounged aft, while a few members of her crew, natty in white duck, dropped anchor under the direction of an officer. Side-steps were lowered and an immaculate toy boat swung out; a sailor occupied the rowing-thwart, while one of the yachtsmen stepped into the stern and took the rudder-lines. The boat sped straight toward the *Barracouta*, which grew dingy and mean by contrast.

Presently the strangers were near. The yachtsman touched his cap. He was a good-looking fellow of perhaps nineteen, with a light, fuzzy mustache and eyes that were a trifle shifty.

"Would you be so kind as to tell me—"

He broke off abruptly as he recognized Percy.

"By the Great Horn Spoon!" he almost shouted, "if it isn't P. Whittington! Percy, old man, what do you mean by hiding yourself away offshore in a lonesome spot like this? Come aboard! Come aboard! The old crowd's there—Ben Brimmer and Martin Sayles and Mordaunt and Mack and Barden. I've chartered the *Arethusa*, and invited 'em to spend a month with me along the New England coast. We're not having a time of it—oh no! or my name isn't Chauncey Pike!"

His eyes dwelt curiously on the details of Percy's

costume and occupation.

"What you masquerading for? Hiding from the sheriff?"

Percy met his gaze evenly. His estimate of men and the things that make life worth living had undergone a material change during the last two months. Pike's jesting flowed off him like water off a duck. He introduced the other members of Spurling & Company, and Pike greeted them cordially.

"I want you all to take dinner on board with us to-night. We've got a first-class chef, and I'll have him do his prettiest. 'Tisn't every day you run across an old friend."

Jim was inclined to demur, but Pike would not take no for an answer, and he finally gave in when Percy added his entreaties to those of the yachtsman.

"Signal the yacht when you're through, Perce," said the latter as he rowed away, "and I'll send ashore for you. I know your friends here will excuse you for a while if you come aboard and talk over old times with us."

"Better let me set you ashore now," said Jim, "so you can wash up and change your clothes."

"Not much!" refused Percy. "I'll see every fish salted first."

He was as good as his word. Not until the last hake lay on the top of its brethren in the hogshead did he take off his oilskins and prepare for his visit to the yacht. At his signal the boat rowed in and took him aboard. He received an uproarious greeting from his former friends. The first welcome over, he came in

for more or less chaffing.

"Boys," jeered Pike, "what do you suppose I found this modest, salt-water violet—or barnacle, I should say—doing? Actually dressed in oil-clothes and cleaning fish! Think of it! P. Whittington, the one and only! Wouldn't his friends along Fifth Avenue like to see him in that rig! Honest, Perce, if I wanted to bury myself, I'd pick a cemetery where the occupants didn't have to perform so much bone labor. I'd rather face the firing-squad than do what you were doing this afternoon."

"Guess you're telling the truth, Chauncey," retorted Percy.

"Come down below and let's have a drink all round!"

"Not unless it's Poland water," said Percy, firmly. "The one drawback about this island is that the only spring's brackish. If you've any good bottled water I'll be glad to drink with you, but nothing stronger."

"Just listen to that, fellows! Well, have your own way, Perce! We've a dozen carboys of spring water aboard, and you can drink 'em all if you want to. Try these cigarettes!"

"Swore off over a month ago."

"No! Shouldn't think you'd find life worth living. What do you have for amusement?"

"We're too busy to need any," replied Percy, truthfully.

Pike looked serious. Removing Percy's cap, he tapped his head with the tips of his fingers.

"There's some trouble inside," he said at last, "but I

can't quite make out what it is. I think we'll have to take him up to the city to consult some prominent alienist, as the newspapers would say. But first he's going east in the *Arethusa* with Doctor Pike. Come on, Perce! Put off the sackcloth and ashes, or rather the oilskins and fish-scales, and travel with us for a while. We're all artists aboard, but we paint in only one color, and that's a deep, rich red! We're going to spread it over Castine and Bar Harbor and Campobello, and we want your esteemed assistance. Do we have it?"

Percy shook his head.

"You do not," he declined. "I'm booked for college in the fall, and I'm studying to make up my conditions."

Pike looked sadly round at the others.

"And so young!" he lamented. "I presume your friends ashore share your sentiments, and we'll have to take 'em into consideration in planning for that dinner to-night. Wouldn't have any scruples, would you, about beginning with a clear soup, then tackling a juicy beef roast with all the fixings, and winding up with lemon pie and ice-cream?"

"Lead me to it," grinned Percy. "Well, fellows, I'm mighty glad to see you, even if we don't agree on all points. Now I've an engagement ashore for a half-hour or so, and if you'll set me on the beach I'll come aboard with the others."

Curious eyes followed him as he climbed the bluff with his sweater and plunged into the woods. At six he rowed out with the rest of the Spurlingites, Filippo included. The dinner to which they sat down was one they remembered for the rest of the season.

Pike had not overpraised his French chef. Everybody had a good time, and at the close of the meal a toast was drunk—in spring water—to the continued success of Spurling & Company. The boys went ashore early.

No trawling was done the next morning, as it was the regular day for the trip to Matinicus. The *Barracouta* started at nine o'clock. At about the same time the yacht catted her anchor, fired a farewell gun, and proceeded eastward, her passengers first lining up and giving three cheers for their guests of the night before, and receiving a similar salute in return.

"Perce," said Jim as the sloop rose and sank on the swells on her way over to Seal Island, "if you won't think me impertinent, I'd like to ask you a question."

"Fire ahead!"

"You can tell me or not, just as you please, but I've been wondering since last night whether, right down at the bottom of your heart, you'd rather be with your friends on the yacht or with us on the island."

"That's an easy one, Jim," replied Percy. "And the best answer I can make is the fact I'm on the boat with you this minute. I had an invitation to go with them, and I declined it. Things look different to me from what they did two months ago."

At Matinicus Percy found a letter from his father, answering his epistle of a few weeks before.

DEAR PERCY [it ran],—Glad to hear you're on the job. Keep it up.

Percy countered that night as follows:

DEAR DAD,—I'm still sticking.

XVI

A LOST ALUMNUS

Throppy stepped out of the fish-house at the close of a breezy afternoon and started for the camp to wash up. The morning's catch had been split and salted; it just filled a hogshead. He glanced seaward at the white-capped squalls chasing one another over the broad blue surface. Three steps from the building he halted in surprise.

"Hulloo! Who's that?"

Round the eastern point came a small sloop. Evidently she had met with disaster, for the end of her boom was broken and dragging and her mainsail hung loosely. It was easily apparent that she had made a safe harbor none too early.

Attracted by Throppy's exclamation, the other boys joined him, and together they watched the strange craft limp into the cove. As she came nearer they could see that she was old and dilapidated. Her brown canvas was frayed and rotten; tag-ends of rope hung here and there; and her battered sides were badly in need of a coat of fresh paint.

"Built in the year one!" was Jim's verdict. "Almost too old to be knocking round so far offshore!"

Gliding slowly into the cove, she lost headway not far from the *Barracouta*. A small black dog began to

run to and fro on board and bark excitedly. The man at the helm, evidently her only crew, hurried stiffly forward, let the jib and mainsail run down, and dropped the anchor. Then the boys were treated to a fresh surprise.



A shaggy white cat leaped from the standing-room upon the roof of the cabin. A Maltese followed her. Then another, jet black, sprang into view. The three rubbed about the legs of the man as he made his cable fast. Nemo, roused from his nap under the stove, ran down to the water's edge and began an interchange of ferocious greetings with the strange canine; while the cats, lining up in a row on the side, arched their backs and spit fiercely.

The boys viewed this menagerie with amazement.

"Barnum & Bailey's come to town!" muttered Budge.

His craft safely moored, the man drew in a small punt which was towing astern and stepped into it. The dog followed.

"Back, Oliver!" ordered his master.

Grasping the animal by the scruff of the neck, he tossed him into the standing-room. Then he slowly sculled the punt to the beach. Jim walked down to meet him.

The stranger was of medium height, and apparently over sixty years old. His beard and mustache were gray. He wore a black slouch-hat and a Prince Albert coat, threadbare and shiny, but neatly brushed. He stepped briskly ashore, with shoulders well set back. His dark eyes carried a suggestion of melancholy, and his face was deeply lined.

"I've dropped in to make repairs," said he. "Broke my main boom in a squall about a mile north of the island, and thought I might get some one here to help me fix it."

"You did right to come," returned Jim. "We'll be glad to do anything we can, Mr.—"

"Thorpe," supplied the other. "That isn't my name, but it'll do as well as any."

"Mine's Spurling," said Jim.

They shook hands and walked up to the camp. There Jim introduced the newcomer to the other boys. Supper was about to be put on the table and the stranger was invited to share it. He accepted, and ate heartily, almost ravenously.

"Seems good to taste somebody's cooking besides your own," he apologized. "When you've summered

and wintered yourself, year in and year out, the thing gets pretty monotonous and you almost hate the sight of food."

"Then you're alone most of the time?" ventured Lane.

"Not most of the time, but all the time."

The boys would have liked to inquire further, but courtesy forbade, and their guest did not volunteer anything more regarding himself. He shifted the conversation to Nemo.

"Bright-looking dog you've got there!" he commented.

"Yes," said Jim. "And he's fully as bright as he looks. I see you've a dog and some cats aboard."

"Yes; and they're good company—better, in some ways, than human beings, for they can't talk back. The dog's Oliver Cromwell; and the cats I've named Joan of Arc, Marie Antoinette, and Queen Victoria. I must go aboard and give 'em their suppers."

He rose from the table.

"Come back again in an hour," invited Jim, "and we'll have some music. We've a violin here."

"I'll be more than glad to come," returned their guest. "Music's something I don't have a chance to hear very often."

Walking down the beach, he sculled out to his sloop. His animals greeted him, Oliver Cromwell vociferously, the cats with a more reserved welcome.

"What d'you make of him?" asked Percy. "Odd stick, isn't he?"

"Yes," said Jim, meditatively, "but he seems like a gentleman. What I can't understand is why he's cruising along the coast alone in that old Noah's ark. It doesn't seem natural. Besides, it's dangerous business for a man of his age. Well, it's no concern of ours. Let's give him a pleasant evening."

Promptly at the end of the allotted hour the stranger came ashore again.

"Got the children all in bed for the night," said he. "Now I can make you a little visit with a clear conscience."

He spoke faster and more cheerfully than he had done before. The melancholy in his bearing had vanished. Jim thought he detected a slight odor of liquor about him, but he could not be sure. They all sat down together, and Throppy brought out his violin.

"What shall it be, boys?" he asked, after a preliminary tuning up.

"Give us 'The Wearing of the Green,'" suggested Lane.

Soon the wailing strains of the familiar Irish melody were breathing through the cabin. "Kathleen Mavourneen" followed, and the stranger sat as if fascinated. At "'Way Down Upon the Suwanee River" he dropped his head in his hands and his shoulders shook.

"Something livelier, Throppy," said Jim.

Stevens started in on "Dixie." As the first spirited notes came dancing off the violin their guest raised his head quickly, and before the selection was finished his cheerfulness had returned.

"Can you play 'The Campbells Are Coming'?" he inquired.

As Stevens responded with the stirring Scotch air Thorpe rose to his feet and began whistling a clear, melodious accompaniment. The notes trilled out, pure and bird-like. The boys broke into hearty applause when he finished. Their approval emboldened him to ask a favor.

"I used to play a little myself," he said; "but it's been years since I've had a bow in my hand. Would you be willing for me to see if I can recall anything? I'll be careful of your instrument."

"Sure!" cordially returned Stevens.

He handed violin and bow to Thorpe. The latter took them almost reverently. Tucking the violin under his chin, he drew the bow back and forth, at first with a lingering, uncertain touch, but soon with an increasing firmness and accuracy that bespoke an old-time skill. Gradually he gathered confidence, and a bubbling flood of liquid music gushed from the vibrating strings.

At first he played a medley of fragments, short snatches from old tunes, each shading imperceptibly into the one that followed, blending into a whole that chorded with the night and sea and wind and the driftwood fire crackling in the little stove in the lonely island cabin. The boys sat motionless, listening, brooding over the visions the music opened to each. They had never heard such music before. Even Percy had to acknowledge that, as he leaned breathlessly forward, eyes glued to the dancing bow.

One final, long, slow sweep, and the last notes died

away, mellow and silvery as a distant bell. The musician raised his bowed head and looked about.

"More!" begged the boys.

With a nod of assent, he began "Annie Laurie." His audience sat spellbound. "Flow Gently, Sweet Afton" followed; and he closed with "Auld Lang Syne." Then he laid the violin carefully on the table and burst into tears.

For two or three minutes nobody spoke. Filippo was weeping silently; Percy cleared his throat; and even the other three were conscious of a slight huskiness. The evening was turning out differently from what they had anticipated.

Brushing away his tears, the stranger controlled himself with a strong effort.

"I don't know what you'll think of me, boys," said he, shamefacedly. "I'm sorry to have made such an exhibition of myself. But music always did affect me; besides, it's wakened some old memories. Guess I'd better be going now."

He half rose.

"Stay awhile longer," urged Jim; and the others seconded the invitation.

Thorpe sank back on his box.

"You won't have to persuade me very hard. Evenings alone on the *Helen* are pretty long."

His eye fell on Percy's Æneid on the shelf beside the window.

"Aha! Who's reading Virgil?"

"I am," confessed Percy. "Making up college conditions."

The stranger looked at him keenly.

"Conditions, eh? Guess you don't need to have any, unless you want 'em."

"Found you at home there, Perce!" laughed Lane.

"I don't propose to have any more after this summer," averred Percy, stoutly.

"Stick to that!" encouraged Thorpe. "There's enough have 'em that can't help it."

Taking down the volume, he opened it at the beginning of the first book, and began reading aloud, dividing the lines into feet:

> *"Arma virumque cano, Trojae qui primus ab oris Italiam, fato profugus, Laviniaque venit.*

"Wouldn't want to say how long it's been since I last set eyes on that. Probably you boys notice that I use the English pronunciation of Latin instead of the continental; it's what I had when I was in college."

"What was your college?" inquired Percy.

Melancholy darkened Thorpe's face again.

"Never mind about that," he replied, a little brusquely.

Glancing round the cabin, he caught sight of Throppy's wireless outfit; soon the two were engaged in an interested discussion on wave-lengths and the effect of atmospheric disturbances. Later he was talking over the lobster law with Jim, and life-insurance with Lane. He seemed to be equally at

home on all subjects.

Eight o'clock came before they realized it. The stranger's face suddenly grew somber.

"Boys," said he, "I must be going now. You've given me a mighty pleasant evening and I sha'n't forget it right away. You'll think it a strange thing for me to say, but the best return I can make for your kindness is to tell you something about myself."

He glanced at Percy.

"You asked me what my college was. I'm not going to answer that question, but I'll say this: At the end of its catalogue of graduates you'll find a page headed 'Lost Alumni,' and my name—my real name—is there. It's a list of those whose addresses are unknown to the college authorities, men who have dropped out, gone back, disappeared. Nobody knows what's become of 'em, and by and by nobody cares. That's just what I am—a lost alumnus! And it's better for me to stay lost!"

With trembling hands he picked up a worm-eaten stick beside the stove.

"I'm like this stick now—only driftwood! Once I was young and sound and strong as any one of you—just as this wood was once. Now—"

Lifting the stove cover, he flung the stick into the fire; a burst of sparks shot up.

"That's all it's fit for; and it's all I'm fit for, too! Name ... character ... friends ... home ... all gone—all gone!"

He took a step toward the door, then halted.

"I've told you this because it may do some one of you

some good while there's time. Don't throw your lives away, as I've thrown away mine!"

The sober, startled faces of his hearers apparently recalled him to himself.

"Sorry I spoke so freely," he apologized. "Forget it, boys, and forget me! Everybody else has. Good night!"

He opened the door.

"Won't you stop ashore with us?" invited Spurling. "We can fix you up a bunk."

"No; I must go aboard. My dog and cats would be lonesome; wouldn't sleep a wink without me. They're mighty knowing animals."

He went out and closed the door. The boys looked at one another. Lane was the first to speak.

"What d'you suppose was the matter with him? Must have been something pretty bad to make him feel that way. But, say! Didn't he make that violin talk? Never heard anything like it before!"

That night the boys went to bed feeling unusually serious. Percy, in particular, did not get to sleep until late. The stranger's remarks had given him much food for thought.

The next morning, before sunrise, the barking of Oliver Cromwell and a thin, blue smoke curling from the stovepipe of the *Helen* told that the lost alumnus was preparing breakfast. Jim and Percy had started off with their trawls some time before. Stevens volunteered to help their visitor repair his boom, so Filippo went out with Lane to haul the lobster-traps.

All the boys were back at noon, when Thorpe, repairs made, waved farewell and sailed slowly out of the cove, dog and cats manning the side of the *Helen*, as if for a last salute. Throppy told of his morning's work.

"Tried to pay me for what I did; but of course I wouldn't take anything. You might not think it, but, inside, that old boat is as neat as wax. Got a good library on board, too; books there that were beyond me. All the current magazines. Easy to see how he keeps up to date about everything."

At two o'clock that afternoon in popped the *Calista* in quest of lobsters. The boys told her captain about their strange caller. Higgins laughed shortly.

"What—old Thorpe! Oh yes, I've known of him these twenty years! Mystery? Not so much as you might think. It's the same mystery that's ruined a lot of other men—John Barleycorn! Thorpe showed up from nobody knows where about a quarter of a century ago; and ever since then he's been banging up and down the coast in that old boat. They say he's a college graduate gone to the bad from drink."

"What supports him?" asked Lane. "Does he fish?"

"Not more than enough to supply himself and his live stock. I've heard he's got wealthy relatives who furnish him with all the money he needs. He likes to live in this style, and they like to have him. He's out of their way, and they're out of his. In the winter he ties the sloop up in some harbor and stops aboard."

"He seemed to be sober enough last night," said Jim.

"Yes; when he's all right you couldn't ask for a man to be more peaceable or gentlemanly; but when he's

in liquor, look out! I passed him a month ago one squally day off Monhegan, running before the wind, sheet fast, shot to the eyes, and yelling like a wild man. It's a dangerous trick to make that sheet fast on a squally day, or on any day at all, for that matter. Some time he'll do it once too often. Well, as the saying goes, 'When rum's in, wit's out!' How's lobsters?"

XVII

BLOWN OFF

At two o'clock on a Friday morning toward the end of August Spurling and Whittington started with six tubs of trawl, baited with salted herring, for Clay Bank. Long before sunrise the last fathom of ground-line had gone overboard and the tubs were empty.

Swinging the *Barracouta* about, they retraced their course to the first buoy.

A long, oily ocean swell, heaving in from the south, undulated the breezeless sea. The air was mild, almost suspiciously so. Dawn was breaking redly as they reached their starting-point and prepared to pull in the trawl.

"I'll haul the first half, Perce," volunteered Spurling.

Drawing the dory alongside, he cast off her painter and sprang aboard. Before taking in the buoy he

stood for a half-minute, scanning sky and sea.

"Almost too fine!" he remarked. "I don't like that crimson east. You remember how the rhyme goes:

"A red sky in the morning,
Sailors take warning.

Looks to me like a weather-breeder. Those swells remind me of a lazy, good-natured, purring tiger. You wouldn't think they'd swamp a toy boat; but let the wind blow over 'em a few hours and it's an entirely different matter. Still, I don't think we'll see any really bad weather before midnight at the earliest. Guess we'd better plan not to set to-morrow."

He was soon unhooking hake and coiling the trawl into its tub. Percy kept the *Barracouta* close by. At the middle buoy he relieved Spurling in the dory. The set yielded over two thousand pounds of fish, principally good-sized hake.

"Very fair morning's work," said Spurling. "We'll leave that last load in the dory. Now for home!"

Soon the sloop was heading for Tarpaulin, the weighted dory towing behind. They were almost up to Brimstone Point when, with a final explosion, the engine stopped. Spurling gave an exclamation of mingled disgust and relief.

"Something's broken! Well, we're lucky it didn't give way five miles back. It'd have been a tough job to warp her in so far, with a white-ash breeze. Cast off that dory, Perce!"

As Percy pulled the smaller craft alongside the distant quick-fire of an approaching engine fell upon

his ears. He glanced quickly toward the northeast.

"No blisters for us this morning!" he shouted. "Here comes Captain Ben in the *Calista!* He'll tow us in."

Presently the lobster-smack was alongside, and soon the *Calista*, with sloop and dory in tow, was heading for Sprowl's Cove. Jim and Percy had left their boat and come on board the smack. They noticed that Higgins seemed unusually serious.

"What's the matter, Cap?" inquired Spurling. "Any trouble with lobsters?"

"No," replied the captain, soberly, "there's no trouble with lobsters, so far as I know. Haven't met with any losses to speak of, and I'm paying twenty-five cents a pound. But something's happened to a friend of yours. Remember that stranger who made you a call a couple of weeks ago?"

"Sure! What about him?"

"Well, coming across from Swan's Island yesterday afternoon, I nearly ran over a boat, bottom up, close to Griffin Ledge. I managed to spell out the name on her stem; it was the old *Helen*. Thorpe had made his sheet fast once too often, as I've always said he would. So he's gone, dog, cats, and the whole shooting-match. I cruised about for a while to see if I could find anything, but it wasn't any use; the tide runs over those ledges like a river. The old fellow had a good streak in him, and I'm all-fired sorry he had to go that way. It only shows what rum can do for a man, if you give it a fair chance."

The tragic news had a sobering effect upon the boys. Percy, in particular, remembering the habits of certain of his friends, took the story to heart. Nobody

said anything more until they were inside the cove and running toward the lobster-car. Budge and Throppy saw them coming and rowed out in the pea-pod.

While the lobsters were being dipped aboard the smack and weighed, Spurling tinkered the *Barracouta's* engine. At last he discovered the cause of the breakdown.

"Broken piston-rod!" he exclaimed. "That means a trip to Matinicus. And we've got to go right away, so we can get back before night ahead of the storm that's coming. We must fix that engine, or we may lose two or three days' good fishing, after the sea smooths down. Perce, you and I'll go in the dory. You other fellows'll have to dress those hake alone this time."

"I'll tow you across, Jimmy," offered Higgins. "But it looks a bit smurry to me. I think there may be a norther coming; and you wouldn't want to get caught out in that. Remember what happened to Bill Carlin!"

"I know," answered Spurling. "But that engine's no good without a piston-rod. I was born in a dory. Besides, if it should blow too hard, we can stop on Wooden Ball or Seal Island."

A few minutes later the *Calista*, with Jim and Percy aboard and the dory in tow, was moving away from Tarpaulin. An easy run of two hours brought them to Matinicus. Higgins dropped his anchor in the outer harbor near Wheaton's Island, and the boys rowed ashore in their dory, landing in the head of the little cove near the fish-wharf.

Percy made a few necessary purchases at the store

while Jim attended to the piston-rod. A half-hour later they were pushing off the dory, ready for their long row back. The sky was hazy and the sea calm. In the outer harbor Captain Ben hailed them from the *Calista*.

"Be good to yourselves, boys, and don't risk too much. You won't have any trouble getting to Seal Island; if it looks bad, you'd better hang up there with Pliny Ferguson. He'll be glad of company at his shack for the next two days; for, unless I'm 'way off, there won't be many trawls set or traps pulled until next Monday. I'm going to stick to Matinicus till the blow is over."

It was still calm when they passed the Black Ledges and headed for the northeast point of Wooden Ball. Jim was rowing, and the dory drove easily onward under his powerful strokes.

Percy looked north. The mountains on the mainland had vanished, and even the heights on Vinalhaven were being blotted out; but as yet not a breath of air disturbed the glassy, undulating sea.

They were now only a few hundred feet north of the ledges on the extremity of the Ball. The swell was breaking white against its barnacled granite boulders in a long, crashing rumble.

"Let me spell you at the oars, Jim," said Percy.

"Don't care if you do! And pass that bag of hard bread forward! I feel hungry enough to eat the whole of it. Wonder what Filippo'll have for supper to-night!"

The boys had been in such a hurry to get away from Matinicus that they had not taken time for any

dinner; so both had keen appetites. Jim made a hearty lunch on the crisp crackers. Percy's mouth watered as he swung to and fro at the oars, facing his companion. Ten weeks ago he would have disdained such plain fare; but now he could eat it with a relish. His gristle was hardening into bone.

Four or five of the brittle disks satisfied Jim's hunger.

"Your turn now, Perce! Let me take her again!"

"Hadn't I better row a little longer?"

"No! I feel good for five miles. Those crackers put the strength into a man."

Percy attacked the bag with an appetite equal to Jim's. Malcolm's Ledges were near, breaking white half-way from the Ball to Seal Island. To Percy's ears the roar of the surf sounded louder.

"Sea's making up a bit, isn't it, Jim?"

"Yes; but I don't think it'll amount to anything for a long time yet."

Down swept a squall from the north, roughening and darkening the water. The dory careened a trifle as it smote her side.

"Well, Perce, we're more than a third of the way home. There's Brimstone Point, eight miles ahead. We may see a little rough water before we get there. Lucky you're not seasick nowadays!"

The squall passed, but left a steady breeze blowing in its wake. The sky was gray, the sea leaden. The horizon all around seemed to be contracting, and the familiar islands were losing their height.

They ran to leeward of the breaker on Gully Ledge, and passed into smooth water under the protecting barrier of Seal Island. Pliny Ferguson's shack was in plain view, and its owner came out and swung his hand to them. Spurling remembered Captain Higgins's advice, and hesitated.

"What do you say, Perce? I'll put it up to you. Shall we keep on or stop here with Pliny? Seems to me there isn't the least doubt about our reaching the island before dark; but I don't want to make you run any needless risk. So I'll do as you say. Pliny'll be glad to make us comfortable, and we can slip across after the gale is over."

Percy scanned the steep, desolate cliffs a half-mile to the north.

"What would you do if you were alone, Jim?"

"Make for Tarpaulin as fast as oars would take me."

"Then I say keep on!"

"Keep on it is, then," assented Spurling.

Shielded from the wind by the high shore, the dory sped on east by south. The island was over a mile long. When they emerged from the protection of the ledges on its eastern end they could see that the breeze had increased in force. Up to windward in the direction of Isle au Haut Bay occasional white-caps were breaking.

Spurling stopped rowing and took a long look around. Then he pulled off his sweater, settled himself firmly on the thwart, and braced his heels against the timber nailed across the bottom of the dory. His oar-blades caught the water with a long,

steady stroke.

"We'll head north of the island," he said to Percy, after a few minutes of vigorous rowing. "The flood'll be running for the next three hours, and that'd naturally set us toward the north; but before we get to Tarpaulin the wind'll be blowing us the other way. We've got to allow for both."

Fifteen minutes went by, thirty, a full hour. Little by little Seal Island sank behind them and the familiar outlines of Tarpaulin loomed clearer and higher. The increasing breeze, blowing against the ocean current, kicked up a lively chop, on which the dory danced skittishly. It took all Spurling's strength and skill to drive her onward.

At four o'clock they still had between four and five miles to go. The sea was alive with white horses. As the boat fell into the trough Percy momentarily lost sight of the island. He now recognized Spurling's wisdom in heading so far north of their goal. But for that they would inevitably have been blown off their course.

Jim was buckling to his task like a Trojan. Bare-headed, shirt open at the neck, sleeves rolled up above his elbows, he swayed to and fro, a tireless, human machine. His blades entered the rough sea cleanly and came out on the feather. Admiringly, almost enviously, Percy watched the play of the banded muscles on his brawny forearms. He would have given anything to be as strong as his dory-mate.

Past five o'clock, and still over two miles to the island. It was growing rougher every minute. The gale had fairly begun. It sheared the crests off the racing billows and flung them over the boat in

showers of spray. Now and then a bucketful came aboard. It kept Percy busy bailing.

Occasionally Jim brought the dory head to the wind and lay on his oars to rest. After all, human muscles, powerful as they may be, are not steel and india-rubber.

"Pretty rough, isn't it?" said he, at one of these intervals. "Seasick, old man? You look a little white around the gills."

Percy shook his head. The situation was too serious for seasickness. In spite of the jocularity of his words, Jim's voice sounded hollow. Both of them knew that it meant a hard fight to reach Tarpaulin.

Silence, gray and leaden as the misty sky, settled over the dory. Spurling was throwing all the strength he possessed into every stroke; Percy bailed continuously. It took considerably more than an hour to make the next mile and a half. A rainy haze, driving down from the north, had shrouded the island, and Brimstone Point was barely visible.

Jim's strokes were slower; they lacked their earlier force. His face showed the strain of the last hour. Uneasily Percy noted these signs of weariness.

"Tired, Jim?"

"Yes."

The brief monosyllable struck Percy with dismay. If Spurling's strength should give out, what would happen to the dory?

"Don't you want me to row awhile?"

"You can take her for a few minutes."

Scrambling forward, Percy grasped the oars and took Jim's place on the thwart. The latter lay down flat on his back in the bottom of the dory. Apparently he was not far from complete exhaustion.

"Keep her up into the wind as well as you can," he directed.

Percy did his best; but he found it a hard job. The gale, now far stronger than the tide that flowed against it under the surface, was forcing them steadily southward. Brimstone Point could just be seen, a half-mile to the northeast.

Though he pulled his heart out, Percy could tell that he was losing ground, or rather water, every second. The wind mocked his efforts. He could not keep the boat on her course. Big rollers swashed against the port bow and broke aboard. Jim raised a drenched face, haggard with weariness, and took in the situation.

"Harder, Perce!" he urged. "Hold her up till I can get my breath. It's the ocean for us to-night, if we don't hit Brimstone."

Spurred by this exhortation, Percy jerked at the oars savagely and unskilfully. As he swayed back there was a sharp snap, and the starboard oar broke squarely, just above the blade.

Round swung the dory, head to the south. Up started Spurling with a cry of alarm, his fatigue forgotten.

"You've done it now!"

Wrenching the port oar from his horrified mate, he sprang aft, dropped it in the notch on the stern, headed the boat once more for the island, and began

sculling with all his might.

It was a hopeless attempt. However strong he might be, no man with only one oar could make headway into the teeth of such a gale. For a time his desperate efforts held the dory in her place. Then little by little she began to go astern.

With sinking heart Percy watched Spurling's shoulders rack and twist as he threw his last ounce into his sculling. By degrees his motions became slower and more painful. Suddenly he pulled in the oar and dropped it clattering aboard.

"No use!" he groaned as he toppled backward and collapsed in the bottom of the dory.

XVIII

BUOY OR BREAKER

Consternation seized Percy. Never before had he known Jim to acknowledge himself beaten. Their plight must be serious indeed.

The dory swung side to the sea and sank into the trough. A half-barrel of water slopped aboard. Percy bestirred himself. Setting the oar in the scull-hole, he brought the boat's head once more into the wind. He was not strong enough to drive her against it; but he could at least keep her pointed into the teeth of the gale and prevent her from swamping. He dropped to

his knees, for it was too rough for him to keep his balance if he stood upright.

How far off was Tarpaulin? As he looked back a red glare sprang up northeast. Budge and Throppy had fired the driftwood beacon on Brimstone Point. Small good it would do Jim and himself to-night.

They could not reach the island with one oar, and it was now too dark for their friends on Tarpaulin to make out the drifting dory.

Percy began sculling frantically.

"Hi! Hi! Hulloo-oo!" he yelled. "Oh, Budge! Oh, Throppy! We're going to sea! Come out and get us!"

It was like shouting against a solid wall. His cries were whirled away by the gale. Presently he became silent, realizing that he was wasting his breath.

Rapidly the dory drifted seaward. The fire dimmed to a misty red glow. A smart shower burst, and great drops spattered over the dory.

Jim sat up. He turned his face toward the island, and Percy knew his eyes had caught the dying beacon. He said nothing; there was nothing to say. In a little while all was black, north, east, south, and west.

Then Jim spoke, and his voice was as calm and deliberate as if he were in the cabin on the island, instead of a mile to leeward, driving to sea before a norther.

"Well, Perce, we're in for it! I'm sorry I spoke so sharp when you broke that oar. It's an accident liable to happen to anybody. Let's take account of stock! We're in for a night and more on the water, and we want to do our best to keep on top of it, and not

under it, until the gale blows itself out. The prospect isn't exactly rosy; still, it might be a blamed sight worse. We're in a good dory, and that's the best sea boat that floats."

"Aren't we likely to be picked up before morning?"

"Pretty slim chance. Everything small has scooted to harbor long before this. We haven't any light, and a vessel or steamer large enough to pay no attention to the storm would be as liable to run us down as to pick us up. So about the best we can hope for is to have everything give us a wide berth until daylight."

"Will the gale last as long as that?"

"Longer, I'm afraid. 'Most always we have one good, big norther in August that blows two or three days. I'm really the one to blame for getting us into this mess. I know the sea, and you don't. I ought to have had brains enough to stop on Seal Island. Well, it's no use crying over spilled milk. The only thing now is to try not to spill any more."

The rain was descending in torrents. Storm and night drew a narrow circle of gloom about the reeling boat.

Spurling tried to rise to his feet. The dory jumped like a bucking horse, and he caught the gunwale just in time to escape being pitched overboard.

"Jerusalem!" he gasped. "Guess I won't try that again! Hands and knees are good enough for me. Hold her, Perce! I'll throw out some of this water."

Kneeling in the flood that swashed from bow to stern, he bailed vigorously until the boat was fairly clear.

"No use wearing ourselves out trying to keep her head to it with the oar!" said he. "I'm going to rig a drug!"

Directly under Percy's arms, as he sculled, was a trawl-tub containing their purchases at Matinicus. These Jim tossed into the stern. Taking the tub, he crept forward. A lanyard of six-thread manila, put across double between holes in the top of its sides, formed a rope bridle or bail. To the middle of this bail Jim tied the thirty-foot painter with a clove hitch. Then he dropped the tub over the bow.

"Pull in your oar, Perce!" he called out.

Percy obeyed gladly. A heavy sea struck the dory. She reared, shot back, and started to swing sidewise. Then the "drug" caught her, and she seesawed again up into the wind and rode springily.

The tub, filled with water, and drifting on its side thirty feet before the bow at the end of the straightened-out painter, formed a floating anchor, which held the dory head to the wind and sea. Practically submerged, and offering the gale no surface to get hold of, it moved much more slowly than the high-sided boat, and so retarded its course.

Jim came crawling aft again.

"Guess that'll hold her!" he exclaimed. "I've strengthened the lanyard with some ground-line, and it ought to last us through the night. We'll be as snug as if we were in Sprowl's Cove, hey, Perce?"

Percy could hardly agree with him. The roaring, rain-shot blackness, roofed with murky clouds and floored with rushing surges, was not calculated to inspire confidence in a landsman. With every sea the dory

leaped back several feet, until the straightened painter brought her up. Showers of spray flew over the boys. It was well both were clad in oilskins.

They were not entirely without light. The water was firing. Every breaking wave dissolved in phosphorescence. The tub before the bow was outlined in radiance; the whipping painter was transmuted to a rope of silver; and as the dory split the crashing rollers they streamed away in sparkles of ghostly flame. Even in their peril the boys could not help appreciating the weird beauty of the display.

"Wonderful, isn't it?" said Percy. "Say, Jim, how far south's the nearest land?"

"Somewhere around two thousand miles, I guess. Too far to interest us any. I think it's one of the West Indies."

The wind was growing stronger, the sea rougher. Now and then a young flood set both boys bailing, Jim with the bucket, Percy with the scoop.

"Won't do to let it gain too much on us," remarked Jim. "She can't sink; but if she should fill it'd be pretty uncomfortable."

The rain had ceased; the clouds did not hang so low. Suddenly Percy gave a whoop of joy.

"Look in the west!"

Not far above the horizon appeared a rift of clear blue sky, sown with stars. Longer and wider it grew. Other rifts added themselves to it, and in an unbelievably short time the entire heaven was swept clean. But somehow the wind seemed to blow harder

than before.

"How soon will it calm down?" asked Percy.

Jim shook his head.

"Can't say! May be a dry blow for two days longer."

He looked eastward.

"What's that coming? Steamer?"

Sure enough it was. Below the white light on the masthead appeared and disappeared the red and green, obscured intermittently by the tossing waves. Soon they could be seen all the time. Percy began to grow excited.

"Suppose they'll pick us up?"

"Not a chance in a thousand. It's too rough for the lookout to spy our boat, and, even if the steamer should come close, we could never make her hear. She's either a tramp or an ocean liner from Halifax for Portland."

On she plowed unswervingly and majestically, straight toward them.

"I'm afraid she's coming too near for comfort," said Jim, anxiously. "She might run us down and never know it. Lots of fishermen have gone that way. Ship that oar in the scull-hole. I'm going to haul in the drug."

He lifted the trawl-tub aboard and sprang quickly aft.

"We'll know pretty quick whether she's likely to pass ahead or astern. We can't count on being seen. We've got to look out for ourselves."

Freed from its floating anchor, the dory bobbed wildly. Wielding his oar skilfully, Spurling held her bow to the north, ready to scull for the last inch, or to let her drop back, as the approach of the steamer might make it advisable.

Closer and closer came the big boat; her lights oscillated with pendulum-like regularity as she rolled on the heavy seas.

"She'll pass astern," was Jim's verdict. "Won't do to drift in front of her."

He sculled strongly, keeping an anxious eye on the threatening monster. Percy's hair bristled.

"Harder, Jim!" he shouted. "She's going to run us down! Steamer ahoy! Keep off! Keep off!"

The rushing foam smothered his cries. Meanwhile Spurling worked like a steam-engine. Two lives hung on his oar-blade.

As the knife-like stem sheared past, close astern, the green eye disappeared; the red glared menacingly down from the huge bulk looming overhead. Then the lofty black side swept by, flashing an occasional ray from a lighted port-hole. The screw gave them a sickening moment, but they soon tossed safely astern, breathing hard, eyes on the dwindling leviathan, wallowing westward.

Jim spoke first: "Close as they make 'em! I'm glad that's over!"

Percy agreed with all his heart. Jim had discovered that the tub was becoming a bit shaky, so he reinforced the lanyard, and strengthened the bottom by binding it with ground-line. Before long it was

towing again in front of the bow, as good as new.

Hours passed, but the intensity of the gale did not slacken. The sea was frightfully rough. It kept the boys bailing continually.

Dawn broke at last. On the eastern horizon grew a pale light, against which the ragged, savagely leaping crests were silhouetted weirdly. It brightened to a crimson glow, and soon the sun was shooting its fiery arrows across the heaving, glittering waste.

The forenoon wore slowly on as they drifted steadily south. The water around the dory was alive with whirlpools. Gigantic green seas rushed down as if to overwhelm her, but she flirted her bow aloft and rode them stanchly.

Percy, glancing to starboard, saw a black fin cutting the slope of a watery ridge.

"Shark, Jim?"

"Yes. And there's another to port. They're looking for trouble. They'll stick by till we're out of this scrape or in a worse one."

He was right. The sun reached its zenith and began to descend, but still the black fins wove their ceaseless circles round the boat.

Jim had been scanning the sea, hand over his eyes.

"There's a schooner," he remarked, without enthusiasm.

Percy was all excitement.

"Where? Where?"

"Up there, two miles to windward. Double reefed and

clawing west. She'd never see us in a thousand years, and if she did she couldn't do us any good. Forget her!"

The schooner inched her way imperceptibly under the horizon. The boys had eaten nothing for twenty-four hours; excitement had prevented them from feeling hungry. Now they came to a realization that they had stomachs, and they finished half the hard bread remaining in the bag.

"We'll save the rest," decided Jim. "May need it worse later than we do now."

Percy could easily have eaten twice his share, but he recognized the wisdom of Jim's decision. Both were very thirsty, but without a drop of fresh water aboard there was nothing to do but wait.

At four o'clock came disaster. The drug suddenly let go!

Round whirled the dory, side to the seas. Jim grabbed the oar and jammed it into the scull-hole, but before he could wet the blade a crumbling roller almost swamped the boat. Out went everything that would float.

"Save that bucket, Perce!" shouted Spurring.

Percy clutched the handle just as the pail was going over the side. He bailed, while Spurling brought the flooded craft stern to the seas.

"Take her now, Perce! Give me the bucket!"

Furiously he began scooping out the water. After a long, discouraging fight the boat was bailed clear.

"We've got to run before it while I rig another drug,"

said Spurling. "Keep her as she is."

In the stern stood a five-gallon can of gasolene, one of the few things that had not been washed overboard when the dory filled. Making use of the sadly diminished coil of ground-line, Jim fastened this can to the end of the painter. Picking a smooth chance, he swung the bow up into the wind again; and soon they were floating snugly behind their new drug.

For another hour they drifted uneventfully. Out of a cloudless sky the red sun dropped below the flying spindrift. A second night was coming, and still the norther raged with undiminished violence.

It was growing dark and the stars were already out when a new sound fell on Percy's ears.

"What's that?" he exclaimed.

Up from the south came a faint, long-drawn, mournful voice, *Oo-oo-oo-ooh!* They listened breathlessly. It sounded again, *Oo-oo-oo-ooh!*

"Whistling buoy!" ejaculated Jim. He thought a moment. "Cashe's Ledge!" he shouted. "Sixty miles south of Tarpaulin! That's drifting some since yesterday afternoon. Must be less than a mile to leeward or we couldn't hear it against this gale."

Nearer and nearer, louder and louder, sounded the melancholy note, just west of south. Both boys strained their eyes.

"I see it!" cried Percy, triumphantly. "There—rising on that swell! Almost astern! It's striped red and black!"

But Jim gave him no heed. Lips parted and face pale,

he was gazing intently at something farther off. Suddenly he lifted his hand.

"Listen! Do you hear that?"

Above the noise of the surrounding sea rose a low, savage roar. Percy caught Jim's alarm.

"What is it?"

"The breaker on the shoal! Sometimes it combs up high as a house. It's less than a quarter-mile southwest of the buoy, and we're drifting straight down upon it! If we go over it, we'll be swamped, sure as fate, drug or no drug! We'll simply be buried under tons and tons of water!"

Percy fought off his panic.

"What shall we do?" he stammered.

"Make the whistler—if we can. It's buoy or breaker, and mighty quick, too!"

The dory's drift, if unchanged, would take her several yards west of the steel can crowned with its red whistle-cage. Its warning blast set the air vibrating, *Oo-oo-oo-ooh!*

Jim snatched out his knife and sprang forward.

"Oar in the scull-hole, Perce! Lively!"

Driving the point of his blade into the side of the bow, he dragged the painter in until he reached the gasolene-can. Severing the rope with one quick, strong slash, he scrambled aft and seized the oar.

"Stand by with that painter to jump for the buoy, when I put the bow against it! Better take off your shoes first!"

Percy obeyed. In his stocking feet he would be less liable to slip on the wet iron. Making a loose coil of the painter, he crouched in the bow. Meanwhile Jim had turned the dory round and headed her north of the whistler. A strong current was setting toward the shoal. It took all his strength to scull against it.

Rapidly they neared the can. About eight feet in diameter at the water-line, it tapered to two feet across its flat top, seven feet above. From the circumference rose two iron bails, crossing each other at right angles, several inches above the whistle, which stood two and one-half feet high. A little to one side stuck up the small tube of the intake valve. Round the buoy above the water-line were bolted four lugs, or iron handles, by which the can could be hoisted on board the lighthouse steamer.

As the steel cone sank the whistle bellowed resonantly. Down, down, till the waves swept over its top. Then, slowly it began to rise. The bellowing cut off, and the air rushed into the intake tube.

Percy watched it, fascinated. Jim's voice roused him to their peril.

"Look sharp! Be ready!"

Less than ten feet of wild black water lay between the madly leaping bow and the buoy. Beyond it the shoal broke with an angry roar in a long line of crumbling foam. Percy gathered his strength for the leap.

The distance lessened, foot by foot. Foot by foot the red-and-black cone emerged, as if thrust up by a giant hand. Percy fastened his eyes on a lug.

A grayback heaved the dory forward.

"Now!" screamed Jim.

Young Whittington sprang upon the bow thwart, painter end in his right hand, and leaped for the lug. A second later the boat crashed against the buoy.

His left hand caught the bent iron bar; his right missed it. His body thudded against the riveted side, slid down, and he hung by one arm, waist-deep in the water.

OO-OO-OO-OOH!!!

From the inverted mouth of the whistle, a few feet above, a hoarse, deafening blast roared down into his face.

As he flung up his right hand and passed the end of the painter through the lug a body shot over his head. Spurling had leaped on the top of the dropping buoy. Percy was dragged down under the surface, the whistle still ringing in his ears. He clung desperately to lug and painter.

The vibrations ceased. The can had reached its lowest point. It was rising again. Out came his head.

"Can you hold on a minute, Perce?" roared Spurling's voice.

"Yes," strangled Percy.

"Then let go that painter! I've got it."

Hanging head down, his legs twined round a bail, Spurling worked rapidly with both hands. Soon he had fastened the rope securely to the lug, mooring the dory to the buoy.

OO-OO-OO-OOH!

The can was sinking again. Putting both hands under Percy's arms, Jim lifted him. Then he lowered his grip to the boy's waist. That terrific blast rendered speech inaudible, but Percy understood. As the water raised part of his weight, he scrambled up over his friend's body.

Thirty seconds later, drenched and gasping, they stood clinging to the bails on the top of the buoy.

XIX

ON THE WHISTLER

Jim was the first to recover his breath.

"Well!" he ejaculated. "Here we are! And mighty fortunate! We'll neither of us ever have a closer shave."

He looked southwest, where the ledge was breaking white through the gloom, and shook his head. Percy, shivering with excitement, said nothing; but he felt as thankful as his mate. They stood close together on the circular top, holding on to the crossed bails, waist-high. Between them rose the whistle, thirty inches tall. Every time they sank in the trough it emitted its dismal bellow.

To leeward the dory wallowed at the end of her painter, almost full of water.

"Split her bow when we struck," said Spurling. "Just

as well not to be in her. At any rate, we're not drifting."

Their position, however, was none too secure. The buoy had a rise and fall of seven feet. Unsteadied by keel or rudder, it bobbed unexpectedly this way and that. The boys were obliged to cling fast to keep their footing on the narrow, slippery top.

A sudden jump of the rolling can wrenched Percy's right hand from its hold. But for his left, he would have been flung into the sea.

"That won't do," said Spurling.

Producing a coil of line, he took three or four turns round Percy's waist, and lashed him fast to the bails. He did the same for himself.

"Guess we'll stick on now," he remarked.

"Where did you get that rope?" asked Percy.

"It's all that's left of the ground-line. Thought it might come in handy, so I jammed it inside my oil-coat before I jumped. Never can tell when you'll need a few feet for something or other."

The screech of the buoy, recurring regularly, set their ears ringing.

"We've got to choke that off!" exclaimed Spurling, finally. "We'll go crazy, sure, if we have to listen to it all night."

"How'll you do it? Jam something into the mouth of the whistle?"

"Might smother it that way, but I know an easier one."

He pushed his handkerchief into the curved end of the intake tube just as the bellowing buoy reached its lowest point. The next time it sank there was no sound.

"Can't sing out unless it fills up with air," remarked Spurling. "It's human, so far!"

"Is it all right to shut the signal off altogether? Mightn't some vessel strike the shoal if she doesn't hear it?"

"Not much chance of that to-night! Everything'll give Cashe's a wide berth in a norther. But I'll let it scream a few times every ten minutes. That'll be often enough to warn off any craft within hearing."



THEY STOOD CLOSE TOGETHER ON THE CIRCULAR TOP, HOLDIN(TO THE CROSSED BAILS, WAIST-HIGH

The last red embers of the sunset died out, and from horizon to horizon the sky was ablaze with stars. Even the boys, wet, hungry, and exhausted, could not be blind to such magnificence.

"Good evening to study astronomy, Perce!"

"Never saw a finer! But I'd want a steadier foundation than this for my telescope."

As on the previous night, the sea was aglow with phosphorescence. Every wave was crested with silver. Buoy and tugging dory kept the water alive with light as they rose and fell. Leeward the long shoal broke in glittering foam.

Spurling gazed silently down into the eddying tide.

"Runs fast, doesn't it?" said Percy.

"Yes; it's the ebb out of Fundy. Comes piling down over Cashe's at a two-knot rate. When the flood begins it'll run just as hard the other way. That's what makes the shoal so dangerous. There's only from four to seven fathoms over the ledge at low water, and that's little enough in a storm."

"Were you ever down here before?"

"No; but I've heard Uncle Tom Sprowl tell about the place dozens of times. Once, in particular, he was here in a schooner, hand-lining. It was almost calm, just a light east wind blowing, when they anchored an eighth of a mile to weather of the shoal. Pretty soon the decks were alive with fish. It kept breezing on all the time, and the ledge broke higher and higher; but they were having such good luck they hated to leave. So they hung to it till it got too rough for a small boat, and the breaker was twenty or thirty feet high. There was a big cod or haddock on every line, when all of a sudden the cable parted and they began to blow down on the ledge. It took some lively work to save the schooner and themselves. They got sail on her just in time to skin by the end of

the breaker. Uncle Tom's been out in some pretty bad storms, but he's always said the time he parted his cable on Cashe's was the closest shave he ever had. See that shark!"

Ten yards off, just under the surface, appeared the glittering outlines of a great fish. It moved leisurely, its projecting fin making a silver ripple.

"Twelve feet, if he's an inch! I'd hate to fall overboard while he's around."

"Think he's a man-eater?"

"Don't know! But I'd rather let somebody else find out. There's another! I've heard fishermen say the sea round here's alive with 'em. I haven't a doubt but those two fellows that chased us to-day are somewhere about. Once they get after a boat, they'll follow it till the cows come home. Guess I'll let Ole Bull give us a few notes!"

He pulled his handkerchief out of the intake tube. Presently the voice of the whistle was echoing across the sea. After a half-dozen screeches Spurling stopped up the tube again.

"That'll do for now! We'll give him another chance in ten minutes."

Up and down went the buoy, pitching and reeling dizzily. An occasional wave-crest buried the boys to the waist.

"No place for a man with a weak stomach, hey, Perce," said Spurling. "You couldn't have stood this two months ago."

Percy was gazing intently southward.

"What's that white spot?" he asked, suddenly, pointing to a glittering patch fifty or sixty yards square.

"School of herring! Now look out for some fun! Something's liable to be after 'em any minute."

Hardly had the words left Jim's mouth when a great white streak moved rapidly toward the schooling fish.

"Whale!" shouted Spurling, excitedly. "Watch out!"

With a tremendous rush the huge, gleaming body shot suddenly clear of the water. For an instant it hung suspended, ten feet above the surface. Then, with a mighty splash, it dropped back, right amid the herring. The glittering school dispersed in a thousand directions, and the monster moved slowly off to the south.

"Biggest whale I ever saw," observed Jim. "Fully seventy feet long! Well, he's had one good meal. Wish we could say the same! Hungry, old man?"

"Yes; but more thirsty."

"Stick to it! Somebody's likely to show up at any time to-morrow and take us off."

"But if they don't—"

"We'll have to hang on till they do."

Percy could hardly stand upright. His joints ached. His eyelids sagged heavily for want of sleep. He would have given anything if he could have lain down. But that was impossible. Something of his father's doggedness enabled him to set his teeth and stand clinging to the bails.

Their plight was bad enough, but it might have been much worse. Percy shivered a bit as he looked at the wallowing dory and the breaker beyond it.

The buoy could not drift. It could not founder. It afforded them a safe refuge from wind and sea; but it could not give them food or drink.

Particularly drink. Every atom in Percy's body, every corpuscle in his blood, seemed to be crying out for water. It did not seem as if he could endure it. He was almost desperate enough to quench his thirst from the sea. But, no! Men who did that went crazy. He moistened his dry lips with his tongue. If only he could have had a full dipper from the spring behind the camp! And he had turned up his nose because it was brackish!

"Wish I had some of Filippo's hot biscuits!" said Jim. "I can taste 'em now."

"Don't, Jim! It makes me feel worse. How long can a man stand it without eating and drinking?"

"There was a fisherman out of Bass Harbor, last October, who went in a power-boat to Clay Bank after hake. His engine played out and he got blown off by a northwester. For over five days he didn't have a thing to eat or drink. Then he got back to Mount Desert Rock. That's the longest I ever heard of."

Five days! And they had not yet gone two. Percy became silent again.

The night dragged painfully. With mortal slowness the Great Bear circled the Pole Star. Jim was acquainted with the principal constellations, and he ran them over for Percy's benefit. Gradually,

however, their conversation lagged. You cannot feel much interest in astronomy when your eyes feel as if they were being pressed down by leaden weights and your stomach is absolutely empty.

Percy's body drooped over the bails. Though the position was horribly uncomfortable, he had all he could do to prevent himself from going to sleep, even despite the occasional screeches of the whistle. With an immense effort he stiffened himself upright. Jim was gazing down into the water.

"It's going to moderate before long," he remarked, casually.

Percy came wide awake in an instant.

"How can you tell? It's blowing as hard as ever."

"I know that. But the tide doesn't run so strong against the buoy. Just as it always makes up before the wind comes, so it begins to go down before the wind lessens. I believe the gale'll blow itself out by the middle of the forenoon."

The news seemed too good to be true; but it dispelled Percy's drowsiness. He pried his eyes open and stared around.

The waves were still running high and breaking in fiery sparkles. The silver sharks unwearyingly kept their silent vigil about the rocking buoy. Up the eastern horizon was stealing a faint pallor, harbinger of the approaching dawn.

Lighter and lighter it grew. The gulls, which had been floating on the water all night, began to take wing and fill the air with their grating cries. The phosphorescence died out of the sea. Another day

had begun.

Raising his right hand, Spurling turned its open palm toward the north.

"What did I tell you?" he exclaimed. "The wind is going down."

Even Percy could see that it was not blowing so hard. The water, too, had grown much smoother, and the roar of the breaker was not so loud.

"It'll be calm as a mill-pond in a few hours," remarked Jim. "By noon there ought to be some fishermen out here. They always start from Portland on the end of a norther, and run for this buoy to make their grounds from. All we've got to do now is to hold on and wait."

He pulled in the dory and looked her carefully over.

"Bow split open, as I thought," said he. "But apart from that she isn't damaged any. A little work'll make her as good as new. And in the stern is that box with the piston-rod in it. I'd have hated to lose that, after all this fuss. Things might have turned out a good deal worse, eh, Perce? But the next time I'll know enough to hang up at Seal Island."

Jim's cheerfulness was contagious. Percy felt better. Though he was still tormented by hunger and thirst, the thought that relief might soon come gave him courage to endure them. Jim let the dory slip back to the end of her painter.

"Might as well take an Indian breakfast."

He buckled his belt a hole tighter.

"Not a sail in sight yet! We could lie down in the

dory and go to sleep, if she wasn't full of water. But, as things are, we'll have to make ourselves as comfortable as we can right here. Let's hope it won't be for long!"

The gale weakened to a brisk breeze. The sea fell rapidly to a long, lazy swell, on which the buoy rocked drowsily. The warm sun inclined the boys to sleep; but they fought it off and scanned the horizon with eager eyes. Seven o'clock. Eight. Nine. Ten. And still no sign of a sail.

At half past ten a smoke-feather rose in the east.

"Yarmouth boat on her way to Boston," said Jim. "She'll pass too far north to see us."

He was right. The steamer's course kept her on the horizon, several miles off. Before long she vanished to the west. Half past eleven went by, and no fishermen appeared. Percy began to fear that Jim was mistaken, after all.

"Here comes our packet," remarked Spurling, quietly.

A tiny saw-tooth of canvas was rising out of the sea, miles northwest. As it grew larger it developed into a schooner under full sail, heading straight for the buoy.

"She sees us," said Jim.

Percy felt like dancing for joy. Nearer and nearer came the schooner. The boys could see her crew staring curiously at them from along her rail. Fifty yards off she shot up into the wind and prepared to launch a boat. They could read the name on her starboard bow.

"The *Grade King*," spelled Spurling. "I know her. She's

a Harpswell vessel. Come out to seine herring. Bet she left Portland early this morning. Her captain's Silas Greenlaw; he used to sail with Uncle Tom. He'll use us O. K."

A dory with two men in it came rowing toward the buoy.

"How long've you fellows been hanging on here?" shouted a red-sweatered, gray-haired man in the stern.

"Since six last night. We blew down from Tarpaulin Island in the norther. Don't you know me, Captain Greenlaw?"

"Why, it's Jim Spurling, Tom Sprowl's nephew!" exclaimed the astonished captain. "So the gale blew you down from Tarpaulin, eh? Well, all I've got to say is that you were confounded lucky to hit the buoy and not the breaker. How long since you've had anything to eat or drink?"

"Forty-six hours since we've had a swallow of water, and about twenty since we finished our last hard bread."

"Well, well! You must be hungry and thirsty! Come right aboard and we'll see what we can do for you."

Gladly the boys cut the lashings that bound them to the bails. The whistle gave a screech of farewell as they tumbled stiffly into the boat. The solid deck of the *Gracie* felt good beneath their feet.

"You can have all the water you want, boys; but you'd better go light on food at first," cautioned the captain.

It seemed to Percy as if he could never get enough to

drink. Gradually, however, his thirst was quenched. He began to realize that he had not slept for two days and a half.

"I'd like to carry you right back to the island," said Captain Greenlaw, "for your friends must be worrying. But there are lots of herring here, and I've got to get a load first. That may take two or three days. I'll land you at Tarpaulin on my way home. Better turn in and sleep."

The boys were shortly wrapped in a heavy, dreamless slumber. It seemed to them as if they had just closed their eyes when they were shaken awake again.

"Here's the cutter!" exclaimed the captain. "They got a wireless to hunt you up. Going to run in to Rockland, and can land you at Tarpaulin this evening. What do you say?"

Tired though they were, Jim and Percy were only too glad of a chance to get home speedily. So they were transferred to the *Pollux*, and their leaking dory hoisted aboard. Swung in hammocks in the seamen's quarters, they were soon slumbering dreamlessly again.

At eight that night the *Pollux* stopped off the island. The dory, made sound and tight by the ship's carpenter, was dropped overboard, and the boys rowed into Sprowl's Cove.

Their appearance transformed the gloom that overhung Camp Spurling into the wildest joy. Budge, Throppy, and Filippo burst out of the cabin and raced headlong down the beach, waking the echoes with their shouts of welcome. Even before the dory

grounded they tumbled aboard and flung their arms about the castaways. No brothers, reunited after deadly peril, could have given one another a warmer greeting.

Jim freed his hands at last, stooped, and picked up a package which he tossed out on the gravel. There was a suspicious moisture in his eyes.

"There's the piston-rod!" said he in a rather choky voice. "I guess we'll get our set all right day after to-morrow."

XX

SQUARING AN ACCOUNT

It was almost noon the next day before Jim and Percy rolled out of their bunks in Camp Spurling. One of Filippo's best dinners satisfied the last cravings of their appetites; but for a week they felt the strain of their forty-seven hours in the dory and on the buoy.

"When did you reach the *Pollux*, Throppy?" asked Jim.

"I didn't reach her at all. When you didn't show up that night I wirelessed Criehaven, and the operator there hit the cutter thirty miles to the westward the next forenoon. She began hunting for you right away, but it wasn't until twenty-four hours later that

she found you on the *Gracie King*. We picked up a message from her some time after she took you off the schooner. Perhaps it didn't relieve our minds!"

Jim drew a long breath as he glanced round the cabin.

"Seems good to be here! Not a bad old camp, is it, Perce?"

"Never saw a hotel I'd swap it for," replied Percy, promptly.

Two mornings later Budge and Percy started in the sloop for Vinalhaven after a load of herring. Jim did not accompany them, as he had decided to spend a forenoon hauling and inspecting the lobster-traps. The *Barracouta* ran in alongside Hardy's weir at nine o'clock and took aboard thirty bushels of small fish. She then went around to Carver's Harbor to purchase supplies and fill her tank with gasolene.

It was Percy's first visit to the town since July 4th, the occasion of his disastrous encounter with Jabe. In actual time, his defeat lay only a few weeks back; but, measured by the change that had taken place in himself, the period might well have been years in length.

Percy was treading hostile ground, and he knew it. Prudence might have counseled him to remain on board the *Barracouta* while Budge was making his purchases. Instead, he chose to stroll carelessly along the main street. At a corner he passed a group of small boys, who recognized him at once.

"It's the fresh guy Jabe licked on the Fourth," he heard one mutter in a low tone. "Let's have some fun with him!"

"Sh!" exclaimed another. "Jabe's over in Talcott's grocery. We'll get 'em together again!"

Never interrupting his leisurely saunter, Percy passed out of hearing. But his heart was beating a little quicker and he was conscious of a tightening of nerves and muscles. Weeks of secret, painstaking preparation were drawing to a climax.

Half-turning his head, he saw a barefooted urchin dash across the street and into a store on the other side. Percy began to whistle cheerfully as he strode along, alive to all that was taking place behind him. Crossing the street, he was able to glance back without appearing to do so; and he was just in time to see a stout, freckle-faced, bullet-headed youth shoot out of the store and come hurrying after him, with an eager crowd of small fry trailing behind.

Still feigning unconsciousness of the approaching peril, Percy proceeded, whistling blithely. Through a gap between two buildings he had caught sight of a barn standing alone, some distance ahead and well to one side of the main street; its door was open, revealing a broad stretch of empty floor. He quickened his pace, and presently turned down the short street leading to the structure. Jabe and his retinue were less than fifty yards behind, and gaining rapidly. As Percy turned the corner they broke into a run.

At that same instant young Whittington also began to sprint at top speed; and he kept up this pace as long as he felt sure the building on the corner concealed him from his pursuers. The second the sound of their approaching feet became audible he dropped into his former gait. He was now almost opposite the open door of the barn.

His ears told him that Jabe and his crew had also swung into the cross-street.

"Hey, there!" shouted a voice, roughly.

Percy halted at once and wheeled about with affected surprise. A side glance into the barn told that its mows were well filled and that its floor was strewn with hayseed. Standing at ease, he awaited the approach of his foes.

Jabe dashed up on the run. Five feet from Percy he came to a sudden stop and pushed his bulldog jaw out belligerently.

"Well," he growled, scowling darkly, "I've got you at last just where I want you. You can't cry baby now and run to that big, black-haired fellow. I'm going to lick you good!"

Percy stared at his enemy in mild wonder.

"What for?" he queried, innocently.

But the outward calm of his tones and manner did not betray, even remotely, what was going on beneath. His heart was pumping like an engine, the blood coursed hotly through his arteries, and all over his body his wiry muscles had tensed and knotted. Nine weeks of vigorous life in the open, combined with systematic exercise, taken with the possibility in view of some time squaring his account with Jabe, had made of him an antagonist that even an older, heavier boy might well hesitate to tackle.

Of all this Jabe was ignorant. He saw before him the same fellow he had mastered on the evening of the Fourth, a little browner and clearer-eyed, possibly a little straighter and stouter, but still the same foe his

fist had sent to the ground. Jabe knew of no reason why he could not easily repeat his victory, and he burned to do so in the presence of his admirers. Percy's harmless query roused him to unreasoning anger.

"What for?" he mimicked. "What for? Why, because I always intend to finish what I begin; and I had you only half-licked when they pulled me off. Now I'm going to polish you up to the queen's taste. Hustle into that barn!"

Percy allowed himself to be herded through the open door; it might have been noticed, however, that he was careful not to turn his back to Jabe, and that he stepped springily, with his feet well apart. Once inside, he slid his sole over the hayseed that covered the floor; it was no slipperier than the carpet of needles in that glade of the evergreens where he had practised daily with his improvised punching-bag since the second week in July. A quick glance about photographed on his brain the details of the arena in which he was so soon to play the gladiator.

Jabe misunderstood the glance, and it increased his eagerness to begin the fray.

"Afraid, are you?" he sneered. "Looking for some way out? Well, there isn't any besides this door. Line up across it, boys, and trip him if he tries to bolt before I get through with him. The rat's cornered at last, and now he's *got* to fight. Peel off that coat, Mister! Move quick. I don't want to stop here all day!"

Percy deliberately drew off the garment, folded it into a neat bundle, and laid it, with his cap, on a barrel in a corner of the floor. He had on a closely fitting black jersey, trousers held up by a belt, and

rubber-soled tennis sneakers. This costume was not accidental. It had been donned that morning with an eye to possibilities and in accordance with previous solitary rehearsals. Thus far, events could not have suited him better if he had planned them.

His deliberate motions increased Jabe's anger.

"You'll move faster than that when I get after you," he sneered, "or it'll be over so quick that there won't be any fun in it. Now put up your fists, for I'm going to lick you within an inch of your life! Guard that door, boys!"

His grinning satellites lined up across the opening, two deep, eyes and mouths wide open. In the front rank Percy recognized the imp who had burnt his coat, Jabe's brother, whose chastisement had started the trouble. The lad was dancing up and down with pleasurable anticipation.

"Lick him, Jabe!" he shrilled. "Lick him, Jabe!"

Swinging his clenched fists windmill fashion, Jabe made a savage rush across the echoing floor. Percy waited until his foe was almost upon him, then agilely leaped to one side. Carried on by the momentum of his charge, Jabe swept by and smashed against the wooden partition with a violence that set the hayseed sifting down from the loaded mow. Whirling about, he came back with increased rage.

The boys yelled encouragement to their champion, their voices blending in a chorus, topped by his brother's high-keyed falsetto:

"Lick him, Jabe! Lick him, Jabe!"

Baffled in his first attempt, Jabe needed no applause to incite him to his best efforts. His fists rose and fell like flails as he spurned the flooring in a second onslaught upon his nimble foe. Again Percy, standing motionless until his assailant was almost within arm's-length, avoided his attack; and again Jabe brought up against the other wall with a force that made the boards rattle.

Percy stood untouched a few feet away, smiling slightly, as his opponent gathered himself for another rush. The sight of his enemy, cool and unruffled, made Jabe furious.

"Why don't you fight, you coward?" he cried. "If only I can reach you just once, it'll be all over!"

He hurled himself forward like a missile from a catapult. His right fist grazed Percy's cheek. Roused from his policy of inaction, Percy shot in a stinging blow that found its mark under Jabe's right ear and sent him staggering. The fight was now fairly on.

To and fro across the slippery hayseed the antagonists battled, raising a cloud of dust. The floor echoed hollowly under their quick tread.

From the outset Percy knew that he had not a single sympathizer. But instead of discouraging him, that fact nerved him to do his utmost. He kept himself well in hand and did not waste an effort. If he could continue to side-step Jabe's quick rushes, and let the latter tire himself out, the fight was as good as won.

It was a very different battle from that on July 4th. Jabe was as good as before, but no better; while Percy had improved at least a hundred per cent.; he had more skill and his nerves and muscles were far

stronger. His rubber soles, too, gave him an advantage that he was not slow to improve. They assured him firm footing on the slippery floor and enabled him to turn quickly, as without trying to strike he contented himself with eluding Jabe's mad charges and sledge-hammer blows.

The audience that blocked the door had grown silent. Things were not going according to schedule. After the first few rushes they had realized that their hero was getting the worst of the encounter.

Ten minutes had gone by. Jabe was breathing hard, while Percy was fresh as ever. His cool smile maddened his antagonist and made him less skilful. In one of his onsets he had slammed his doubled fist against the wooden partition and split his knuckles; the pain and the running blood made him wild with rage.

Confident at first of easy victory, he had finally realized that Percy was playing with him, that he had met his master in the boxing-game. His face had shown in turn anger, surprise, alarm, and at last positive fear. But one thought possessed his mind, to win at any cost, by fair means or foul. His rushes, which had slackened, grew more violent. He came at Percy head down; he tried to crowd him into a corner, to throw his arms around him, to overpower him by sheer, brute strength.

Percy realized that in a rough-and-tumble he would be no match for Jabe. In legitimate boxing he had shown himself his foe's superior; and he was not particularly anxious to emphasize that fact by blacking Jabe's eyes or "bloodying" his nose. He would have been willing to let the matter stand where it was or allow Jabe to wear himself fruitlessly

down to exhaustion. But such a course was neither feasible nor safe. Jabe would never voluntarily acknowledge that he was beaten. Besides, there was always the chance of something happening to put Percy at his mercy; and Percy knew only too well what that mercy would be.

His only safety was to force a clear-cut decision.

"It's a case of knock-out," he decided. "No use to bruise him up. Might as well have it over quick!"

Savagely, though somewhat wearily, yet with undaunted determination, Jabe rushed him and struck out with his left. For the first time in the battle Percy launched in with all his strength. He cross-countered with his right on the point of Jabe's jaw.

It was the wind-up. Jabe hit the hayseed in a heap. For a few seconds he lay motionless, then struggled to a sitting position.

"Got enough?" asked Percy.

Jabe took the count.

"I'm licked," he acknowledged; and there were tears in his voice.

"Can I do anything for you?"

"No; I'll be all right in a little while."

Percy put on his coat and cap and started toward the door. As he passed Jabe the latter stretched out his hand.

"You can fight," he conceded, grudging admiration in his tones.

Percy grasped the bunch of stubby fingers.

"So can you," he returned. "If you'd been to the masters I've had, I wouldn't care to mix it with you."

The boys opened a way for him respectfully as he passed through the door. He was breathing a little quicker than usual, but he had not received a scratch. Going back to the wharf where they had landed, he found that Budge had been waiting for him almost fifteen minutes.

"What makes you so late, Perce?" he hailed. "We want to ship these groceries and start for Tarpaulin before noon."

Percy began passing the boxes and bags down aboard the dory.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting," he apologized. "But I've just been settling an account with an old friend."

Then he told Lane of his encounter with Jabe.

"Now," continued he, "I'll tell you why I've been up into the woods every afternoon with that sweater of rockweed. I made it into a tight bundle and hung it on a springy limb to use for a punching-bag. It wasn't very ornamental, but it served the purpose. I've been training for this fight ever since the Fourth; had a feeling I'd get another chance at him. It's over now, and I hope everybody's satisfied. I am, at any rate."

"So that's the reason of your daily pilgrimages," laughed Lane. "You certainly have been faithful enough to deserve to win. But what if you'd never run across Jabe again? Wouldn't you have felt that you'd thrown away your time?"

"Not a bit of it! That bout every afternoon has kept

me in first-class shape. But now the great event has come off, I'm going to break training and give the rockweed a rest."

The *Barracouta* was back at Tarpaulin before three o'clock. A remark dropped by Budge roused the curiosity of the others, and Percy was obliged once more to recount the story of his fight with Jabe.

"Well," said Jim, when he had finished, "they say a patient waiter is no loser; but I guess it depends a good deal on how you spend your time while you're waiting—eh, Perce?"

That night, after dark, when the boys were preparing to turn in, Filippo stepped out to the fish-house for some kindling. He came back on the run.

"*Fuoco!*" he panted.

The others trooped out hastily. On the southern horizon flamed a ruddy light. Spurling gave a cry of alarm.

"Boys, it's a vessel on fire!"

XXI

OLD FRIENDS

Touched by the live wire of human sympathy, Camp Spurling came wide awake in an instant. Out there, four miles to the south, men were perhaps battling

for their lives. Jim issued his orders like bullets.

"Come on, boys! We'll take the *Barracouta*. Fetch a five-gallon can of gas from the fish-house, Perce! Budge and Throppy, launch that dory!"

Dashing into the cabin, he quickly reappeared.

"Thought I'd better get one of those first-aid packets! Somebody may be burnt bad. Now, fellows! Lively!"

The dory was barely afloat when Percy came staggering down the beach with the heavy can. Spurling swung it aboard, and all but Filippo jumped in.

"Start your fire again!" shouted back Jim to the Italian. "Make some coffee! And be sure to have plenty of hot water! We may need it."

Soon the sloop was under way and heading out of the cove.

"Lucky you thought of that fresh can of gas, Jim," said Budge. "The tank's pretty near empty. We'd have been in a nice fix if the engine had stopped about a mile south of the island."

"Take the tiller, Perce!" ordered Spurling.

Vaulting up out of the standing-room, he grasped the port shroud and fastened his eyes on the fiercely blazing vessel. The flames had run up her masts and rigging, and she stood out a lurid silhouette against the black horizon. It was evident that she was doomed.

"She's gone!" was Jim's comment as he dropped back into the standing-room. "Hope her crew got off all right. There isn't much we can do to help; but at any

rate we ought to go out and tow in her boats."

"What is she? Fisherman?" asked Throppy.

"Most likely! And not a very big one. Shouldn't wonder if she'd had a gas explosion in her cabin; I've heard of a good many such cases. Hope nobody's been burnt bad!"

There were a few minutes of silence as they gazed on the spectacle of destruction. The *Barracouta*, driven to her utmost, steadily lessened the distance. Brighter and larger grew the fire; every detail on the fated craft stood sharply out against the pitchy background.

"Here come two boats!" exclaimed Lane.

Sure enough, they were clearly visible, more than two miles off, rising and falling on the swell, their oars flashing in the light from the conflagration. The crew had abandoned the hopeless fight and were saving themselves.

"Keep her straight for 'em, Perce!" directed Jim.

Whittington obeyed. Soon the *Barracouta* was within hailing distance of the dories. In the now diminishing light from the distant fire the boys could see that both were crowded with dark figures.

"Must be at least twenty-five aboard the two," commented Stevens.

"Yes," returned Spurling. "These fishermen carry big crews. Ahoy there! What's the name of your vessel?"

"The *Clementine Briggs*, of Gloucester," replied a man in the bow of the foremost dory. "Running in to Boothbay from Cashe's with a load of herring. The

gas exploded and set her on fire. We tried to put it out, but it was no use. Just got clear with our lives and what we stood in."

"Anybody hurt?"

"Couple of men got their faces burnt, but not very bad. Lucky it was no worse. But the old schooner's gone. Pretty tough on Captain Sykes, here, for he owned most of her and didn't have much insurance. Fisherman's luck!"

"Want a tow in to the island?"

"Sure!"

"Well, toss us your painter, and tell the other boat to make fast to your stern."

In a very short time the *Barracouta* was headed back for Tarpaulin, with the two heavily loaded dories trailing behind her. Delayed by her tow, she moved considerably slower than when coming out. A strange silence hung over the two dories. For fishermen, their crews were unusually quiet, sobered, evidently, by the catastrophe that had overtaken their schooner.

"Wouldn't those men who were burnt like to come aboard the sloop?" inquired Spurling. "Perhaps I can give 'em first aid."

"No," returned the spokesman. "One of 'em's Captain Sykes, here in this dory with the handkerchief over his face. He isn't suffering much, but his cheeks got scorched, so I'm talking for him. The other man is in the next boat. The only thing for 'em to do is to grin and bear it; but just now they're not grinning much, 'specially the captain."

Silence again. The sullen, red blaze on the distant vessel was dying down against the horizon. The flames had stripped her to a skeleton. Her hempen running rigging had been consumed; sails, gaffs, and booms lay smoldering on her decks; above the hull only her masts and bowsprit were outlined in fire against the blackness behind.

Lacking anything better to do, Jim began counting the men in the dories. He made thirteen in each. Most of them sat like graven images, neither speaking nor stirring. They had not even turned their heads to look at the perishing schooner. He could not understand such indifference to the fate of the craft that had been their home.

Sprowl's Cove was right ahead. Filippo opened the cabin door and stood framed within it, the light behind him casting a cheery glow down the beach. Louder and louder the bank behind the lagoon flung back the staccato of the exhaust. Presently the sloop nosed into the haven, the engine stopped, and Throppy went forward to gaff the mooring.

The dories were cast off and rowed to the beach. By the time the boys got ashore all the men had landed. Jim, who had been watching them quietly, noted that most of them disembarked clumsily, more like landlubbers than sailors. They separated into two groups of very unequal size. One, numbering six, including the men with handkerchiefs over their burnt faces, withdrew from the others and began to talk in low tones, with earnest, excited gestures. The remaining twenty clotted loosely together, awkward and ill at ease, still preserving their mysterious silence.

Before Jim had time to offer his unexpected guests

anything to eat or drink, Filippo bustled hospitably down the beach to the larger group.

"Will you have *caffè*? It is hot and *eccellente*."

They stared at him without replying. By the light from the open door Jim could see that they were dressed like landsmen and that their clothes did not fit well. Their faces were darkish, they had flat noses, and their close-cropped hair was straight and black.

Before Filippo could repeat his question a man from the smaller group hurried up and pushed himself abruptly between the silent score and their questioner.

"No!" said he, brusquely. "We don't want anything. We had supper just before the fire."

His tone and attitude forbade further questioning. Filippo, abashed by the rebuff, returned rather shamefacedly to the cabin. The speaker remained with the group, as if to protect them from further approaches. To Jim his attitude seemed to be almost that of a guard. It deepened the mystery that already hung about the party.

It was now past eight o'clock, and naturally some provision would soon have to be made for passing the night. Jim pondered. Twenty-six guests would prove a severe tax on their already cramped accommodations. Still, the thing could be arranged; it must be. The smaller group of six could be taken into the camp. Six of the silent twenty could be stowed away aboard the sloop; while the remaining fourteen must make what shift they could in the fish-house. Jim proposed this plan to the sentinel.

The man disapproved flatly.

"No!" was his decided reply. "We've got to get away to-night."

"To-night?" echoed Jim in amazement. "Why, man alive, you can't do that! It's fifteen miles to Matinicus, and you're loaded so deep it'd take you almost until morning to row there. And even if you made it all right, you wouldn't gain anything, for the boat for Rockland doesn't leave until the first of the afternoon. Besides, this wind's liable to blow up a storm. Of course you could row ten miles north to Head Harbor on Isle au Haut, walk up the island, and catch the morning boat for Stonington; but you'd have to pull most of the way against the ebb, and when this wind gets a little stronger it's going to be pretty choppy. *I* wouldn't want to risk it. Better stop with us to-night and let us make you as comfortable as we can; and to-morrow you can start for any place you please."

The man shook his head stubbornly.

"How far is it to the mainland?" he asked.

Jim could hardly believe his ears.

"The mainland!" he exclaimed. "A good twenty-five miles."

"Well, we've got to be there before morning."

"You're crazy, man! Twenty-five miles across these waters in the night, with thirteen men in each dory! You'd never make it in the world. You can't do it."

"Well, maybe we can't," retorted the other, impatiently, "but we're going to. There's more ways to kill a cat than by choking her to death with cream."

He walked back to the smaller group, and soon they were in heated, but indistinct, argument. Jim noted that the men with handkerchiefs over their faces seemed now to have no difficulty in bearing their share of the conversation. Captain Sykes, in especial, was almost violent in his gestures.

Presently they seemed to have reached an agreement. The spokesman walked back to Jim and came directly to the point.

"What'll you take to set the crowd of us over on the mainland near Owl's Head before daylight?"

Jim was equally direct.

"No number of dollars you can name. I don't care to risk my boat and twenty-five or thirty lives knocking round the Penobscot Bay ledges on a night like this. But I'll be glad to take you all over to Matinicus tomorrow for nothing."

"That won't do. We've got to reach the mainland tonight. I'll give you fifty dollars. Come, now!"

Jim shook his head.

"Seventy-five! No? A hundred, then! What d'you say?"

"No use!" replied Jim. "I told you so at first."

The stranger eyed him a moment, then stepped aside to parley again with the others. The colloquy was even more spirited than before. Captain Sykes swung his arms like a crazy man. He pointed to the sky, then to the sea, then to the voiceless score, huddled together, sheep-like, on the beach. Back came the speaker again, a nervous decision in his manner.

"If you won't set us over yourself, what'll you sell that sloop for? Give you two hundred dollars!"

Reading refusal in the lad's face, he raised the bid before Jim had time to open his lips.

"Three hundred! We've some passengers who must get to a certain place at a particular time, and they can't do it unless we can land 'em before daylight to-morrow. Say four hundred!"

"That sloop isn't for sale."

"Wouldn't you take five hundred for her?"

"No; nor a thousand!"

Jim's jaws came together. Back in his brain was forming a suspicion of these fishermen who raised their bid so glibly. Why were they so eager to reach the mainland that night, and why did the twenty have no voice in the discussion? He scrutinized them searchingly.

"What are you staring at?" demanded the man, angrily.

Jim did not reply. Percy passed by on his way to the cabin. He had been using his eyes to good advantage. He nudged Jim.

"Those fellows are Chinamen," he whispered. "I've seen too many of 'em to be mistaken."

His words crystallized Jim's suspicions into certainty. The whole thing was plain now. The crew of the *Clementine Briggs* (if, indeed, that was her name) were no fishermen, but smugglers of Chinese!

He remembered a recent magazine article on the

breaking of the immigration laws. Chinamen would cross the Pacific to Vancouver, paying the Dominion head-tax, and thus gaining admission into Canada. A society, organized for the purpose, would take them in charge, teach them a few ordinary English phrases, transport them to New Brunswick, and slip them aboard some fast schooner. The captain of this vessel would receive three hundred dollars a head for landing his passengers safely here and there at lonely points on the New England coast, whence they could make their way undetected to their friends in the large cities. Thus were the exclusion laws of the United States set at naught.

The destruction of the schooner had made it necessary for her passengers to be landed somewhere as secretly and as quickly as possible. Twenty men at three hundred dollars a head meant six thousand dollars. That explained the anxiety of the six white men to reach the mainland that night. They were criminals, breaking their country's laws for money.

Jim decided that they should never make use of the *Barracouta*.

The spokesman dropped his conciliatory mask and turned away defiantly.

"All right, young fellow! You've had your say; now we'll have ours."

"Throppy," said Jim in a low tone to Stevens, who was standing with Lane beside him, "these men are smugglers. Call the cutter!"

He had time for nothing more. As Stevens slipped quietly back into the cabin there was an angry outburst among the group on the beach.

"I've done my best, Cap," protested a voice. "He won't listen to reason. Now take that rag off your face and handle this thing yourself. It's up to you."

There was a sudden rush of enraged men toward Lane and Spurling. As they came, two wrenched the handkerchiefs from their faces, revealing to the astounded boys the features of the would-be sheep-thieves of the first of the summer, Dolph and Captain Bart Brittler!

The latter was white with rage. His voice rose almost to a screech.

"No more fooling! We need that sloop and we're going to have her! Will you sell her?"

"No."

"Then we'll take her!"

Brittler's hand shot into his pocket as if for a revolver.

"Stop there, Cap!" warned Dolph's voice. "No gun-play! 'Tisn't necessary. We can handle 'em."

He flung himself suddenly on Spurling; another man leaped upon Lane. Though taken completely by surprise and almost hurled backward, Jim quickly recovered his balance. A sledge-hammer blow from Dolph's fist grazed his jaw as he sprang aside. He returned it with interest, his right going true to its mark; down went Dolph, as if hit by a pile-driver. He lay for a moment, stunned.

Strong and active though Jim was, he could not bear the brunt of the entire battle. Lane's assailant had proved too much for him; they were struggling together on the gravel, the older man on top. Percy

and Filippo came running; but their aid counted for little. A stocky smuggler turned toward them. A single blow from his fist sent the Italian reeling. Percy lasted longer; but his skill was no match for the brute strength of his foe. His lighter blows only stung his antagonist to fiercer efforts. Little by little the boy's strength failed and his breath came harder. He slipped on a smooth stone; with a sudden rush his foe pinioned his arms and held him struggling.



"WE NEED THAT SLOOP AND WE'RE GOING TO HAVE HER!"

Dolph recovered, staggered to his feet, and entered the fray again. It was four to one against Jim; he fought manfully, but it was no use. Presently he lay flat on his back on the gravel, bruised and panting, one man kneeling on each arm, and a third on his chest.

"Take him up to the camp, boys!" puffed Brittler.

The doughty captain had not escaped unscathed. A swollen black eye and a bleeding nose bore eloquent testimony to the force and accuracy of Jim's blows. A guard on each side and another behind were soon

propelling Spurling toward the open door. From within came the ceaseless click of a telegraph instrument. Throppy was still calling the cutter. Jim heard the quick patter of the continental code; Brittler heard it, too, and understood. He sprang forward with a shout of alarm.

"They've got a wireless! Smash it!"

A buffet on the side of the head knocked Stevens off his soap-box and sent him rolling on the floor. Five seconds later a crashing blow from a stick of firewood put the instrument out of commission. Brittler poised his club threateningly over the prostrate Stevens.

"Wish I knew if you've been able to get a message through to anybody! If I thought you had—"

He did not finish, but half-raised the stick, then dropped it again and turned away. One by one the remaining members of Spurling & Company were bundled unceremoniously into the cabin. Then the door was slammed shut and two men with automatics were stationed on guard outside.

"Don't shoot unless you have to," instructed Brittler's voice, purposely raised. "And remember a bullet in the leg'll stop a man just as quick as one through the body."

And then in a tone lower, but perfectly audible to those inside:

"But don't stand any fooling! Stop 'em anyway! You know as well as I do how much we've got at stake."

XXII

PERCY SCORES

Defeated and imprisoned in their own camp, the boys faced one another dazedly. Though none of the five had suffered serious injury in the scuffle, all were more or less bruised. Lane had a slight cut where the back of his head had come in contact with a sharp stone on the beach; and a swelling on Jim's right cheek told where the hard fist of one of his assailants had landed.

Outside, the two guards conversed in low tones; but for a few minutes no one spoke or moved in the cabin. The boys sat on the boxes or had thrown themselves into their bunks. Elbow on table, chin resting in palm, Jim was buried in thought. In a short time, he knew, Brittler and his gang would sail away in the *Barracouta*. They would land their human cargo and probably scuttle the sloop. Somehow they must be thwarted; but how?

The boys had no weapons to match those of their armed guard. Without ammunition, the shot-gun was but a bar of iron. How could they cope with the bullets in the automatics? Undoubtedly every smuggler carried a revolver, and would use it in a pinch; possibly some might not wait until the pinch came. It was a knotty problem. The drops oozed out on Jim's forehead as he wrestled for its solution.

A low whistle fell on his ear. He glanced toward Percy's bunk and saw the latter's hand raised in

warning; he was taking off his shoes, quickly and noiselessly. Why? Jim and the others watched.

Soon Percy stood in his stocking feet. He pulled out his knife and opened the large blade. Stooping low, he stole toward the farther end of the cabin. The window there was open and covered with mosquito netting.

Steps grated on the pebbles outside. One of the guards was making a circuit of the camp. Percy flattened himself on the floor directly beneath the window. The others, hardly daring to breathe, looked away. The man paused for a moment; Jim knew that he was peering in. Apparently satisfied that all was well, he resumed his patrol.

Without delay Percy rose. He drew his knife along the netting near the sill, then cut it from top to bottom on each side, close to the frame. So skilfully did the keen blade do its work that the screen hung apparently undisturbed.

The guards began talking again. Placing one of the boxes silently under the window, and stepping upon it, Percy slipped through the opening. His light build enabled him to drop to the ground without making any noise. The netting fell back and hung as before.

Outside, it was thick fog; a slight drizzle was beginning. It was impossible to see further than a few feet. But the last two months had familiarized Percy with every square yard of the beach, and he could have found his way along it blindfold. Cat-footed, he stole down toward the water.

Steps approached, voices; he halted, ready for a hasty retreat. But the feet receded toward the cabin,

and he had no difficulty in recognizing the tones of Dolph and Brittler. The latter was in a bad humor.

"Now," he growled, "we've got a long way to go, and none too much time. Every minute we waste here means just so much off the other end. Granted we reach the mainland all right, we'll have to hustle to slip those Chinks under cover before daylight. You'd better round 'em up in that fish-house, so none of 'em'll stray away and keep us from starting the second the sloop's ready. We've got to make sure there's plenty of gas aboard, as well as a compass and chart. I'll see if I can scare up a couple of lanterns."

The two separated, Dolph evidently going to look after the Chinese, while Brittler kept on toward the cabin. Percy stood stock-still, his heart thumping. Would the captain discover his absence?

"How's everything here, boys?" hailed Brittler.

"All quiet," replied one of the sentries.

"Come inside with me, Herb, so these fellows won't try any funny business."

The door opened. Percy felt a thrill of fear. How could they fail to notice there were only four prisoners in the camp?

But their captors evidently had not the least suspicion that he had escaped. Probably they thought he was lying in one of the bunks. He could hear the voices of Brittler and Jim, the one questioning, angry, and menacing, the other tantalizingly deliberate as he grudgingly gave the information demanded. Percy delayed no longer. He had his own work to do, and it demanded all his energy.

Down he stole to the water's edge, then followed it west until he reached a sloping rock. The *Barracouta*, he knew, was moored not fifty feet out in the black fog.

Without hesitating a second Percy waded in, and soon was swimming quietly toward the sloop. He had not dared to take one of the boats, for fear the grating of her keel on the beach or the sound of her oars might betray him. He cleft the water noiselessly, and it was not long before he grasped the *Barracouta's* bobstay and hoisted himself aboard.

Dropping down the companionway, he groped forward through the cabin to the little door leading into the bow, and crept in on hands and knees. His fingers found what he wanted, an opening between two planks, where a leak had been freshly calked with oakum. He dug this out with his knife-point, and the water began spurting in.

Backing out and closing the door, he found a wrench in the tool-box and began fumbling about the engine. Soon the spark-plugs were unscrewed and in his pocket.

"And there's a good job done!" he thought, triumphantly. "Guess that gang of blacklegs won't get very far in the *Barracouta* to-night!"

Voices on the shore. Dolph and Brittler were coming with a lantern; a blur of light brightened through the fog.

"The compass and chart are aboard," came the captain's voice, "and this can of gas'll be enough to make us sure of striking the mainland. Launch that dory!"

The dip of oars and an increasing brightness told that the boat was approaching. It would not do for Percy to be detected. Lowering himself from the port bow into the water, he clung to the bobstay.

"They won't see me here!"

Bump! The dory struck the sloop and grated along her side. Dolph and Brittler clambered aboard and descended into the cabin.

"Here's the chart!" exclaimed the captain. "And the compass, too! He told the truth about them, at any rate."

"Lucky for him!" rejoined Dolph. "I don't like that big fellow worth a cent."

"Good reason!" was the captain's rather sarcastic comment.

"You haven't any license to joke me about that knockdown, Bart Brittler! I noticed you weren't in any hurry to mix it with him."

There was a moment of silence.

"What's that?" cried the captain, suddenly. "Sounds like water running in! Hope the old scow isn't leaking. Let's have that lantern!"

Through the thin planking Percy could hear him open the little door and crawl up into the bow. Then his faint, muffled voice reached the eagerly listening boy.

"There's a bad leak here! Come in a minute!"

Into Percy's brain flashed a sudden idea that left him trembling with excitement. Could he do it? If he

tried, he must not fail. An instant resolution set him dragging himself toward the stern.

Clutching the rim of the wash-board, he flung up one leg, caught his toe, and raised himself, dripping. A moment later he was in the standing-room.

He looked down into the cabin. The light of the lantern, shining round a body that almost filled the little door to the bow, showed a pair of legs backing out.

The die was cast. It was too late now for Percy to withdraw. His only safety lay in action.

Like lightning he slammed and hooked the double doors of the companionway, pulled the slide over, and snapped the padlock. Dolph and Brittler were prisoners on board the *Barracouta!*

There was a moment of surprised silence. Then bedlam broke out below, a confused, smothered shouting, a violent thumping on the closed doors and slide. But Percy gave it no heed. Thus far his plan had succeeded, even beyond his expectations. But his work was only begun. Before it should be finished, four men on shore must be overcome.

Aquiver with excitement, he sprang into the dory and quickly rowed to the beach, some distance from the camp. Then he leaped out with the oars and carried them well up on the shingle.

The other dory of the smugglers was, he remembered, almost exactly in front of the cabin. Skirting the water, he soon came plump upon the boat. He felt inside, found the oars, and gave one after the other a shove out into the cove. Barely had he done this when hurrying steps approached. One of

the guards from the camp was coming to investigate the tumult on the *Barracouta*.

He passed so close to the dory beside which Percy was crouching that the boy could almost have touched him. Luckily he had no lantern. Percy hardly dared to breathe until the man was twenty feet past.

"What's the trouble out there?" he shouted.

If the two on the sloop heard him at all, they made no intelligible reply. The tumult and thumping kept on. Not waiting to see whether or not the sentinel would succeed in establishing communication with his marooned companions, Percy ran silently up the beach. Making a broad circuit, he approached the cabin from behind.

Through the open window he could see his mates, listening with parted lips to the hubbub outside. He attracted Jim's attention by tossing in a pebble. Spurling sauntered leisurely toward the rear of the cabin. His precautions were needless; the remaining sentry had concentrated his whole attention on the uproar in the cove.

"Jim," whispered Percy, hurriedly, "I'm going to jump that guard. You and Budge stand close to the door. The second you hear any fracas rush out and take hold with me. Stop him from shouting, if you can."

Jim nodded and stepped back from the window. Percy crept stealthily round the camp toward the fish-house. He rightly inferred that the smuggler would be gazing down the beach toward the invisible sloop.

A well-oiled clock could not have worked more smoothly. The sentry's thoughts were focused on

what was taking place out there in the fog, and he was all unconscious of the peril that menaced him in the rear.

Suddenly out of the blackness behind him a lithe figure shot like a wildcat. One arm encircled the neck of the astounded guard, the hand pressing tightly over his mouth. The other hand caught his right wrist and twisted it backward, causing him to drop his revolver. The force of the attack flung him flat on his face.

Before he could even struggle the door was wrenched open and two figures darted out and joined in the mêlée. It was soon over. Three to one are heavy odds. The sentry, gagged and securely bound, was hustled inside the cabin. His hat, overcoat, and automatic were appropriated for Jim Spurling, who took his place. So skilfully had the coup been conducted under cover of the disturbance in the cove that none of the other smugglers had taken the slightest alarm.

Spurling assumed his post none too soon. Hardly had the door been closed, with Lane, Stevens, and Percy on the alert just inside, when the other guard came hurrying anxiously back. He had been unable to fathom the meaning of the tumult on the *Barracouta*.

"I don't like this at all, Herb," growled he as he drew near Jim. "Dolph and the skipper have gotten into some kind of a scrape, but what the trouble is I can't figure. I'd have gone out to them in the other dory, but I couldn't find any oars. We'd better call Shane and Parsons away from guarding those Chinks and decide what it's best to do. We don't know the lay of the land here, and any mistake's liable to be expensive."

By the time he had finished his remarks he was close to Spurling. The latter's silence apparently roused his suspicions. He stopped short.

"What—"

He got no further. Jim's left hand was over his mouth and Jim's right grasped his right wrist. Out burst reinforcements from the camp. It was a repetition of the case of the first sentinel, only more so. Presently Number Two lay on the cabin floor beside his comrade, unable to speak or move. Jim was a good hand at tying knots.

The five boys gathered in a corner and took account of stock. Two of the six white men prisoners; two others marooned on the sloop and *hors du combat*, at least temporarily; two still at large and in a condition to do mischief, but at present entirely ignorant of the plight of their comrades. Two automatics captured, and the dories of the foe useless from lack of oars. Best of all, the boys themselves free and practically masters of the situation. Matters showed a decided improvement over what they had been a half-hour before.

But the victory was as yet incomplete and Jim was too good a general to lose the battle from over-confidence. At any minute Dolph and Brittler might burst their way out through the double doors of the *Barracouta* and establish communication with the two men guarding the Chinese. So once more the trap was set and baited. Roger put on the hat and coat of the second sentry and joined Jim on guard.

Crash! Crash! Crash! A succession of heavy, splintering blows, echoing over the cove, announced that the pair imprisoned on the sloop had at last

discovered some means of battering their way to freedom.

Crash-sh!

Speech, low but intense, came floating over the water. The smugglers were out and evidently looking for their dory. Baffled in their search, they began shouting.

"Hilloo-oo! On shore! Shane! Parsons! Herb! Terry! Are you all dead? Come out and take us off! Somebody's scuttled the sloop and locked us down in the cabin! Just wait till we get ashore! We'll fix those boys! Ahoy there! Our boat's gone! Come and get us!"

Jim pressed Roger's arm.

"Ready! Here comes one of 'em!"

Somebody was running toward them from the fish-house. A black figure suddenly loomed up, close at hand.

"What's the trouble out there, Herb? Dolph and the cap are yelling like stuck pigs! Hear 'em! Guess I'd better go out to 'em in the other dory, don't you think? Shane can handle the Chinos—"

His voice shut off in a terrified gurgle. A strong hand forcibly sealed his lips and two pairs of muscular arms held him powerless, while Percy, darting from the cabin with a coil of rope, relieved him of his automatic and tied him firmly under Jim's whispered directions. Soon he, too, lay beside his comrades.

"Shut the door a minute, Filippo!" ordered Jim. "Now," he continued, briskly, "I guess we've got 'em coppered. We'll do up that man in the fish-house in short order. By the way, Throppy, did you raise the

cutter before the captain smashed your instrument?"

"Don't know," answered Stevens. "I was so busy calling for help that I didn't wait for any reply."

"We'll know before midnight," said Jim. "Take Parsons's automatic, Perce, and come along with Budge and myself. Throppy, you stay here with Filippo and help guard these fellows."

He glanced at the sullen three lying bound on the floor.

"Don't look as if they could make much trouble. Still, it's better for somebody to keep an eye on 'em."

Jim, Budge, and Percy stepped out and closed the door. The shouting from the *Barracouta* kept on with undiminished vigor. Appeals and threats jostled one another in the verbal torrent.

"Let 'em yell themselves hoarse," whispered Jim. "It won't do 'em any good."

The fish-house was near. A lighted lantern hung just inside the open door. Near it stood the fourth smuggler, peering anxiously out; behind him huddled the Chinamen. He gave an exclamation of relief as he saw Jim's figure approaching through the fog.

"I'm glad—"

He stopped short, frozen with surprise, at the sight of the three boys. Swiftly his hand darted toward his left coat pocket.

"None of that, Shane!" commanded Jim, sharply. "Put 'em up!"

The three automatics in the boys' hands showed the

guard that resistance was useless. He obeyed sulkily.

"Feel in his pocket, Perce, and take his revolver! No, the other side! He's left-handed."

Percy secured the weapon. Escorting Shane to the camp, they soon had him safely trussed. Brittler was bellowing like a mad bull.

"Now for Dolph and the skipper! Guess the three of us are good for 'em!"

Leaving the four smugglers in the custody of Throppy and Filippo, the other boys proceeded down to the water. The shouting suddenly ceased. A rope splashed.

"They've cast off the mooring!" exclaimed Jim.

Another unmistakable sound.

"Now they're rocking the wheel to start her!"

Percy felt for the spark-plugs in his pocket.

"They'll rock it some time!"

They did. At last they stopped. There was a muttered consultation, inaudible to the listening ears on shore.

"Might as well wind the thing up now!" observed Jim in an undertone.

"On board the sloop!" he hailed. "It's all off, Captain! We've got your four men tied up, and we've got their revolvers. You and Dolph might as well give it up. Throw your guns in on the beach, and we'll come out and get you, one at a time!"

A tremendous surprise was voiced by the absolute silence that followed. It was broken by Brittler's

sneering voice:

"So we might as well give up, had we, eh? Guess you don't know Bart Brittler, sonny! Let 'em have it, Dolph!"

Spang—spang—spang—spang!

A fusillade of revolver-shots woke the echoes. The bullets spattered in the water and thudded on the beach. Fortunately no one was hit.

"Scatter, fellows!" shouted Jim. And in a lower voice he added, "Don't fire back!"

Silence again. The two on the sloop were evidently reloading. Then came a regular splashing. The men on the *Barracouta* were paddling her ashore. Armed and desperate, now fully aware that the only things between themselves and a term in a Federal prison were the bullets in their automatics, they would go to almost any length to escape, even to the taking of life itself. Plainly there was trouble ahead.

The boys came together again at the foot of the sea-wall. Should they fight or run? It was one or the other. Whatever else they might be, Dolph and Brittler clearly were not cowards. If there was a fight, it was certain somebody would be shot, very likely killed. Was the risk worth taking? Would it not be better to hurry back to the cabin, warn Filippo and Throppy, and escape up the bank into the woods? The smugglers, with but two automatics against four, would hardly dare to follow them.

"Way enough, Dolph!" growled Brittler's voice.

The sloop had grounded. Splash! Splash! Her two passengers had leaped out into the water and were

making their way to the beach.

Jim came to an instant decision. He opened his lips, but the words he had planned to speak were never uttered. The strong, rhythmical dip of oars suddenly beat through the fog.

"What's the trouble here?" demanded a stern voice.

A great surge of thankfulness almost took away Jim's power of speech.

"It's the cutter!" he ejaculated, chokingly. "Throppy got her, after all!"

XXIII

WHITTINGTON GRIT

So far as the smugglers were concerned the game was up. It was one thing to attempt to overpower a group of boys and appropriate their sloop, but it was quite another to offer armed resistance to the officers of the United States revenue service.

Dolph and Brittler realized that; they realized, too, that they had absolutely no chance of escaping from the island, so they stood sullenly by while Jim told his story to the lieutenant commanding the boat. At the close of his recital the officer turned to them.

"You hear the statements of this young man. What have you to say for yourselves?"

"Nothing now," replied Brittler.

"You may hand over your guns."

The two surrendered their automatics and were placed under arrest. Following Jim's guidance, the lieutenant inspected the captured smugglers in Camp Spurling and the Chinese in the fish-house. Leaving a guard on shore and taking Jim with him, he went off to make his report to the captain.

"It's a case for the United States commissioner at Portland," decided the latter. "We'll have to take the whole party there. Guess you boys had better come along as witnesses. The *Pollux* was bound east when we picked up your wireless; but this matter is so important that I'm going to postpone that trip for a couple of days. I can bring you and the rest of your party back here early day after to-morrow."

It meant to the boys a loss of only two days at the outside. That was a little thing in comparison with what might have happened if the cutter had not come.

"We'll start without waste of time," resumed the captain. "Lieutenant Stevenson, you may bring the prisoners aboard."

Jim went ashore with the officer to notify his companions and prepare for this unforeseen journey. Eleven o'clock found the *Pollux* steaming west with her thirty-one additional passengers. The passage was uneventful and they were alongside the wharf in Portland early the next forenoon.

Promptly at two came the hearing before the commissioner. It did not take long. Brittler and his accomplices were held for trial at the next term of

court, and the Chinese were taken in charge by the immigration inspector. Before six that night the boys were passing out by Portland Head in the *Pollux*, bound east. The next morning they landed once more in Sprowl's Cove, and a few hours later they had fallen back into their customary routine, as if smugglers were a thing unknown. The leak in the *Barracouta's* bow was calked, making her as tight as before.

The following day dawned fiery red and it was evident that a fall storm was brewing. Jim and Percy had to battle with a high sea when they set and pulled their trawl; and they were glad enough to get back to Tarpaulin with their catch. By noon a heavy surf was bombarding the southern shore.

Five o'clock found the gale in full blast. A terrific wind whipped the rain in level sheets over cove and beach and against the low cabin squat on the sea-wall. Great, white-maned surges came rolling in from the ocean to boom thunderously on the ledges round Brimstone. The flying scud made it impossible to see far to windward. It was the worst storm the boys had experienced since they came to the island.

At half past five, after everything had been made snug for the night, they assembled for supper. On the table smoked a heaping platter of fresh tongues and cheeks, rolled in meal and fried brown with slices of salt pork. Another spiderful of the same viands sputtered on the stove. Hot biscuits and canned peaches crowned the repast. Filippo had done himself proud.

A long-drawn blast howled about the cabin.

"Gee!" exclaimed Percy, "but wasn't that a screamer!

This is one of the nights you read about. 'The midnight tempest was shrieking furiously round the battlements of the old baronial castle!'"

"Cut it out, Perce, cut it out!" remonstrated Lane. "You make me feel ashamed of myself. It's really unkind in you to air your knowledge of the English classics before such dubs as the rest of us."

"Well, at any rate, I'm glad we're under cover. Wonder if the men who used to go to sea in this cabin enjoyed it anywhere near as much as we have!"

"Not half bad, is it?" said Jim. "Remember how delighted you were when you got your first sight of it, three months ago?"

Percy grinned.

"I've changed some since then," he admitted. "Forget that, Jim! It's ancient history now."

As he drew up his soap-box his eye dwelt appreciatively on the delicacies in the platter.

"Aren't you other fellows going to eat anything?" he inquired, with mock concern. "I don't see any more than enough for myself on that platter. Don't be so narrow about the food, Filippo!"

The Italian pointed to a pan rounded up with uncooked titbits.

"Plenty more!"

"Good!" said Percy. "I was afraid somebody else might have to go hungry."

All devoted themselves to the contents of their plates. They kept Filippo busy frying until their

appetites were satisfied.

Supper was over at last, and the dishes washed and put away. Outside, the storm raged worse than ever. Stevens sat down to his instrument, repaired after its damage by Brittler, and put the receivers over his ears.

"Come on, Throppy!" exhorted Lane. "Don't go calling to-night! Get out of the ether and give some other wireless sharps a look-in! Pull off that harness and take down your violin. Let's make an evening of it! We sha'n't have many more."

Stevens lifted his hands to remove the headpiece. Suddenly a change came over his face and his arms dropped slowly. He gave his mates a warning look. There fell a silence in the cabin. Anxiously the others watched the operator's tense features. Minutes passed.

On a sudden he sprang up and tore off the receivers.

"There's a steamer in trouble outside. Name sounded like *Barona*. Her engine's disabled and she's drifting. Can't be very far off!"

The boys felt sober.

"It's a hard night for a craft without steerage-way," said Jim. "What's that? Thunder?"

A long, low rumble made itself heard above the storm. It came again, and yet again. The gloom was lighted for a second by a sudden blaze.

"What's that!" exclaimed Jim once more.

Between the thunder-peals his ears had caught a single whip-like crack. A stunning crash followed a

lurid glare, lighting up sky and sea. Again came the sharp detonation, but little louder than a fire-cracker. This time all heard it.

"A signal-gun!"

Lane's voice was full of excitement. He sprang to the door and the others followed. The gale was blowing squarely against the end of the cabin. So great was its force that Roger had all he could do to push the door open. Presently the five stood outside, exposed to the full fury of the blast. For a few seconds all was black.

"Look! A rocket!"

Up from the pitchy sea southwest of Brimstone shot a line of fire, curving into an arc and bursting aloft in a shower of many-colored balls. At its base were dimly visible two slender masts and a white hull. Almost instantly they vanished; but the boys had seen enough.

"A steam-yacht!" cried Jim. "Not more than a half-mile off Brimstone and drifting straight on the ledges. Looks as if she was a goner!"

"Can't we help her somehow?" asked Percy.

"I'm afraid not. We couldn't drive the sloop against this gale and sea; besides, those rollers would swamp a life-boat. All we can do is to get out on the point and try to save anybody who comes ashore. Put on your oil-clothes, fellows! Light both the lanterns, Percy! Budge, you and Throppy each take one of those spare coils of rope! I'll carry another and the Coston lights. Now I can see why Uncle Tom always insisted on having a couple of 'em in the cabin. Filippo, you'd better stay here, keep up a good fire,

and make plenty of coffee. There goes another rocket! The gun, too! I don't blame 'em. Men couldn't be in a worse fix!"

Leaning sidewise against the gale, the little lantern-guided procession trudged along the sea-wall and stumblingly ascended the slippery path to the beacon on Brimstone. Sheltering the oil-soaked kindlings with his body, Jim scratched a match; and in a twinkling long tongues of smoky flame were streaming wildly to leeward.

"Ah! They see us!"

Three rockets in quick succession rose from the yacht, now barely a quarter-mile away. The thunder and lightning were almost continuous. Every flash told that the imperiled craft was steadily drifting nearer the dangerous promontory.

"She'll strike the Grumblers!" muttered Jim. "And that means she's done for! If only she was a thousand feet farther east she'd float by into the cove. Hard luck!"

The Grumblers were a collection of jagged rocks, exposed at low tide. Under the incessant flashes their black heads appeared and disappeared in a welter of frothy white. It was an ominous spectacle for the men on the yacht.

Taking one of the Coston lights, Jim clambered down on the ledges. Soon the warning red glare of the torch, held high above his head, was illumining the rocks and breakers. He held the light aloft until it went out, then rejoined the others.

"They're getting a boat over!" cried Stevens.

Half a dozen men, working with frantic haste, were

swinging a tender out to leeward.

"No use!" said Jim, despondently. "She won't live a minute in this sea."

Ten seconds confirmed his prediction. The yacht rolled. As the boat struck the water a giant sea filled her. Then came darkness. The next flash showed the boat drifting bottom up beside the larger craft. Another tender was launched; it survived one sea, but the next overturned it. Still a third boat met with the same fate.

Every surge was heaving the yacht nearer the breakers with dismaying speed. A group of figures gathered amidships. Silently, with pale faces, the boys watched the progress of the doomed craft. She was going to her death. How could any of those on board escape?

Jim threw off his despondency.

"Now, fellows," he cried, "the minute she strikes she'll begin to pound to pieces! Their only chance'll be to run a line ashore. We must get out as far as we can to catch it."

Every billow buried the base of the point in snowy foam and sent the spray flying far up its rugged front. Using the utmost caution, the boys descended to the limit of safety. At the next flash they peered eagerly seaward.

The yacht was almost on the Grumblers! Up she heaved on a high surge, dropped. They caught their breaths. No! Not that time. She rose again.

Down ... down ...

Suddenly she stopped. A grinding crash reached their

ears.

"She's struck!" screamed Lane.

A blaze of sheet lightning showed her, careened landward, lying broadside toward them about one hundred feet distant. It was the beginning of the end. Jim, clinging to a boulder far out on the streaming ledges, now showered with spray, now buried waist-deep, was watching every movement of the crew.

"They've made a line fast round the foremast!" he shouted back. "They're going to send its end ashore on a barrel! Watch out!"

Presently the tossing cask was visible, drifting rapidly landward. For the first twenty-five yards its progress was unhindered; then a half-tide ledge barred its way. It hung on this in the trough of a sea; but the next billow swept it over. Before long it was bumping on the rocks almost within Jim's reach.

Watching his chance, he lunged forward and caught it. A crashing surge flung him down heavily and rolled him over and over; but he stuck stoutly to his prize. When the water ran back he came crawling up on his hands and knees, sliding the cask before him.

"Can't stand!" he explained, briefly. "Ankle hurt! Now muckle onto this line, everybody, and haul in! They've got a hawser bent on the other end."

A glance toward the yacht told that he was right. It also told that the peril of her human freight was greater than ever. Each sea, raising her slightly, dropped her back with her decks at a sharper angle toward the land. The grinding of the rocks through her steel side could be distinctly heard.

"All together! In she comes! Now ... heave! Now ... heave! Now ... *heave!*"

Their strength doubled by the realization that life hung on their efforts, the boys swayed at the line until at last they grasped the end of the hawser. To it was attached another smaller rope for pulling in a boatswain's chair.

Working rapidly, they made the hawser fast round an upright boulder. The lightning flashes were now less frequent, but lanterns on the ship and ashore enabled each group to note the other's progress. At last the slender cableway was rigged. Jim swung a lantern. Another lantern on the yacht answered.

"The smaller line, boys! Pull in! Careful!"

As the boys hauled, a figure dangled away from the vessel's side. Shoreward it swayed, now high above the wave-troughs, now dipping through a lofty crest. It dragged safely over the inside ledge, while the boys held their breaths; and presently they were unlashing a man from the boatswain's chair.

"Yes," he said in response to Jim's question, "she's the steam-yacht *Barona*. Belongs to Churchill Sadler of New York. One of his millionaire friends chartered her for a short trip to the Maine coast. Fifteen men aboard. I'm the mate. Came ashore first to see if this rig would work all right."

The chair was already half-way back to the vessel.

"They'll send Mr. Whittington next," continued the mate.

Percy started with surprise.

"What's that? Whittington?"

"Yes. John P., the millionaire! He's the man who hired the yacht."

"He's my father!" gasped Percy.

The mate gave an exclamation of astonishment.

"Lucky we got this chair to working or soon you wouldn't have had any father!"

The swinging seat had now reached the yacht. Two men lashed into it a stout, squarely built figure. The lantern signaled that all was ready and the shoreward journey began. Percy was shaking so violently that he could hardly pull. The mate reassured him.

"Don't be frightened, young fellow! We'll land him all right!"

He added his strength to that of the others, and John P. Whittington came in faster. He reached the ledge, only twenty-five feet from shore. Then came disaster!

Something gave way on the yacht, and the hawser suddenly slackened, letting the boatswain's chair drag on the ledge. The end of a swinging rope caught in a crack. The millionaire stopped short!

"Harder!" shouted the mate, setting the example.

The boys surged on the rope, but to no avail; they could not budge the chair. Percy stood motionless with horror.

Up curled a huge wave, high over the struggling figure. A thundering deluge hid him from view. It looked bad for John P. Whittington. Two or three seas more and it would matter little to him whether he was pulled in or not.

Guttering and rumbling, the water flowed back. Down over the ledges after it leaped a slim, wiry figure. It was Percy Whittington!

He had thrown off his oil-clothes to give his limbs greater freedom. His head was bare and his light hair stood straight up from his forehead. Grasping the hawser, he plunged into the sea and dragged himself toward the rock to which his father was fastened.

The group on the point stood silent, watching him struggle yard by yard through the black water until he gained the ridge. On it lay the figure in the boatswain's chair, struggling feebly. Percy planted his feet on the slippery rock. But before he could reach his father another liquid avalanche buried them both.

It seemed to the anxious watchers as if it would never run back. When it did, the older man sagged from the chair, motionless; the lad still clung to the hawser. The future of the house of Whittington hung trembling in the balance.

The mate gave a groan.

"He can't do it!"

At that very instant Percy roused to activity. Even before the ledge was entirely clear he was leaning over his father, knife in hand. It was useless to attempt to extricate the rope-end from the crack in which it was caught; the only thing to do was to cut it. Percy stooped quickly. Already the next sea was curling over his head. He made a savage assault upon the rope.

Slash! Slash! Twice his arm rose and fell. The billow was breaking down over him when he leaped erect

and flung up his hand.

"Pull!" yelled Jim.

Just as the flood boiled over the ledge the chair and its senseless burden jerked away. Percy grasped the lashings and was towed along behind his father. Dread overcame him as he felt the limpness of the older man's body.

Through the eddying tide ... up over the slippery rocks ... and presently Jim and the mate were unfastening the bonds that held the insensible millionaire in the boatswain's chair. They carried him up near the beacon and laid him down on Percy's oil-clothes.

"He's breathing!" said the mate. "He'll come round all right. You'll know what to do for him. I'll go back and help get the other men off. Their lives mean just as much to their people as his does to you."

Working with Budge and Throppy, he took in the slack of the hawser, and soon the chair was dancing back to the yacht. Meanwhile Jim and Percy were working over Mr. Whittington, and before long he recovered his senses. With a groan he half raised himself.

"Where am I?"

"You're all right, Dad!"

"Percy!"

Both father and son showed a depth of feeling Jim would hardly have credited them with possessing.

"You don't need me here any longer," he said. "I'll go down and help pull the others ashore. Throw these

oil-clothes of mine over your father, Percy, and make him comfortable, and as soon as the rest are safe we'll carry him to camp."

"What's that?" growled the millionaire. "Carry me? I guess you don't know the Whittingtons, young man!"

His jaw set and he rose somewhat unsteadily to his feet.

"Come on, Percy! Where's that camp?"

Walking slowly, the father leaning on his son's shoulder, the two disappeared in the darkness. Jim watched them for a few seconds, then started down over the ledges. The last half-hour had raised his estimation of the Whittington stock considerably above par.

Then for a time, engrossed in life-saving, he forgot everything else. At last all the men were landed safely. It was none too soon, for the yacht was now almost down on her side; and it was plain she would pound to pieces before very long.

Rescuers and rescued sought the cabin, where a good fire and hot coffee awaited them. Whittington, senior, clad in dry clothing, lay in Percy's bunk. Filippo was bustling to and fro to supply the wants of his numerous guests. His eyes fell upon a dark-haired, olive-skinned young man in the rear of the shipwrecked group, and the cup he was carrying clattered on the floor.

"Frank!" he cried. "*Fratello mio!*"

The brothers flung themselves into each other's arms. The Whittington family was not the only happy one in Camp Spurling that night.

XXIV

CROSSING THE TAPE

There was little sleep on Tarpaulin, either for rescuers or rescued, until the small hours of the morning. The cabin was crowded to its utmost capacity, as the fish-house was too cold for the drenched, wearied men. Filippo kept a hot fire going until long after midnight, and served out coffee galore. During his intervals of leisure he and Frank conversed in liquid Sicilian.

Outside, the storm roared and the surf boomed on the ledges about Brimstone; beyond in the blackness lay the wrecked *Barona*, hammering to pieces.

Gradually conversation ceased and the camp grew quiet. The boys and their unexpected guests, sandwiched closely together on the floor and in the bunks, drifted off into fitful slumber. But John P. Whittington's eyes remained wide open.

He was outstretched in Percy's bunk. His clothes hung drying before the stove, and he had on an old suit of Jim's, as nothing that Percy wore was large enough to fit his father's square, bulky figure. Beside him lay his son, sound asleep. John P. marveled at his regular breathing. Occasionally he touched the lad with his hand.

All his thoughts centered about Percy. He could not but feel that this brown, wiry fellow who had saved his life was a stranger to him. He could see with half an eye that a great change had come over the boy during the summer; he had grown quieter, stronger, far more manly.

Yes, Percy had stuck. John Whittington had only half believed that he could or would; and he had spent a good many valuable hours worrying over what he should do with his son if he didn't stick. The result showed that all those hours had been thrown away; but somehow the millionaire couldn't feel very bad about the waste.

He began to wonder if Percy might not have done better in the past if his father had put in a little more time with him personally and spent less in mere money-making. He had tried to shift his responsibility off on somebody else, had hired others to do what he should have taken pains to do himself. That was a big mistake; John P. Whittington could see it plainly now. And it had come near being a pretty costly error for him, for Percy. Well, those days were over. Percy had turned squarely about and was doing better. Whittington, senior, determined to do better, too.

Little by little the gale blew itself out. By daybreak the sky was clear and the wind had gone down, but the high rollers still wreaked their wrath on the shattered yacht and thundered on the point. A fiery sun shot its red rays over the slumberers in the crowded cabin. Filippo roused yawningly, built the fire, and busied himself about breakfast.

Soon everybody was astir. The millionaire's clothes were now dry, and he dressed with the others. Save for a slight stiffness and a few bruises, he was all right.

After breakfast he went up on Brimstone with Percy and the others to take a look at the *Barona*. The steel hull lay on its side on the foaming reef, a battered, crumpled shape, sadly different from the trim yacht

that had left New York so short a time before. A miscellaneous lot of wreckage was swashing in the surf at the base of the point, and Jim and some of the crew were salvaging what they could; but it was not very much.

Standing in safety on the promontory in the sunlight of the pleasant morning, John P. Whittington gazed long at the wreck.

"Well," he remarked at last to the captain, who stood beside him, "I guess I see where I'm out fifty or seventy-five thousand dollars. Might as well take my medicine without a whimper. It was all my fault. You wanted to run into Portland when the storm was making up, but I thought we'd better try for some port nearer the island. I've gotten so into the habit of having men do as I want them to that I thought the wind and sea would do the same. But I've learned they won't. It's been an expensive mistake, and it came altogether too near being more expensive still. It's up to me to foot the bills. I'll make it all right with you and the crew and Sadler."

The sea was going down rapidly. A council was held. The Rockland boat would leave Matinicus at half past one, and, as Jim felt that the *Barracouta* could easily make the run to the island, it was decided to send the crew back to New York that very day. The captain and the mate arranged to remain on Tarpaulin until a wrecking-tug from Boston should arrive.

Mr. Whittington, yielding to the persuasions of Percy and the invitation of the other boys, consented to take the first vacation of his life and stop with them a week or ten days, when their season on the island would close.

While the crew were preparing to embark, Filippo approached Jim with his newly found brother.

"I like to go with Frank," he said.

"Sorry to have you leave, Filippo," returned Jim. "But I know just how you feel, and I don't blame you a bit."

He called Stevens and Lane aside. Presently the latter went into the cabin and reappeared with a roll of bills. Jim handed them to the Italian.

"Here's one hundred dollars, Filippo, your share for your summer's work. You've earned it fairly. If there's anything more coming to you, after we figure up, I'll send it on. What will your address be? We hope to see you again some time."

Filippo was overcome. Tears of gratitude filled his eyes as he stammered his thanks. It was arranged that letters in the care of the Italian consul at Boston would always be forwarded to him.

Jim and Throppy took the departing party over to Matinicus on the *Barracouta*, getting them there in ample time for the Rockland steamer. The sloop was back at Tarpaulin by four o'clock.

Meanwhile John P. Whittington had started on his vacation. Though his time ran into thousands of dollars a week, he felt he could profitably spend a little of it in getting acquainted with his boy. One of the first things his keen eyes noted was the absence of the cigarettes.

"Knocked off, eh, Percy? For how long?"

"For good, Dad!"

The millionaire suppressed a whistle; something had certainly struck Percy.

The next morning, his sturdy figure garbed in oilskins, he started out with his son and Jim for Clay Bank. He had to acknowledge that rising at midnight was a little early, even for a man accustomed to work as hard as he had always done.

Out on the shoal he was a silent but interested spectator while the trawl was being pulled and the fish taken aboard. An old swell was running, and he speedily discovered that seasickness was another thing his will could not master. That afternoon he watched Percy skilfully handle the splitting-knife and later do his part in baiting the trawl.

On the morning following he went out lobstering, and found as much to interest him as on the day before. Everything was new to him. He discovered that even a man experienced in big business can learn some things from boys. Soon his sleep at night was as sound as his son's.

He made a trip to Matinicus in the *Barracouta*, and talked prices with the superintendent of the fish-wharf and the proprietor of the general store.

"Have a bottle of lemon, Dad?" invited Percy.

Mr. Whittington was on the point of refusing; he did not care for soda. On second thought, however, he drank it soberly.

Percy appreciated his father's acceptance of the proffered courtesy.

"It's the first time my money ever bought anything for you."

The experience was a novel one for them both.

Just after light one morning the wrecking-tug from Boston appeared. A brief examination of the *Barona's* hull by a diver showed that the havoc wrought by the sea and rocks had been so great that but little of value could be saved. So the tug started back that very afternoon, and the captain and the mate of the yacht went with her.

The weather was now much cooler, and the boys were glad that their stay was to be short. Wild geese were honking overhead in V-shaped lines on their way south. Mr. Whittington accompanied the others on a gunning trip to Window Ledge, and came back with a dozen coots. He smacked his lips over the coot stew and dumplings prepared by Jim. Throppy dismantled his wireless and packed up his outfit to send away.

On their last Thursday at Tarpaulin Uncle Tom Sprowl came in on the smack with Captain Higgins. He had boarded the *Calista* at York Island. Everybody, including Nemo and Oso, was glad to see Uncle Tom. His rheumatism was fully cured and he was spry and chipper. He was more than satisfied with what the boys had accomplished during the summer, and he planned to continue lobstering after their departure.

He noted the change in Percy.

"Told Jim your son needed salting," he confided to Mr. Whittington. "He's all right now."

The afternoon before they were to leave the island Roger reckoned up his accounts. They showed that after Uncle Tom's share had been deducted, Spurling

& Company had a thousand dollars to divide. Of this, one hundred dollars had already been paid to Filippo.

Lane handed Percy one hundred and fifty dollars.

"I don't want him to take that," objected Mr. Whittington.

"We shouldn't feel right if he didn't," said Jim.

"Dad," spoke up Percy, "I want it. I've earned it. Look at those hands and arms. It's the first money I ever had that you didn't give to me. I'm going to have one of the bills framed behind glass."

"He's earned it, fast enough," corroborated Jim. "Let him take it, Mr. Whittington. We'll all feel better about it if you will."

So the millionaire gave his consent, with the mental reservation that in some way he would make it up to the others later.

"What are you going to do with all that wealth, Percy?" he asked. "It won't keep you very long in gasolene."

"Send half of it to Filippo for his brother Frank," replied Percy, promptly. "He lost about all he had when the *Barona* was wrecked."

Later that afternoon Mr. Whittington took Jim aside out of Percy's hearing.

"Honestly, between us, how has the boy done this summer?"

"I wouldn't ask to have anybody take hold any better than he has since the middle of July."

The millionaire looked gratified.

"I'm more than pleased at the way things have turned out, and I don't know how I can ever repay you. Can't I help you somehow in money matters?"

Jim shook his head decidedly.

"No, thank you, Mr. Whittington. As I told you at the beginning of the summer, we're making our own way. Percy is entitled to every cent we've paid him, and I can honestly say we're glad he's been with us."

A half-hour afterward Mr. Whittington found his son alone.

"How about those college conditions, Percy?" he asked.

"Just finished my work on 'em before the wreck, Dad. I'm ready to take my exams the minute I strike college. It's been a hard pull, harder even than the fishing and lobstering, and it's kept me hustling; but I believe I've won out. Studying isn't so bad. All you've got to do is to make up your mind to get your lessons, and then get 'em."

"That's so in other things besides studying, Percy. You'll find it out later on."

"I guess I don't need to tell you," continued his son, "how much I owe to Jim Spurling and the others. They're the whitest bunch I ever ran with, and I wouldn't have missed my summer with them for anything."

"Something different from what you felt three months ago, eh, Percy? Remember our talk at Graffam Academy, Commencement night?"

"Rather guess I do! And, believe me, I sha'n't forget it in a hurry. By the way, there's one fellow I owe a good deal to that I haven't told you about yet."

He related to his father the story of his two encounters with Jabe. The older man listened with grim but satisfied attention.

"Licked him at last, did you? If you hadn't, I should want you to look him up and do it now. It's a Whittington habit to carry through what you begin. Well, Percy, you've certainly made good."

A glimmer of pride, the first he had ever shown in his son, crossed his face.

"I blamed you for junking your auto. Now I've gone and junked a yacht that'll cost me more than fifty times as much. Well, there's no fool like the old fool! But it's been worth it."

He gave his son a look in which affection mingled with pride.

"It was quicksilver, kill or cure; and I'm mighty glad it's been cure."

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK
JIM SPURLING, FISHERMAN ***

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