The BUNGALOW BOYS along the YUKON

DEXTER J. FORRESTER

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Sandy was a good swimmer and he struck out valiantly.
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BY
DEXTER J. FORRESTER

AUTHOR OF "THE BUNGALOW BOYS," "THE BUNGALOW BOYS MAROONED IN THE TROPICS," "THE BUNGALOW BOYS IN THE GREAT NORTHWEST," "THE BUNGALOW BOYS ON THE GREAT LAKES," ETC., ETC.

WITH FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS
BY CHARLES L. WRENN

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THE BUNGALOW BOYS ALONG THE YUKON

CHAPTER I.

A MYSTERIOUS CRAFT.

On a certain May afternoon, Tom Jessop, assigned to "cover" the Seattle waterfront for his paper, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer,* had his curiosity aroused by a craft that lay at the Spring Street dock. The vessel was newly painted, trim and trig in appearance and was seemingly of about two thousand tons register. Amidships was a single yellow funnel. From the aftermost of the two masts fluttered a blue flag with a square of white in the center. The reporter knew that this was the "Blue Peter," flown in token that the steamer was about to sail.

But the steamer, which bore the name of *Northerner*, flew no house flag to indicate the line she belonged to, nor in the shipping news of the day did her name appear. The reporter scented a "story" at once. From some hangerson about the dock he found out that the strange craft had formerly been the *James K. Thompson*, of San Francisco, in the coastwise trade. She had been refitted and equipped at the Aetna Iron Works by her purchaser, a Mr. Chisholm Dacre. That was all that the longshoremen could tell him.

On the bridge was a stalwart form in a goldlaced cap indicating the rank of captain. By his side stood a well-built man of middle age with a crisp iron-gray beard neatly clipped and a sunburned face, from which two keen blue eyes twinkled quizzically as he gazed down at the figure of the reporter on the dock.

"Are you Mr. Dacre?" hailed the reporter, guessing that the bearded man was the *Northerner's*new owner.

"That is my name. What can I do for you?" was the rejoinder.

"My name is Jessop. Ship-news man for the *Post-Intelligencer*. Can I come on board?"

"I am afraid not, Mr. Jessop," rejoined Mr. Dacre, whom our readers know as the Bungalow Boys' uncle. "What do you want?"

"Why, your destination, the object of your voyage and so forth."

"That will have to remain my private property for the time being," was the reply

in a kindly tone. "I appreciate your keenness in looking for news, but I cannot divulge what you would like to know just now."

"It's no time for visiting, anyhow," said the sailor-like man at Mr. Dacre's side, who Tom Jessop had guessed was the skipper of the mysterious craft, "we'll soon be getting under way."

The young reporter's face grew fiery red.

"What line are you?" he demanded. "What's the game, anyway?"

"I am not at liberty to answer questions."

"Private craft, eh? Tramp?"

There was almost a sneer in his tones as he spoke. He was trying to make the captain angry and by that means get him to talk. But the other remained quite unruffled.

"Not in trade at all."

"Pleasure trip, eh? Why can't I come aboard?"

"Against orders."

Just then, and before the young newsgatherer could vent his indignation further a cab came rattling up the dock and disgorged at the foot of the *Northerner's* gangplank three brightfaced, happy-looking lads. They were Tom and Jack Dacre and their inseparable chum, Sandy MacTavish, the voluble Scotch youth whose "thatch" and freckles gave him his nickname. Jack was Tom's junior by two years, but he was almost as muscular and tall as his brother. Both lads were nephews of Mr. Dacre, who had given them their home in the Sawmill Valley of Maine where they had acquired the name of "Bungalow Boys," by which they were known to a large circle of friends.

Tom Jessop turned from the captain to the new arrivals.

"Where is this vessel bound?" he asked.

"She clears this afternoon for Alaska," responded Tom Dacre.

The reporter's eye flashed a look of triumph upward at the bridge.

"In the northern trade?" he asked.

"I didn't say that," was the quiet rejoinder.

Tom Jessop began to get mad in good earnest. He swept his eyes over the ship's decks. Amidships she carried an odd-looking pile of timber and metal.

"A small steamer in sections, eh?" he questioned with a knowing look.

"You're right as to that," spoke Tom.

"Going gold dredging?"

"I can't say."

"Training ship for kids, maybe?"

"Well, I know some folks who might take lessons in good manners without its hurting them a bit," flashed Jack angrily.

The reporter changed his tone to a more conciliatory one.

"You might help a fellow out," he said. "What are your names?"

"I guess we can tell you that much," said Tom. "I am Tom Dacre, this is my brother, Jack, and this is our friend, Mr. MacTavish."

The good-natured Sandy broke into a grin at this formal introduction. He was about to speak, but the reporter interrupted him.

"Dacre!" he exclaimed. "You're the kids that broke up that gang of Chinese smugglers on the Sound a while ago!"

"You're unco canny to guess it," said Sandy. "We're the boys."

At this instant another figure appeared on the bridge—a tall man with rough-looking clothes and a battered derby hat. It was the pilot. He addressed Mr. Dacre.

"The tide serves, sir. If you are all ready, we'll get under way."

"Come, boys," hailed Mr. Dacre from the bridge. "Time to get aboard."

The three lads hastily gathered up the few packages that they had been purchasing at the last moment. The cabman was paid and they bounded with elastic strides up the gangway. As they reached the end of it, the stern lines were cast off.

"Let go breast and bow lines," bawled the foghorn voice of the pilot.

The order was quickly executed. Jessop shouted something, but his voice was drowned in the three mournful blasts of her siren that were the *Northerner's* farewell to Seattle. But the instant the whistle ceased and the tug that was to tow the *Northerner* into the stream began to puff energetically, he found his voice again.

"S-a-y!" he shouted across the widening breach between the steamer and the dock.

"Hullo!" hailed back Tom, who, with his two companions, stood at the rail amidships watching the city they were leaving.

"Won't you tell me anything about this trip?"

"That's just it," hurled back Tom at the top of his voice, "we don't know ourselves!"

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" exclaimed Tom Jessop as he turned away from the dock and the moving vessel, which he now felt certain held a mystery within her gray steel sides.

CHAPTER II.

NORTHWARD HO!

It was hardly surprising that the ship-news reporter had instantly recognized the Bungalow Boys when he heard their names. Their exploits in many quarters had received numerous columns of newspaper space, much to their amusement. The clever manner in which they had broken up forever the operations of the gang of counterfeiters in the Sawmill Valley, as related in the first volume of this series, "The Bungalow Boys," had brought them before the public. Further interesting "copy" had been made by their wonderful adventures in search of a sunken treasure galleon. Readers of this series were given full details of that adventurous voyage on the surface and below the ocean, in the second volume dealing with our young friends' experiences, which was called "The Bungalow Boys Marooned in the Tropics."

In the third volume we followed them throughout their venturesome doings in the northwest. "The Bungalow Boys in the Great Northwest" showed how pluck and self-reliance can win out even against such a combination as the boys found in the "Chinese runners." The fourth volume dealt with their voyage on the Great Lakes. The mysteries of Castle Rock Island, the ways of the wreckers who captured the lads, and the daring manner in which the boys escaped from the ruined lighthouse, all were set forth in the book in question, which bore the title, "The Bungalow Boys on the Great Lakes."

Now the Bungalow Boys found themselves setting forth on a voyage to the Northland on board a fine, staunch steamer. That adventures and possibly perils lay ahead of them they could not doubt; but just what the object of the voyage was, had not been revealed to them.

Tom had stuck to the strict truth when he told the reporter that he did not know anything about the voyage. His uncle had merely invited Jack and himself to take a "sea voyage." At the lad's solicitation, Sandy had been allowed to make one of the party. Of course, the boys would not have been taken from their studies to make this trip, but the headmaster of the academy that they all attended had been taken very ill a short time before and the school had been temporarily closed.

The pilot had been dropped and the *Northerner* was in free sea room, forging ahead through the great swells of the ocean. The steamer appeared oddly silent. There were no passengers rushing about, no bustle and confusion. The voyage had begun as unobtrusively as the departure from the dock. The small crew moved about under the direction of a mate, setting things to rights, coiling ropes and making everything snug. On the bridge were Captain Goodrich and Mr. Dacre. Presently a third person joined them—a man of massive build with crisply curling hair and a big beard. This was Colton Chillingworth, the rancher friend of Mr. Dacre, whose Washington ranch had formed the scene of some of the boys' most exciting adventures in the northwest.

"Where are we headed for?" asked Jack, as the three lads stood at the stern of the steamer watching the white wake that was rolling outward from the vessel's counter at a twelve-knot gait.

"Bang for the Straits of San Juan de Fuca. I heard the captain tell the pilot so when we dropped him," replied Tom.

On one side of the steamer were the picturesque, snow-capped Selkirks, on the other the Olympics, calm and majestic in the afternoon light. Along the shore were small settlements fringing the deep woods. Above all towered Mount Rainier, sharply chiseled against the sky. The pearly whiteness of its eternal snow-cap glistened in the sunlight like a field of diamonds.

Broken at intervals by cliffs of chalk, white or dark brown stone, immense forests of somber green fir and cedar stretched from the hills almost to the water's edge. Here and there a cascading stream like a silver thread could be seen dashing its troubled way down the steep mountainside. It was a beautiful, impressive sight, and the boys felt it so as they gazed. But uppermost in their minds was the question of the object of the trip, of its destination. In this regard they were not to be left long in the dark.

"And after the Straits?"

The question came from the Scotch boy.

"Northward, I guess, to Alaska. That's positively all we know," came from Jack.

"Awell, we're entitled to a guess, I ken," hazarded Sandy. "Suppose we are going pole hunting?"

"What!"

"Looking for the north pole," responded the other stoutly, while Tom and Jack exploded with laughter.

"Nonsense," said Tom. "Uncle Chisholm has too much sound common sense to go off on a wild goose chase like that."

"Anyhow, the pole has been found," quoth Jack in tones of finality.

"You can be sure of one thing at least," put in Tom; "whatever we are after, the whole expedition has been carefully thought out. That steamer on the upper deck, for instance."

"She's all in numbered sections to be put together when we get ready," said Jack. "Doesn't that suggest something to you?"

"How do you mean?" questioned Tom in his turn.

"Just this. In my opinion, we are going to ascend some river."

"But what for?"

"Ah! that's just what we shan't know till they choose to tell us."

"Hoot, mon," exclaimed Sandy, "gie ower guessing! We'll ken all aboot it in gude time. In the meanwhile, we're three mighty lucky boys to have a chance to make such a trip."

"Them's my sentiments," coincided Tom heartily.

They looked seaward. The air had a sharp brisk tang in it, a veritable sea tonic that braced and invigorated. The waves were choppy and as the *Northerner* steamed onward through them, from time to time a glistening cloud of spray was hurled high above her sharp bow. From her funnel poured a column of wind-whipped black smoke, showing that coal was not being spared to drive her along at her best gait.

"Oh, but this is great!" exclaimed Jack, pulling off his cap and letting the wind blow through his tousled hair.

"One thing is certain, this is no idle cruise. There's an object in it," said Tom, "and I reckon that we boys are due to play a part in whatever enterprise is on hand."

"Well, I hope we make good, whatever it is," said Jack.

"Nae fear o' that," spoke up Sandy confidently.

The *Northerner* arose on a higher swell than usual, and then with a sidewise motion settled glidingly down into a watery hollow, rising the next instant on the crest of another roller. Her masts swept the sky in broad arcs. All at once Sandy released his hold on the rail and slid half across the deck before he brought up. His face had suddenly grown very pale. His freckles stood out on it in bright relief.

"What's the matter?" demanded Jack, noticing the woe-begone expression of his friend's face.

"Um?" inquired Sandy. "Matter? Naething's the matter, mon. O-h-h-h-h!"

"Seasick, eh? That's the last meal you ate ashore. I warned you against all that pie."

Sandy shuddered.

"Don't talk of pie," he groaned.

Just as Tom was about to suggest that Sandy go to his stateroom and lie down for a while, the second mate approached them.

"You young gentlemen are to go to the charthouse. Mr. Dacre says he has something to tell you."

The boys exchanged glances. Even Sandy forgot his woes in the interest aroused by this communication. The officer walked on aft while Tom exclaimed in a low tone:

"At last we'll find out where we are bound, and what for. Come on, Jack."

"How about me?" inquired Sandy.

"Thought you were seasick."

"I was," rejoined Sandy, "but, mon, I feel grond again. If Mr. Dacre is going to talk, I'm a weel boy the noo."

CHAPTER III.

MR. DACRE EXPLAINS.

Both Mr. Dacre and his companion, Colton Chillingworth, regarded the boys smilingly as the latter filed into the charthouse, wide-eyed with expectation at the news they were confident they were to hear.

"Well," began Mr. Dacre, "I suppose you young men are anxious to know a good deal more about this voyage than you have yet been told?"

"Anxious is no word for it," rejoined Tom. "Sandy has even forgotten seasickness so that he can hear what you have to tell us."

"It will not take long. Mr. Chillingworth, here, is my partner in the enterprise on which we are bound. We are going to Alaska in search of foxes."

Had Mr. Dacre said that they were going to the moon in search of green cheese, the boys could not have looked more astonished.

"Foxes!" exclaimed Tom. "Just common foxes?"

"By no means. The kind we are after are silver grays and blacks. Mr. Chillingworth and I have decided to start raising them on his ranch. When I tell you that a good skin of a silver fox is worth anywhere from twenty-five hundred dollars upward, you will see why we have spent so much in equipping this expedition and chartering this steamer. You will wonder why we did not embark on a regular passenger steamer. For many reasons. One was that we could not care properly for such valuable and timid animals on a regular craft. Another was that we do not want any details of our plans to leak out till the business is well established. Such creatures as silver foxes might well tempt unscrupulous persons to steal or kill them, so that on all considerations, it was deemed best to charter this craft, which we managed to get cheap, and to form our own expedition."

"What country are we going to hunt for the foxes in?" asked Tom, his eyes shining at the prospect before them. The other boys looked equally excited and delighted.

"Along the Yukon River," was the reply. "That is why that light draught portable steam launch is on deck."

"How long shall we be gone?" came the next question.

"That is impossible to say. If we do not 'get out,' as they call it, before the winter sets in, we may have to remain in the north till the spring."

The boys exchanged delighted glances.

"The prospect appears to please you," said Mr. Chillingworth.

"Please us!" cried Tom. "We're tickled to death."

"Well, I think you will have an instructive and, I hope, a pleasant time," said Mr. Dacre, "and at the same time be useful to us. Both Mr. Chillingworth and myself have been in the Yukon country before, and I can assure you that it won't be all picnicking. It is a wild country we are going to. North of fifty-three lies one of the few really wild territories left in the world. It's a great chance for you boys to show what you are made of."

Soon afterward the boys left the charthouse, half wild with excitement. The lure of the north was upon them. Each hastily went over in his mind all that he could recall about the land for which they were bound. There was magic in the name of Yukon, that mighty river of frozen lands, whose course winds through golden sands and solitudes undisturbed by the foot of man.

"Fellows, it seems too good to be true," exclaimed Jack warmly. "It's the chance of a lifetime."

"We'll have lots of good hunting. I'm glad we brought our rifles," said Jack.

"Maybe we'll find gold!" exclaimed Sandy.

"Well, at the market rate for silver and black foxes, a few of them would be as good as a gold mine," declared Tom.

"But who ever heard of raising foxes to sell?" objected Jack.

"Foxes wi' siller coats, too!" added Sandy incredulously.

"Don't try to be funny, Sandy," struck in Tom. "It appeals to me as a great business and one with lots of possibilities in it for the future."

"Well, it seems at any rate that we are going to get plenty of fun out of it," declared Jack. "I wouldn't much mind if we did get stuck up north for the winter. It would be a great experience."

The gong for dinner cut short their chat, and they hastened to their cabins to get ready for the meal. As the *Northerner* had once been a passenger steamer, she was well provided with cabins, and each boy had a well-equipped stateroom on the main deck. Their elders occupied cabins forward of midships, and on the opposite side of the superstructure the captain, his two mates and the engineers had their quarters.

They entered the dining saloon to find it a handsomely fitted white and gold affair, a relic of the passenger-carrying days of their ship. Electric lights gleamed down on the table and the boys, when joined by their elders, set to with sharp appetites on a meal excellently cooked and served by two Chinese stewards. As they ate, the object of the trip was, of course, the main topic of conversation, and Mr. Dacre gave them much valuable information concerning the country whither they were bound. As we shall accompany the boys in their own experiences "north of fifty-three," there is no need to set down here all that the enthusiastic man told his eager young listeners.

Absorbed in the wonders which were being described, the two Bungalow Boys and Sandy MacTavish sat late at the table, listening to accounts of the great river for which they were bound, of the flaming volcanoes of the Aleutian Archipelago, of the seal poachers, the midnight sun and the vast undeveloped riches of Uncle Sam's northerly possession. The thought that soon they would be up there themselves, participating in the marvelous life of which they had heard, sent them to bed in anything but restful moods. It was long before they slept, and then their dreams were of the most jumbled description, in which huge bears and other denizens of the wild figured, together with golden rivers and snow-capped mountains.

When they awakened and hastily dressed, it was to find the *Northerner* out of sight of land and rolling briskly along in a sea flecked with white-caps. Ahead of the ship flashed the wet backs of a school of porpoises, seemingly intent on a race with the *Northerner*. The boys watched them with interest, although they were no novelty to them, many such schools having been encountered during their cruise in the tropics. But there was, nevertheless, a fascination in watching the sportive creatures as they rolled and tumbled along, from time to time leaping right out of the water and showing their black, glistening bodies.

"This is the life for me," exclaimed Jack. "How is the seasickness, Sandy?"

The sandy-haired youth gave him a reproachful look.

"I dinna ken what you mean," he said. "I wonder how soon breakfast will be ready?"

"You're cured, all right," chuckled Tom. "But glorious as all this is, I can hardly wait till we get that steamer together and go chugging up the Yukon into the heart of Alaska."

"I guess we all subscribe to that," echoed Jack with enthusiasm. Just then the breakfast gong boomed out its summons.

"I'll beat you to the table!" shouted Jack. The challenge was accepted and off they all dashed, while the long silent decks of the converted *Northerner* rang with their shouts of merriment.

CHAPTER IV.

SANDY FINDS A MASCOT.

Northward, along the rugged, rock-bound Alaskan coast, the good ship *Northerner* plowed her way. The boys by this time had become quite used to life on board the staunch craft and every day found something new to rouse their interest and enthusiasm. Among the equipment left on the craft when she had been chartered by her present navigators was a wireless outfit.

Mr. MacKenzie, the second officer, could work this, and the boys whiled away some of their time in studying the use of the apparatus. As they all knew something of telegraphy they speedily became quite proficient, considering the short time they had to pick up a knowledge of the wireless operator's methods.

One bright noonday the vessel's course was changed and she nosed her way into the entrance of that great indentation of the coast known as Resurrection Bay. Her destination was the town of Seward, which lies at the head of the harbor. The boys were all excitement as they passed the rugged rocks at the bay's mouth and saw hundreds of sea lions crawling on them like huge slugs, or else plunging into the water after fish. As the *Northerner's* whistle gave a shrill blast, the seals set up an answering shout, barking and leaping from the rocks in hosts.

The purpose of the stop at Seward was to purchase some supplies which had been overlooked in the haste with which the departure from Seattle had been made. Some minor repairs to the machinery, too, were necessary, and it was decided to stop over two days. The boys found plenty to interest them. They wrote voluminous letters and sent them home, as well as post cards, which were readily obtained even in that out-of-the-way corner of the world.

The second morning of their stay, while Tom and Jack remained on board writing letters, Sandy elected to go ashore in one of the small boats. He returned just before dinner time. As he approached the ship, pulling laboriously at the oars, it was seen that some object was being towed astern.

"Hey! what's your souvenir?" hailed Tom, with a grin. "Looks like a log."

"We're not hard up for firewood," added Jack.

"Whist!" exclaimed the Scotch youth, with a knowing look. "Bide a wee and be more respectful."

He shipped his oars and turned his face up toward his two companions, who stood leaning over the rail good-naturedly chaffing him.

"If you've naething else to do, you may rig a block and tackle, the noo," said he.

"What for? To hoist that old saw-log on board?" disrespectfully inquired Tom.

"It's nae a saw-log," protested Sandy with spirit.

"Then what on earth is it?" demanded Jack.

"It's an idol."

"An idol!" echoed both boys in a breath.

"Aye, an idol, or rather a 'totem,' is what they call 'em up here. No home is complete without one."

Jack broke into a laugh.

"Why, you bonehead, there's nothing sacred about a totem. They're simply family records, that's all. Something like the crests that our newly rich keep librarians so busy digging up."

Sandy looked blank.

"And that's all they are?" he questioned doubtingly.

"That's all. The natives used to set them up outside their houses like door-plates to show who lived within. For instance, John Smith Aleut would be known by a seagull's head at the top of his totem pole, while on the stalk of the thing would be carved some of his big stunts and those of his ancestors."

With a disgusted look, Sandy pulled out his knife. He bent over the tow-rope, ready to cut loose the bulky object bobbing about astern. But Tom checked him.

"What are you up to now?"

"Hoot, mon! I've been stung by an innocent native. The gloomeroon that sold me yon totem told me that it was a sacred idol. That's why I bought it. Whist! back she goes, and I paid five dollars of my good money for it!"

"Hold on a minute!" cried Tom checking him. "Maybe we have found a mascot after all."

"Yes," declared Jack, who had been leaning over the rail closely scanning the figure of the totem as it bobbed about alongside the *Northerner*, "it looks as if it were the figure of some old gent of these parts. Maybe the old fellow is the 'Good Genius of the White North.'"

"Anyhow, that's a good name for him," agreed Tom. "Come on, fellows, let's rig a block and tackle and get him on board."

The three boys set about preparing to hoist the "Genius of the White North" on board. It was a crudely carved figure about seven feet in height. A fierce-looking face with big chunks of wood inserted for teeth and a large, round stomach were the chief characteristics of the totem, which was about two feet wide and tapered toward the grotesquely small feet. Carved on the body was what appeared to be meant for a whale or a seal hunt. The figure had once been brightly daubed with red, yellow, black and white, but these colors were faded now.

"Well, he was a beauty, whoever he was," declared Tom, when the boys had hoisted the dripping figure on deck.

"Looks like an 'ad' for a dentist, with those teeth of his," laughed Jack.

"That is meant for a good-natured grin," maintained Sandy, confronting his purchase critically.

"Appears more as if he was getting ready to tackle a whale steak or something of that kind," declared Tom.

"I guess it will bring good luck," went on Sandy, poking his prize in the ribs. "The native told me that if you kept it handy, say in your pocket, you'd have good luck all the time. Never go hungry or get sick."

"That alone is worth the price of admission," chuckled Jack skeptically. "How does it work?"

"You just stick it up in front of your house, and as long as it is planted there and kept painted it'll stay on the job," was Sandy's glowing reply.

"That's simple," said Tom, "about as cheap a way of maintaining a mascot as you could find."

At this point Mr. Dacre, who had been busy below consulting with the engineering force, came on deck. A smile overspread his face as he saw the totem.

"Well, well. You young men are certainly acquiring the rudiments of a museum," he said amusedly. "Who is the owner of the gentleman with the 'bowsprit' teeth?"

Sandy proudly proclaimed his ownership and the manner in which he had come by it. Mr. Dacre declared that he had not been unduly cheated except in the declaration of the native that the totem possessed magic powers.

"The use of the totem pole may fitly be termed 'Alaskan heraldry,'" said he. "It acts as the shield of the various tribes or families. Among the totems of the Haidas, to mention only one tribe, the insignias of the eagle, whale, crow, wolf and bear are found. To anyone who can decipher it, the totem pole in front of a house forms a history of the family within.

"The figure at the top may sometimes be a rude portrait, as in the case of Sandy's old gentleman, or it may be any symbol similar to those I have mentioned. The carvings on the pole usually represent traditional events connected with the history of the tribe.

"According to ethnologists, the totem was first adopted to distinguish the four social clans into which the Alaskan Indians were formerly divided, namely, the Kishpootwadda, the Lacheboo, the Canadda and the Lackshkeak. The Kishpootwadda symbolically were represented by the fish-back whale on the sea, the grizzly bear on land, the grouse in the air and the sun and stars in the heavens.

"The Canadda tribes adopted the frog, raven, starfish and bull's-head. The wolf, heron and grizzly proclaimed the Lacheboo, and the Lackshkeaks selected the eagle, beaver and halibut. Members of a clan, though living hundreds of miles apart, are recognized as blood relations by means of their totems.

"According to Indian legends, in the dim past they lived in a beautiful land where there was unlimited game and fish. The creatures on the totem poles were the divinities of this mystic land, just as the ibis and the cat are held sacred in Egyptian lore.

"Families having the same crest may not intermarry. A Frog may not marry a Frog, or an Eagle an Eagle. A young Lochinvar of the Frog family may woo and

win,—sometimes with a club,—a maiden of the Whale family. But it would be considered very bad form for a Wolf and an Eagle to marry, as both are creatures of prey.

"Like most other races, the Alaskan Indians have a 'bogyman' story with which to frighten naughty children. In a northern village there is a totem pole surmounted by the whitened face of a Caucasian, flanked on each side by the figure of a child wearing a tall hat. The story is that long, long ago a chief's wife left a temporary summer camp. Taking her two children with her she crossed a channel in a bidarka or native canoe, and landed on an island where she gathered spruce boughs for holding salmon eggs.

"Before she entered the woods, she drew the canoe up on the beach and told the children to stay right by it. When she came back the children had vanished. She called and called, but in vain. From the woods came back the mocking voices of crows and that was all. In despair she returned to the camp and told her story. The Shaman, or medicine man of the tribe, brewed potions and wrought spells and found out that a white man had stolen the children and that they had been taken to America to wear tall hats and forget their tribe. The white man is supposed still to haunt the woods and waters looking for disobedient children, and if the story is doubted, there is the totem pole to show the recorded history of the fate of the two youngsters in the dim past. And that, young gentlemen, will conclude what I'm afraid has been a tedious lecture on totem poles."

But the interested faces of the boys showed that they had appreciated Mr. Dacre's little talk, and the figure of the old gentleman with the prominent teeth took on a new interest in their eyes.

"That Indian told me that if you poured oil on this totem when you were going fishing, your boat would go where you wanted to go and make no trouble for you," said Sandy.

"Well, he certainly gave you your five dollars' worth," smiled Mr. Dacre.

At five o'clock that night the *Northerner's* anchor rumbled home. She was off once more. In the extreme bow of the vessel, erect and boldly facing the north, was Sandy's totem. Its head glistened with oil. Although rather dubious as to whether it was the right brand, the boys had used kerosene for the baptism. But so far as the totem displayed his feelings, he had no preference in the matter!

CHAPTER V.

A MID-OCEAN HUNTING TRIP.

"Well," remarked Jack after breakfast the next day, "old 'Frozen Face' seems to be on the job all right."

"Yes, but, mon, we should have baptized him wi' seal oil! I've just remembered that that was what the native told me to use."

"Seal oil, eh?" laughed Tom. "Well, there's a scarcity of that article on board just now, so I'm afraid that Mister Totem will just have to job along without any."

"Huh!" grunted Sandy, "then dinna depend on yon old gent to treat us right. I'll bet he's got it in for us richt noo."

The next day it appeared, indeed, as if Sandy's dire predictions were about to be verified. The *Northerner* ran into a storm that buffeted her about sadly. Her speed had to be cut down till she made scarcely any headway. It was a difficult matter to get about on deck owing to the great seas that washed over the laboring vessel. By orders of Mr. Dacre the lads were kept below much to their disgust.

The gale finally blew itself out and the boys found that the old totem had remained at his post through it all, although they had more than half expected to find him washed overboard. But their faith in him as a mascot was sadly shaken.

From time to time, as they nosed northward, the ship encountered floating icebergs. None of them were so large as to cause alarm, however, and for the most part they were low and islandlike in appearance.

The boys were idly watching one of these as the ship approached it, when Tom made out several black objects on the floe. What these specks were did not become apparent till some time later when Jack proclaimed their nature.

"Seals!" cried he. "Don't I wish we had a harpoon! We'd have a seal hunt!"

Tom smiled and drew from his pocket his automatic revolver which he had been cleaning.

"I guess this is as good as any harpoon that ever harpooned," he said, tapping its heavy stock.

"I wonder if we could get permission to go after them?" pondered Jack. "I'm sick of being penned up on board here."

"I'll be the lad to go and ask," declared Sandy boldly. "If we can kill a seal it'll be a chance to baptize old 'Frozen Face' in the richt style. I'll point oot to Mr. Dacre that all the hurlyburly the other day came from shampooing him with kerosene instead of seal oil."

"I hope he puts the seal of approval on your plan," declared Jack.

"Don't repeat that offense, or in case we do get leave to go, you'll be left behind," said Tom.

"I'll seal you later," cried Sandy, dashing off before a justly merited punishment could be visited upon him.

He was back in a few minutes.

"It's a' richt, fellows!" he exclaimed. "We're to take the small boat and not delay longer than we have to. They won't give us more than half an hour."

"Then we'll have to hustle. We'll be up to that floe before long," cried Jack.

The boys darted to their cabins to get ready for the hunt. Their faces glowed with pleasure at this unexpected break in the monotony of the voyage. When they returned on deck, they found Mr. Dacre awaiting them and the boat lowered alongside with the accommodation ladder dangling above it.

"Boys," he exclaimed with some excitement, "we've been looking at that floe through the glasses. They're not seals that have taken passage on it, but walruses, a herd of them."

"Good!" cried Tom. "We'll get a fine lot of tusks to send home."

"Steady on, steady on," warned his uncle, "walrus hunting is a very different matter from chasing seals. An old bull makes a formidable enemy."

"Are you coming along?" asked Tom, who saw that his uncle had his rifle.

"Yes, I wouldn't care to let you lads go on such an expedition alone. Seals, as I said, are too tame to afford real sport. Walrus hunting is another thing

altogether."

While the steamer lay by, the adventurous little party clambered down into the boat. From the bridge, Mr. Chillingworth, who had elected to remain on board, waved a farewell to them and shouted his wishes for their good luck.

Tom and Jack took the oars and rowed with strong, swift strokes toward the drifting berg. As they neared it, it was seen that its sides were higher than they had looked from the steamer's decks. It was no easy task to make a landing. Finally, however, Mr. Dacre scaled a four-foot shelf and then pulled Tom up after him. Jack followed, and Sandy, who had not much fancied a closer view of the big-tusked, formidable-looking walruses, was not sorry to be told to stay behind and look after the boat, which there was no means of mooring to the smooth, slippery floe.

When the hunters gained the top of the berg, they saw that had they rowed around to the other side, a landing might have been effected much more easily. A depression ran like a small valley down to the water's edge, making an almost perfect landing place on the ice floe. Jack was ordered back to tell Sandy to row the boat around the floe to this point and await the hunters there.

In the meantime, Mr. Dacre and Tom had crept cautiously forward, crouching behind every projection that afforded cover, for at the approach of the boat the big walruses had flopped clumsily to the other side of the drifting berg.

As Jack made his way back from his errand to Sandy, he saw Mr. Dacre suddenly crouch low, and Tom, who was at his side, did the same. The boy suspected that the game had been sighted and was within range. He made his way cautiously to the hunters' sides, and was rewarded with the sight of about a dozen huge black masses lying along the outer edge of a ridge of ice that ran into the "valley" before mentioned.

Mr. Dacre put a warning hand on Jack's arm to prevent his making any outcry. He pointed to the highest point of the ice valley. There, with his great, clumsy head erect, his hairy nostrils distended and his long tusks gleaming white against his fat, shiny body, was a huge bull walrus. The sentinel, perhaps the leader of the herd of formidable-looking creatures.

"We're on his wind," whispered Mr. Dacre, "we must creep along this ridge. Follow me and make no noise. He's scented us, but he hasn't seen us yet."

With nerves athrill the two boys followed their elder, wriggling cautiously over the ice.

Suddenly Mr. Dacre stiffened. His rifle was jerked to his shoulder. Taking careful sight, the hunter's weapon rang out echoingly above the ice floe. Tom and Jack saw the great bull shake his head, roar angrily and emit a hoarse, shrill bellow of pain and rage. He had been shot, but he stood his ground. All about him the herd gathered.

"You hit him!" shouted Tom, half wild with excitement. He was about to run forward exultingly, but his uncle jerked him backward.

"*You stay right here*," he said as he pulled the boy down beside him.

CHAPTER VI.

A LIBATION TO THE TOTEM.

Mr. Dacre rose to his feet and began scrambling forward over the rough ice. Slipping and bumping, he pushed toward the stricken bull, with the two boys close behind him.

"He looks ready for a fight," whispered Tom.

"He sure does. Wow! Look at those tusks! I'd hate to have them bite into me," rejoined his brother.

"Halt!" cried out Mr. Dacre suddenly.

Before them was the roaring bull. Behind him were grouped his companions. They appeared to be unsettled whether to fly or give battle. Apparently they were waiting to see what action their leader would take.

The boys came to a standstill. As they did so, Mr. Dacre raised his rifle for a second shot. But as he was about to shoot something jammed in the repeating mechanism of his weapon. At the same time, with a roar of rage, the wounded bull threw himself forward on his awkward flippers.

"They're going to attack us!" called Tom. "Why don't you fire?"

"I can't. Something's gone wrong with the magazine of my rifle!" explained his uncle. "You boys run for the boat. These fellows are ugly customers when they get roused."

But Tom's automatic revolver was out of his pocket in a jiffy. He leveled it and then pulled the trigger. There was a spiteful crack as the weapon began shooting lead. The big walrus sank to the surface of the floe with an earpiercing squeal, but wounded as he was, he turned and managed to propel himself along over the ice on his clumsy flippers.

"After him. He's the prize of the herd!" cried Mr. Dacre.

As their leader had turned tail, the others had swung round. Now their great

bulks were in full retreat across the ice. The boys ran forward while Mr. Dacre struggled to get his rifle into working order once more.

Tom swiftly reloaded and threw up his automatic. But as he ran his eye along the barrel he dropped the weapon with a gasp of alarm.

At the landing place to which he had been directed was Sandy, standing erect in the boat. Toward him, down the valley leading to the break in the ice, wallowed the retreating walrus herd. The boy was directly in their path.

"Look out! Look out!" screamed Tom, but Sandy, if he heard him, paid no attention.

Tom saw the Scotch lad pick up an oar and stand brandishing it as the herd, in full retreat and snorting alarmedly, bore down upon him. Behind them lumbered the great creature that carried the bullets of Mr. Dacre and Tom in his gigantic carcass.

Bloodstains showed that the monster had been severely wounded, but Tom did not dare risk another shot at it. Right in line of fire with it was Sandy's upstanding form.

"Gracious, they'll charge right down on him and maybe stave the boat!" cried Tom, almost sick with apprehension.

But Sandy appeared quite unaware of his danger. With uplifted oar he awaited the oncoming of the vanguard of the retreating herd. But it now appeared that they did not intend to attack the boat.

With noisy splashes they flopped into the water all about it, while Sandy, in a frenzy of excitement, waved his extemporized weapon and yelled at the top of his voice.

"Let 'em all come! Hooray!" he shouted, and whacked one of the animals between the eyes as it plunged below.

He actually appeared delighted at the novel combat.

"Whoop! Overboard with ye!" he shouted shrilly, "get along now"; and down would come the oar with a resounding thwack!

Mr. Dacre and Jack came running up. The former had got his rifle under control again.

"The boy's gone crazy!" he cried. "If he doesn't look out, one of those creatures will turn on him and then there'll be trouble."

"Look! Look!" broke in Jack suddenly.

The wounded bull had reached the water's edge. He raised his head and snorted as he glared with angry eyes at the upstanding boy. Then, with a snort, he lunged downward into the water out of sight.

"It's gone! The prize one's gone!" shouted Jack.

"What a shame," echoed Tom, and then the next instant, "No, see there! He's coming up again."

Sure enough, the next moment a bulky, hideous head appeared above the water close to the boat. The animal was gnashing his teeth as if determined to wreak vengeance on one at least of the party that had attacked him and his companions.

"Hoots!" yelled Sandy. "Take that, you old oomeroon!"

He brought down his oar on the walrus, but the creature caught the blade in his tusks and split it with a rending sound as if it had been merely matchwood.

"Look out for him!" shouted Mr. Dacre as, having accomplished this destruction, the monster dived once again. "He hasn't gone yet. Look behind you!"

But although Sandy turned quickly, he was not swift enough. The great sea monster had only dived a few feet. Now he came up like a battering ram. He drove his big, fleshy nose right against the boat's side. Had the craft not been of the stoutest construction, it must have been stove in.

As it was, caught unawares, the shock threw Sandy from his feet. He made an ineffectual effort to save himself, but the next instant, while his friends set up a shout of dismay, he toppled overboard into the cold water which was now alive with bobbing black heads.

Directly they had recovered from their first shock at the accident, the boys, followed by Mr. Dacre, set off faster than ever over the rough ice. As they ran they shouted encouragement to their chum. Sandy's head could be seen in the water. He was striking out for the side of the boat. But behind him came the blunt head of the big walrus. The others appeared to be taking no notice, leaving the task of demolishing the boat and Sandy to the wounded animal.

"Good boy, Sandy! Strike out! You'll make it!" roared Tom, all a-quiver with apprehension.

"Swim for your life, my boy!" shouted Mr. Dacre. "Make the boat and you'll be all right. I'll attend to the walrus."

Sandy was a good swimmer and he struck out valiantly. But the monster head, with its huge gleaming tusks, was terribly close behind him as he made his way through the water.

Mr. Dacre raised his rifle. He was going to try a desperate shot. The head of the walrus, huge though it was, was moving too swiftly to offer a good target, and yet it was the only chance to save Sandy. Steadying his aim with an effort, Mr. Dacre drew a careful bead on the creature, aiming for a spot between the eyes.

Between his sights appeared the oily head, the bristling whiskers and the fierce tusks of the creature. He pulled the trigger. In the churn of the water and the wave of spray that succeeded the sharp report, it could be seen that the wounded walrus had been struck again and had sunk from sight. But his tenacity of life had been such that they were still by no means sure that he was dead.

"Get into the boat! The boat!" called Mr. Dacre as he saw the blood-stained swirl of waters where the walrus had last been seen.

Sandy was clinging to the bulwark of the craft, and after some difficulty climbed on board. Just as he reached safety, there came a shout from his friends.

"Behind you! Behind you!" shrieked Tom.

Sandy looked. Coming toward the boat was once more a swirl of water. The old bull was rushing down on the boat, rearing his head aloft. His ugly creased neck tilted back. His great tusks impended above the boat's side ready to crush on it as a terrier seizes on a rat. But before the ponderous jaws could close, "Spit!" came from Tom's automatic, and dazed and finally wounded unto death, the huge bull slipped back harmlessly into the water.

As the craft careened in the swell of the sinking body, Sandy almost went overboard for a second time. But he managed to save himself just as the carcass came bobbing up alongside. He seized the boat hook, jabbing it down into the great body, and gave a yell of triumph.

"I got him," he yelled, as the others came running and stumbling toward him.

"Come on, and get your dead walrus!"

A cheer answered him. Not long after, with the shivering Sandy wrapped in what dry clothing they could spare, the boat, with its prize in tow, was sculled back to the ship where, as you may imagine, all hands had a thrilling tale to tell.

Sandy was made to gulp down boiling coffee and was hustled into a change of garments, while the others examined the body of the monster in whose slaying it might be said that they all had had a more or less active share. Tom felt not a little proud of his part as they gazed at the dead bull and admired his huge proportions. Soon Sandy joined them.

"Aweel, I'm thinking that we'll have a christening the noo," said he.

While the sailors were skinning the walrus and cutting out the four foot tusks, Sandy snatched up some strips of blubber and vanished. In a quarter of an hour or so he appeared with a cooking pan in his hands. Its contents was steaming and emitted a rank and fishy odor.

"What in the world have you got there?" Tom wanted to know.

"Give you three guesses," rejoined Sandy.

"It smells like sixty," observed Jack.

"Yes; keep to leeward of us, my lad," put in the captain.

"Well, what is it?" asked Mr. Dacre.

"Soup,—walrus soup," guessed Jack.

"If it is, I don't want any of it," declared Tom, sniffing the fishy odor.

"Don't worry, *you* won't get any," chortled Sandy.

"What are you going to do with it?" asked Jack.

"As I observed some time ago, we'll have a christening the noo," was the rejoinder.

"A christening!"

"Aye! That native said that old 'Frozen Face' needed a shampoo wi' seal oil, but I'm thinking that walrus oil will be just as good or better."

A shout broke from the boys.

"Good for you, Sandy," cried Tom. "Come on, we'll give the old boy a bath in it. He surely looked out well for you to-day."

While their elders looked on amusedly, the lads doused the long suffering totem with the ill-smelling oil and danced around the aged figure with mock solemnity, intoning what was meant to be a mystic chant:

"*Oh, totem in our hours of ease,*
Uncertain, coy and hard to please;
Now you have had your walrus bath,
Be nice and kind, and smile and laugh;
And kindly watch our destiny,
Northward, toward the Arctic Sea."

CHAPTER VII.

AN ADVENTURE OF JACK'S.

"What's that yonder, uncle?" asked Tom.

It was the morning after the adventure with the walrus and the *Northerner* was steaming steadily on toward Valdez, her next port of call on her voyage north. At that place she would take on coal for the final stage of her journey to St. Michaels near the mouth of the Yukon, where the party would be left after the small steamer had been put together.

Tom was a great boy to lean against the rail scanning the sea in search of something that might prove exciting. He had been gazing steadily against the far horizon for some minutes. Mr. Dacre hastened to his cabin and came back with a pair of binoculars.

He raised them and looked fixedly in the direction that Tom had indicated.

"It's a whale," he declared, "or rather a whole school of them, if I'm not mistaken. They are dead ahead of us. If we keep on this course, we shall run almost squarely into them."

He hastened off to inform the captain and Mr. Chillingworth while Tom set out to find his chums. He found them in the wireless room practicing on the key. At his news they speedily jumped up and joined him in the bow.

Within an hour they came into plain sight of what appeared at first to be so many giant logs rolling about in the sea. All at once, among the "logs," which of course were the whales, appeared splashes of white water. The leviathans swam swiftly here and there as though in fear.

"What's the matter with them?" wondered Tom.

"Maybe it's the ship's coming that has scared them," suggested Jack.

"It's the totem at the bow, mon," declared the Scotch boy solemnly.

The captain leaned over the bridge rail and shouted to them.

"There's a school of killers in among them."

"Killers?"

"Yes, the killer whales. They are the enemies of the other kind and just naturally take after them when they meet. Watch close now!"

The boys needed no second bidding. Strangely fascinated by the turbulent scene below, they leaned far out to watch the thrashing water. It was a strange combat of the sea. The monster fish appeared, in their panic at the advent among them of the killers, not to notice the oncoming steamer.

"Look close now and you'll see tall, upright fins moving about among 'em," sung out the captain.

"I see them!" cried Tom. "Are those the killers?"

"That's what. Sea tigers, they ought to call 'em. They're as bad as sharks," was the reply.

Mr. Dacre joined the boys. One of the biggest of the whales appeared to be an especial target for the "killers." They pursued it relentlessly in a body.

"Wow!" cried Tom suddenly, "look at that!" The big whale had leaped clear out of the water, breached, as the whalers call it. Its body shone in the sunlight like a burnished surface. They saw its whole enormous bulk as if it had been a leaping trout.

"He's as big as a house!" cried Jack.

"I've seen houses that were smaller!" laughed Mr. Dacre; "your bungalow, for example."

Down came the whale again with a splash that sent the spray flying as high as the *Northerner's* mast tops.

"How do they fight the whales?" Tom wanted to know, when their excitement over this episode had subsided.

"They tear them with their teeth," replied his uncle. "They get round them like dogs worrying a cat. They literally tear the poor creatures to bits piecemeal."

"Looks like one of the whale hunts that old 'Frozen Face' here must have had a hand in," said Jack. "Here, old sport, take a look for auld lang syne."

He loosened the lashings that held the totem in place in the bow, and while they all laughed, he tilted the old relic till "old Frozen Face," as they called him, actually appeared to be gazing at the conflict raging about them.

"See, the big fellow is acting kind of sleepy!" cried Jack suddenly.

"Yes, he must have got his death warrant," declared Mr. Dacre.

"Look! He's coming right across our bows!" yelled Sandy.

"Hey! Look out, captain, you'll hit him!" roared out Tom.

But even as he spoke, there came a heavy jar that almost stopped the sturdy steamer. Her steel bow had struck the whale amidships with stunning force. The craft appeared to quiver in every rib and frame.

The party on the fore deck, taken by surprise, went over like so many ninepins. They recovered themselves in a jiffy.

"Goodness! Don't run into any more whales! You'll have the ship stove in the first thing you know," cried Mr. Dacre. "I don't think——"

But a shout from Tom checked him.

"Jack! Where's Jack?"

"He was there a minute ago. By the totem."

"I know, but the totem has gone!"

"Great Scott, it must have gone overboard when that shock came and carried the boy with it."

They darted to the rail where Jack had last been seen. The next instant they set up a mingled cheer and groan. The cheer was in token that Jack was alive, the groan was at his precarious position. Clinging to the totem as if it had been a life buoy, the lad was drifting rapidly astern, and toward him was advancing the mad turmoil of waters that signified the battle royal raging between the killers and their huge awkward prey.

As he saw his friends, the boy on the floating totem waved his hand in a plucky effort to reassure them. He shouted something encouraging that they could not catch. But the peril of his position was only too plain.

Only a short distance separated the killers and their frightened quarry from the drifting boy. Once in the midst of that seething turmoil his life would be in grave danger.

It was a moment for action, swift and decisive. Within a few seconds, although to Jack's excited friends it appeared infinitely longer, a boat had been lowered and the steamer's way checked. This latter was the more easy to accomplish for the huge carcass impending at her bow had almost brought her to a standstill.

Manned by two sailors, the boat flew toward the imperiled boy. In the stern, with pale faces, stood Tom and Sandy, side by side with Mr. Dacre and Mr. Chillingworth. All carried rifles. Jack's position was a grave one as the school of whales, pursued by their remorseless foes, rushed down upon him. But those in the boat were in equal danger. One flip of those giant tails or a chance collision, and the stout boat would inevitably be sent to the bottom with a slender chance of its occupants being saved.

No wonder that little was said as they rowed swiftly toward Jack and that many anxious glances were cast at the waters astern, which were boiling like a maelstrom as the huge bodies of the whales and their foes dashed blindly hither and thither!

CHAPTER VIII.

"THE TALE OF A WHALE."

"Give way, men!" implored Mr. Dacre anxiously, as the sailors bent to their task vigorously.

There was small need to admonish the men. The affair had literally become a race for life between the boat and the surging, battling whales. As they came alongside Jack, who was clinging to the totem, he gave an encouraging wave of the hand.

"Gee! I'm glad you've come. This water is pretty cold, I can tell you."

He was hauled on board with all swiftness.

"Don't forget old 'Frozen Face,'" he begged anxiously as he heard his uncle give orders to take to the oars again.

"No time to wait for him now, Jack," declared Mr. Dacre; "look there!"

He pointed behind them. Rushing toward the boat with the speed of an express locomotive was a mighty head. It parted the water like an oncoming torpedo boat. The boys gave a shout of alarm.

"It's coming straight for us!"

The sailors pulled on their oars till the stout ash wood bent as if it had been bamboo. Suddenly there came a loud crack. One of the oars had snapped. No doubt, as sometimes occurs, there was a flaw in the wood. The man who was pulling it rolled off his seat into the bottom of the boat.

As he did so, there came a second loud cry of affright. The whale was almost upon them. On either side of its enormous blunt head was a mountainous wall of water. Even if it did not hit them, the mighty "wash" that its onrush made was likely to swamp the little craft, deeply loaded as she was.

The snapping of the oar had cost valuable time. A collision appeared to be inevitable. The second sailor seemed to be paralyzed with fright. He stared

stupidly at the great bulk bearing down upon them.

With a sharp exclamation Mr. Dacre seized an oar out of the fellow's hand. In the stern of the boat was a "becket." He thrust the oar through this, and with a few powerful strokes moved the boat forward. It was then out of the direct path of the whale, but still in peril of the mighty wave the great body of the creature upreared.

It was at this juncture that Tom proved his mettle. He grabbed the other oar from the stupefied sailor's hands and thrusting it overboard on the port side tugged on it with all his might.

"That's right! Good lad! Head her into it!" cried Mr. Dacre, perceiving the object of Tom's maneuver, which was to force the boat bow first against the towering wave sweeping down upon them. It was the only thing to do, and Tom's experience had taught him to act quickly.

Hardly had the boat's bow been swung till it was facing the onrushing wave, than, with a roar and smother of foam, a huge black bulk shot by, drenching them with spray. Carried away by excitement, Jack did a foolish thing. Raising his revolver he fired point blank at the huge wet side of the whale.

Instantly, as the bullet struck it, the great creature spouted. From its nostrils two jets of water shot up with a roar like that of escaping steam.

"Duck your heads!" roared out Mr. Chillingworth.

He had hardly time to get out the words before the spouted water came down with the force of a cloudburst upon the boat. It was half filled, but they had hardly time to notice this before the great wave that the speeding whale had caused to rise swept under them. The small boat, half full of water and overcrowded, rose sullenly. To the boys it seemed that they were rushed dizzily heavenward and then let down into an abyss that was fathomless. But a few seconds later a glad cry from Mr. Dacre announced that the danger had passed. The boat had ridden the wave nobly, and as for the killers and their quarry, all that could be seen of them was a fast receding commotion in the water.

"Phew, what a narrow escape!" gasped out Tom. "I thought we were goners sure that time!"

"Same here," agreed Sandy with deep conviction.

The strained faces of the others showed what they had thought. Mr. Dacre relieved the tension by ordering all hands to get busy and bale out the boat with some baling cans that were under the thwarts. They were in the midst of this task when Jack gave a sudden outcry and pointed over the side.

"What's up now, another whale?" cried Sandy, his face showing his alarm.

"Whale nothing!" scoffed Jack. "Look, it's the 'Good Genius of the Frozen North!'"

"The mascot!" cried Sandy.

"The mascot, sure enough," declared Mr. Dacre. "It undoubtedly helped to save Jack's life."

"Yes, after carrying me overboard first!" snorted Jack.

Sure enough, alongside the boat old "Frozen Face" was bobbing serenely about.

"We've got to take him back to the ship," declared Sandy.

"Yes, since he's inviting himself we can't be so impolite as to leave him," said Mr. Chillingworth.

Accordingly, a line was made fast to the totem and he was towed back to the ship and once more restored to office as official mascot in the bow of the *Northerner*. But the ship did not get under way at once following the adventure of part of her crew. The body of the wounded whale still hung limply to her bow. Sailors with tackles had to be called into requisition before the vast obstruction could be cleared.

By this time, as if by magic, thousands of birds had appeared. They fell upon the carcass, paying scant attention to the men at work on it, and fought and tore and devoured flesh and blubber as if they were famished. The captain said that they were whale birds, such as haunt the track of ships engaged in whale trade for weeks at a time.

"Gracious, we certainly are having exciting times!" said Tom as the ship once more got under way bound for her next port of call, Valdez, to the east of the great Kenai Peninsula.

"I expect you boys will have more exciting times later than any you have yet experienced," remarked the captain, who happened to be passing along the deck

at the time. "Your adventure with the whales reminds me of a yarn that a certain old Captain Peleg Maybe used to spin, of the perils of whaling. Like to hear it?"

The boys chorused assent. They knew something of the captain's ability as a spinner of yarns.

"Well, it appears, according to the way old Captain Peleg used to tell it, that his ship, the *Cachelot,* was becalmed in these seas while out after whales," began the skipper with somewhat of a twinkle in his eye. "One day he decided to enliven the monotony of the constant doldrums by having his small dory lowered and going a-fishing after halibut. Well, the boat was lowered away and the skipper pulled off to some distance from the ship before he cast his lines.

"Now it seems strange, doesn't it, in an ocean five hundred miles wide and a thousand feet deep, that when he cast his light anchor overboard, the fluke of it should land in the blow-hole of a whale, which isn't much bigger than a man's fist?"

"What's a blow-hole?" demanded Sandy.

"Why, the orifice through which a whale spouts or sounds, as whalemen call it. You had a specimen of spouting when that whale Master Jack shot at gave you a shower bath. But, according to Captain Peleg, that was just what happened to him. The fluke of his anchor lodged right in that whale's nostril.

"As soon as the anchor hit that whale where the apple hit the man who discovered the law of gravitation, off he dashed, and naturally the boat being fast to him, off dashed the boat, too. The line was drawn as tight as the 'G' string on a bull fiddle.

"Cap'n Peleg was standing up in the stern just ready to cast a line over, when 'bang!' the fun started. He almost went overboard, but recovered himself in time to find that he was being drawn through the water at 'sixty-'leven' miles an hour or more. He said afterward it was the fastest he'd ever traveled. The wind hit his face as if he was coasting down a forty-five grade mountainside in a runaway six-cylinder auto without brakes or windshield.

"The cap'n said that the wind blew in his face so hard that every time he tried to get to the bow of the boat to cut the line, he was blown back again. All this time he couldn't think what he was hitched to. In fact he didn't do much thinking at all. It wasn't till the whale had gone what Peleg said must have been a hundred

miles or more, that it turned plum round and headed right back for his ship again.

"They made the trip in as fast time as if he'd been hitched to a runaway cyclone. As they came near the ship there was the greatest excitement on board that they'd had since they ran into a herd of sperms up in Bering Sea.

"'Come aboard, cap!' yelled the mate.

"'Can't, you're only a way station,' yells back the skipper, 'and this is the Alaskan flyer.'

"Just then, the way Cap'n Peleg told it, up comes the whale to spout. Seems funny it didn't think of doing that before, but the way Peleg told it, the creature hadn't. Anyhow, just as they were passing the ship, up comes the whale and gives an almighty sneeze. That blew the anchor out of its nose and off it goes, while Peleg takes an oar and guides the boat alongside his ship after the most exciting ride he ever had. The boat was going so fast when the whale cut loose, that he didn't need to row her alongside; all he had to do was to steer her like a launch and then he had to make two circles to reduce speed before he dared try to reach his ship.

"Peleg said that when they hoisted the boat on deck they found she had stood the trip all right, except that paint on her sides was blistered and burned by reason of the friction kicked up by the terrific pace they had traveled through the water."

The boys burst into a roar of laughter at the conclusion of this surprising anecdote. The captain's eyes twinkled.

"Remember, I don't vouch for it," he said; "I'm only telling the tale to you as it was told to me."

"The tale of a whale," chuckled Tom.

"A whale of a tale, I guess you mean," spoke Jack.

"Captain, what did you say the name of that skipper was?" inquired Sandy innocently.

"Maybe," was the answer.

"Aweel," said the Scotch lad soberly, "I'm thinking he was well named."

CHAPTER IX.

WILD WATERS.

Early one morning the boys were awakened by the steady booming of the *Northerner's* whistle. By the lack of vibration they knew that she was proceeding slowly. Wondering what could be the cause of the reduced speed and the constant raucous bellowing of the whistle, they hustled into their clothes and met each other on deck.

It was at once apparent what was the matter. Thick, steamy sea-fog enveloped the ship. Through a fleece of blanket-like vapor, she was forging ahead at a snail's pace. The boys made their way to the bridge. There they found their elders in anxious consultation. And there, too, the blowing of the whistle was explained to them. It was not, as they had at first thought, for fear of encountering other vessels that the big siren was kept incessantly roaring its hoarse warning.

The whistle was sounding to enable the captain to get his bearings in the dense smother. Sea captains along the part of the coast where they were now steaming, keep their whistles going in thick weather so as to catch the sound of an echo. When they hear one reverberating back through the fog, they know that they are in dangerous proximity to the cliffy, rockbound coast, and keep outward toward the open sea.

"Where are we?" was naturally the first thing that the boys wanted to know.

"We are somewhere off the coast of Afognok Island," was the rejoinder.

"That's a misnomer for it," declared Jack.

"How's that?" unsuspectingly inquired Tom.

"Why, it's the last place I'd think of calling A-fog-not," rejoined Jack, dodging quickly to a place of safety behind a stanchion.

"Are we near a harbor?" inquired Sandy.

"As well as I can tell, we ought to be off the mouth of Kadiak Harbor soon after

breakfast," rejoined the captain, squinting at the compass and giving a brief direction to the man at the wheel.

Sure enough, after breakfast the anchor was let go with a rattle and roar and the *Northerner* came to a standstill. The whistle was blown in impatient short toots as a signal to the pilot to come off, if, as the captain was certain, they were really near the harbor mouth. Mr. Dacre was anxious to go ashore, as he had some friends living in the Alaskan town whom he had not seen for many years.

At last, out of the fog came the sound of oars, and then came a rough voice roaring out through a megaphone a message to the *Northerner's* company.

"Steamer, ahoy! Who are you?"

"Northerner, under charter, San Francisco to St. Michael," rejoined the captain succinctly. "Are you the pilot?"

"Aye! aye!" was bellowed back through the all-enveloping mist.

"Come aboard then, will you?" admonished the captain, and jerked the whistle cord sharply so as to give the pilot his bearings.

In a few minutes a big, capable-looking dory, manned by two Aleuts appeared alongside. In the stern sat a grizzled, red-faced man in oilskins. This was Bill Rainier, the pilot.

"How about taking her in, pilot?" demanded the captain anxiously.

The man grinned.

"All right, if you've no further use for her, cap," he rejoined. "If you don't mind piling her up on the rocks, we'll go right ahead."

"Mr. Dacre here is anxious to go ashore," responded the captain. "He has some goods to give to some friends of his, Mr. Beattie and his brother. How long before this fog is likely to lift?"

"Can't say," was the noncommittal reply; "it may last a week. But tell you what you do. The Beatties are good friends of mine. I'll take your man ashore if you like."

But here arose a question about carrying the goods which Mr. Dacre had for his friends, who were storekeepers, and which he had brought up freight free. The

question was finally decided in this way: A ship's boat would be used to transport the goods and Bill Rainier and Mr. Dacre would go ashore in her. The boys, who had begged to go ashore, too, would follow in the pilot's dory with the two natives as guides.

It did not take long to get out the goods from the hold and lower them overside. Then the boys scrambled down and took their places in the dory, while the natives, with grinning faces, stared at them.

Bill Rainier roared something at the Aleuts in their native tongue and off glided the dory into the fog, bearing three happy, excited boys as cargo.

Mr. Dacre, busy superintending the work of getting the goods transferred, did not notice their departure till some minutes later. Then he asked sharply:

"Where's that dory gone?"

"That's all right, cap," rejoined Bill easily, "I sent it ahead. Those Aleuts know the way as well as I do."

"Just the same, I wish they had waited for us," said Mr. Dacre with a slight frown.

"Oh, they'll be waiting for us when we get there," declared Bill confidently, and no more was said.

But when the steamer's boat reached the dock, no dory was there. Nor had any of the loungers hanging about seen one.

"Maybe they've got into another channel and gone down Wolf Island way," suggested Bill, looking rather grave. "Don't you worry, sir, they'll be along."

"Well, if an Aleut can do anything pig-headed and plum foolish, that's what he's a-goin' to do," opined the dock superintendent, who knew the facts in the case.

"I'd suggest we get up to the store with these goods," said Bill, "and by the time we're through that dory'll be here."

"But it should have reached here long ago," said Mr. Dacre. "I tell you, Rainier, I don't half like the look of this."

"No harm can come to 'em," Bill assured him.

But nevertheless, for some time both men stood motionless, with lips

compressed, staring out into the blanket of fog without exchanging speech.

In the meantime, the dory was being rowed through the fog by the two stolid natives without the boys suspecting in the least that anything was wrong. As a matter of fact, the two natives, for reasons apparent to those who know the native Aleut, had decided to take a short cut through a passage behind Wolf Island. But the fog had shut in thicker now and they were not at all sure of their bearings, skilled boatmen though they were. They rowed stolidly on and on through the dripping mist without speaking.

Tom was the first to notice that, although they had been rowing for an hour or more, the dory was still rolling on the heavy swells of the open sea. Suspecting that something was amiss, he signaled to the men to stop rowing. Without a change of expression, the flat-faced, lank-haired Aleuts rested on their oars.

Everything about the tossing dory was silent except for the swish and sigh of the waves as they swept under her. Listen as they would, they could hear no other sound from any quarter.

"I don't like the appearance of things much," said Tom in reply to a question from Jack; "we ought to have reached the dock by now."

"Looks that way to me," was the response.

"How far did the captain say it was?" inquired Sandy.

"Not more than half an hour's row from the ship. If these fellows know their business, we ought to be there by now."

"That's evident. How silent it all is," said Jack in a rather awestruck voice. "Surely if we were near the town even, we would be able to hear something."

"Just what I was thinking, more particularly as fog exaggerates sound," responded Tom. "What makes it worse, too, is that the steamer has stopped sounding her whistle. We can't even get back to her now."

"I wish we'd stuck to the pilot boat," put in Sandy dismally.

"See if you can get anything out of those Aleuts," suggested Jack.

But although Tom tried to get something understandable from the natives, they only grinned and shook their heads. But at last they fell to their oars again.

"They don't know where they're going, but they're on the way," said Jack with a rather weak attempt at humor.

The sea began to come tumbling up astern of them in long black water rows that broke and whitened with spray now and again. The dory swung skyward and then plunged down as if bound for the bottom of the sea, as the swell nosed under her keel.

The boys exchanged serious glances. Their faces looked several shades paler than when they had left the steamer. The fog lent a ghastly grayish hue to everything. The dismal quality of the weather only added to their perplexity and alarm.

The Aleuts rowed steadily on without a shade of an expression on their greasy, yellow faces.

"Maybe they do know where they are going, after all," said Tom hopefully. "We may be ashore in a short time and laughing over our scare."

The others did not reply and the Aleuts rowed stolidly on like two images as lifeless as Sandy's totem. But in spite of Tom's hopeful prophecy, there was no sign that they were approaching land and friends. Instead, the water grew rougher, the white caps more frequent. The boys exchanged looks of dismay. In all their lives they had never been in such wild waters as these.

CHAPTER X.

THE TIDAL "BORE."

"What's the matter, Sandy?"

Tom spoke as the dory swung dizzily between heaven and earth.

"I—I'm scared!" confessed Sandy, turning a white face to his chum.

"Pshaw! Cheer up, Sandy," said Tom, trying to put a bold face on the matter, as was always his way.

"Yes, we'll come out of it all right," struck in Jack bravely, concealing his real fear of the outcome of the adventure.

"We've been in worse fixes than this before and got through all right," supplemented Tom, and Sandy appeared to pluck up some heart from the confident tones of his companions.

"Tell you what," suggested Jack suddenly, "I've got an idea."

"What is it?"

"Why, to find out where we are. It's no use asking those wooden Indians; they wouldn't say if they did know, and couldn't if they didn't."

"Well, but what's your plan?" asked Tom impatiently.

"Just this. You remember how the captain on the *Northerner* found out when he was dangerously near to the coast by blowing the whistle and waiting for the echo?"

Tom nodded.

"Well, why can't we do the same by hollering at the top of our voices?"

"Good boy! I see your idea. If we're near land, we ought to catch the echo of our voices."

"That's the scheme exactly."

The boat was tossing too violently to stand up in it, but the boys placed their hands to their mouths, funnel-wise, and set up as loud an uproar as they could.

Sure enough, back out of the fog faint and obscure, but still audible, came an unmistakable reply.

"Hul-l-o-o-o-o!"

Their faces brightened. Even Sandy broke into a grin.

"We're aboon the land!" he cried out.

"Must be," declared Tom positively.

He looked at the two natives, who had been regarding the proceedings with no more interest than they appeared to display in anything else.

"Row that way," he ordered in a loud, clear voice, pointing off into the fog in the direction from whence the answer to their shouting had come. The natives obeyed without a word. Whether they understood him or not Tom never knew, but they appeared to apprehend his vigorous gesture well enough.

As they rowed along, the boys repeated their practice, and every time the echo came louder and more clearly.

"Wish we'd thought of that before," sighed Jack, "we might be in the harbor by this time."

"Better late than never," Tom assured him cheerily.

Before long they could hear the roar of waves breaking on the coast. The natives apparently heard them, too, and kept the boat out a little. The angry sound of the breaking waters was sufficient warning that no landing could be attempted there.

"We must be running along the coast," decided Tom.

"How can you guess that?" inquired Jack.

"Yes, I dinna ken how you know, unless you hae the second sight," agreed Sandy, who had in a large measure recovered his self-possession at the idea of the proximity of land.

"Easy enough," responded Tom, "the echo only comes from one side. If we were in a harbor or channel it would come from both sides."

"So much the worse," declared Jack. "We know now that we are not anywhere near Kadiak, for that is rock walled on either side and we should get the echo from both directions."

"Still, it's something to know that we are even within touch of land," said Tom, and in this they all agreed.

After a while the roaring of the surge grew less loud. This gave Tom an idea.

"We must be near to an inlet or something that will afford a landing place," he said, as the thunder of the surf diminished and finally almost died away. "What do you say if we go ashore?"

"What kind of a country will we find?" objected Jack.

"It couldn't be worse than tossing about in this dory, could it?" demanded Tom. "At any rate, we might find people ashore and a shelter and some food."

Both Jack and Sandy agreed to this, and Tom made motions to the native oarsmen that they were to make a landing if possible. In response to his gesture the men nodded as if they understood what was wanted, and began rowing directly toward the direction in which they had guessed the landing place lay.

As they neared the shore, which was still, however, invisible through the mist, the surf thunder grew louder. But the natives did not appear alarmed. No doubt they were thoroughly used to handling their craft in the surf and such proved to be the case.

When they got quite close to the shore and the boys could see a dark outline against the mist which they judged was a wall of cliffs, the two natives stopped rowing and back-watered. They did this till a big wave came along behind the dory, lifting its stern high in the air. Then, with a piercing yell they dug their blades into the water.

The dory was flung forward like a stone from a sling. The men leaped out as the wave broke, and ran the craft amidst the surf and spume high and dry upon what proved to be a sandy beach in a little covet between two frowning battlements of rocky cliff.

The boys scrambled out. Even though they had not the remotest idea where they were, the touch of solid earth felt good under their feet after that blundering voyage in the mist. But their surroundings were cheerless enough. Above them,

except where the soft blanket of fog obscured the view, towered the dripping walls of black rock, all moist and shiny with the mist.

On the beach, the surf thundered and screamed as the waves broke and receded. Now and then the sharp shriek of some sea-bird rose startlingly clear above the voice of the sea. The boys felt lonely and wretched. But this feeling, seemingly, was not shared by the stoical Aleuts. They drew out pipes and began to smoke in silence. They appeared to pay no attention to the boys whatever, and Tom began to get angry at their indifference. After all, their blundering had placed the boys in their predicament, and Tom felt, and so did his companions, that the natives ought to make at least some effort to right their error.

"Here, you," he said angrily, addressing one of them, "where are we?"

The man shook his head. If he knew, he did not betray it by a change of expression or a spoken syllable.

"Ask him about getting something to eat," said Sandy. "Mon, but I'm famished."

Tom tried to convey this idea to the natives in speech, but it was plain they did not understand. Then he fell back on the sign language. Here he succeeded better. He pointed to his mouth and then rubbed his stomach, a sign understood from the Arctic Ocean to Statenland. The native grinned and gave over smoking a minute. He nodded his head.

"Bye'm bye," he said, "bye'm bye."

"Well, at least he understands that much English," cried Tom triumphantly. "I wish I could tell him to hurry up. 'Bye'm bye' might mean any time."

But in answer to further efforts, the native only nodded and smiled amiably. After a while, during which the boys strolled about disconsolately, the natives smoked their pipes out, and then began to talk in their guttural, grunting tongue. Of course, the boys could not understand what they were saying, but as well as they could judge the two men were coming to some sort of a decision. Suddenly they got to their feet and made off through the fog at a swift pace. The boys ran after them, shouting, but the Aleuts speedily vanished.

It was a pity that the boys could not know that the two natives, after a discussion, had decided to set off across the island to a fishing settlement for help. For it was Wolf Island on which the party had landed and the natives had only delayed to get a smoke before starting for aid. But of this the boys knew nothing.

Hour after hour they waited with despairing faces for the two Aleuts, whom they thought had basely deserted them. At length Tom reached a decision.

"Those fellows have left us. We'll leave them," he declared.

"How?" inquired Jack.

"In the dory."

"Which way will we go?"

"Toward the direction from which we came. We are bound to get somewhere, and at any rate the fog seems to be lifting. We can keep track of the shore by the echo, and so find our way back to Kadiak."

"The sea's pretty rough," objected Jack.

"The dory's a good sea boat, and anyway it isn't as rough as it was. I'm for pulling out of here right away before we waste any more time."

"So am I," agreed Jack, and Sandy, although he looked rather sober at the thought of venturing out on the big swells again, assented to Tom's plan.

By good luck they managed to get the dory launched on a big sea, and almost before they knew it, they were out on the tossing waves once more. The dory proved heavy and hard to pull, but the boys all had well-seasoned muscles and they made fairly good progress.

They were laboriously toiling in the direction Tom had pointed out, when Jack gave a shrill cry of real fear.

"Look! Look there!" he cried.

For a moment they all stopped rowing and gazed ahead.

Bearing down on them was a towering, walllike ridge of white, foamy waves. They were higher than their heads, even had the boys been standing upright in the boat. The mighty phalanx of water appeared to be rushing down on them with the purpose of engulfing them in its maw.

"What is it?" gasped Jack, cowering.

"More whales!" shouted Sandy.

But it was something far worse than any creature of the deep. Although they did not know it, the mighty waves that it appeared certain would presently engulf them, were caused by the tide-bore, the irresistible wall of water that twice each day sweeps down the east coast of Kadiak between the islands that form what is virtually an inland channel. The mighty forces of the Pacific tide and the Japan current unite to make the titanic tide-rip which now threatened the boys.

With blanched faces they watched its oncoming. Escape was impossible. Sandy covered his eyes and crouched in the bottom of the dory. Jack shook with fear. Tom alone kept a grip on his faculties.

"Get her round. Let her head into the wave quartering, or we're goners!" he shouted.

Swirling and breaking and crying out with a thousand voices, the parapet of water marched down on the seemingly doomed boat.

CHAPTER XI.

ADRIFT ON THE OCEAN.

The dory was a better sea boat than they had imagined. In a situation where a craft of another build would not have lived an instant, she succeeded in riding the first onslaught of the tide-bore. In another instant, Tom and Jack had her around with stern to the stampeding seas and were being borne swiftly along.

Alongside, a thousand angry, choppy waves reached up like hungry hands, as though determined to come on board and drag the craft to her doom. The manner in which the boat handled surprised and delighted Tom, and Jack was no less pleased. True their position was still a highly precarious one, but at least the watery grave they had dreaded had not yet engulfed them.

Sandy sat up in the bottom of the boat and looked about with wondering eyes.

"We're all right the noo?" he asked.

"I won't say that," rejoined Tom, "but at least we have got over the first great danger."

"What are we doing?"

"Riding along on the top of the tide-rip, for that's what it must be, and now I remember hearing of such a thing on this coast."

"How long will it keep on, I wonder?" questioned Sandy.

"I don't know. I suppose till the tide is full or till we get out of the passage that we must be in."

The others looked at him silently.

"But this is a dandy boat," went on Tom cheerily, plying his steering oar, for there was no need to row in that rushing current, "she rides like a chip."

Even a powerful steamer, if caught where the boys were, could have done little more than they were doing to meet the emergency. Her only course would have been to run before the furious tide. The boys began to be resigned to their

fortune. The fog seemed to lift occasionally now and then, shutting down, however, as densely as ever between the intervals of lighter weather.

Wild screams of sea birds that flew by like spirits of mist assailed their ears. Now and then the herculean splash of a great dolphin feeding in the tide came close alongside and startled them smartly.

True it was that they were still afloat and now appeared likely to remain so, but each moment was carrying them rapidly further from their friends and closer and closer to dangers whose nature they could only surmise.

As Sandy thought of all this, his fears began to return. His lip quivered.

"I wish we'd never left the ship," he said at last.

"That's a fine way to talk," spoke Tom sternly. "When you're in a scrape the only thing to do is to try to get out of it as best you can."

"That's the stuff," assented Jack, "but if we only had something to eat, I'd feel a little better."

"Maybe there's something under that stern seat," suggested Tom, indicating the place he meant. Sandy raised the seat, which tilted back disclosing a locker, and gave a cry of delight. Two tins of beef, some packages of crackers and a big pie reposed there. Evidently Bill Rainier, the pilot, believed in carrying lunch with him when he went out in a fog.

"Jiminy crickets," roared Jack, as one after another Sandy held up the eatables, "just think, those have been there all this time! Let's eat and forget our troubles."

"Better go slow," admonished Tom, no less pleased, however, than the others at this unexpected good fortune.

Jack cut open the meat tins with his knife and they fell to eating as they discussed their situation. They made a good meal, not forgetting liberal portions of the pie. But the lack of water troubled them. Crackers and salt beef with dried raisin pie do not make a lunch calculated to allay thirst. But they were in no mood to complain. The food alone heartened them wonderfully and put them in a mood to face their dilemma less despairingly.

Little by little the waves began to grow smaller. The current grew less swift.

"We must have reached some place where the channel widens and the tide can

spread out," observed Tom, noticing this. "Now if the fog would only lift, maybe we could get ashore some place."

"Let's try the oars again," suggested Jack.

"That's a fine idea if we only knew where to row to," rejoined Tom. "I'm afraid we'll have to drift till the fog lifts. I've no more idea which way our course lies than the man in the moon."

"Same here. I'm all twisted up like a ball of yarn," admitted Jack.

Although they had been afloat for such a long time, it was still daylight. At that time of year in those regions it is light almost all day long. This was a good thing, for if darkness had overtaken them they would doubtless have become even more alarmed than they were. For some time they drifted on, when all at once a sudden shift of the wind came. The fog was whipped into white ropy wreaths that drifted off like smoke. And there before them, not half a mile off, was a fair sized bay edged by rocky cliffs, but green and tree-grown close by the water. The blue bay, smooth and calm compared to the open sea, led back into the heart of a noble mountain panorama. Beyond the coast hills were snow-covered peaks and inaccessible valleys. Between the hills that formed the bay, the vegetation was plainly fresh and verdant.

"Hurray!" shouted Jack, carried away by enthusiasm at the sight of land once more.

Tom checked him gently.

"Remember we have no idea where we are yet," he said. "This country is sparsely settled and we may have stumbled on some desert part of it."

Jack's face fell, and Sandy, who had been about to share his rejoicing, remained silent.

"Can't you figure out what land this is?" asked Jack.

"I've not the remotest idea. I'm like you, all twisted up as to locality."

"That bore gave us such a shaking up, I couldn't tell east from west," observed Sandy.

"At any rate, that land yonder is no illusion," declared Tom cheerily. "Come on, boys, get busy with the oars and we'll be ashore in no time."

"I hope it is inhabited," said Jack.

"Same here; but that remains to be seen. At any rate, judging by the green trees and grass there's water there from the mountains beyond. We can stop some place ashore and make camp."

CHAPTER XII.

SHIFTING FOR THEMSELVES.

This was voted a good idea. As they drew closer to the shore the aspect of the little bay became more inviting.

Tom pointed to a strip of beach which bordered a rather deeper indentation on the edge of the inlet.

"I guess that's the place for us to land," he said. "Looks like there is water there and a good beach."

Wearily—for now that the strain of their wild ride on the tide-rip was over, they felt exhausted—wearily they pulled on the oars, moving the heavy dory slowly over the placid waters of the inlet. The sea, its force broken by an outcropping reef across the mouth of the miniature bay, broke gently on the shore, and it was an easy matter to make a landing. The dory was pulled as far up the beach as they in their tired state could manage, and its painter made fast to a stunted willow tree.

The beach, bordered with trees and stunted shrubs, rose upward. They mounted it and found themselves on a yielding, marshy carpet of moss. It was the tundra of Alaska. It would have made hard walking to cross it, but while they were pondering the advisability of doing so, Tom made a discovery.

"Look! a path!" he exclaimed. "It runs right along here."

He pointed to a beaten path, plainly enough made by human beings, leading along the top of the "sea-wall" between the tundra marsh and the beach.

"There must be people here. Somebody must have made it."

"Evidently, and look over there, that's the answer."

Tom had followed the path slightly in advance of the others. Now he had come to a halt, pointing toward a singular structure at some little distance, toward which it was clear that the path led. The hut was shaped like a low beehive and appeared to be built of drift-wood and peat.

"It's a native hut of some sort," declared Jack, rather an alarmed look coming into his eyes.

The boys' experience with Aleuts had not inclined them to place much confidence in the natives, for it will be recalled that our heroes thought that their two boatmen had deliberately left them on the beach.

"There's no smoke coming from it," said Tom.

"In that case, maybe it is deserted."

"Perhaps so. But we had better be careful."

"That's right, after what we experienced from those two rascals of the pilot's, I'm taking no chances with these people."

Tom did not confide to his chums another bit of information that he had acquired concerning this part of Alaska from the captain of the *Northerner*. This was that in a part of the country in which they were cast away, the native tribes are ugly and vicious, never visiting a white settlement except when they must, and refusing to have any intercourse with Caucasians.

He had heard many tales of the bloodshed and theft attributed to these renegade natives, and as may be imagined, the thought that perhaps they had stumbled on a camp of them was not a pleasant one. However, Tom said nothing for fear of unnecessarily scaring his companions. The landscape looked wild enough to form the dwelling place of any desperate natives who, for any reason, wished to evade the United States revenue cutters and missionary ships.

But the need of water was imperative, and judging by the greater luxuriance of the trees and grass near the hut, there was water there. In fact, the presence of the hut in that site argued the existence of water near by. They watched the solitary structure for some minutes. But no sign of life appeared about it. Seemingly, they were the only human beings for many miles in that wild country.

"Well, come on," said Tom at length; "anything is better than enduring this thirst any longer, and I'm pretty sure there must be water yonder."

They followed the path and soon found themselves on the threshold of the hut. Its door, a clumsy contrivance, was ajar, and littered all about were fish bones, scales, and bones and remnants of animals. A rank odor assailed their nostrils, the true smell of an Aleut settlement.

Tom strode boldly forward and was about to cross the threshold when something dashed out of the hut, making him jump back with an involuntary shout of alarm. For a minute he was sure they had been attacked by whoever dwelt within. His companions, too, echoed his cry, but the next instant they all burst out laughing. What had alarmed them so was a small red fox that had darted off like a flash.

"That shows us no one is inside," chuckled Tom, turning to his comrades. "I guess we've dispossessed the sole inhabitant."

They crossed the threshold and found themselves in a low, smoke-begrimed structure with a dome-shaped roof. In the middle of the roof was a hole presumably for the smoke to escape, although soot hung thick on the rafters that supported the grass-sods, peat and earth that formed the covering of the rude dwelling.

Tom bent and examined a heap of ashes in the middle of the dirt floor under the hole.

"Nobody has been here for a long time," he declared, "except wild beasts."

"I wonder who put it up?" inquired Sandy.

"Trappers, maybe; but most likely Aleuts," replied Tom. "I've seen pictures of their huts and they are very like this one. I never thought we'd have to take up quarters in one, though."

"Hoot! d'ye think we'll have to stay here lang?" asked Sandy.

"Impossible to tell," rejoined Tom. "Of course, as soon as they find we're gone they will start on a search for us; but unless they find those rascally Aleuts they'll never know what became of us, unless they stumble on us accidentally."

There was a brief but eloquent silence, which Tom dispelled cheerily.

"The first job is to look for water," said he. "Let's explore a little."

They left the hut, but before they went Tom picked up an old tin pail that lay on the floor in a corner. He did not explain what he wanted this for. As he had expected, where the luxuriant growth flourished, was a stream which ran down crystal clear and cold as ice from the snow mountains to the sea.

The sight of this made the boys forget all their troubles temporarily. They lay flat on their stomachs and drank to repletion. Never had anything tasted half so good

as the waters of that mountain stream. Their thirst quenched, Tom methodically filled his pail with water and then started back.

"What are you going to do?" demanded Jack in some astonishment.

"Clean out the hut and get ready for supper while you fellows catch some fish."

"Fish for supper? Where?" demanded Jack.

"Right in this creek. I saw them dart off when we came down, but they will soon be back."

"How about hooks?"

"I saw some in the bottom of the boat. And by turning over some of those stones, I guess you'll find some sort of things that will do for bait. Hurry up now, boys, and while you're getting the tackle, bring the rest of the grub and the oars out of the boat."

Glad to be busy, the boys all hurried off on their tasks. When Jack and Sandy had brought the oars and tackle from the boat, they set off on their fishing expedition. Long alder limbs broken off from the bushes that overhung the creek, served them for poles. Under the rocks, as Tom had surmised, they found fat, white grubs in abundance. The fish bit hungrily, for it was still early in the year. Soon they each had a fine string. With lighter hearts, for now they had at least the essentials of existence, they set out on the return journey to the hut.

When they got back, they found that Tom had made a fire, using matches from his water-proof box, which none of the boys would have gone without. It crackled up cheerily. When he had a good bed of red coals, Tom split the fish which the others had scaled and cleaned, and held them on sharpened sticks above the blaze till they were cooked. With crackers and the broiled fish they made a rough but sufficient meal.

There was plenty of firewood in the hut and they made a roaring blaze, so that, lacking blankets as they did, they would not get cold. In a corner was a pile of sweet-scented dried grass, evidently used as beds by whoever had occupied the hut before them. On this they threw themselves down while the fire glowed cheerily, warming the hut comfortably since the door had been closed.

Despite the strangeness of their position on this wild, unknown coast, they were too weary to remain awake long. Outside came occasionally the cry of a bird or

the booming of the sea, but it all acted as a lullaby to the three tired boys.

One by one their eyes closed and they dropped off into the deep, dreamless slumber of exhaustion. Never, in fact, had they slept more profoundly and peaceably than they did in the smoky native hut on the wild shores upon which they had been so strangely cast away.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN ISLAND LIFE.

Tom was awakened by the sun streaming down into his face. It came through the vent-hole in the roof. At first he could not recall for the life of him where he was, and for a time thought that the vent hole was the port hole of his cabin, oddly misplaced by some accident to the roof. But he soon realized all that had happened, and aroused the others, who at first were equally confused.

"The steward has called for breakfast!" said Tom laughing.

"Humph! And where is the breakfast coming from?" grunted Sandy, looking at the remains of the fried fish and thinking of the scant store of crackers and tinned beef that remained.

The others did not reply to this, and Tom devoted himself to dressing. As he had taken off only his outer garments, this did not take long. Shoving open the door he looked outside.

"Gee whiz, fellows, a dandy day!" he exclaimed. "Clear as a bell and the sea is quite calm."

In a few minutes the others joined Tom at the door. They stood looking about a while, when suddenly a loud splash not far off made them all exclaim.

"What was that?" asked Jack.

"Don't know. Sounded like somebody throwing a big rock into the water," was Tom's reply.

"It did, too," declared Sandy. "Hark! there it is again!"

"It's down by the creek," announced Tom. "I tell you what, fellows, it's fish!"

"Fish!"

"Surely. Fish leaping. Big ones, too, by the sound of them."

Two or three more splashes came while the boys were talking. They hurried

down to the creek, and as they went they noted that a great cloud of crows and ravens were hovering above it. Wondering greatly what all this could mean, they quickened their footsteps.

Arrived at the creek, they found the shallow sand bar between its mouth and the sea all aboil with confusion. Masses of fish seemed to be trying to get from the sea into the creek. All at once a great fish eagle swooped down out of a cottonwood on the opposite side of the creek. It struck the water with a splash. There was a brief struggle and then the bird of prey shot upward again. In its talons it held a silver-scaled fish of large size.

"Well, he's going to breakfast all right," remarked Jack ruefully. "My, what a whumping big fish!"

"No wonder: it was a salmon," declared Tom. "This must be the season when they rush up into the rivers to spawn."

"Look! there's lots of them wriggling about on the sand bar!" cried Jack.

"Hookey! So there are. If only we could grab some of them we'd solve the breakfast problem in jig-time."

All this time Sandy had been quietly whittling a long stick to a sharp point. Now he rushed suddenly forward, wading waist deep in the creek to the sand bar. Half a dozen salmon lay wriggling there, their silvery scales flashing in the sun. Sandy's arm holding the spear shot up and then descended, spearing one of the stranded fish. Before he could strike again, the others had escaped and joined the rest of the "run" in their mad rush up the creek for their spawning grounds. With a cry of triumph Sandy came ashore again and received the congratulations of his comrades. Broiled salmon and the remainder of the crackers formed their breakfast, which they ate with much gusto.

The food problem appeared to be solved by the salmon run and the other fish with which the creek abounded; but a bread supply offered a further puzzle. However, the boys did not worry much about this at the time. After breakfast they visited the dory and found everything all right with the boat.

"I don't know that we'll be so badly off here for a time," said Tom.

"Yes, but we can't stay here forever," objected Jack gloomily.

"Oh, dinna fear but they'll find us oot," declared Sandy hopefully. "What do you

say if we hoist up a flag on the point yonder?"

"That's a good idea," declared Tom, "but in any event we won't stay here long. If no help comes before many days, we'll set out in the dory and keep along the coast till we reach some settlement where we can get into communication with our friends."

The flag question bothered them sadly for a time, but it was solved by utilizing an old bit of canvas that was in the dory. With this they improvised a signal, affixing it to a tall limb of a tree which they had lopped off and anchored on the rocky point by piling stones about its base.

They were coming back from this task, having vainly scanned the sea for a sail, when Tom halted suddenly and pointed toward the hillside that sloped upward behind the hut. The others likewise came to a standstill at his sudden exclamation.

Among the bushes, which grew thickly on the lower part of the slope, some large animal was moving. A glimpse of a shaggy back could be seen and the bushes waved and swayed as some big body came lumbering through them.

"What can it be?" wondered Jack, round-eyed, gazing at the disturbance.

The mystery was soon explained and in no very pleasant way. Out into an open space there suddenly emerged the huge, clumsy form of an enormous bear. It was almost as big as a colt, and shaggy and ferocious looking.

"O-o-oh!" cried Sandy, his cheeks turning white.

There was good reason for the boys to feel scared. The bears of Kadiak Island are the largest in the world. The specimen the boys were now gazing at with awestruck faces was a giant even among his own kind.

"Cracky!" cried Jack. "That fellow could eat us all without salt. What'll we do?"

"Get back to the hut as soon as possible. We must make a detour to avoid him," decided Tom quickly.

"Is he after us do you think?" asked Sandy.

"No, I guess he's come after salmon. See, he's heading for the creek."

"Wow! Christmas!" yelled Jack suddenly. "Look, there come two more!"

Out of the brush from which the first bear had emerged there came two more shaggy, lumbering brutes. One was quite tiny, plainly a cub. The larger animal, which was a sort of yellowish-gray color, the boys guessed to be the little fellow's mother. It certainly was an exciting moment as, crouching behind a friendly patch of brier bushes, the boys watched the mother and cub join the head of the family.

Luckily the wind was blowing offshore, that is from the bears toward the boys. But, nevertheless, the great animals appeared suspicious. The mother stopped suddenly and sat up on her haunches. Then she began swaying a huge head from side to side as if puzzled. But evidently her suspicions were lulled soon afterward, for after a few minutes in this attitude of listening, she dropped on all fours and the three bears began to advance once more.

"Now's our chance," declared Tom as the bears vanished in the tall, thick growth between the hillside and the creek.

The boys raced down the hill at top speed. They were between the bears and the sea, and it was their object to cross the creek and gain the hut on the further side before the bears sighted them. They made good time and reached the creek and crossed it, while the bears were still in the thick growth.

They reached the hut and Tom closed the door. Then the boys exchanged blank glances. Unless the bears went away they would be prisoners, for the hut was quite visible from the creek. Tom found a peephole in the sod covering of the shack and peered through. Then he beckoned to the others. The bears had reached the creek and were fishing. The old mother sat in midstream with her offspring beside her, while father bear was further up the creek on a sand bar.

Serious as their position was, the boys could hardly help laughing at the antics of the old bear and her cub. The cub was apparently learning to fish. And it was not an easy lesson. His mother proved a hard task mistress. The boys could see her long hairy paw swoop out in scoop fashion, land a fine salmon and throw it up on the bank. The cub wanted to start for the bank every time this was done. But the old lady would have none of this.

Every time it happened, she raised her huge paw and struck the cub a box on the ears that knocked him into the water. He would get up whining and crying pitifully and then try to fish on his own account. But his small paws failed to land the fish. All his efforts were failures. At last his mother appeared to relent. She waded ashore followed by Master Bruin, who was then allowed to regale

himself on the pile of fish the old bear had landed.

While both mother and son were eating greedily, up came the old father bear. He, apparently, was not much of a success at fishing. At any rate, with growls and blows he drove his wife and son away from their pile of fish and pitched into it himself. His blows must have had the force of a sledge hammer, for huge as she was, the mother bear reeled under them.

"One of those blows would mean good-night to the strongest man that ever lived," declared Tom.

"And to think that if they don't go away we've got to stick in here, or run the risk of getting a dose of the same medicine or worse," groaned Jack despairingly.

"Hoot, mon, we're nae sae safe even in here," put in Sandy. "We're caught in a fine trap and yon bears hae the key."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GREAT BEARS OF KADIAK.

This appeared to be only too true. The bears, so far as the boys could observe through their peephole, were thin and famished from the long winter they had spent in some cave back in the mountains, and intended probably to remain camped by the creek as long as the salmon were running.

Having finished his meal, the father bear lay down and rolled over in sleep, while the mother and cub set about catching some more fish, which they devoured. But instead of going to sleep as the boys hoped, the old mother kept herself on sentry duty. Once or twice they caught her looking toward the hut. It caused an uncomfortable sensation to run through them.

Luckily they had a little water in the place, although none too much. At any rate it would not satisfy more than their immediate needs. For food there were a few crackers, the remains of the salmon that they had broiled for breakfast, a few fragments of tinned beef and that was all. The situation was about as serious as it could well be. All that afternoon they took turns watching the creek, awaiting an opportunity to sally forth after water. But the bears remained as if they meant to take up permanent quarters there.

The question of how they were to make their escape began to be a serious one with the practically imprisoned boys. The door of the hut opened toward the creek and to attempt egress by that way would at once attract the attention of the monster bears, with what results the boys guessed only too well.

So the afternoon hours dragged away. Although tormented with thirst, the boys decided to refrain from drinking more than enough of the precious water to cool their mouths. From time to time one of them would relieve his comrade at the peephole. But the bears remained there as if firmly determined to stay. When the old mother bear took a snooze, either the cub or the largest of the bruins was on sentry duty.

"If only we had some rifles," sighed Tom. "This is a lesson to me as long as we are in this country, I'll never leave ship or camp again without a weapon of some sort."

"Wait till we get back to the ship or to a camp," scoffed Jack; "it's my belief that we will be prisoners here till winter."

"Nonsense," said Tom sharply. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Jack Dacre, for talking like that. It's no use giving way to despair. Maybe we'll hit on some way of getting out before long."

"Not unless those bears change their minds and go back to their happy mountain home," said Jack positively.

They sat in silence for a while.

"If it would only get dark up here like it does in more southerly latitudes, we could take a chance on sneaking down to the dory and getting away to some other part of the coast," said Tom at length.

"Couldn't we make it anyhow?" inquired Sandy.

Tom shook his head.

"I don't see how. The minute we came out of the hut one of the bears would be bound to see us and take after us. They can run mighty fast, too, in spite of their clumsy forms."

Another silence ensued. All the boys were thinking hard, from time to time approaching the peephole to watch the bears.

"We might as well eat, I guess," said Tom at length.

The embers of the fire were still alive and fresh wood was piled on till there was a cheerful blaze. The boys warmed their salmon above it and fell to on what was the gloomiest meal they had ever eaten. In the middle of his supper, Jack got up and went to the peephole. He turned from it with a face full of alarm.

"The wind has carried the smoke down toward the bears and they are sniffing at it suspiciously," he announced.

"Maybe it'll drive 'em away," suggested Sandy.

"They're not mosquitoes," scoffed Jack.

"Wow! they are coming this way, Tom! What in the world shall we do now?"

"Sit tight. I don't know what else to do."

"But suppose they claw down the door?"

"In that case, our troubles will soon be over," was the brief reply.

What Jack had said was correct. The smoke drifting down on the bears had caused them to sniff suspiciously. Hunters came to Kadiak Island frequently, and doubtless they knew that smoke betokened the presence of human beings. The big bear's fur bristled angrily. He gave a low growl, which was echoed by his mate.

After sniffing and listening for a few seconds the great creatures, the most formidable foes the boys had ever encountered, began slowly to lumber up the slope from the creek toward the hut.

That they did not advance hastily made their approach even more sinister in its effect. It was as if they were in no hurry to reach the hut, as though they realized that they could afford to take their time, their prey was so certain. The boys all realized, too, that when animals are accompanied by their young they are rendered three times as ferocious as on ordinary occasions.

"Maybe they'll sheer off after all," suggested Tom hopefully.

But his confidence was misplaced. The bears lumbered steadily forward till they were wading through the tall, half dry grass that grew almost up to the shack's sides. Then the female and the cub stopped, and the big father bruin came on to investigate. For all the world like some huge dog, he began sniffing around the walls at the base of the oven-shaped structure.

Then, all at once, in an unlucky moment, he discovered the door. There was quite a big crack under it, and the boys watched with horror-struck eyes as the huge creature's sniffing and poking sent the dust on the floor of the place flying up in little clouds. Then they heard a heavy body hurled against the door and the scratching of feet shod with claws as keen and sharp as steel chisels.

It was a thrilling moment for all of them. Jack and Sandy in particular were badly scared. Their faces blanched and their knees knocked. It hardly seemed possible that the door could survive the attack of the monstrous creature that assailed it. But although built of driftwood fastened together with old iron bolts and strips of skin, the portal held its own much better than might have been expected. It shook and trembled, but remained standing. After a while the bear appeared to tire of this method of attack and ceased.

The boys breathed more easily.

"Perhaps he'll go away now," suggested Jack.

But a glimpse through the peephole showed that the bear had no intention of doing anything of the sort. With the stubbornness of his kind, he began pacing up and down in front of the hut, from time to time emitting a low growl.

"Looks as if he meant to keep up the campaign on these lines if it takes all summer," said Tom with grim pleasantry.

CHAPTER XV.

HEMMED IN.

"We must get to the boat," said Tom.

"Yes, but how?" questioned Jack.

"If only we'd gone to the boat at first instead of bolting in here, we'd have been safe the noo," spoke Sandy.

"That's obvious," agreed Tom, "but having foolishly allowed ourselves to be bottled up, it's up to us now to devise some means of getting out."

"Well, we're all open for suggestions," struck in Jack. "Bother that smoke, it was that which brought the bears to the hut to investigate."

"No question about that," agreed Tom, "but I've just got an idea, fellows."

"Good, let's have it," chorused his young companions.

"Well, it is granted that we can't stay in here forever."

"Nor even for many more hours," supplemented Jack.

"Very well. Then it is up to us to take a chance on escaping, no matter how desperate the scheme may appear."

"It's a case of life or death, it seems to me," said Sandy soberly.

"What's your plan?" asked Jack impatiently.

"Just this. We must burn those bears out."

"Burn them out!"

Sandy and Jack stared at the lad, who, by common consent, was their leader.

"That is what I said. Don't look at me as if I was crazy. This hut is surrounded almost up to its walls by semi-dry grass which ought to burn easily, isn't it?"

"Yes; but I don't see your drift," spoke Jack.

"We'll set the grass on fire. That will drive the bears off, and while they are on the run we can make our escape to the boat."

"But the grass will burn all round the hut. How can we get out through the flames ourselves?" objected Jack.

"Hold on a minute. Wait till I explain. We can set the grass alight by throwing out some of the hot brands from our fire."

"Of course, that's easy," assented Jack, and then with the air of somebody pronouncing an unanswerable question he went on: "But how are you going to get your burning embers outside? If you open the door, the bears will rush us at once."

For answer Tom indicated the hole in the top of the roof.

"I must get up there and roll the blazing embers down the roof into the grass. Then when it is on fire, we'll have to scramble out somehow, slip down to the boat before the fire surrounds the hut, and then row out to sea."

"Sounds delightfully easy," said Jack rather sneeringly, for the plan did not appeal to him, "but in the first place, how are you going to get on the roof?"

"The simplest part of it. This hut isn't more than seven feet, or so, high. You 'give me a back' and then I can reach the hole easily and boost myself through."

"Well, I admit that is possible, but after the fire is started, and supposing everything goes all right, how are Sandy and I going to get up?"

"Sandy is the lightest. He will have to give you 'a back' and I'll haul you through somehow. Then Sandy must stand up, and together I guess we can hoist him through without much difficulty."

Jack shrugged his shoulders. Sandy looked dubious.

"I know it's a desperate chance," admitted Tom, "but ours is a desperate situation. Now then, let's lose no time in putting it into effect. If it fails, we can't be much worse off."

"No, that is true enough, unless the hut burns down."

"Oh, the damp, thick sod that covers it wouldn't ignite as easily as all that,"

declared Tom, who was waxing enthusiastic over his plan.

Jack got down on all fours and Tom mounted on his back. He was able in this way, being a tall boy, to grasp the edges of the hole. This done he hoisted himself up with his muscular young arms, much as a lad "chins the bar." Once up on the roof, he reached down into the hole for the firebrand, which it had been arranged that Jack was to hand up.

He had hardly grasped it when an angry growl from close at hand apprised him that the bears had perceived him. There was no time to be lost. Raising a wild, blood-curdling yell that awoke the echoes of the cliffs, Tom flung his firebrand down into the thick grass.

Almost instantly it ignited and a thick smoke curled up. The bears sniffed uneasily. Any boy who has seen marsh land burned off in the spring knows how swiftly flames spread among dried grass and weeds. The herbage amidst which Tom had flung the blazing bit of wood proved no exception. Fanned by a brisk breeze it ran literally like wildfire among the dried grasses. Luckily the wind was from the side of the hut in which Tom was perched and blew toward the bears. As the flames swept down on them, they uttered loud snorts of terror and turned tail ingloriously.

The mother bear, with her frightened cub, was the first to depart, and she stood not on the order of her going, but galloped off at top speed. The huge male bear lingered but a few minutes longer, then he, too, fled before the fiery terror which Tom's clever strategem had kindled.

"Hooray, boys, they're on the run!" shouted Tom, unable to restrain his enthusiasm.

He swung down his arms and dragged up Jack without much difficulty. Then came Sandy's turn. They had just hauled the Scotch lad to the roof, however, when an alarming thing occurred. The covering of the Aleut hut had not been built to withstand any such strain as the weight of the three lads now perched upon it.

Without warning, save for a sharp crack, it suddenly sagged.

"Look out! It's caving in!" roared Tom.

"Cracky, so it is!" echoed Jack as he felt the sod roof begin to sink under them.

"Roll!" shouted Tom. "Roll down it!"

He seized Sandy, who appeared to be paralyzed from alarm, and gave him a shove. Down the roof rolled the Scotch lad, landing in a heap on the ground, shaken and bruised, but not otherwise injured. Close behind him came Tom and Jack. Behind them the roof fell in with a roar, leaving a big gaping cavity.

But the boys had no time to notice this just then. Scrambling to their feet they dashed off toward the beach where the dory lay. The flames almost reached them as they left the hut. But looking back Tom saw something worse than the flames pursuing them. They could easily distance the blazing grass and that gave him no alarm. But what did cause his heart to stand still for an instant and then resume beating furiously was the sight of the bears.

They had rallied from their fright and perceived the escape of the boys. Now, skirting the flames by outflanking them, they were lumbering toward the fugitives at a speed that would not have been thought possible in such bulky creatures.

CHAPTER XVI.

UNCERTAINTY.

"Run! Run for your lives! Run!"

Tom panted out the words as he pointed behind them. The others saw almost as soon as he, and quickened their pace, though they had been running almost at their top speed before. There was a reason for Tom's thus urging them to hurry, although they had a good start of the bears. The tide, as he had seen, was low. The dory lay at some distance from the water.

That the craft was a heavy one he knew, and it was likely that it might take some time for them to get her to the water's edge. In the circumstances even a brief delay was a thing to be avoided, and it was important that they should gain every second that they could.

They reached the boat and seized hold of her on either side. But although the beach was hard and sloping, it was terribly slow work to drag the heavy craft along.

Tom spied some dead limbs lying below a cottonwood tree and they used these as rollers, after which their progress was swifter. But just as they reached the water's edge the bears were upon them. One good shove and they were knee deep in the water.

"She's afloat!" cried Jack gleefully.

He sprang into the boat. Sandy was not a minute behind him. But Tom's foot caught on a boulder as he shoved off the bow, and he fell headlong into the water. As he fell, he was conscious of a hot breath and a deafening roar almost in his very ear. Then he heard something crash downward with a dull thud, followed by a scream of pain.

The next instant Jack had him in a strong grip and pulled him on board the dory. Sandy plied the oars furiously. In a few moments more they were out of danger and Jack was telling Tom how, just as the big bear prepared to seize him, following his unlucky stumble, it had come into his, Jack's, head like a flash of

inspiration that in the grapple that lay in the bottom of the boat was a weapon that could be utilized against the monster.

He had snatched it up and whirled it around his head for an instant, and then let the weighty mud-hook, with its sharp points, come crashing down on the bear's head. One of the points had wounded the creature too badly for it to give its attention to anything but a gaping cut for the next few seconds, during which the dory had been rowed far out of reach of the big bears of Kadiak with which the boys had had such a thrilling encounter.

"Well, where away?" asked Sandy, as they gazed back at the shore.

On the beach stood the three bears, while beyond them the smoke of the fire they had kindled towered high into the sky in a wavering pillar.

He let the weighty mud-hook … come crashing down on the bear's head.
—Page 154.

"We'll pull right along the shore," decided Tom after a moment's thought, "we may fall in with some ship, or at any rate a native canoe."

Accordingly the oars were manned and the dory rowed along the coast, while the boys all kept a sharp lookout to seaward for any sign of a vessel.

"There's one good thing," said Tom presently; "the smoke from that fire would attract the attention of anyone who might be in the neighborhood and lead them to make inquiries."

"Yes, but there's not a vessel in sight," objected Jack.

"Never mind. That smoke must be visible at a great distance. I don't doubt that the *Northerner* is out hunting for us and they would not be likely to neglect such a clue as that smoke column will afford."

"I think you're right there," agreed Jack, "but they may have started the search in another direction."

"That is a chance we shall have to take."

The brief darkness of the Alaskan night fell without a single sign of a ship being

detected on the lonely ocean. Thoroughly disheartened, hungry and half crazy from thirst, the boys rowed on till Tom ordered Jack and Sandy to take some sleep. They obeyed and were soon wrapped in deep slumber. Tom allowed the dory to drift. Rowing only increased his thirst, and in any event could not accomplish much good.

They would have rowed ashore long before and searched for water, but the land off to their right was a frowning escarpment of rugged cliff which offered no hope of water. The boy found himself wishing that they had had the foresight to stock up the dory in case of their leaving the cove hurriedly; but it was too late for such regrets now.

Tom caught himself dropping off to sleep. He dozed half awake and half in the land of nod for some time. How long it was he did not know, but he was suddenly awakened by a harsh shout that appeared to come from the air above him.

"Hard over your helm! It's a boat!"

"Where away!"

"Right under our bow! Sheer off! Hard over!"

Tom sprang to his feet, broad awake in an instant. Right above, like an immense black cliff, towered the bow of a steamer. He could see the bright running lights shining like jewels.

"Jack! Sandy!" he bawled out. "Get up! They'll run us down!"

The huge black bulk of the strange craft did, indeed, appear as if it must inevitably cut the drifting dory in two. But the outcry of the bow watch had come in time. Just as Jack and Sandy sprang up and Tom was thinking that everything was over, the great bow swung off. The steamer rushed by so close that Tom could almost have touched her with his hand.

"Ahoy!" roared a voice from the bridge. "What boat is that?"

"It's a native canoe," came another voice.

"Not on your life it isn't," yelled Tom. "This is an unofficial exploring expedition and——"

"Tom Dacre!" bellowed a voice from the bridge.

"Ahoy, uncle!" hailed back Tom, who had caught the word *Northerner* on the steamer's bow as she was swinging by.

"Tom, is it you? Are you all right?"

There was a ring in Mr. Dacre's tone that showed how he had suffered since the strange disappearance of his nephews and their chum.

"We never were better in our lives," cried Tom, deftly catching a rope that came snaking down as the steamer's speed diminished. "But how in the world did you come to run across us? Talk about a needle in a haystack!"

"Never mind the details now, my boy. Come on board at once. I can hardly wait till I see you."

Not many minutes later, in the comfortable cabin of the *Northerner*, Tom, Jack and Sandy, ragged and begrimed, were telling, between intervals of eating and drinking, the tale of their strange adventures since they were lost in the fog. When they had concluded the tale, Tom inquired of his uncle how it was that he had so miraculously found them.

"If you hadn't almost run us down we'd never have seen you," Tom continued, "for I was too sleepy to keep my eyes open."

Mr. Dacre's story was soon told. The two Aleuts who had apparently deserted the boys had really come back from the village with food. They were terrified when they found the boys and the dory gone, for they knew that it was time for the daily tide-bore to sweep through the straits. Getting a native canoe, they made their way to Kadiak, sought out Mr. Dacre and told him what had happened. The *Northerner* was at once put in commission for the hunt, although Mr. Dacre confessed that he had had a dreadful fear, not unshared by Mr. Chillingworth and the captain, that the boys had been caught in the tidal bore and lost.

From the captain's knowledge of the coast, they had been able to make a fairly intelligent search. Just before the brief darkness closed in that night they had made out a column of smoke rising on the horizon, and more as a forlorn hope than anything else, had made toward it, hoping against hope that it had been kindled by the young castaways.

"And so it was," laughed Tom happily, his hand finding his uncle's. "After all, maybe those bears were a blessing in disguise. If it hadn't been for them, we wouldn't have lighted that fire, and if it hadn't been for the fire, you'd like as not

never have found us."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE "YUKON ROVER."

Some weeks later there steamed away from the wharf side at St. Michaels, a small, stern-wheeled craft of light draught. So light was it, in fact, that the loungers on the dock who watched its departure declared that it would be possible to navigate it on a heavy dew.

It bore the name *Yukon Rover*, and was painted white with a single black smoke-stack. As it drew away from the dock, it blew a salute of three whistles which was answered by a fair-sized steamer lying in the roads.

As our readers will have guessed, the *Yukon Rover* was the portable steam craft which had been shipped north to the Yukon on the deck of the *Northerner*, which latter was the vessel that replied to the small craft's farewell. The *Northerner* was to return to Seattle, carrying down what cargo she could pick up, and come back late in the year with a cargo for the needs of the country during the rigid Alaskan winter, when little can be shipped. In this way Mr. Dacre and Mr. Chillingworth hoped to make their venture additionally profitable.

On the bow of the small light-draught craft was a strange ornament. This figure-head, if such it can be called, was nothing more nor less than the figure of a buck-toothed man roughly carved out of wood and daubed with faded paint. In a word, it was Sandy MacTavish's mascot, now assigned to duty on the small craft which was to carry the adventurers up the turbulent currents of the mighty Yukon.

As to the *Yukon Rover's* mission, there was much speculation in St. Michaels concerning it. But the consensus of opinion was that the two gentlemen and the boys were going on a scientific expedition of some sort. The "Bug Hunters" was the name bestowed upon them in the far northern town from whence embarkation for the mouth of the Yukon was made.

This suited Mr. Dacre and his partner well enough, as they had no wish for the real object of their expedition to become known. The hunters and trappers of the Far North are a jealous, vindictive lot when they imagine that what they consider their inalienable rights to the fur and feather of the land are being invaded by

outsiders.

Both gentlemen knew that if any suspicion of the real object of their voyage leaked out, much trouble might be made for them, although it was still rather early in the year for any trappers to be going "inside," as penetrating into the interior of Alaska is called.

A shed near the waterfront had been rented and ways constructed, and here the *Yukon Rover* had been rapidly put together by the engineers from the *Northerner*. But on her trip up the river the boys were to act as machinists and stokers, and as the *Yukon Rover's* machinery was simple enough, this was a delightful and interesting task to them. Like most healthy, normal boys, our young friends liked to tinker with machinery, and they had had plenty of instruction in their new duties on the trial trips of the stern-wheeler.

Tom, who had been relieved at the engines by Jack, while Sandy attended to stoking the small boiler, adapted to either wood or coal burning, came on deck and surveyed the scene they were leaving behind them.

Astern was St. Michael, lying on the island which bears its name and which is separated from the mainland by a shallow strip of water known as St. Michael's Slough. The town was uninteresting and he was not sorry to leave it, a feeling that his two chums fully shared.

The white houses, the spire of the old Russian Church and the odd-looking fort, half ruinous, which stood near the Alaska Trading Company's hotel, were the most conspicuous features of the dull, drab town. There was hardly a tree on the island, and fuel was in the main supplied by the timber which in flood time drifted down the Yukon from the interior in great quantities and was washed up on the beach or secured in boats.

"Good-by, St. Michael, and ho, for the Yukon!" thought Tom, as turning his face in the other direction, he gazed forward.

The *Yukon Rover* was ploughing along at about eight knots an hour. Black smoke pouring from her stack showed that Sandy was keeping up his furnace faithfully. Forward of the bow-like structure which contained sleeping and eating accommodations, was a miniature pilot house. In this was Mr. Dacre at the wheel, while beside him Mr. Chillingworth was poring over charts of the treacherous sandy delta that marks the junction of the Yukon and the sea. The course was southwest, along a flat, dreary-looking coast that afforded nothing

much worthy of notice.

Since their memorable adventures at Kadiak, life had moved dully for the excitement-loving Bungalow Boys. Tom found himself hoping that now that their voyage for the Yukon had fairly begun, they would find some lively times. How near at hand these were and how lively they were to be, he did not dream as the *Yukon Rover*, rolling slightly in the swell, made her way toward the "Golden River."

Jack joined his brother on deck.

"Everything running smoothly?" asked Tom.

"Smooth as silk," declared Jack. "Say, isn't it fine to be under way again after sticking around St. Michael like bumps on a log?"

"I should say so. I have a notion that we are going to have some fun, too, before we get through."

"Same here. Well, I'm ready for whatever happens, short of another tidal bore. One was quite enough for me."

That afternoon they came in sight of the northern mouth of the Yukon, by which they were to enter the stream. It required skillful steering to guide the *Yukon Rover* through the maze of sand bars and shoals that encompassed her, and they had not gone far between the low, marshy shores when Mr. Dacre gave a hail from the pilot house through the speaking tube that connected the steering compartment with the engine-room.

"Leave your engines a while to Sandy's care," he ordered Jack, who answered the hail, "and come on deck."

Tom and Jack lost no time in obeying the summons, and found that they were required to manipulate the big poles, with which it was necessary to help guide the small steamer against the stiff current. It was hard work, even with the aid of Mr. Chillingworth, to keep the *Yukon Rover* on her course, but from time to time the stream widened out and became deeper and they got a short respite.

Toward dusk they passed a native canoe or bidarka, a narrow-beamed, cranky craft of walrus skins stretched over frames. In it sat two high-cheek-boned natives with slanting eyes, bearing remarkable resemblances to the inhabitants of Japan. The small, cranky craft shot swiftly past and was followed, round a bend

in the river, by three more. The natives appeared not to pay much attention to the steamer, although the boys shouted and hulloed in salute as they passed.

A short time after passing the natives, Jack announced that the engine, a new one, was heating up badly and that it would be necessary to stop and make a thorough inspection of the machinery. Accordingly, the *Yukon Rover* was tied to the bank and preparations made for a somewhat lengthy stop.

Flocks of wild geese and other birds could be seen settling down above the flat country surrounding them, and the boys begged permission to go out with their guns. That is, Tom and Sandy did. Jack was too busy on his engines to spare the time. The notion of a hunting trip to kill time till supper was voted a good one, and Mr. Dacre and Mr. Chillingworth decided to accompany the boys.

Full of high spirits, the party struck off across the tundra, leaving Jack hard at work on the machinery. They had been gone perhaps an hour when the boy was surprised to hear a step in the engine-room. He looked up quickly, thinking that possibly it was his friends returning, but instead, facing him, he saw the yellow face and skin-clad figure of one of the natives who had passed them in the canoes. Jack possessed a mind that worked quickly. A notion shot into his head that the fellow was there on mischief bent, and certainly the startled way in which he regarded the boy supported that suspicion.

It was plain that the native had not expected to find anyone on board the *Yukon Rover*, and that he and his companions, some of whom now swarmed into the engine-room, had imagined, from the fact that they had seen the hunting party, that the craft was deserted by all hands. This being the case, they had returned to see what they could find in the way of small plunder. Jack recalled having heard at St. Michaels that the natives of the Yukon are notorious small thieves and he at once decided that knavery was the purpose of their visit.

He stood up, monkey-wrench in hand, and facing the first arrival, who seemed to be the leader, he demanded of him what he wanted. The man appeared not to understand him. It was at this instant that Jack noticed that under the arms of the other natives were cans of provisions and other small articles plainly pilfered from the store-room of the steamer.

The boy was in a quandary for a moment. There were six of the natives and he was alone on the boat. Doubtless, too, the hunting party was out of ear-shot. It was an anxious moment for the boy as he stood there facing the pilfering natives and undecided how to act.

But the next moment there came to him that indignation which everyone feels when marauders intrude upon his possessions.

"Hey, you! What do you mean by stealing those things?" demanded Jack, indicating the cans and other articles which the natives had tucked under their arms.

The chief broke silence with what was meant for a friendly grin.

"Me good mans! All good mans!" he said.

"Humph! Well, that being the case, it's funny you should come aboard here when you thought no one was about and steal our food."

"You give us. We good mens," said the chief, with unruffled amiability.

"We might have been willing to do that if you hadn't helped yourselves," said Jack indignantly, "but under the circumstances you'll have to put those things back and get off this boat."

Unquestionably the chief did not understand all of this speech, but part of it was within his comprehension for he said:

"No, no; you give us."

"Not on your life," declared Jack, coming forward wrench in hand.

Now, whether the chief interpreted this move into a hostile signal or not cannot be decided, but it is certain that he uttered some quick, guttural words to his followers and instantly all sorts of weapons appeared as if by magic—rifles, harpoons and nogocks, or whale-killing weapons. Things began to look grave. But Jack held his ground.

He looked the chief right between the eyes and then spoke slowly, giving every word due emphasis.

"You give back all you take. We, Uncle Sam's men. Understand?"

This remark appeared to give the chief ground for reflection, for he hesitated an instant before replying. But when he did, it was in an irritated voice.

"You no give 'um,—we take."

So saying, the natives backed slowly out of the engine-room, which was flush

with the deck. Jack, completely taken aback, hesitated for a moment, which gave the men time to clamber over the low sides of the *Yukon Rover* and into their bidarkas. As Jack emerged on deck, they started paddling swiftly off.

Jack bounded into his cabin and came back with a rifle. He had no intention of shooting the men, but he wanted to give them a good scare. He had hardly raised the weapon to his shoulder before he saw the chief rise up in his wabbly skin boat and whirl his nogock. From the weapon there flew, much as a stone is projected from a sling, a sharp-barbed dart of steel.

The boy by some instinct dodged swiftly, and the barbed dart whistled by his ear and sank into the woodwork of the deck-house.

In his indignation, he discharged the rifle. The bullet must have gone uncomfortably close to the natives, although he did not aim it at them, for they fell to their paddles with feverish energy and vanished around a bend in the stream, working furiously to get out of range.

"Well," remarked Jack to himself, "our adventures are surely beginning without losing any time over it."

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE NATIVES.

Jack hastened to the store-room and found that the wily natives in their soft-soled skin shoes had wrought great havoc there, while he, all unconsciously in the engine-room, was working without dreaming that there were unwelcome visitors on board. The *Yukon Rover* was well stocked with food and there were settlements up the river where the raided stock could be replenished, but it annoyed the boy to think that the plundering rascals had had such an easy time in absconding with what they had abstracted from the steamer's larder.

"It's a lesson to keep a sharp lookout," thought the boy to himself. "In future we'll keep all bidarkas at long range unless they can give an account of themselves."

The boy went back to his work, but this time with a rifle beside him. He was still at his task when he heard voices.

"Cracky! It's those rascals coming back, I'll bet a doughnut," he exclaimed to himself excitedly.

With hands that shook a little, he picked up the rifle and prepared to give them a warm reception. As he was stepping out on deck, he collided with a figure just entering the engine-room door.

"Stop right where you are or I'll fire!" he cried out in a loud tone.

"What's the matter with you, Jack, are you crazy?" cried a voice that he instantly recognized as Tom's.

His relief was great, and as the hunting party, laden with three geese, some ducks and shore birds, came into the deck-house, explanations ensued. It appeared that the hunting party had been almost as much alarmed as Jack, for they had heard the report of his rifle and had hastened back at once without lingering at their sport.

Naturally Jack's tale of the occurrences during their absence aroused a good deal of indignation. Mr. Chillingworth, however, said he was not surprised. The

Yukon Indians are great thieves, and it is necessary to be on constant watch against them. He was astonished, though, at Jack's story of the dart from the *nogock*.

"These Indians don't usually resort to anything like that," he said. "That old chief must be what the police in the Yukon country call a 'bad one.' I suppose he saw that only a boy opposed him and his men, and he intended to give you a good scare."

"Well, he succeeded all right," declared Jack, with conviction, "but I guess I managed to give him as good as he gave me. The way those bidarkas shot around that bend was a caution."

"Do you think there is any chance of their coming back again?" asked Tom. "Because if there is, we might give them a warm reception."

"I hardly think they'll return," said Mr. Dacre. "They were probably on their way to St. Michaels. That raid on our store-room must have been a wind-fall for them."

"Hoot! I'd take a wind-fall oot of them if I had my way," grunted Sandy. "Can't we take the dinghy" (for the *Rover* carried a small boat), "and get after them?"

"They are probably miles away by this time," said Mr. Chillingworth. "I guess the shot that Jack fired after them gave them considerable to think about. I doubt if they'll be in a hurry to attack another boat."

Supper, cooked on a gasolene stove in a small galley by Tom and Jack, who were quite expert as cooks, was served in the large cabin which did duty as both living and dining room.

Jack announced that his engines were once more in A1 shape, but it was decided that as they were all tired it would be better to remain where they were for the night. By this time the boys had become quite used to going to bed by daylight, although at first it had been a very odd sensation. They were soon asleep, and their elders, after discussing the prospects of the trip for some little time longer, followed the lads' example and sought their cabins. Before long the *Yukon Rover* was wrapped in slumber and silence, only the swift ripple of the current, as it ran by, breaking the stillness.

It was Tom who first opened his eyes with the indefinable but distinct idea that something was wrong. It was almost dark, so he knew that it must be after

midnight. What the trouble he vaguely guessed at could be, he was at an utter loss to determine, but the feeling was so strong that he slipped on some clothes and emerged on deck.

He looked about him for a minute and almost decided that he had been the victim of one of those transient impressions that often come to those abruptly awakened from sleep.

But almost simultaneously with this idea the truth broke sharply upon him like a thunderclap.

"Uncle!" he shouted. "Boys! Wake up! We are drifting down stream!"

The others were awake in an instant, and in all sorts of costumes they crowded out on deck. Jack carried a rifle under the impression that they had been attacked.

"What's the matter?"

"Is it the natives again?"

"Are we attacked?"

These and half a dozen other questions assailed Tom's ears before he was enabled to point out the true state of affairs.

"We are drifting rapidly down the stream," he said. "We must be far from where we tied up."

This was unquestionably the truth. The *Yukon Rover* was not only drifting on the swift current, but was near the middle of the stream where the tide was more rapid than at the sides. In the deep twilight, which is the far northern night, they could see the low-lying banks slipping by like a moving panorama.

The profound stillness rendered the scene still more impressive as the alarmed party stood thunderstruck on the deck of the castaway steamer.

"What can have happened?" demanded Jack.

"Perhaps the mooring rope broke," suggested Sandy.

"Not likely. It was a brand new one of the best manilla," declared Mr. Dacre. "There is more in this than appears."

"The first thing to do is to get out an anchor before we drift down on a sand-bar," said Mr. Chillingworth.

"Yes, it's a miracle we haven't struck one already," agreed Mr. Dacre.

The boys hustled off to get overboard the heavy spare anchor that the drifting steamer carried on her bow. But as the splash that announced that it was in the stream came to their ears and the rope began to tauten, there was a heavy shock that almost threw them all off their feet.

"Let out more rope!" cried Tom, thinking that the sudden tautening of the anchor rope had caused the shock.

"No need to do that," said Mr. Dacre, "we are anchored hard and fast."

"Where?"

"On a sand-bar."

CHAPTER XIX.

HARD ASHORE.

It was at this juncture that Tom came aft with a rope trailing in his hand. It was the original rope. He had drawn it aboard when he discovered it dangling from the mooring bitts into the water.

"Look at this rope," he cried excitedly. "It was no accident that we went adrift."

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Dacre.

"That it was cut."

"Cut?"

"Yes."

"How do you know that?"

"All the rope is not here. If it had slipped from the anchor we cast ashore among the rushes, or if the anchor had slipped, it would be."

"Perhaps some animal chewed it."

"We'll soon see that. Who's got a match?"

Tom struck a lucifer. As it flared up, Mr. Dacre took the end of the rope in his hand. A single glance sufficed. The rope had been severed so cleanly that there was no question that it had been done by a sharp knife. No animal's teeth could have made that neat, clean incision.

"Well, what do you think of that?" demanded Tom.

"Who could hae done it?" wondered Sandy.

"I know." Jack interjected the remark with confidence.

"Who?"

"Those natives. That bunch that raided our pantry."

"By Jove, boy, I believe you are right," declared Mr. Chillingworth. "It would be just like one of their tricks."

"Well, here we are, stuck hard and fast," said Mr. Dacre. "I suppose those natives would feel highly gratified if they could see our predicament."

"I guess we ought to be glad that they didn't set the boat on fire," commented Jack indignantly. "I'd like to have a brief interview with them."

As an examination showed that the *Yukon Rover* was in no particular danger, it was decided to wait till daylight before trying to get her off the bar. In the meantime, Sandy went below and began getting up steam, for he had banked his fires during the sleeping period. The others discussed the situation.

It was plain that they had drifted some distance, though how far they had, of course, no means of estimating. Although no actual harm had been done, they naturally felt incensed against the natives, who they were certain had played the scurvy trick on them. Had the wily old chief and his followers happened along just then, they would have met with a warm reception. Perhaps it was just as well that they did not.

After hot coffee had been served out, all hands went to work with a will to release the steamer from her sandy bed. But this proved to be no easy task. It had been hoped that she could be got off under her own power by dint of utilizing the stern wheel. But the blades of the wheel were stuck in the sand, and to have tried to work them might have crippled the ship permanently.

Another plan, therefore, was adopted. The boys got out the small boat and taking the anchor on board carried it some distance up the stream. Then they returned to the ship and began heaving with might and main on the cable, using the small capstan to do this. A cheer went up when, after about half an hour of back-breaking work, they felt the *Yukon Rover* give a quiver and move about an inch.

"Hurrah, boys! Keep it up! We'll soon be afloat!" cried Tom cheerfully.

Sure enough, as they worked they got the vessel further and further off the sand-bank and at last had the satisfaction of feeling her floating free. As soon as this happened, the engine was started and the steamer began bucking the current once more. The anchor was hoisted as the *Yukon Rover* came "up on it" and the voyage, which had been so mischievously interrupted, was resumed with great cheerfulness. About ten miles up the river they came to the spot where they had

anchored the night before. The steamer was stopped and the boys went ashore to investigate. On the banks were the tell-tale marks of the keels of the bidarkas and numerous footmarks around them. The anchor was found undisturbed, with about ten feet of rope attached to it, and was brought back on board.

The resumption of the journey found them still traversing much the same kind of country as that they had hitherto steamed through. Low banks, thickly grown with alders and other water-loving trees, islands covered with willows, sand-bars and sluggish, outbranching sloughs innumerable.

These willow islands formed troublesome obstructions to navigation. But the outcropping willows at least served one useful purpose. They indicated the presence of sand-bars which, in some instances, lay several feet beneath the surface of water at the high stage of the river. It was not till some days later, during which time they had steadily bucked the current, only tying up for sleep, that the character of the scenery began to change and the boys felt that they were really getting into a wild country at last.

The flat banks and occasional small towns with remnants of Russian forts and occupancy about them, had been left behind. Now the banks shot up steeply above the swift current, and the *Yukon Rover* was called upon to test her power against the full strength of the stream.

One night,—of course, it was not dark, but "rest time,"—the travelers tied up on the north bank of the stream under a particularly precipitous mass of cliff. It towered above them like the side wall of a skyscraper. Mr. Dacre, who examined it, declared that it had once been a glacier, and there were still traces of glacial action visible upon it. The ground thereabouts was also rich in fossils and the boys obtained permission to go ashore and collect a few of these last.

They set off in high spirits, landing by the long gangplank which the *Yukon Rover* carried for such purposes. Shouting and laughing they made their way up through the woods till they had clambered to quite a height. All their pockets were bulging with specimens of rock formation, many of them very curious.

"Let's go over to the edge of that glacier," said Sandy, "and hae a look doon on the river. It must be a grand sight."

Nothing loath, they struck off over the rough ground under the larch and pine trees, and soon found themselves at the edge of the sharp acclivity, which had been ground almost to the smoothness of a board by a mighty glacier centuries

before. They had not climbed so far above the river as they had imagined from the laboriousness of the ascent. In fact, they were surprised to find that far from being at the top of the glacier, hundreds of feet of its extent still towered above them.

Below lay the *Yukon Rover* tied to the bank, with the smoke wisping lazily from her funnel. Mr. Dacre and his partner sat out on deck reading. It was a peaceful scene, the silence broken only by the voice of the river as its mighty current hastened down to the sea. All at once though, the calm of the scene was rudely scattered by a loud yell from Sandy.

The Scotch lad had been amusing himself by throwing rocks down the smooth incline of the glacier, which sloped right down into the river, and watching them vanish in the current.

In the course of this amusement he had climbed up on the edge of the treacherously smooth rock chute, which was practically what it was.

"Look out there, Sandy!" warned Tom, knowing the boy's remarkable faculty for getting into trouble.

"Hoot toot! Dinna fash yersel' aboot me," returned Sandy easily, and set another rock rolling and bounding down the glacier.

As if in bravado, he clambered right up on the smooth cliff before his companions could check him. But at that instant his foot caught on a rock and he stumbled and fell.

Tom jumped forward to save him, but the lad's clothes tore from his grasp, as Sandy shot downward at a terrific speed, at the same time emitting a wild shriek of terror.

At the same instant his cry was echoed by Jack, for Tom, who had in vain sought to save his chum, now shared Sandy's misfortune and went chuting downward to the river on the smooth rock chute at lightning speed.

"Help!" cried Jack, as if human aid could accomplish anything, "help! They'll both be killed."

"Ki-i-i-i-i-l-l-e-d!" flung back the mocking echoes from the cliffs.

CHAPTER XX.

DOWN THE GLACIER.

Sandy's wild shout of alarm caused the gentlemen on the deck of the *Yukon Rover* to start up in affright.

They looked above them and what they saw was sufficiently alarming. Two boys, rolling and tumbling down the smooth rock slope, bound straight for the river! So swiftly did it all happen that they had hardly time to realize the catastrophe that had overtaken the boys, before the two victims of this double disaster struck the water with a splash and vanished from view.

"Quick, Chillingworth! The life preservers!" cried Mr. Dacre running to where they were kept. He flung all he could lay his hands on far out toward the spot where the glacier dipped into the water. In another instant, to the unspeakable relief of both men, they saw two heads come to the surface.

But on Sandy's head was a broad cut, and though he struck out toward the nearest life preserver, his efforts were feeble. It was evident that he had been injured in his fall, but how badly, of course, they could not tell. Tom was striking out with strong, swift movements. He had seized one of the life preservers, when he perceived Sandy's plight. Instantly dropping the ring, he struck out for the Scotch lad.

Just as he reached his chum's side, the rushing current caught both boys in its grip and hurtled them out toward the middle of the stream. So swiftly did it run that, despite Tom's strong strokes, he could not gain an inch on the body of his chum, which was being borne like something inanimate down the stream.

The gentlemen on the deck of the *Yukon Rover* watched this scene with fascinated horror. Powerless to aid, all they could do was to watch the outcome of this drama.

In the meantime, Jack, pale with fright, was coming down the steep cliffside in leaps and bounds. He had not seen his brother and his comrade rise and did not know but that they had not reappeared at all.

Tom felt the current grip him like a giant's embrace. He had been partially stunned by the swiftness of his flight down the steep, precipitous glacier, but the plunge into the cold waters of the river had revived him. When he had risen to the surface after his plunge, he was in full possession of all his faculties. To his delight he was not injured, and almost the first thing he saw near him was Sandy's head.

As we know, he struck out for it, only to have his chum snatched almost out of his very arms by the mighty sweep of the current.

Like those on the steamboat, he had seen the cut over Sandy's eye and knew that he was injured. This made Tom all the more feverishly anxious to catch up with him, for although Sandy was a strong and good swimmer and had plenty of presence of mind in the water, if he was seriously hurt it was not probable he could stay long above the surface.

But Tom speedily found that, try as he would, he could make no gain on his chum. He heard Sandy cry out despairingly as the current swept him round a bend. The next instant Tom realized that not far below them lay some cruel rapids which the *Yukon Rover* had bucked that afternoon with the greatest difficulty. He knew that if something didn't happen before they got into the grip of that boiling, seething mass of water, their doom was sealed.

He almost fancied as he drifted along, allowing the current to carry him and saving his strength for the struggle he knew must come, that he could already hear the roaring voice of the rapids and see the white water whipping among the jagged black rocks, contact with which would mean death.

It was at this instant that he spied something that gave him a gleam of hope. Right ahead of them there loomed up a possible chance that he had forgotten. It was one of those willowy islets that have been mentioned as dotting the Yukon for almost its entire length. If he could but gain that, if some lucky sweep of the current would but carry Sandy in among the trees, both their lives might be saved.

And now the river played one of those freaks that rapidly running streams containing a great volume of water frequently do. Sandy's body was swept off into a sort of side eddy, while Tom felt himself seized by an irresistible force and rushed forward in the grip of the tide as it roared down to the rapids.

Horror at his utter incapacity to stem it or to do aught but yield to the rush of the

stream, rendered him almost senseless for an instant. In his imagination his body was already being battered in the rapids and flung hither and thither in the boiling whirlpools.

But suddenly an abrupt collision that almost knocked the breath out of his body gave him something else to think of. Twigs brushed and scratched his face and he was held fast by branches. With a swift throb of thankfulness he realized the next instant that the impossible had happened.

A vagary of the current had swung him into the midst of the willow island and he was anchored safely in the branches of one of the trees. But he gave himself little time to think over this. His thoughts were of Sandy. Where was the Scotch boy?

Had he been swept on down the river to the rapids or had he sunk? Hardly had these questions time to flash through his mind, when he gave a gasp and felt his heart leap.

Coming toward him, and not more than a few feet away, was a dark object that he knew to be Sandy's head. The next instant he saw the boy's appealing eyes.

Sandy had seen him, too, as the same current that had caught Tom in its embrace hurtled his chum down the river.

"Tom!" he cried. "Tom!"

Tom made no reply.

It was no time for words. He quickly judged with his eye the spot where Sandy must be borne by him, and clambered out upon a branch overhanging the water. His object was to save his chum, but it must be confessed that his chances of doing so looked precarious.

The limb upon which he had climbed was, in the first place, not a branch in which much confidence could be consistently placed. It was to all appearances rotten, although it bore his weight. But it was no time to weigh chances. The stream was bearing Sandy down upon the willow island, and Tom realized that, unless the boy was carried into the midst of the clump as he had been, he would hardly have strength enough left to grab a projecting branch and thus save himself from the grip of the river.

He had hardly made up his mind to the plan he would pursue when Sandy was right upon him. But he was further out than Tom had calculated. However, Tom

had anticipated this possibility and throwing himself flat on the limb, he twisted his legs around it and reached out, with an inward prayer that he might be successful in the struggle that was to ensue between himself and the mighty Yukon.

As Sandy shot by, Tom's arms enveloped him. The pull of the current was stronger than he thought, but he held on for dear life, his face almost touching the rushing waters. He was drawing Sandy in toward him and in another instant both would have been safe, when there was an ominous "crack!"

Throwing himself flat on the limb … he reached out. (*Page 200*)

The branch had parted under the double strain!

In a moment both boys were caught in the clutch of the current of the swiftly flowing "Golden River."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE GRIP OF THE YUKON.

The moments that followed were destined to be burned for his lifetime into Tom's brain. Half choked, sputtering, blinded by spray and spume, he found himself in the water with Sandy, completely exhausted by this time, to care for as well as himself. The Scotch boy lay like a dead burden on Tom's arm, and it was all that he could do to keep him afloat and still keep his own head above water.

Suddenly something struck him on the back of the head. It was the branch that had snapped off and cast them into the wild waters. But Tom at that moment hailed it as an aid and caught hold of it with his free arm. It was a large limb and to his delight he found that it kept them afloat, aided by his skillful treading of water.

But barely had he time to rejoice in this discovery, when the roar of the rapids ahead of them caused his brain to swim dizzily with fear. He knew that in the center of the rapids was a comparatively wide, smooth channel through which they had ascended that afternoon in the *Yukon Rover*.

If the current shot them through this, there was still a chance that they might live, slender though that hope appeared to be. But on either side of this channel, if such it could be called, there uprose rocks like black, jagged fangs in and amongst which the water boiled and swirled and undersucked with the voice of a legion of witches. It was into one of these maelstroms that poor Tom was confident they were being borne.

Now the sound of the rapids grew louder. They roared and rumbled like the noise of a giant spinning factory in full operation. The noise was deafening and to Tom's excited ears it sounded like the shrill laughter of malign fates. Suddenly something dragged at his legs. It felt as if some monster of the river had risen from its depths and had seized him.

But Tom knew it was no living creature. It was something far more terrible,—the undertow.

He caught himself wondering if this were the end, as he was sucked under and the water closed over his head with a roar like that of a thousand cataracts.

His lungs seemed bursting, his ear drums felt as if an intolerable weight was pressing in upon them. Tom was sure he could not have lasted another second, when he was suddenly shot to the surface with the same abruptness with which he had been drawn under.

Ahead of him were two rocks between which the pent up river rushed like an express train. Tom had just time to observe this and figure in a dull way that he and Sandy would be dragged through that narrow passage to a miserable death, when something occurred that gave him renewed hope.

In that terrible plunge under the water when the undertow had its way with him, the boy, more by instinct than anything else, had retained his grip upon the willow branch. As has been said, it was a thick stick of timber and had parted under the leverage of the boys' double weight near to the trunk.

What happened was this,—and Tom did not realize what had occurred till some seconds later, so suddenly did his deliverance from what appeared certain death come upon him. As the boys were being drawn in between the two rocks the branch became twisted around, broadside to the stream.

Before Tom knew what was taking place, and quite without effort on his part, the stick of timber was caught across the two rocks, barring Tom's progress further. The force of the current kept it there like a barrier, while the water tugged and tore in vain at Tom and Sandy. For some time after his deliverance, Tom was not capable of moving a limb. But now he began to edge his way toward the rock which was closest in to the shore.

It sloped down to the river, and on the side nearest to him had a broad base which he thought would prove easy to climb. So it might have been had he not been burdened with Sandy, but as it was, things took on a different aspect and he was confronted with a task of more difficulty than he had anticipated.

By slow and laborious steps he managed to secure a foothold on the rock and to reach a position where he could draw Sandy up beside him. When he had done this, Tom, almost exhausted, sank back on the smooth stone surface, and while the river raced by almost at his feet gave thanks to Providence for their wonderful delivery from the jaws of the rapids.

For some time he reclined, thus getting back his strength and examining Sandy's injury, which appeared to be only a flesh wound. The immersion in the cold water and the amount of it he had swallowed was probably more to blame for his collapse than the wound. Tom bathed the cut and was presently rewarded by seeing Sandy open his eyes.

The Scotch boy pluckily declared that he felt all right except for a slight dizziness.

"Well, rest up a while," said Tom. "We've done a whole lot, but there's a heap more to be accomplished."

While Sandy got together his exhausted faculties, Tom made a survey of their situation. What he saw did not encourage him much. Toward the stream were swirling pools and jagged rocks. Shoreward, the rocks extended in a line which, although broken here and there by water ways through which eddies bubbled tempestuously, he yet thought might be capable of being bridged. He was pretty sure, in fact, that he could manage the passage, but of Sandy he was by no means so certain. It required a cool head and a steady nerve to negotiate the course to safety that Tom had mapped out as being the only one available.

Manifestly the longer they stayed where they were, the more time they were wasting. It would be impossible for a boat to reach them where they were marooned, and the only course was to attempt to reach the shore. Tom explained the case to Sandy and the Scotch boy declared that he felt strong enough to attempt the feat.

With Tom in the lead they set out. It was fully a hundred yards to the shore, and a slippery, dangerous causeway that they had to traverse. But although once or twice Sandy was within an inch of losing his nerve and the passage was marked by many slips and halts, yet in time they gained the margin of the stream and drew long breaths as they attained safety under the big pines that fringed it almost to its edge.

There followed a short rest and then they set off up the bank, eying the stream for the small boat from the *Yukon Rover* which they felt certain would be sent out. Sure enough, before long, a glad shout from Tom announced that he had sighted the little craft. At the same instant, Jack and Mr. Dacre, who manned it, caught sight of the two lads on the shore. They lost no time in pulling toward them, and in a very short time the reunited adventurers were warmly shaking hands and listening to Tom's recital of their thrilling escape from a terrible death

in the rapids.

The adventurous lives the Bungalow Boys had led, made them disinclined to dwell upon the details of the occurrence, but in their hearts there was a feeling of deep gratitude to the Providence that had intervened and saved them from one of the most perilous positions in which they had ever been placed.

CHAPTER XXII.

TWO STRANGE VISITORS.

Late one evening, when the savory odor of frying bacon, pancakes and coffee mingled with the balsam-like aroma of the pines, and the river was singing loudly its eternal murmuring song, Jack, who had wandered a short distance from the others, came dashing back along a sort of shaly trail made some time in the past by the feet of wandering prospectors or trappers. They were camped up the river some distance above the scene of Tom and Sandy's adventure.

"Well, what's up now?" demanded Tom, looking up with flushed face and rumpled hair from the cooking fire.

The others regarded Jack questioningly.

"What is it, my boy?" asked Mr. Dacre, seeing that some unusual occurrence was responsible for Jack's excitement.

"Visitors!" cried the lad.

"Visitors? I suppose Lady Wolf or Baroness Muskrat are coming to pay us a call the noo," scoffed Sandy.

"Quit your joking, Sandy, these are real visitors. Regular company."

"Best bib-and-tucker folk?" demanded Tom.

"That's what. Better fry up some more bacon and get ready an extra supply of other grub."

"Say, kindly have the goodness to explain what you are driving at, won't you?" pleaded Tom.

"Just this. Two regular wild west customers are coming down the trail. I kind of guess they'll be glad to accept any invitation we might be inclined to give them."

Jack knew that in the wild places the hospitality of any camp is gladly extended to the stranger, and that the news that visitors were approaching would be a pleasant surprise to these sojourners in the far north. It was long since they had

seen strange faces.

"Of course they are welcome to the best the camp affords," said Mr. Chillingworth heartily.

"You say that they are rather tough-looking customers, Jack?" asked Tom rather anxiously.

Mr. Dacre set the lad's question aside with a laugh.

"Pshaw! You would hardly expect to find visitors in correct regalia for calling in this section of the country," he said.

"Come down to that," agreed Tom, chiming in with his uncle's laughter, "I guess that we are pretty hard-looking cases ourselves."

Before they had time to comment on this remark, which was unmistakably a true one, the sound of footsteps coming down the loose, stony trail could be plainly heard. A few minutes later two men came in sight. Both were typical products of the region.

One was tall, strapping and sun-browned, six foot two in his stockings. His round, good-natured face was topped with a thatch of corn-yellow hair, which, with his light blue eyes and fresh complexion, showed his Norse origin.

The other wayfarer was smaller and more compact, but as he bent under his heavy pack they could see the tense muscles bulge and play under his coarse blue shirt. He was tanned almost to a mahogany hue and, no less than his companion, bore the stamp of a battler in the lonely places. A certain quiet air of watchfulness, of self-reliance and ruggedness sufficiently displayed this quality.

The two men introduced themselves. The fair-haired one was Olaf Gundersen, for many years a dweller in the Yukon region. He had packed, trapped, hunted and prospected for many seasons in the wildest parts of Alaska. With his companion, Lafe Cummings, a wiry Iowan, he was making a trail down the Yukon to be used later on when the two established a pack train. From the proceeds of this venture they hoped to reap a golden harvest, which their rough, adventurous lives had so far failed to yield them.

They were bid a hearty welcome and before long the entire party, re-enforced by the two newcomers, were seated about the fire devouring their supper in a way that bade fair to call for a replenishment of the larder in the near future.

"Ah-h-h-h! dase bane good grub," sighed Olaf, as he finished up a hunk of cheese after disposing of two heaping saucerfuls of canned peaches, the latter opened as an especial compliment to the company.

"You're dead right there, Olaf," agreed Lafe in a high, nasal tone. "You folks done us white and no mistake."

They sat around the fire late that evening, and the boys' elders explained the object of their presence in the region as freely as they thought advisable. Lafe and his partner were equally open in discussing their affairs, and the boys listened with rapt attention to the budget of tales the two hardy pioneers had to tell of the Yukon and its pleasures and perils. As they talked, the rushing voice of the river and the deep sighing of the wind in the pines made a fitting accompaniment to their Odyssey of the far north.

Lafe had just finished a picturesque tale of life in Dawson City in the early days, when eggs were a dollar each and flour worth literally its weight in gold, when, from the forest behind them, came a shrill, unearthly cry. It was like the shriek of a human creature in mortal agony and it cut the silence like a knife.

They all looked around, startled for an instant, and then Mr. Dacre exclaimed:

"A wild-cat!"

"That's what it is. One of them pesky varmints, sure enough," declared Lafe. "I mind me of a time in Nevady, when——"

But they were none of them listening to Lafe just then. Their eyes were centered on Olaf.

An extraordinary change had come over the big, blonde Norwegian. He glanced about him nervously, almost timorously. It was odd to see the effect that the ululation of the wild cat crying out in the woods had had upon the strapping frontiersman. His light eyes held, for an instant, all the fear of a frightened child. Then the cry died out and with its passing, the fear faded from his face.

By common consent they looked at Lafe, as if seeking an explanation for the phenomenon. Olaf glanced uneasily about as if he was half afraid of being ridiculed for his momentary exhibition of alarm.

"One fears one thing, one is dead mortal scared of another," volunteered Lafe at length. "I knowed an old lady at home that wouldn't go nigh a cat. 'Nuther feller

I hev in mind was as bold as a lion in everything but one, an' that was spiders. Yes'ir, let a spider come anigh Spence Higgins and he'd come purty near hollering out like a school gal that spied one of the critters on her best pink muslin."

"Yes, I suppose that we all have our pet dislikes," said Mr. Dacre.

"Wa'al, Olaf, he's got a heap more reason an' title to his dislike than most of us, I reckon," said Lafe. "I'll bet a cookie right now that you thought that thar critter was a mounting lion fer a minute, na'ow, didn't yer, Olaf?"

The big Norseman smiled his slow smile.

"He bane sound powerful lake it, Lafe," he said at length, "an' das a soun' you know I don't bane lake. No, sir, he skoll make me bane planty scared all right, I tale you."

"You had some adventure with a mountain lion one time?" asked Mr. Chillingworth, scenting a story.

"Aye. I skoll bet you may lafe, I bane have bad time with mountain lion one tame long ago," said Olaf slowly. "I never forgate him, I bate you, no not so long as I skoll live."

"Tell 'em about it," urged Lafe, "go on. Then they'll see why you've no reason to like the critters, though there's none round hereabouts that ever I heard tell of."

Olaf regarded the group about him with unblinking eyes and his slow, good-natured smile.

"You lake I bane tale you why I no lake mountain lion?" he asked.

"Yes, please, by all means," urged Mr. Dacre, who knew that it could have been no common adventure that had branded this big-limbed giant with a dread of a creature which ordinarily is glad enough to give human beings a wide berth.

"Then I bane tale you why Oaf Gundersen give mountain lion the inside of the trail whenever as be I skoll meet him again," said the Norwegian.

"It all happened a long time ago," he began, and in telling his story we shall not try to reproduce his odd, broken idioms, nor his inimitable style, "a long time ago when the boys here must have been little fellows. It was back in Californy where the creatures were as thick as blackberries and gave lots of trouble to the

settlers and the miners. I was working a small mine and trying to run a small mountain ranch at the same time. My living I eked out by hunting and trapping when I got a chance.

"One day while I was out hunting, a big mountain lion and his mate came down on the ranch and killed the only horse I had. I hunted the male for a week and then I found him and shot him down. But the account was not yet even. I determined to kill his mate, too.

"I tracked her for days but could never get close enough to her for a shot. The creature appeared to have an uncanny sense of my purpose of revenge. She always evaded me with what appeared to be almost supernatural skill. Time after time I thought that I had her at my mercy, only to have her escape my rifle-fire unharmed.

"After some time devoted to this fruitless quest of vengeance, I began to see the killing of this puma as a fixed purpose. Nothing else seemed to matter much so long as I could kill the beast that had so often evaded me.

"I used to start out early every day and return home only late at night from the hunt, and always I was baffled. The she-puma still lived in spite of my efforts. If she had been human I would have said that she laughed at me, for sometimes at night I could hear her screaming in the forest like a big wild-cat, as if in defiance of me.

"At such times I would grit my teeth as I lay in my bunk and say to myself. 'All right, my lady. It's a long lane that has no turning, and I'll never give up till I have killed you.'

"But the next day she would avoid me again, sometimes by not more than a hair's breadth; but it was enough. She carried her hide whole and I was still unrevenged for the death of my horse.

"One day I followed her trail to a part of the mountains where fallen trees, underbrush and jagged stones made the traveling hard. All at once, after some half hour of scrambling forward, I found myself facing a cave, a black, narrow opening in a cliff of grayish stone that towered high above the forest.

"I knew as if by instinct that I had found the mountain lion's lair. But was she inside? That was the question. If she was, I determined to lie there till she came forth, even if it took days, and then despatch her without mercy.

"With this object in view I cast myself on my stomach in the midst of a tangle of underbrush, and with my rifle all ready for instant use I began my vigil.

"I lay there for quite some time," said Olaf, "and then, all at once, I began to hear sounds that made me prick my ears up. From inside the cave came whining little growls and mews almost like the crying of kittens. Of course I knew almost instantly what caused the noise. The puma had young ones. They were what I heard.

"'Aha!' thought I, 'so much the better. Now I know I have you, my lady. When you come back to your cubs, I shall kill you and my revenge will be complete.'

"The thought gave me much satisfaction and I lay there listening feverishly for the slightest sound of the returning mother. But after a while something happened that gave my thoughts a different trend. Out of the cave mouth there came tumbling two fuzzy, fussy little mountain lion cubs. They looked like yellow balls of down. They sat there blinking in the sun for a while and then began playing just as kittens do. It was a pretty sight, but I had other thoughts to occupy me just then. An idea had suddenly come to me.

"Why not take the cubs and raise them? I would be able to sell them to some menagerie or zoo for a good sum when they grew older, and I would thus be repaid for the loss of my horse. The more I thought it over, the better my plan appeared to me. I resolved to put it into instant execution."

CHAPTER XXIII.

OLAF'S GREAT LESSON.

"Another thing that urged me to take the cubs," continued Olaf, "was the fact that I was certain that if I kept them captive in my hut the mother would sooner or later put in an appearance seeking them, and then I could kill her with ease. So, as the two cubs rolled about kitten-like, I wriggled through the brush toward them, and then with a sudden leap I pounced on them and seized them both by the scruff of the neck. They spat and growled vindictively, but I had hold of them in such a way that they could not hurt me. It didn't take me long to tie them together with a bit of twine, and then shouldering my rifle and carrying the mewing, spitting cubs, I set out for home.

"The trail was a rough one to follow and I had a lot of difficulty. I had not gone more than a hundred yards before, quite close behind me, I heard a horrible yell. In an instant I dropped the cubs and jerked my rifle up to my shoulder. I knew what that yell meant. It was the mother lion after the man who had robbed her of her cubs.

"I dropped to my knee to steady my aim, and as her tawny, lithe body came into view, I fired. It was a shot that I wouldn't have missed once in a hundred times under ordinary circumstances. But this was the hundredth time.

"As my weapon was discharged, the lioness emitted a great roar, gave a whisk of her tail and dashed off into the forest. I knew that I had not harmed her. It was then that I began to think that the creature bore a charmed life. It certainly appeared so.

"I was the crack shot of that part of the country and yet I had gone wide of a target that a ten-year-old boy could not well have missed. But as I picked up the cubs and resumed my journey, I thought to myself, with grim satisfaction, that it would not be long before I had another chance at the beast, and that next time I promised myself that my bullet would find its mark.

"Well, it wasn't long before what I expected and hoped for came true. I was out in the back of my shack splitting wood two days later, when through the light green of the trees that grew close up, I thought I saw the flash of a swiftly-

moving, tawny body.

"I chuckled to myself. 'So you have come at last, eh? That is good. Now you and I will try conclusions together.'

"Such was the thought that ran through my mind as I made all haste into the hut for my rifle. As the light-colored mass moved again among the trees, I leveled my weapon and fired. But again I missed!

"There was a swift dash, more like the passage of a streak of light than the moving of a living thing, and then I knew that the puma had fooled me once more. But I also knew that she would come back. The mother-love that lives in all animals would bring her. I was to pay dearly for playing upon this noble instinct. I have never tampered with it since. A creature with young is sacred to me. But I had not learned my lesson then, and I planned to use the puma's motherly instinct to trap her to her destruction.

"That evening she was back. I heard her crying her soft, mother cry among the trees. From inside the cabin, in a sort of rough cage I had contrived for them, the cubs answered her with little sharp barking cries.

"But strong as were the ties that bound her to the cubs, the mother mountain lion came no closer. She was not visible to me. I crouched, rifle in hand, waiting for one chance at her; but it didn't come. She kept far up the mountain side, from time to time giving her cry. It was like the cry of that wild-cat we heard to-night. It was a sound that I have come to dread. Sometimes in dreams I hear it and then I waken and cry out. Lafe can tell you.

"I brought the cub's cage outside the hut. I thought that maybe that would bring her within range of my rifle. But the animal seemed to know I was laying a pitfall for her, for she did not approach any closer; but all that night her cries shook the forest.

"I shouted at her. My desire for revenge had got the upper hand completely of me now. When the puma shrieked and howled, I shrieked and howled, too.

"'I shall kill you yet,' I promised her, 'your hour is close at hand. Olaf will have his revenge for his horse. You will see.'

"Toward morning the cries came closer.

"'Now is my time,' I thought.

"I took my rifle and sallied out of the hut. It was bright moonlight. Once more the cries came from a clump of woods up to my left. I swung round. My heart gave a bound of delight. Out of the deep shadow of the woods I saw two burning points of light gleaming. I knew what they were. The puma's eyes!

"All I had to do was to fire between them. For me, that ought to have been an easy task. But quick as I was in raising my rifle, the puma was quicker of movement than I. In a flash the points of light had vanished, and when next I heard her cries they came from some distance off.

"Utterly disgusted, baffled and angry, I went back to my bunk. I lay long awake revolving all sorts of schemes to catch the puma napping, and I was still planning when I fell asleep. That night my dreams were all of the working out of my revenge. I guess I wasn't far from going crazy. Dwelling all the time on one thought and living alone, had worked powerfully on my mind. I felt that if I didn't kill that mountain lion she'd kill me, and how near she came to doing it, I'm going to tell you in a minute.

"For one mortal week I tried every way I could think of to get a shot at that lion. But it was all of no use. If the animal could have read my mind, she couldn't have kept out of the way more cleverly than she did.

"But all the time she was near at hand. The cubs, whom I fed regularly with venison and small game, used to answer her night and day. I lost sleep and flesh, but still I was no closer to attaining my object.

"I tried dozens of ways of getting my chance to shoot the animal down. Failing in all of them, I set poisoned bait around the house. But it was never touched. With the same uncanny instinct that had taught her how to keep out of my reach, the puma avoided the poisoned meat. Steel traps were a joke to her, I guess, for conceal them cleverly as I might, she never went near them.

"And all the time I grew madder and madder. I had hunted and trapped for a good many years and this was the first animal that had ever escaped me once I set out to get it. I began to get nervous. When I was out hunting, for I had to go pretty frequently to get food for the young pumas, the slightest unexpected sound would make me jump out of my skin.

"'Olaf, you've got to end this thing,' I told myself.

"And then later on I said to myself again:

"'Olaf, you must end the puma or the puma will end you, my friend.' And so the days went by. A dozen times a day and as many at night I would think I was at last to put an end to the almost unbearable situation, and every time that puma fooled me. But all the time she was about the hut. Always within earshot of the cubs.

"One day, for security, I shut them in an inner room. I was afraid that during one of my absences the mother mountain lion might break in and effect a rescue. It was about two days after I had made this arrangement, that the thing happened that has ever since made me pale when I hear the shrill cry of a mountain lion or any sound resembling it.

"It was in the early morning. I was sitting outside my shack cleaning my rifle. I was happy and whistling quite gaily. Suddenly I looked round for some rags to finish up my job. There were none there and leaning my rifle against a stump, I went into the hut to get some.

"I had just about got inside when I heard a roar, and then a great body came hurtling past me into the hut. The puma had been watching me. By this time, so often had I fired at her, she knew that my strength lay in my rifle. The instant that she saw me lay it down, she knew her chance had come. Like a flash she was into the hut after her cubs.

"And there was I, weaponless, powerless, and face to face with a mother puma mad to regain possession of her little ones.

"I had one second in which to think and act simultaneously. My bunk was built high up, luckily, and with one bound, so active did my terror make me, I was in it and secure for an instant. The puma crouched, lashed her tail and with bared claws glared at me with terrible hatred in her green eyes.

"I could feel the cold sweat break out upon me. I could almost sense the last struggle when she should have sprung upon me in the bunk. But at that instant the cubs beyond the door set up their cries anew. That saved me for the time being. With a mighty bound the puma flung herself against the door. Again and again she flung herself at it like a battering ram.

"But it was a stout door and it resisted all her attacks till at last, panting and breathless, she lay down on the floor of the hut to rest. I dared not move for fear of attracting her attention. I was in a horrible trap. Noon came and passed and still she lay there. I was almost mad with thirst, but stronger than my thirst was

my fear of that great cat crouching there with her eyes fixed on the door beyond which lay her cubs.

"The door fastened with a steel catch. If only I could reach that catch, release it and open the door there was a possibility that my ordeal would be at an end. Having regained her cubs, there was a chance, a mighty slim one, but still a chance, that the lioness would take them and go.

"The time dragged along on leaden feet. The sun grew lower. A ray of the declining day struck in through the one window the hut boasted and struck the steel catch that confined the cubs.

"How long it was after this that my nerve went all to bits, I don't know. But go it did. I gave a loud yell and then, careless of what might happen, but determined to end the tension at all hazards, I reached out with one foot and kicked up the steel catch.

"I was quick but not quick enough. As the door swung open, the lioness leaped for my leg, but the next instant she saw in the room beyond her two cubs. In her joy at beholding them again everything else was forgotten by her. With her sharp, strong claws she tore the box that confined them to bits, and then, after licking them all over, she picked them up as a cat does her kittens and—strode out of the door.

"I never saw her again; but I shall always remember her by this."

The woodsman drew up one leg of his loose trousers and showed a long, livid scar.

"That bane why I skoll never hear the cry of the puma or a cry that bane lake him without feeling the big fear," he concluded.

Olaf's story had taken some time in its narration, but it had held them spell bound. They all agreed that he had passed through an ordeal well calculated to make him dread the creatures, one of which had held him a prisoner for so many terrible hours.

They turned in late and when they awakened, Olaf and Lafe had taken their leave without disturbing them. They had left a scribbled note of thanks, however, with their best wishes for good luck.

"I shall never forget Olaf Gundersen," declared Tom, a sentiment which the rest

echoed.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ON THE PORCUPINE RIVER.

We must now pass over an interval of several weeks. During this period our readers are to imagine the numerous rapids and perils of the Upper Yukon conquered and the permanent camp of the silver fox hunters established upon the swift Porcupine River, not far above its junction with the Yukon and amidst a country wilder than any into which the Bungalow Boys had yet penetrated.

The work of setting out the peculiarly constructed traps in which the silver and black foxes were to be trapped had occupied much time, and some exciting adventures with bears and wolves had accompanied the work. When completed, the "trap-line" extended for more than twenty-five miles from the camp, which was pitched on the bank of the river to which the *Yukon Rover* was tied.

Did space permit we should like to tell in detail, and may at some future time, the numerous exciting episodes that marked those weeks of our young friends' lives. But we must now hasten on to an event which was to try their resources as they had rarely been tested before, and which was peculiarly characteristic of the life in that wild region "north of fifty-three" which they were exploring.

It is first necessary to explain that the work of overseeing the trap-line was attended to every week, the work being divided into "shifts," one of the party, or more, being left to guard the camp during the absence of the others. At the particular time we are now dealing with Mr. Dacre was disabled with a slight fever, and Sandy, also, was a "little under the weather" from the same cause. So that it devolved upon Tom and Jack to assume the task of going over the trap-line, a duty which had to be performed, while Mr. Chillingworth remained behind with the invalids.

And right here it is proper to explain that although the traps had been set and baited, the trappers did not expect any results till later in the season when the "big cold" set in. Nevertheless, in order to guard against the possibility of vicious or unprincipled trappers or "dog Indians" interfering with them, a rigid patrol was necessary to insure the well being of the trap-line. The actual trapping was destined to come later when the wastes of forest to the north were frozen and the

creatures of the wild came toward the river in search of food.

Well used to roughing it as the boys were, they carried little more with them on these expeditions than flour, "erbwurst,"—a sort of concentrated soup, not very palatable, but nourishing,—teas, salt and sugar. Their rifles, blankets and canteens completed their loads, with ammunition, of course, sufficient to enable them to "live on the country."

The trap-line led back into a wild range of mountains known as the Frying Pan Range, though just why that name had been given to the section is beyond the present chronicler to explain.

On the particular morning with which we are dealing, we find Tom and Jack almost at the end of the trap-line. Not much to their surprise, their investigation of the fifty or more traps scattered through this territory had not resulted in their discovering any silver foxes ensnared. Other wild creatures, though, had been entrapped, but they were not bothering with these. In every instance, if they were not maimed, the creatures were set loose, with one exception. That was the ugly "glutton" or wolverine, a notorious robber of trappers' and miners' camps, and a savage, truculent animal. When such creatures were found, they were despatched without mercy.

Tom, the first to open his eyes that morning, gave a glance of astonishment as he gazed about him from his blankets. On every side of them was a fleecy blanket of fog as thick and blinding as that which had encompassed them at Kadiak. He awakened Jack and the two looked about them rather anxiously. In pursuit of a deer, the carcass of which hung in a neighboring tree, high up so as to be beyond the reach of wild animals, the boys had, the evening before, wandered rather far from their beaten track.

They had, in fact, been overtaken by night in a part of the mountains which was entirely strange to them. But they felt no apprehensions on that score. They, of course, carried, like all wilderness travelers, a good compass and had the accurate bearings of their camp. The trap-line itself was marked by a blazed trail, so that once upon it their course was as plainly recognized as if they had been on a public highway.

After breakfast, consisting of deer-meat steaks, which when freshly killed are by no means as good as asserted, flap-jacks and tea, well sugared, the two young trappers took earnest counsel as to the best course to pursue.

The fog enwrapped them closely in billowy folds of white. On the mountain top on which they had halted, the mist was peculiarly dense and heavy.

"Well, Jack," said Tom, "we're in cloudland, all right. Are you in favor of waiting till the clouds roll by or striking out for camp?"

Jack at once declared for the latter course. Mr. Dacre's illness and Sandy's indisposition had not a little to do with Tom's falling in with this plan. He was anxious not to remain away longer than necessary for, as he knew, the river fevers sometimes resulted quite seriously.

Accordingly, the blankets were rolled up, some meat cut from the deer, canteens filled at a nearby spring, and the march back to the river begun. The fog still hung heavy and dense, and the boys strode along through the steamy vapor talking little, but saving their wind and their strength for the rough stony ground they were traveling over.

About noon the mist lifted and rolled away like a drop-curtain in a theater. And it was then that the boys made a disquieting discovery. The general scenery adjacent to the trapping line was familiar to them. But the spot which they now had reached held nothing that struck a reminiscent note.

Instead of being surrounded by noble forests of huge, somber trees, they were in a place that resembled more the scenery found in the "Bad Lands" than anything else the boys could call to mind. Grotesque piles of rocky hills, pinnacled like cathedrals and minsters, with here and there the semblance of some strangely formed animal, surrounded them on every side.

Towering columns and immense, fantastically-shaped masses of clay, suggesting pre-historic monsters of the pre-glacial period, rocky cliffs resembling enchanted castles,—these were only a few of the remarkable features of the section of the country into which they had strayed.

They looked about them with awe. The strata of the various weird formations were brilliantly tinted with blue, red, white, yellow and other colors mingled and mixed like the hues of a kaleidoscope. The utter barrenness of the place suggested a city of the dead, untrodden by man or beast for centuries.

"Where under the sun have we wandered?" asked Jack in an awed tone, gazing about with wonderment not untinged with alarm.

"I've not the slightest idea. We've never even seen a suggestion of such country

on our hunting excursions off the trapping line. We must have strayed far off our course."

"But the compass?"

"I followed what should have been our direction," declared Tom. "I cannot understand this at all."

"Nor can I. Let's have a look at that compass."

Tom fished it out of his pocket and extended it. He glanced at the dial and then uttered a cry of astonishment. The needle was dipping and plunging and behaving in a very odd manner.

"Gracious, what's the matter with the thing? Is it bewitched?" gasped Jack.

"It is certainly behaving in a very mysterious fashion. Something must have deflected it and led us out of our way."

"What could have done this?"

"I don't know, unless—hullo!"

Tom stooped and picked up a bit of stone which glittered with bright, shining particles.

"Iron pyrites!" he exclaimed. "I remember the professor back at school showing some to the geology class. No wonder the needle was deflected! Look, Jack, those cliffs yonder are almost solid masses of pyrites!"

"And those deposits of iron switched the needle of the compass?"

"Beyond a doubt."

"Then we are lost."

"I don't like to say that."

"But we are far out of our way?"

"No question of it."

"How far?"

"I have no idea. It's a nasty predicament, Jack, but we'll get out of it, don't

worry."

"But you haven't any idea in which direction to go?"

"No; we must scout around and try to get our bearings. I would suggest that we strike out for that high hill yonder that will place a ridge between us and the pyrites cliffs, and perhaps the compass will behave normally."

They struck off in the direction that Tom indicated. But it was hard traveling in that broken, uncanny country into which they had wandered in such a strange manner. The hill, too, was further than they thought, the clear air being deceptive. But dripping with perspiration and not a little anxious at heart, they gained it at last.

As Tom placed his hand in his pocket to draw out the compass, he almost let the instrument drop to the ground.

A sudden sound had broken the stillness of the place. It was a sound that ordinarily would have caused confidence in the hearers. But heard under the circumstances in which it was, it was so unexpected, so out of keeping with the wild surroundings, that it startled and shocked them both.

It was the sound of laughter.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MYSTERIOUS MEN.

There could be no mistake about it. It was human laughter that they had heard. It has been said that his ability to laugh is what chiefly distinguishes man from other animals and it is an undeniable fact that the sound resembles no other in nature.

The laughter they had heard was not loud, but it was none the less genuine and hearty on that account. Jack gripped Tom's arm and asked in an affrighted whisper:

"What does it mean, Tom?"

"It means that somebody is pleased over something," replied Tom, who, despite the light tone of his reply, was no less agitated than his companion, "but who can he be?"

"One thing is certain, it isn't a native, for they only grin without making any racket over it."

The boys stood side by side, and grasping their rifles firmly, peered toward a thick clump of fir woods from whence the sound had proceeded. But no more laughter came. Instead, the branches parted and coming toward them they distinguished the forms of three men.

Suddenly the hearty mirth broke out once more, and the shoulders of one of the three were seen to bob up and down as if his mirth was unrestrainable. But this time the outburst was roughly checked.

"Shut up, Rufus!" exclaimed one of the men angrily. "A joke lasts you longer than anybody I ever saw."

"Wha's dat? Oh, lawdy! Look-ee, boss! Dere's two white boys!"

It was a short, stocky negro who gasped out these words, his lower jaw dropping in a comical manner as he stared at them as though they had been beings from another world. For their part, the boys were no less astonished at this encounter.

The negro's exclamation was the first apprisal that his two white companions had of the boys' presence on the scene, and their surprise appeared no less than his. They were both rough, wild-looking fellows, with shaggy, unkempt beards and rough clothes with knee boots. Both carried shovels and tin pans, while the negro bore a pick and other mining tools. The boys guessed at once that the men were prospectors.

"Howdy, pards," exclaimed one of the men, coming toward the boys with extended hand, "what in the name of time air you doin' roun' these diggin's?"

"Glad to meet you," said Tom, taking the proffered hand and introducing his brother and himself. He then explained his plight. Both men raised their eyebrows as they listened, and the negro rolled his eyes in an odd fashion.

"Well, I'll be hanged," exclaimed the companion of the man who had first addressed the boys. "That's a tarnation bad fix and no mistake, ain't it, Jim?"

"It sure is, Seth," replied the other, "an' I ain't got no idea of the track they ought to take, seem' as we come inter this country from the other way."

Jim Stapleton, for that was his name, pulled out a pipe and lit it. His companion, Seth Ingalls, shook his head as if in meditation. Then the two men whispered together for a time while the negro surveyed the boys with a blank expression. There was something about that look that puzzled them. It was not till afterward that they were to learn what it meant. The black man appeared to be about to speak, when the two men, who had withdrawn a little for their confab, came back.

"How come you so far from the river?" asked Jim, and Tom for a passing moment thought he detected suspicion in his tones.

"As I told you, to look after our trap line," said Tom.

"Humph! This is a funny time of the year to go trapping."

Tom, omitting all the details that he could, explained the reason for the line being set out before the early winter closed in. If the man had been suspicious, as Tom had for an instant fancied, the answer appeared to lull such thoughts.

"We were foolish to start off in that fog," went on Tom, "but of course I'd no idea that the compass would betray us like it did."

The men made no rejoinder to this. Then Jim spoke up and in his rough voice told the boys that they were camped not far from there and would be glad to make them welcome if they cared to come along.

The boys, after some hesitation, accepted this proposition. For one thing they were full of youthful curiosity concerning these men, and in the second place, after their experiences of the morning they did not feel inclined to resume their journey, which now bade fair to be a long and arduous one, till they had had some rest.

The men explained that they had been out that morning with the negro Rufus, who acted as cook and did the rough work about the camp, on a prospecting expedition to a distant ridge. But, explained Jim Stapleton, at their home camp lay the real object of their quest in these wild and solitary hills.

"We're the luckiest fellows in the whole world," exclaimed Jim, swinging his arms in wild gesticulation. "We'll be the richest people in America, in Europe, in the whole world! The gold is not far off now. We'll be greater than Solomon in all his glory. We'll be——"

"Here, here, choke off, will you, Jim Stapleton," growled his companion in a taciturn tone.

The boys gazed at the two men in astonishment. The outburst of Jim Stapleton seemed more like the ravings of an unbalanced mind than the speech of a well disciplined one. His eyes had flashed as he spoke, with a wild sort of light and his gesticulations were extravagant. Tom was about to speak, but in the very act his eye caught that of Rufus, the negro cook. To his astonishment the black man's left eye closed in a swift but unmistakable wink that said as plainly as words, "Say nothing."

Jack, who was not so alert as his brother, had noticed none of this by-play, but he, too, had been astonished at the miner's outburst. As for Tom, a suspicion shot into his mind that was to bear fruit in the near future.

The gruff rebuke of Seth Ingalls seemed to have had its effect upon his companion, for Jim Stapleton said no more as they trudged on, and ere long they came in sight of what was the gold-seekers' headquarters.

Among piled up masses of huge rocks and boulders, the two men had found a retreat which could not have been better suited to their purposes if it had been

built to order. It consisted in a general way of a cavern about a dozen yards in depth and one-fourth as broad and high, with an entrance that an ordinary sized man could pass through by slightly stooping.

The floor, walls and ceiling were of solid rock, but an opening must have existed in the rear, for a fire was smouldering in that portion of the cavern, with some sort of food cooking above it in a huge iron pot, and the smoke was curling up and vanishing through some unseen aperture.

Into this curious home, the men whom the boys had encountered had moved their belongings. These consisted of the most primitive and barely necessary sort, a cooking-kit, extra clothing and provisions such as a gun cannot procure. In one corner was a pile of blankets, and a sort of burlap curtain had been fitted over the opening which could presumably be drawn in severe weather, making the place snug and weather proof.

"Do you know anything about the gold mining business?" was almost the first thing Jim Stapleton said as he ushered the boys into this cave home.

"Well, we've never looked for it except in the shape of coined money," said Tom with a smile.

"I never knew that there was much to be found in this part of the country," added Jack.

"Then that's just where you're wrong," said Jim, who, despite his taciturn comrade's frowns and winks, seemed bound to talk. "There's gold in plenty here. It's no guesswork on our part. *We know it!*"

Again into his eyes came the odd gleam that Tom had noticed. It never appeared there but when he talked of gold. Then his optics danced and glittered like living coals.

Seth Ingalls had gone outside on some errand connected with the business of the men's retreat. Rufus was chopping wood. The boys were alone in the cave with Jim Stapleton. He leaned forward suddenly and whispered in Tom's ear.

"We have the secret. We'll have gold enough for all. You shall share it. The treasures of Ophir never for an instant compared with what lies in Dead Man's Mine."

"Dead Man's Mine!" echoed Tom. The name carried a sinister suggestion.

"That's its name. See here."

Jim Stapleton arose and tip-toed to the wall. From behind a recess he drew out a rolled up bit of paper, stained and dirty. He unfolded it and showed it to the youths. All the markings were in lead pencil, blurred and indistinct. But one thing about the plan, which was entitled in bold letters "Plan of Dead Man's Mine," attracted Tom's keen attention.

He unfolded it and showed it to the youths.—*Page 257*.

Upon the map was marked prominently amidst a maze of marks "The Lone Pine," and under it was drawn a crude representation of a blasted, leafless tree of seemingly great size. Now Tom was certain that he had seen no such tree in the vicinity of the cavern. The map, however, did show a canyon similar to the one where the cave was, and also indicated a cave at about the same location. Not far from it a red star showed where the gold was supposed to lie.

Tom glanced up at Stapleton from a scrutiny of the map. As he did so, the suspicion that had flashed across him at their first meeting revisited him. But this time it was a stronger and more sinister impression. He looked at Jack, but apparently he had noticed nothing amiss.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE DEAD MAN'S MINE.

"How did you come into possession of this paper?" asked Tom, feeling an irresistible curiosity concerning the matter.

A look of cunning crept into Stapleton's eyes. His tone grew confidential.

"It's as odd a story as ever you heard," he said. "Do you want to hear it?"

"By all means."

"Well then, it all happened some years back when I befriended an old fellow in the Greenhorn Mountains in Californy. He was a prospector an' had got himself chawed up by a bar. I came across him on the trail an' took him to my cabin and nursed him as well as I could. But I seen frum the first that the old fellow was too far gone to get over his injuries.

"To begin with, he was too old and feeble anyhow, an' then again that bar had clawed and chawed him till he was a mass of wounds. Well, I neglected my work on the claim I had located there, and spent the best part of my time smoothing out the last hours of that old chap's life. I never knew where he came from or how he came to be a prospector, but before he crossed the Great Divide he gave me the astonisher of my life. By his directions I took a package wrapped in oiled paper from his old ragged coat and laid it on the bed afore him.

"Finally frum some old letters and such truck he produces that there plan I just showed you. He said I'd been so kind to him and cheered his last moments, so that having neither chick nor child he wanted to make me a legacy. He said he'd make me the richest man in the world for what I'd done for him.

"Well, he explained before he passed away what all them marks and lines on the plan meant, and made it all as clear as print. Then he told me the story of Dead Man's Mine.

"About thirty years ago a band of trappers found a rich deposit of gold in these hills. But on their way to civilization with it, they were drowned on the Yukon and only one escaped to tell the tale. He was crazy from his sufferings in gettin'

back to civilization, and when he stumbled across a camp of Aleuts they took care of him, having a sort of religious reverence for crazy people. He died among those natives."

"It's a gruesome story," remarked Tom, "but how, then, did the facts become known?"

"Hold on. I'm gettin' to that. Years later an Aleut told the story to a white hunter who had been good to him, and gave him the plan which the crazy man had drawn on a bit of whalebone in lucid intervals. As you may suppose, the white hunter was all worked up over it, as a scratched message on the whalebone said there was more gold left in Dead Man's Mine, that's what the crazy man called it, than had been taken out.

"Well, an expedition was made up by the white hunter to go after the gold, but the natives got wind of it and wiped 'em all out, only one escaping to civilization, and that was the old man who died in my hut back there in the Sierras. He tried twice to get back to the mine by the plan he had copied on to paper from the whalebone. But each time disaster overtook him. Once his men deserted him, declaring he was insane. Another time, winter caught him napping and he got out to the coast more dead than alive.

"He drifted down to the Pacific Coast and tried to get capital to back another expedition, or somebody to grubstake him, but he couldn't do it, and at last he gave up in disgust. He was all alone in the world anyhow, he said, and was too old to enjoy the money if he had got it. Then he wandered off alone, and the bear got him, as I said afore. Soon after he had told me this story and made me promise to try to find the gold, he passed out, and I buried him back there on a hillside under a big pine above the Stanislaus."

"A remarkable story," commented Tom. "And you think that you have located the Dead Man's Mine at last?"

"Not a doubt of it. Seth and I have spent ten years looking for it, and *this is the spot*."

"How do you know?"

"It tallies with the plan in every particular. The gold is here."

Again came that strange gleam which every mention of the yellow metal evoked in Stapleton's wild eyes.

"But where's the lone pine that is pictured on the plan?" objected Tom.

"Oh, that. Probably some storm blew it down or it rotted away. You must remember thirty years have passed since that crazy man drew the plan."

"Hasn't it occurred to you that relying on a plan drawn by a man whose sufferings had turned his brain is a rather uncertain business?"

"See here, partner,——" began Stapleton, but at this instant the silent, sullen-faced Seth entered the cavern, and Stapleton, who appeared to stand rather in awe of him, subsided into silence.

There was something on the mind of Tom Dacre which Stapleton's story had almost clinched into a certainty. Circumstances forbade his making his suspicions known to Jack, but he resolved to do so at the first opportunity. It was a communication that must be made when they were alone. It would never do for the two men to hear it.

Tom had noticed that when Seth left the cavern he had carried a rifle and supposed it was for game. Now, however, he began to suspect another reason when he saw for the first time that the man also had a spyglass with him. The boy decided to put a leading question to Stapleton.

"Are you not afraid of anyone else coming to know your secret and following you here?"

Stapleton's eyes flashed. Then he spoke in low, impressive tones.

"If we caught anyone doing that, we'd shoot him down like a mad dog!"

Tom's heart sank. The inference was only too plain. He was glad that Jack, who had gone to the mouth of the cave, had not heard Stapleton's emphatic remark. If the men felt like that, it was unlikely that the boys would be allowed to go, and this, with the other suspicion mentioned, had been gnawing at Tom's mind ever since they had entered the cavern. So sure was he that they were virtually prisoners, that he did not ask any more questions. He dared not confirm his suspicions in so many words.

He joined Jack at the door of the cavern. It afforded an extensive view. Below it, and to the left at the foot of a high conical peak, were plain traces of the miners' labors. Much of the work looked fresh, and they noticed that numerous workings had been started and apparently abandoned. The work must have been going on

for quite a considerable period, judging from the look of things, which indicated, also, that so far the searchers had not been successful in their quest.

Tom glanced back into the cave over his shoulder. Rufus was busy stirring the big stew pot. The two men were conversing with occasional glances at the boys. Tom drew Jack a little aside and gave a swift whisper in his ear.

"Do you know that we are prisoners?"

"What!"

"Hush, not so loud. Those men are both as crazy as loons. I suspected it some time ago. Now I am sure of it. It's a thousand chances to one that this isn't the location of Dead Man's Mine, even if there is such a place."

"Good gracious!"

"Even going by the plan, they are way off. But it would be likely to throw them into a terrible rage even to hint such a thing."

"It looks as if we are in a mighty bad fix!"

"We are. You can be sure from what was said that they don't mean to let us leave here till gold is found, which will never occur."

"You are sure of what you say?"

Jack looked sick and pale. Tom's face was grave and sober-looking.

"I'm not an alarmist. We are in the hands of a pair of maniacs. We and that negro are the only sane persons in this camp. We must be very careful or we may arouse them to violence."

"Then we are virtually *prisoners*?"

"I'm afraid there is no other way of putting it, old fellow. We must be careful and keep our eyes open night and day, for we are in just about as bad a dilemma as we ever have experienced."

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN NEED OF A FRIEND.

Tom's guess had hit the nail on the head. It was all true. Jim Stapleton and Seth Ingalls were not the first men to have their brains turned by an insatiable lust for gold. On every other subject perfectly normal, they were insane on this one topic.

It was the peculiar light that shone in Stapleton's eyes when he spoke of the yellow metal that had first excited Tom's doubts. Seth Ingalls' sullen, taciturn manner had shown that he was afflicted with a different form of the same mania. In Jim Stapleton's case it took the twist of a desire to confide in the boys his glorious prospects. In Seth Ingalls the same malady induced a dark, secretive manner and a suspicion that everybody was in search of their secret.

The alarming situation of our two young friends may be thus summed up. They were in the hands of two desperate and powerful lunatics, who almost assuredly would not let them depart until the fabulous deposit of gold was discovered. The boys did not dare even to mention the subject of leaving the cavern or the camp, for fear of arousing the men's suspicions, in which case it appeared almost certain that the two crazed miners would unhesitatingly forcibly restrain them or kill them.

Both of the lads recalled reading of such cases, but Jim Stapleton and Seth Ingalls were the first living examples of the gold seeking form of insanity with which they had come in contact. There had not been a word of fiction in Jim Stapleton's account of how he came by the chart, by means of which he and his friend Ingalls had joined forces and started on their insane quest. It was all as true as gospel.

The ten years of search in the wild solitudes of the north, their hopes, their disappointments, their privations had turned their brains. Lured on by their dazzling vision of wealth beyond the dreams of avarice, they had kept up, with an insane persistence, their search, till at last they had stumbled across this spot back of the Frying Pan Range which did, in very fact, look like the site of the new Golconda as described on the old, time-yellowed map.

The main defect of the whole scheme had been detected by Tom. The original plan had been the work of a man whose brain was admittedly turned by sufferings and hardships. It possessed, moreover, one inherent flaw, and that was that while the Frying Pan Range was indicated in a general manner on the map, the precise spot in which the gold lay was not set forth. It might have been anywhere along the four hundred miles of solitary, unexplored country the range traversed.

It was apparent to Tom that the two men, driven half insane by their long hunt, had taken for granted when they came across the spot in which they were now encamped, that they had at last struck El Dorado. Whether the objections that had at once flashed into his mind had ever occurred to them, or whether they had willfully ignored them, tempted beyond their judgment by the *ignis fatuus* of the gold hunters' lust, mattered little. Tom was certain that they had made a woeful mistake and were miles from the hiding place of the fabled gold, even if such a place had ever existed.

Granting that the gold mine described on the chart did exist, only chance could have given them success. But accompanied by their faithful black, whose brain alone had not given way under the continued strain, they had stuck to the quest till their judgment was warped and they were ready to accept almost any site that bore even a fancied resemblance to the blurred outlines of the dead miner's map.

In nothing, in fact, was their mental unsoundness more startlingly indicated as in their determination that this was the right place on which they had stumbled, despite the almost self-evident proofs that it was not.

They had been established in the cavern for some three months when Tom and Jack had so unfortunately stumbled upon them. When they encountered the boys and held that whispered consultation, the lives of our two young friends had literally hung in the balance. For the object of that talk was whether they should despatch the boys forthwith and thus render them incapable of spreading the secret (for they were convinced they were spies sent out by fancied enemies), or whether they should take them into their confidence and hold them prisoners till they reached the gold. This latter event they fancied was not far distant, and they finally decided to hasten its coming by holding the lads captives and making them do their share of the work.

In their warped minds this course was quite justifiable, as they intended, when they struck the vast wealth they imagined awaited them, to reimburse the lads a

thousandfold for their labors. This was the main cause of their sparing the boys' lives. They needed extra help to enable them to reach their fancied gold quickly and therefore they decided not to slay them outright.

The boys knew that this success would, in all human probability, never be attained, while the men were equally certain that the achievement of their golden hopes was but a few days or weeks distant at most.

Their only course, they decided, after a necessarily hasty whispered consultation, was to pretend to fall in with whatever plan the crazy gold hunters might propose to them, and work or do whatever might be required with all the cheerfulness they could muster. In this way, and in this way alone, could they hope to lull the suspicions of the two men who held them in their power.

It was the only course that promised hope. To attempt to escape would be rash in the extreme, and might have fatal results.

They had about reached this conclusion when Stapleton strolled out.

"My partner and I have been talking," he said, "and we have decided to give you youngsters a chance to share in our fortunes. Of course you won't get an equal share, but since you have found us out, we mean to make you work and will reward you well for it. We'll make you wealthy for the rest of your lives."

"You mean that you want us to help you in your gold hunt?" asked Tom.

"That's it exactly. We can't be far from the gold now. A few more days will bring us to it. The more hands the lighter work, so you may consider yourselves elected members of the firm."

"It's very kind of you," said Tom gravely. Jack was beyond speech.

"That's all right, we like you. If you will be useful to us, we'll make you rich. Rufus might have had the same chance, but he doesn't appear to want to take it. He just keeps on cooking and keeping things to rights in the cave."

Tom was weighing every word carefully before he answered.

"I suppose Rufus is just lazy and doesn't like to work," he hazarded.

"Oh, no; it isn't that. He's energetic enough when he wants to be. But it's something quite different."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; sometimes we think he's a little cracked. What do you suppose he says?"

"I've no idea."

"Why, that we have made a mistake, and that this isn't Dead Man's Mine at all, and that there is no such place."

Tom nudged Jack and broke into a laugh as if it was the funniest thing he had ever heard. Jack gave a ghastly echo of his companion's cleverly assumed mirth.

"What can have given him such an idea as that?" asked Tom.

"Well, we've shown him the chart once or twice, but he's so thick he can't make head or tail of it. Why, the poor, benighted idiot asked us once if this was the place where was that dead tree that shows on the chart."

"And what did you say?"

"Just what I told you. The tree had either blown down, rotted away or been struck by lightning."

The earnestness with which the unfortunate victim of an hallucination sought to explain away everything was pitiable.

"That stopped his objections, I suppose," said Tom.

"Oh, yes. He said nothing more. Seth said that if he heard any more rubbish from him, he'd shut him up effectually and we have heard no more from him on the subject. That's the reason we think that Rufus is a little off. He gets such queer ideas in his head."

"Oh, well, we are all liable to get our ideas mixed up a bit sometimes," was Tom's diplomatic reply.

But as Stapleton turned back into the case, his heart sank. The man was even crazier than he had thought. He actually thought that by detaining the boys he was doing them a good turn.

Through the gloom that obsessed his spirits, only one ray of light shone and that was this:

From what Stapleton had said the boy had deduced one clear fact. Rufus the

negro was, apparently, the only one of the trio in the full possession of his senses. In an emergency they would have to trust to the black man to help them.

Would he do it?

It was a question upon which much depended at the crisis the boys' affairs had reached.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

—AND A FRIEND IN NEED.

There were several reasons that inclined Tom to look for aid from this quarter. In the first place Rufus, although seemingly bound to his masters by bonds of affection, had no direct interest in their crazy schemes. In the second place, he had distinctly shown a friendly interest in the boys as had been evidenced when he winked his eye enjoining silence on them. And in the third place, persons of African descent are notoriously less liable, on account of their lower intelligence, to seizures of insanity than persons gifted with higher intellect.

But whether they could count upon the black to aid them was quite another matter. They did not for some time find an opportunity to put the matter to a test. Supper was eaten and the boys, despite their anxiety, made a hearty meal. During its progress they conversed with their hosts, who talked quite rationally on all subjects but their fabulous gold mine.

Anyone coming across the party and not knowing the facts of the case would have taken them to be a jolly band of explorers or miners rather than what they were, two lunatics and two boys who were in their power. When he got an opportunity to do so, Tom stole a look at Rufus' face. It was a round, good-natured countenance, but for any expression that would give him a clew as to how Rufus was inclined toward them, the boy might as well have regarded a graven image of ebony.

After supper the two miners got out their pipes, but Seth had not puffed his long when he suddenly sprang to his feet, dashed the pipe to the ground and burst out in an irritated tone:

"Here we are losing time that ought to be spent in work. This may cause us serious delay in getting the gold out; it may cost us billions of dollars before we get through."

His companion's face lighted up with its odd, gleaming-eyed expression at the mention of the topic.

"That's right, Seth," he assented, "we ought to be at work. We may be keeping

the youngsters here out of a fortune as well as ourselves."

Tom caught Rufus' eye at this juncture and thought that he detected a friendly gleam in it, but he gave no sign and soon averted his gaze for fear it might attract the men's attention. It cannot be said that Tom and Jack felt much enthusiasm, but they made a good assumption of it and seized upon picks and shovels as if they were going to make their fortunes the next minute.

The "mine," as has been said, was at the foot of the tall, conical peak. On close inspection, Tom and Jack were amazed at the amount of work the two fanatics had done on it. Tons of dirt and gravel had been excavated. A deep hole ran right into the ground under the sharp pointed peak.

"Quite a hole, eh, boys?" asked Stapleton in a satisfied tone.

"Indeed it is," assented Tom. "Why, you have done more work than I should have thought possible for two men to accomplish."

"Ah, we'll get along twice as fast now with four pairs of arms," chuckled poor, crazed Stapleton gleefully. "The gold can't be far off, either."

"But if we keep on," objected Jack, hoping it would have some weight, "we shall undermine the whole of that conical mountain above there."

The same crafty glitter that Tom had been the first of the boys to note in Stapleton's eyes now shone in those of his taciturn companion.

"That's the scheme," explained Seth, hastily but enthusiastically. "You and your friend will dig from this side. Jim and I will start work on the other. In that way we'll meet halfway and we're bound to find the gold. We can't miss it."

"Good gracious," thought Tom, "he's crazier than Jim, and that's saying a whole lot. What a pickle we are in!"

"Come, let's go to work!" cried Jim eagerly.

It was easy to be seen that with their golden dream before their eyes, mere physical labor had no terrors for these men. They would work till they dropped before they abandoned their task.

There was no help for it, and with the best grace they could Tom and Jack picked up their tools, jumped into the hole and began to work. The men watched them for a while.

"That's fine," applauded Jim; "that's the way to make the dirt fly. Keep that up and we shan't grudge you your share of the gold. There's enough under here to make a hundred people millionaires."

With that, Jim and the other man set off to the other side of the conical peak. As this was quite some distance off, it will be seen that they planned to dig a subway on quite an extensive plan. In fact, the idea would have never entered into the head of a normal being.

As they vanished Tom quit work and leaned on his shovel.

"Well, I'll be jiggered! This is a fine go, isn't it, Jack?"

Jack flung down his pick with a snort

"Those fellows belong in an asylum, that's where they ought to be. What are you grinning at? I don't see anything funny in all this."

"I was just thinking that we came up here for a holiday, and it looks very much as if we were going to share the fate of those convicts who are condemned to the mines."

"Well, if you can see a joke in that, you've got a fine sense of humor, that's all I can say. Condemned to the mines, eh? Yes, and it looks uncommonly as if we'd get a life sentence, too."

"Come, don't be downcast, Jack. After all, it might have been worse. They might have shot us."

"Humph! That's so, too; but I don't know that it would have been much worse than this. Tunnel under this mountain, indeed! Why it would take a hundred men a hundred years to do it!"

"Yes, and then it would fall on the top of them. But don't let's discuss that phase of the matter. This mountain will never be tunneled under."

"How do you know?"

"At any rate, not without assistance. But we can only make one attempt to get away."

"Why is that?"

"For the simple reason that if one fails we'll never get another. We are dealing

with lunatics, remember that, Jack."

"As if I could forget it! They're the worst pair of looneys I ever saw."

"That being so, it won't do to take any chances. We must work and quiet their suspicions. Then when the chance comes we must take it; but we must be sure it is the right chance."

"In the meantime, what of the folks on the *Yukon Rover*?"

"They will have to form the best theory they can to account for our absence; but I'm afraid that they will be worrying themselves to death."

"That can't be helped. I'll bet they're not worrying any more than we are."

"There's just one hopeful feature about this whole business," resumed Tom, ignoring Jack's irritable remark.

"What's that?"

"Rufus, the negro. How can we utilize him?"

"You think he is friendly?"

"I can't be sure. At any rate, he's not crazy, and certain things made me think he might be disposed to aid us. But if he should, he'd be in danger, too, and——"

"Hey, you white folks down dar! How you lak shovelin' dirt, huh? Das a po'ful big mountain you alls has got ter underminerate."

They looked up. Over the top of the excavation the round, black face of the negro who had been the topic of their talk and thoughts, was looking down at them with a broad grin that exposed a double row of gleaming white teeth.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CONDEMNED TO THE MINES.

"I should say it is," rejoined Tom heartily, returning the fellow's good natured smile, "the New York subway was a child's game to it."

"Das right. Dis gwine ter be reg'lar scrubway ef it don' turn out ter be a graveyard."

"Where are Mr. Stapleton and Ingalls?"

"Roun' t'other side ob dis hill. I seen 'em frum up above. What' you all figger de matter wid dem?"

"Why, I think that their minds have been turned by this gold hunt, Rufus. They're crazy."

The negro laughed aloud.

"Das jus whar you all is puffickly right. Dey's as crazy as two pertater bugs wid de prickly heat. But Lawd bress you, you can't tell dem so. No sah! Dey thinks dat ebberybody else am nutty but themselves. Dat's dere collusion."

"So we discovered."

"Wa'al, dey ain't no manner on ob use argyfyin' wid such folks."

"No. The only thing is to agree with them," said Tom with a sigh, but he was glad to see that the black appeared to be friendly.

"Ah specs dat work agrees with dem better dan it does wid you alls, howsomever," said the grinning negro, showing all his teeth in appreciation of his own joke.

"Naturally," said Jack, "it's not what we'd choose, you can be sure, even were there gold down here, which I'm quite sure there isn't."

"Don' you go fo' to tell eiber ob dem dat," cried the negro. "Dey liable as not to rile up an' polish you off. Dey tink dat befo' long we all gwine ter be

millionaires."

"I'd hate to have to wait till that event comes off," said Tom with feeling.

"Rufus," burst out Jack, "we'll die if we have to stay here. We know, too, that they don't mean to let us leave."

"Dem's de truest words you ebber spoke," said Rufus with conviction. "Dey's so crazy dat dey tinks dat eberybody dat comes near dem is tryin' ter steal dere secret. As sho' as dey catch you tryin' to sneak off, dey plug you sho' as shootin'."

"Do they keep watch all night?" asked Tom.

"Dey neber misses. Yo' see, dey tink dat maybe in de night time somebody come sneakin' up here from Nome or Dawson maybe, and steal de gold what ain't dar."

"Are you ever on watch?"

"Ebery night. Here's de rule. Marse Stapleton he watches till 'bout midnight. Den he 'waken Marse Ingalls. He watch few hours. Den dey kick me on de cocoanut an' ah watches till it am time to git de breakfuss. Yes, sah, dat am de style each night."

"Rufus, are you our friend?" asked Tom bluntly.

"Ah sho' am. Yo' all am po'ful nice young gemmen an' ah hates ter see you in dis yar fixadicament."

"Then you are willing to help us escape?"

"H-e-e-e-e-e-m, dat am a po'ful dangerous obfustertakin'."

"We know it, but we count on your cleverness and good will."

Rufus grinned.

"Oh, ah's a clebber niggah, all right, ah is."

"We know it. That's why we determined to throw ourselves on your good nature and friendliness."

"Ye-e-e-ah! Ah spec's ah kin help you all, too. But see hyah, 'twont no ways do fer yo' and me ter seem too chummy. Ef we do, dey spec's right off dat dar am a

pusson ob cullah in de woodpile. Ah'll act ugly toward you and spress de idee dat yo am no bettah dan po' low-down white trash. Den dey neber tink what big idee circumambulate our mind."

"That's a good plan," cried Tom heartily to their dusky ally. "Why not put it into execution to-night? My brother and I are in a hurry to get back to our friends. Two of them are sick."

"Ah dat so? Well, what you alls gib me if ah helps yo' in dis breakin' ob de jail?"

"I have ten dollars in my pocket. How much have you, Jack?"

"I have five-fifty," responded Jack.

"Golly gumption! Das mo' real money dan ah've seen fo' many a moon," grinned the negro. "Dey all de time talk ob millions an' plum fo'git ter pay me any wages."

"Well, that fifteen-fifty is yours if you aid us, Rufus. Will you do it?"

"Will ah do it? Kin a duck swim?" inquired Rufus with scorn. "Now when ah'm on duty as sentinel to-night," went on the negro, delighted to have an opportunity to show his skill in strategy, "yo' alls jes' sneak up behin' me and knock mah head in."

"Hold on! Not quite as bad as that!" exclaimed Jack.

"Well, ah don' mean ter knock all mah head in," modified Rufus, "jes a part ob it. Den yo' tie mah han's, shove yo rifles down mah throat, and leab me dah. Das a fine plan!"

"It certainly is. We'll put it into execution to-night," declared Tom delightedly.

Rufus' eyes shone with excitement.

"An'-an' ah tell you' what ah do," he cried. "Ah persuade dem two crazy loons dat de right ting to do wid yo' am to shoot yo' on de spot; dat'll show 'em dat I ain't got no use fo' you."

"Wait a minute," cried Jack. "Don't do that, they might take you at your word and——"

"Das so—das so. Well, den ah persuade dem dat de right ting ter do am ter bang you ober de head wid a shobel."

"No, that would be just as bad," laughed Tom. "I tell you, Rufus, when you come on watch we'll just sneak out, tie and gag you, and then you leave the rest to us."

"Das all right," grinned the negro. "Yo' smart pair ob boys an' kin fix tings all right. In de meantime, ah acts fearful mean to yo' all. Guess ah better be goin' now. Dey might come snoopin' round', and it wouldn't do fer ter catch us in confabulation. No sah!"

He shuffled hastily off and the boys exchanged delighted glances. Just when things looked blackest, it began to appear as if there were a chance, and a good one, too, of their escaping from the grip of the two lunatics.

"Well, it all goes to show that one never knows from what quarter aid is going to come," said Tom as he and Jack fell to on their work. "That black negro, ugly as he is, appears more beautiful to me right now than an angel."

"Hush! here come those two crazy gold diggers back again," interrupted Jack, as footsteps crunched over the gravel above the excavation.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE GRASP OF CIRCUMSTANCE.

"Hard at work, eh?" asked Stapleton, as he looked over the edge of the hole.

"Yes, we're in a hurry to get to that gold," rejoined Tom cheerfully.

"That's right. That's the spirit to show," exclaimed Ingalls in a way that for him was quite hearty.

"How soon do you think we'll strike it?" asked Jack.

"In a few days sure. You're not getting impatient?"

"No, but when a fellow feels he's right close to a fortune, he can't help being anxious to close his fists on it as quickly as possible," said Tom.

"Well, you might as well knock off now," said Stapleton. "We'll have a bite of lunch and then turn in."

The boys came out of the pit, and you may be sure that they did not display much reluctance in doing so. They followed Stapleton and his partner up to the cave, where Rufus had some hot tea brewed and the remains of the supper to furnish them with a snack. As the boys drank their tea, the negro looked at them scowlingly. His every action showed dislike and hatred of the boys. He played his part to perfection, yet never made the mistake of overacting it.

After their lunch the boys declared that they felt so sleepy that they could slumber like logs till morning. They were shown a place to lay their blankets by Rufus, who grumbled at having to wait on them, to the huge delight of Stapleton and his partner.

"But we must be up early," said Stapleton, "the rising sun must find us out with our picks and shovels."

"Oh, we'll be on the job," declared Tom heartily. "With that gold so near to hand it'll be all we can do to keep from dreaming about it all night."

"Well, you did a hard day's work to-day," observed Ingalls; "if you keep that up

we'll have no cause for complaint."

The boys noticed that the sleeping place assigned to them was in the rear of the cavern. The significance of this did not escape them. The men were seemingly no longer suspicious of them, but they were taking no chances. Before they retired, Stapleton and Ingalls took a survey from the door of the cave with their spyglass. While they were doing this, Rufus passed swiftly by the boys and dropped a whispered message.

"Yo' mus' try it to-night when I am in de watch. Ah'll be lookin' for yo'."

As he spoke the two men came back into the cavern and began to dispose their sleeping things. While Stapleton took his place on watch, Ingalls and Rufus laid down and were soon off into slumberland. Strange to say the boys, too, slept although their feelings were wrought up almost to the snapping point. They did not wake till they heard Ingalls arousing Rufus with a kick.

"Get up you lazy, black roustabout. It's time to go on watch."

"Wha's de mattah?" yawned out Rufus sleepily.

"Hush! Don't make so much noise. You'll wake the boys."

"Sho'! who cares fo' dem? Why don' dey go watch same as de res' ob us? Wha fo' dey lowed ter sleep sixty-leben weeks while we alls don' git no sleep at all?"

Rufus fairly roared the words out, so anxious was he that the boys should not fail to wake up, although, had he known it, they were wide awake and trembling with the tension of waiting till the decisive moment arrived.

Rufus grumblingly took up his watch while Ingalls rolled himself in his blankets. Tom rolled over on his side so that he was facing Jack.

"All ready, Jack?"

"Sure. Are you?"

"Yes, but we must wait till they are sound asleep. The racket that nigger made may have awakened Stapleton."

"Well, don't go to sleep again while we are waiting."

"Not likely. I was never more wide awake in my life."

"Same here. I can hardly wait till the moment comes."

Although it was early morning after the brief Alaskan night, still it was almost quite dark in the cave, which made the boys think that it must be overcast outside. However, this was so much the better for their plans, and they lay without stirring till the regular breathing of Ingalls and the steady continued snoring of his partner showed that both men were asleep.

But although the time had now arrived for them to make their escape, there was still an obstacle in their path. The cavern was so dark that it was hard to see where the men lay, and both boys knew that one touch of the foot against those sleeping forms and their plan would be doomed to disaster. In the event of awaking them, both men would be upon the two youths like tigers, and they might expect just as much mercy from the two crazed gold-diggers, who would surely think that the boys were sneaking off to carry their secret to the outside world. Cautiously they arose from their blankets, and recollecting where they had left their rifles they reached out for them, for without these weapons it would be impossible for them to make the long journey back to the Yukon and provide themselves with food.

This done, they began stepping out with the utmost delicacy. They did not dare to light a match, as this would have undoubtedly awakened the men who appeared to be restless sleepers. So they had to proceed in the dark. It was ticklish work. One false step and the men would be upon them. They stepped out like cats on ice, raising each foot high in the air as it was advanced.

Tom reached the entrance of the cavern in safety without having aroused either of the sleepers. Jack was not so lucky. His foot encountered Ingalls's body and the man muttered something in his sleep. For one dreadful instant Jack thought that the man was awake. His heart stood still and he fingered his rifle nervously.

But a minute later he knew that it had been a false alarm and speedily thereafter he joined his brother at the cave mouth. Silhouetted against the dark sky was the form of Rufus. Both boys' hearts gave a glad bound at the sight of him.

The negro said nothing, but wiggled his hand in front of his face as though to signify that he was glad to see them. Then beckoning to them mysteriously, he asked the entirely superfluous question:

"Am yo' hyah?"

Equally unnecessarily Tom made his response.

"We are both here, as you can see, Rufus."

"Gollyumption, ain't it as dark as de ten plagues ob Egyup? But dat am a good ting fo' yo' alls. De darker de better till yo' gits clar away."

"That's so. Well, here's your money, Rufus, and thank you. But how about tying you?"

"Gracious, ah plum forgot dat part ob de business! Hyah! Take dis rope and lace me up good an' tight. Don' min' mah feelin's. Ah'm durable."

The negro was trussed up hand and foot by the boys, who then pressed his hand, and with more murmured thanks to him they slipped away into the darkness. They had a general idea of the lay of the land and made off as fast as they could in the direction that Tom judged was the correct one. As they went, their hearts were filled with genuine thankfulness toward the black-skinned friend who had helped them out of a bad dilemma.

And now, as we shall not see Rufus or his masters again, we may as well take this opportunity of detailing their future careers.

Following the discovery that the boys had gone, leaving Rufus tied and gagged, the fury of the two men knew no bounds. Had they discovered the boys then, there is no question but they would have killed them. But although they ranged the woods they did not discover any trace of the two lads, and being eager to get back to their crazy task of undermining the mountain, they soon gave up the search.

They were hastened in this by their insane fears that the boys would communicate the secret of their camp to outsiders, and that a horde of gold-seekers would swoop down on Dead Man's Mine and rob them of their so-called rightful gains. Rufus had acted his part perfectly, and not for an instant did they suspect him. His groans and moans and imprecations upon the heads of the runaways left no room to doubt that he was even more affected by their escape than his masters.

"De scan'lous willians des crep' up behin' me and caught me de worses' wallop ober de ear dat you eber felt," he said. "Den dey knock me down an' tie me up de way yo' fin' me. Which way did dey go? Why, dat 'a way." And Rufus pointed in exactly the contrary direction to that in which the young runaways had gone.

Deeming it a useless task to carry the pursuit any further, the two men, as has been said, resumed their disordered operations on the mine. Day by day their insanity became more and more marked, till finally they hardly gave themselves time to eat or sleep in the belief that the boys would soon be back with a party of men to steal the mine.

They worked all day and finally all night, sleeping a few winks in the mine itself and having Rufus bring them scanty mouthfuls of food. It was a true tragedy of the far north that now began to draw toward a close.

Rufus pleaded with the two men, for whom he really cherished an affection, to listen to reason, but they were too far gone for that. Their every thought now was centered on the gold, which they were certain was close at hand. In the strength of their delirium they actually undermined a great part of the conical hill, a task that would have been thought almost impossible.

Then one morning the end came. Rufus went to the pit to beg the men, who had been working for twenty hours on a stretch, to leave off for a time and get a little rest. He found them lying in the excavation side by side, each with a shovel in his hand, just as he had dropped. Rufus gave them as fitting a burial as he could, and then, as many a man has done before, he uttered a deep curse against gold, the love of which was the infernal cause of all the trouble. Then making up his few possessions into a bundle, he made his way out to the settlements with his strange story. And so ended two careers which might have been useful and dignified had it not been for the lure of gold that ensnares so many men and breaks so many promising lives. Jim Stapleton and Seth Ingalls were not the first men to yield up their lives at the behest of the demon of gold-seeking, and the most pathetic part of their story is that it is exactly true as related in this volume. The author heard it while in the Yukon some years ago, along with many other tales of the same sort.

As for the boys, they endured many hardships and not a few perils on their way back to the *Yukon Rover*. But in due course, thin, half-famished and footsore they reached the craft. With what a warm welcome they were received may be readily imagined. They found Mr. Dacre quite recovered and Sandy as chipper as ever.

The days that ensued were filled with hunting, fishing and long tramps along the trap-line, till every one of the lads was muscled like an athlete and brown as a berry.

One late August morning the first breath of the northern winter came down upon them. The boys hailed it with delight, for they knew then that the real business of their strange voyage on the Yukon was about to begin. With winter would come the trapping season and the long-awaited silver foxes. The boys looked forward eagerly to the time when they could glide with snowshoes through the frozen woods on their visits to the traps.

But they little knew what the winter held in store for them. It was not to be all sport and jollity. When the iron hand of the frost king closes on the far northland, the time has arrived when men and boys are tried on no common anvil to see of what metal they be. Ahead of the lads lay many strange experiences and perils in the frozen wilds. Those who care to read of their adventurous winter in the Yukon country may do so in the next volume of this series, entitled THE BUNGALOW BOYS "NORTH OF FIFTY-THREE."

THE END.

Transcriber's Note:

Archaic and inconsistent punctuation, syntax, and spelling have been retained.

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