

THE CLUE AT SKELETON ROCKS



HUGH LLOYD

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Title: The Clue at Skeleton Rocks

Date of first publication: 1932

Author: Percy Keese Fitzhugh [Hugh Lloyd] (September 7, 1876 – July 5, 1950)

Date first posted: Nov. 11, 2016

Date last updated: Nov. 11, 2016

Faded Page eBook #20161109

This eBook was produced by: Dave Morgan, Stephen Hutcheson & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpcanada.net>

THE CLUE AT SKELETON ROCKS



HUGH LLOYD

A HAL KEEN MYSTERY STORY

THE CLUE AT SKELETON ROCKS

BY

HUGH LLOYD

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GROSSET & DUNLAP

PUBLISHERS : : NEW YORK

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THE CLUE AT SKELETON ROCKS

CHAPTER I ABOARD THE “CACTUS”

Out of the thin mist they rose, gaunt and spectral. In the last rays, of a feeble sunset the green, slimy surface of the rocks still glistened from their recent emergence out of the sea. It was ebb tide and an hour of triumph at the reef—the hour of revelation, for here it was that the mighty ocean yielded her driftage sooner or later. And on this ominously still spring evening it was the wrecked schooner, *Sister Ann*, whose bones were now laid bare on that sea-swept graveyard.

The fated ship rested at an angle which brought her port side under water. Forlorn and forsaken, she seemed to quiver as each onslaught of the sea swept past her and dashed itself into a silver foam upon the reef. Suddenly two gulls rose out of her tattered rigging and, screaming noisily, flew in a straight line to the lighthouse, whose concrete structure emerged from its rocky base and towered against the gray sky not a half-mile distant.

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Hal looked over the port rail of the lighthouse tender, *Cactus*, and glanced thoughtfully at the wrecked schooner lying against

the reef. Suddenly his deep blue eyes traveled swiftly past the partly submerged rocks and rested on the lighthouse.

“Did you say that this *Sister Ann* was wrecked here on a clear, calm night and so close to the light?” he asked without turning his head.

Hal’s uncle, Denis Keen, was standing just behind him. So also was the skipper of the lighthouse tender, Captain Dell, who was at the moment thoughtfully puffing on a corncob pipe.

“My report read that way, Hal,” said Denis. “That’s why I’ve been sent here; that is, it’s partly the reason.” He was silent for a moment, then added: “So far, Captain Dell has been able to confirm all about the weather that night.”

3

“Two nights ago, wasn’t it?” Hal asked without having taken his glance from the silent lighthouse.

“Two nights ago, so ’twas,” said the captain, waving his pipe eloquently. “A calm night an’ as smooth a sea as I’ve seen in these waters fer twenty year. Fur as the boss could find out the light wuz a’right. But then it might o’ been late at night when folks were sleepin’ an’ no boats a-passin’.”

“Your boss is the Service representative down in Portsmouth, isn’t he, Captain Dell?” asked Denis politely.

“That’s him, Mr. Keen, sir,” the captain answered smiling. “A just an’ conscientious man he is too. Allus aimin’ ter keep the lighthouse service up ter snuff an’ yer can’t blame him fer bein’ fussy; it’s his job. Just let a light be out anywheres ’long this coast an’ if he ain’t a-knowin’ ’bout it no longer than

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ten minutes afterward, there's somethin' wrong in Denmark. But that night the *Sister Ann* was wrecked, everything was reported ship-shape in Portsmouth. Barrowe says he wuz at his post like I told you. Why, when the folks in Rocky Cliff went to bed they said they never saw the light burnin' so fine an' bright. That's why it's a mystery."

"Then it's a mystery in more ways than one, Captain Dell," said Denis Keen edging up to the rail beside his nephew and glancing idly down upon the dancing waves. "The *Sister Ann*, so the Service in Washington suspects, was none other than the old smuggling vessel, *Isle of Tortuga*. She carried opium—ever hear about her?"

"Nope," said Captain Dell shaking his gray head vehemently, "I never heerd tell o' her. Who was her master, eh?"

"Captain Bill Doak—a scamp and a scoundrel," said Denis Keen emphatically.

"Ain't never heerd tell o' him neither," said the skipper placidly.

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"I've been unfortunate in hearing too much about him and yet never seeing him. I've been itching to get him for the government for these past ten years. He's as much a mystery as this poor *Sister Ann* out there. We've never been able to get hold of a good description of him even. Elusive as a fox. He's never been tied up with an honest job in his life, I guess. Doak's name is synonymous with shady transactions always. So if this *Sister Ann* turns out to be the old *Isle of Tortuga*, then Captain Bill Doak was master."

“Wa’al, in that case yer huntin’ fer him would be over, Mr. Keen,” said the captain decisively. “All hands were lost, fur as I’ve heerd. Yer Captain Doak must be swappin’ shady jobs with ole Davey Jones by now, eh?”

“Looks that way,” Denis answered, staring across at the wreck. “What did Barrowe say about it, anyway?”

“The talk is that Barrowe says he didn’ see nothin’ nor hear nothin’ unusual that night. He just acted dazed sorta, the boss gave out. But that wouldn’ be outa the ord’n’ry considerin’ that Barrowe’s partner, Bill Hollins, committed suicide that same night. When Barrowe come down from the tower at sunrise next mornin’ he found a note from Hollins sayin’ that he wuz goin’ ter jump off the Rocks down ter Davey Jones’ locker. He said he wuz jes’ tired o’ livin’.”

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“No wonder this poor Barrowe acted dazed!” Denis Keen declared. “Who wouldn’t feel dazed! Imagine finding that your partner and sole companion was a suicide out in this dismal solitude!”

“My imagination quails at the very thought of it,” said Hal seriously. “Golly, I shouldn’t think poor old Barrowe would have much heart to tend the light again.”

“Wa’al, he felt pretty cut up, I reckon,” said the captain. “But like all lightkeepers, Barrowe tends the light jes’ like he eats an’ sleeps. It’s a habit. He’s a queer, quiet sorta duck, Barrowe is. Never wastes words an’ goes ’round like he’s allus broodin’ over somethin’. Thar’s talk that his father went out uv his head ’fore he died so mebbe thar’s a taint in the

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family. Anyways, Barrowe an' a brother wuz born an' brought up in a lighthouse off the Pacific Coast so another reason mebbe is that the lonesomeness o' lighthouse livin' is sorta bred in him, eh? One thing I do know, though, this brother o' Barrowe's wuz a bad one an' in a quarrel once he hit Barrowe on the skull an' cracked it. Barrowe said himself he wuz never the same after thet, 'cause he almos' died. But he wouldn' say a word agin' his brother 'ceptin' that the feller ran away ter sea an' it wuz good riddance ter him. Wa'al, Mr. Keen, sir, this ain't helpin' yer 'bout the *Sister Ann*, eh? We're a-goin' ter anchor here fer the night an' transfer supplies ter Skeleton Rocks fust thing in the mornin'. Yer kin go over ter the wreck now if yer want or wait till good light in the mornin'."

"Frankly, I prefer to look at her in the morning light. Think she'll stay fast?" Denis asked, nodding toward the wreck.

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"She'll stay fast till we git a storm," said the captain, while his twinkling blue eyes swept the heavens. "We'll have a calm till tomorrow noon, I reckon. This mist'll stay fer a while an' keep the storm away."

He chuckled and walked toward the pilot house. A moment later they could hear his deep, resonant voice calling out orders. The clang of the anchor could be heard aft and soon the sturdy craft slowed down and stopped.

"Well," said Denis Keen with a mild smile, "are you glad that you fell in with my plans to come up here aboard a lighthouse tender?"

"Gosh, Unk, I'm always glad when I fall in with your

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plans,” Hal answered, a radiant smile lighting his handsome, though freckled, countenance. He gave his well-shaped head a determined shake, which threw back into place an errant lock of red-curling hair. “They most always turn out bigger than you expect them too, but this time . . . well, there won’t be much to do after tomorrow morning when you find out whether or not this *Sister Ann* is the old schooner, *Isle of Tortuga*, huh?”

“I’ll have plenty to do, Hal. That’s certain no matter if the *Sister Ann* turns out to be just her poor wrecked self. My job is to hunt down Bill Doak dead or alive. The Department gets rather uneasy about him when they hear no news of him in a couple of months’ time. Opium keeps coming in from mysterious sources. But to get back to yourself, how about going over to the lighthouse in the morning when the supplies go? We won’t be at the wreck very long.”

“All right, Unk. That’s a suggestion. It would even be a better suggestion if you had added that I could stay my Easter vacation there. I’m out of ideas right now as to how I’m going to spend it.”

“Wa’al, if yer feel yer’d like ter stay at the Rocks, I reckon I kin speak fer my boss an’ tell yer ter stay!” said Captain Dell, rejoining them. “Yer’ll be doin’ the Service a big favor ’cause they like ter have somebuddy what kin help Barrowe out in case of emergency. Thar’s a half-wit young man by the name o’ Dillie Rawson what Hollins befriended since he wuz a lad. He ain’t got nobody, so he’ll stay on thar, I reckon. But he ain’t no help ter Barrowe much. Jes’ able ter do small chores an’ the like. The boss ain’t got a man avail’ble ter take pore Hollins’ place fer two weeks an’ the reserve man busted

one uv his legs jes' as he wuz gittin' started ter come up here. So if yer willin' ter stay, I'll send word ter the boss now an' it'll give him some peace till the steady man can come."

"Boy, that's great, Captain Dell!" Hal said, enthusiastically. "I'll be glad to do the Service a favor. Tell your boss in Portsmouth that I don't know a thing about lighthouses, but I'll do what I can!"

"Yer a bright young man," smiled the captain, "so yer'll learn frum Barrowe what's ter be done, quick enough. An' talkin' o' Barrowe, thar goes the light on right now."

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Hal grasped the rail, instinctively, and felt a queer sort of shiver run up and down his spine. That first flash of the great light at Skeleton Rocks had an almost awesome effect upon him and he couldn't tell why. The gray sky had not yet so much as a suggestion of a shadow anywhere—the western horizon was still glowing faintly so that the light's rays seemed not so very bright in contrast as yet, and still he had a stunned sort of feeling about the whole thing.

The reef, the mystery of the wrecked *Sister Ann*,—none of these things seemed to interest him. His whole mind was centered on the graceful concrete tower in the distance, and as the powerful light grew stronger in the waning day he found himself being drawn to it irresistibly. It was a hunch, of course, one of his frequent hunches, and what it meant he had no way of knowing. In point of fact, he was certain of only one thing, and that was that Skeleton Rocks did not attract him because of any pleasant aspect. Six miles from the nearest human habitation, it was wind-swept and wave-swept and

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fraught with the mystery of the sea. And then but a few days back, there was old Bill Hollins, a suicide in the rocky caverns of the ocean. Was it that tragedy that drew him?

He was to know the answer to that question in less than twenty-four hours.

CHAPTER II

TALKING OF SHARKS

Hal took a turn on the deck after supper alone. He stopped for a moment at the starboard rail and glanced idly over the dark, murmuring waves. In the anchor lights, he saw the black outline of a shark as it clipped the water. A damp, chill wind was blowing; winter seemed still to be stalking the sea. Dark and starless, the deep gloom of the night was but accentuated by the sweeping arc of light from Skeleton Rocks.

He shivered and, drawing his warm windbreaker about his neck, took another turn about the deck. Then he stepped inside the pilot house where his uncle and Captain Dell were smoking their pipes and talking. The little enclosure was blue with tobacco smoke.

Hal divested himself of his jacket and sat down.

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“I think I saw a shark just before,” he said to the captain. “Do they sort of turn sideways?”

“Sideways an’ upside down, young man,” said the captain.

“The waters here is full of ’em. As big a young man as you are, you’d only make a light cafeteria lunch fer one o’ them blue-noses. Reckon it’d take three six-footers like yourself ter fill ’em up. They git spells o’ hangin’ ’round the reef. That’s where it got its name. Lots of ’em sneaks around Skeleton Rocks too, Barrowe told one of the men.”

“Do you know Barrowe very well, Captain Dell?” Denis Keen

asked, more interested in the lightkeeper than in sharks.

“Nobuddy knows Barrowe, Mr. Keen, sir. They ain’t one uv us has heerd him say more’n three words at a time. Ole Bill Hollins used ter say he didn’ talk any more’n that ter him even. Like I say, he’s a queer duck.” 15

Hal stirred, searched in his back pocket for cigarettes, and getting one out lighted it leisurely.

“Did you ever have any experiences with sharks, Captain Dell?” he asked.

“A few, young man. Reckon thar ain’t a seaman what ain’t met up with ’em now an’ agin. I been lucky though—I’ve pulled in a few what give me a fight an’ never got a scratch. ’Twasn’t so with some o’ the pore devils I’ve seen lose a battle with ’em. Funny thing ’bout sharks though, they come back agin an’ agin ter the spot whar they got their man—yessir, I’ve seed it time an’ agin! Folks say that’s plain superstition, but I say no—I’ve seed it.”

“Something like what they say about a murderer returning to the scene of his crime, eh?” Denis Keen asked, interested.

“Gosh,” Hal said, incredulous, “but how could you tell it’s the same shark? They all seem to look alike to me. Not that I’ve seen so many, just one that I can remember.” He laughed. “The pictures of them all look alike anyway.” 16

“Wa’al, they don’t look alike, young man, not by a jugful! They’re as different as human bein’s. Now take you an’ yer uncle here. Yer both six footers an’ yer both look a pow’ful lot

alike till it comes ter yore hair. Mr. Keen's is sandy an' straight, an' yore's . . .”

“Pray, say no more, kind sir,” Hal said mockingly. “I know what everybody says about my hair and it's too much—too much hair and too much comment about it. So defer your opinion, Captain Dell, to some time when I'm not around. Just now I'd rather hear about how you identify sharks from the human kind. Do some have straight hair like Unk's and others have wool like mine?”

“Hal, for heaven's sake, let Captain Dell have a chance to explain!” Denis Keen exclaimed, trying hard to frown.

Captain Dell, being a genial soul, enjoyed the situation immensely. It was a pleasant innovation having guests aboard the plodding old *Cactus*, particularly the distinguished Denis Keen, whose membership was valued highly by the Secret Service Department in Washington. And because the captain felt himself a member of the government family also, there had sprung up between the two a delightful comradery.

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“Wa'al now,” said he at length, “thar ain't no wonder 'bout tellin' sharks apart. Fer one thing, thar's different kinds, big fellers an' little ones, but none of 'em looks like its brother, I don't care even ef it's the same size. Thar's allus a spot or somethin' ter make 'em different.”

“In other words, Captain, they're all sisters under the skin and that's about all, eh?” Denis Keen asked with a chuckle.

“I reckon that *is* about all, sir,” the captain answered.

Hal blew out a cloud of smoke and watched it circle above his head before he spoke.

“Gosh,” he said seriously. “I only hope I’m able to recognize the shark that battles me if I happen to meet him a second time.”

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Curiously enough, Hal did that very thing.

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CHAPTER III

THE SIREN

The piercing blast of a fog-horn woke Hal and his uncle a little past midnight. They sat up in their berths, bewildered. Suddenly, however, the flash of a light past the porthole helped to clear their sleep-ridden minds.

“It’s from Skeleton Rocks, Unk. There must be quite a mist gathering, huh?”

“Must be,” Denis Keen agreed, unable to stifle a long and audible yawn. And as the fog-horn pierced the ocean silence once more, he started. “Heavens! That thing’s enough to waken the dead.”

“Guess that’s what it’s intended for.” Hal yawned then too, and pulling his lanky legs out from under the covers, he set his feet down on the floor. “As long as I’m awake, I’ll go out and see how thick it is,” he added, reaching for his shoes and socks. “Want to come, Unk?”

20

Denis Keen sighed and slid down again under his warm covers.

“Thank heavens, my curiosity doesn’t carry me to such limits,” he murmured out of his soft pillow. “No, Hal, I’ve no desire to leave this nice warm bunk and get chilled to the bone on that cold deck. I can hear that pesky fog-horn only too well right here. Also, I believe it wouldn’t be blowing if the mist wasn’t thick—I don’t have to go out on deck to see something my own

common sense can tell me right here where I'm warm and comfortable!" He chuckled softly.

"You lazy bird!" Hal said, making a playful attempt at throwing his pillow into his uncle's bunk. "Don't you s'pose I realize the horn wouldn't be blowing if the mist wasn't thick!" He grinned good-naturedly. "What I really want to see is the thick mist—see what it feels like way up here at the edge of things. Boy, I've never seen a really good fog on the ocean before and I don't want to miss this one. I'm glad the horn did wake me up."

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"I'm not," Denis Keen said whimsically. "Besides, an ocean fog depresses me no end, and I'd rather close my eyes to it any night. So pace the chill deck alone, nephew of mine, and scamper out of here quick before you get me so wide awake that I won't be able to get to sleep before morning."

Hal looked back over his broad shoulder with an affectionate twinkle in his eyes. This uncle of his was the best companion a fellow would want, he was thinking. They seemed to understand each other perfectly, he and this boyish brother of his dead father.

"Then you're going to get up and have a turn in the mist with me, Unk, huh?" Hal laughed.

"Yes," the other said with a mock sigh, "you've known all along that you'd force me to do it. I'm twenty years older than you are, I must remind you, Hal, yet you expect me to act your own age. I really ought to get my eight hours tonight—really! Instead . . . oh, well, hand me my shoes! I've an idea the

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floor's none too cozy."

Hal handed him the shoes, laughing.

"As a matter of fact, this floor's as cold as a shark's heart, and it's said that that's the coldest thing extant."

"Talking about sharks," Denis Keen said, rising with a shivering motion throughout his slim and well-preserved physique, "makes me think about this crazy notion of yours to spend a perfectly good Easter vacation out there at that lonely lighthouse. Whatever possessed you to tell Captain Dell you would do it!"

"Don't ask me, Unk!" Hal said gaily. He reached toward a chair and whisking his windbreaker from it, drew it on over his head. "The idea just popped into my little old bean, that's all. I just had a hunch that Skeleton Rocks would have the desired effect."

"What effect is that?" His uncle was struggling with a knotted shoelace.

23

"Any effect you can think of," Hal answered whimsically. "I'm not particular which. As Shakespeare would have said, 'The Effect's the thing'!"

"If I didn't know you as I do, I'd think you were out of your head, Hal. As it is, you may be suffering from some hallucination. In any case, Skeleton Rocks seems to have appealed to you, eh?"

"That's just it, Unk. Speaking seriously, it isn't just any

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crazy idea of mine this time. I want to go there to see just what it is in these lonely, wave-swept lighthouses that can keep Barrowe and his kind, isolated like they are from all mankind, year in and year out. And by that same token, I want to see what it was that forced that poor old Bill Hollins to suicide. There must have been something stronger than himself! Have you stopped to figure that the government treats her lighthouse men pretty fine? After all the years Bill Hollins was in the Service, he must have had enough to feel secure and retire if he'd wanted to. In any case, he didn't *have* to stay at Skeleton Rocks if he didn't want to. What made him prefer suicide in that cold, friendless ocean to a nice, warm berth on land?"

"Hal, you're positively hopeless! From what Captain Dell told me, Hollins was a trifle eccentric just like Barrowe. Perhaps his eccentricity just took that form, that's all. Why all this pother about a man who led a colorless life and who died of his own volition?"

"A theory of mine, Unk," said Hal shrugging his stalwart shoulders. "Ever since I can remember I've heard people talk about the mystery and fascination of the sea. Now that I've got the chance—now that I'm right on the scene, I want to see what's in it."

"You can do that just by standing out on deck. There's fish, fog and storm and I may add, an occasional shark in these waters. What more do you want to see?"

"The things that landsmen never see—the things that Barrowe and Hollins have been seeing all these years. It isn't so much what Hollins did, Unk . . . oh, if it comes down to

it, I really can't say why I want to stay here a week or two. I simply want to."

Denis Keen, fully dressed and amply protected against the damp cold on deck, walked to his nephew standing at the door, and put his arm about his shoulders fraternally.

"Don't let me string you any longer, Hal. Whatever your reason is for wanting to stay here, it's a good one. There's romance in the sea and a chap of your age is bound to feel it. I dare say that two weeks at Skeleton Rocks will be a whole lot better than knocking around New York your whole Easter vacation. You'll get some rest and fine air up here. Your mother will be glad to hear you've stayed on. Well, you're wanting to get out in that pesky mist, so come on."

They could see but a few feet from the rail; the mist all but enclosed the sturdy tender. The light from the Rocks, however, still seemed to penetrate that atmospheric shroud, and now and again the two deck-strollers were forced to put their hands against their ears to shut out the piercing blasts of the fog-horn.

26

"It's so gloomy and spooky, it's fascinating, don't you think so, Unk?" Hal said, his hands deep in his pockets as he puffed determinedly on a cigarette.

"Nothing is fascinating to me when it causes my ear-drums to feel as if someone had been pummeling my head for hours," answered Denis Keen quizzically. He waved his pipe with a dramatic flourish. "To answer your question though—I'm not fascinated with the thought of the gloom and the spookiness of

the mist. I'm too old and too practical and too unromantic to be captivated by that angle of it! You ought to realize that, Hal. My reaction to this whole thing is that God's in his heaven, and Barrowe's right on the job at Skeleton Rocks! That's fascinating enough for me."

Hal laughed and they sauntered arm in arm toward the port rail. There they stopped and, resting their elbows on the cold brass rail, stared out into the mist and darkness. For a moment there was no sound of the fog-horn—nothing but the swish of the waves as they lapped against the hull, and the deep silence of the ocean.

27

There was a light in the pilot house; the first mate was on watch, and Hal had noticed when he and his uncle had passed by that the man was preoccupied with a book. Both the light and the man were just about visible from where the watchers stood—everything else aboard the tender was obscured by the mist.

Hal glanced idly down at the scupper and fixed his eyes upon a piece of tin-foil that was floating slowly through it atop a trickling stream. Suddenly the thick lock of errant red hair, that bane of his life, blew down over his forehead, and just as suddenly he tossed it back into place with a violent shake of his head.

"Breeze must be stirring, Unk," he observed, unconscious of his whispered tones. "Anyway, I heard something stirring."

28

"I felt it too," Denis agreed in a barely audible voice. "Still, I

did hear something else; it wasn't the water either! Yet again it *did* sound like water only . . .”

“Sh! I think I heard something then, Unk. A splash, splash sort of . . . I got it! It's a boat somewhere near us.” Hal's voice was so low, it sounded ghostly.

Denis tugged at his arm, indicating complete silence. For a full minute they stood together and listened and were shortly rewarded by the unmistakable sounds of oars. A small boat was passing near them; there wasn't the slightest doubt about it.

At that moment, the light from the Rocks swept across the *Cactus*, lighting up in its great range a considerable portion of that darkened area northeast of the tender, and flashing on to the reef. That whole arc of radiant light had been made in not more than three-tenths of a second, and yet there was time enough for both Hal and his uncle to see a man in a row-boat illumined quite vividly against the dark water.

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His sturdy arms were at the oars, directing the small craft with an almost ferocious intensity straight toward the wreck of the schooner, *Sister Ann*. And singularly enough, as the piercing light swept over him, he crouched instantly in the bottom of the boat with all the agility of a fleeing feline.

Darkness obliterated both man and boat before Hal could utter a sound. The light had completed its arc and there would be an eclipse of two seconds before it again swung out over the murmuring sea lanes.

Hal and Denis Keen waited for its coming in breathless silence.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE LIGHT

Three times the light made its arc, and three times did Denis Keen and Hal watch with tense expectancy as the man dropped forward in his boat and out of its searching glare. But as the light swept round again, they saw that the boatman had quickly and skilfully maneuvered his small craft out of its direct range and was approaching the wrecked schooner from the far end of the reef.

“He doesn’t want to be seen, Unk!” Hal murmured at last.

Irrelevantly, Denis Keen remarked, “The breeze put that mist to flight. It’s dissipated in the little time we’ve been standing here. Thank goodness, well hear no more of that horn.”

“Unk, what do you suppose that bird wants at that wreck, and at this time of night?” Hal asked. And catching his uncle’s studied expression, he added: “Does the fact that the mist has passed really interest you so much or did you just mention it so’s you could think a little longer about the bird in the boat?”

31

“Hal, you’re positively uncanny the way you read my mind and guess my motives! Of course I’m thinking of the man in the boat. And *look!* The chap is dropping anchor right at the *Sister Ann!*”

“What do you make of it, Unk?” Hal asked hoarsely.

“Sh! Don’t arouse anyone, Hal, for heaven’s sake! I’d like to observe this thing alone—for a while at least.”

Hal nodded and drew his windbreaker up about his neck. There was a sting in the wind and it whistled eerily up and down the deck. The first mate, deep in his book, seemed oblivious of what was going on outside the pilot house. And after all, it was his privilege to forget such things while the ship was riding at anchor.

“Flood tide,” Hal murmured more to himself than to his uncle.

32

Denis was about to say something when they both became aware of a light moving over the wreck. It was only for a few seconds, however, for the piercing shaft of light from the Rocks came sweeping across the wreck and after it was gone, the *Sister Ann* once more seemed dark and silent.

“That bird had a flashlight, Unk.”

“Of course.”

The words were so terse that for a few seconds Hal felt squelched. There was nothing to do but wait for the light from the Rocks each time it swung over the wrecked schooner. Even at those moments he could see nothing save the anchored row-boat rocking to and fro under the *Sister Ann*’s prow.

“Where do you suppose he’s gone?” Hal ventured to ask after what seemed to him an eternity of waiting.

“He disappeared around the pilot house,” came the

33

succinct reply. “It’s obvious that he knows where he’s going and what he wants to do.”

“Maybe a thief, huh?”

Denis Keen shrugged his shoulders.

“He could be most anything,” he answered, at length.

The light from the Rocks continued to make its sweeping journey over the black water and not for an instant did the watchers fail to follow it as it swept across the wreck. In point of fact, Hal found by his radium-dial watch that the mysterious boatman had been gone below decks just ten minutes before the gleam of his flashlight was visible again.

Denis Keen moved closer to his nephew but said nothing.

The light moved also, back around the pilot house, Hal imagined. It was a tense moment for him, somehow. He was puzzled by the man’s stealthy activities and awed by the dark sea murmuring constantly about them. Instinctively, he looked toward the lighthouse tower and saw, not without a profound thrill, the light shoot out of the window and over the water.

34

His uncle tugged at his coat sleeve attracting his attention to the wrecked *Sister Ann*. The light at that moment was sweeping across it, illumining the short, stocky figure of the boatman who was already standing in his rocking little craft, weighing anchor.

Just then a swell caused the boat to rise with it and in a flash, capsized it. The man was flung like a feather into the water.

Two seconds passed in which the reef was shrouded in darkness.

CHAPTER V

“MAN OVERBOARD”

“*Man overboard!*” Hal cried instantly. He had reached the pilot house by the time the light again swept over the darkened reef.

“The man’s struggling!” Denis Keen cried out to him. “*Hurry—everybody!*”

The crew seemed to appear out of nowhere. Sleepy-eyed, but mentally alert, men were already at a life-boat. The first mate and one of the crew were busy at the range-light and had trained it on the reef while Time seemed suspended. And in the midst of these activities stood Captain Dell in stockinged feet, trousers and undershirt, bellowing orders.

The whole area between the tender and the reef was ablaze with light, and with the faithful flashes from the Rocks, there was nothing over that dark, rocking surface which was not discernible from the port rail. Consequently, Hal saw immediately that the man in the water was struggling indeed and making frantic gestures for help.

36

On the rushing tide he had been swept toward the tender, and now threatened to be carried in the opposite direction, on to Skeleton Rocks. Also, he seemed not to have much strength left, for each succeeding gesture for help looked more feeble than the one before. Hal realized at once that the man was not a good swimmer, for he was wearing himself out by trying to fight against the tide. And it would still be a few seconds

before the life-boat was afloat and to the rescue.

Hal summed it up in a flash.

The boat would not ride with the tide until she was turned out and floated past the bow of the tender. That meant that the struggling man would be swept far past that point in the interval, and perhaps past the limit of his strength. He was already parallel with the prow of the *Cactus*. In two seconds a good strong swimmer could head him off. It was the only thing that could possibly save him.

37

Hal had kicked off his shoes and pulled off his windbreaker even as he thought of it. The next second he was poised at the bow and before Denis Keen could rush up and stay him, he had cleaved a rolling wave below.

He had gauged his dive perfectly for he came up several feet from the bow. The man, seeing him, took fresh courage and used all his remaining strength to fight the demon force that seemed determined to carry him on to certain death.

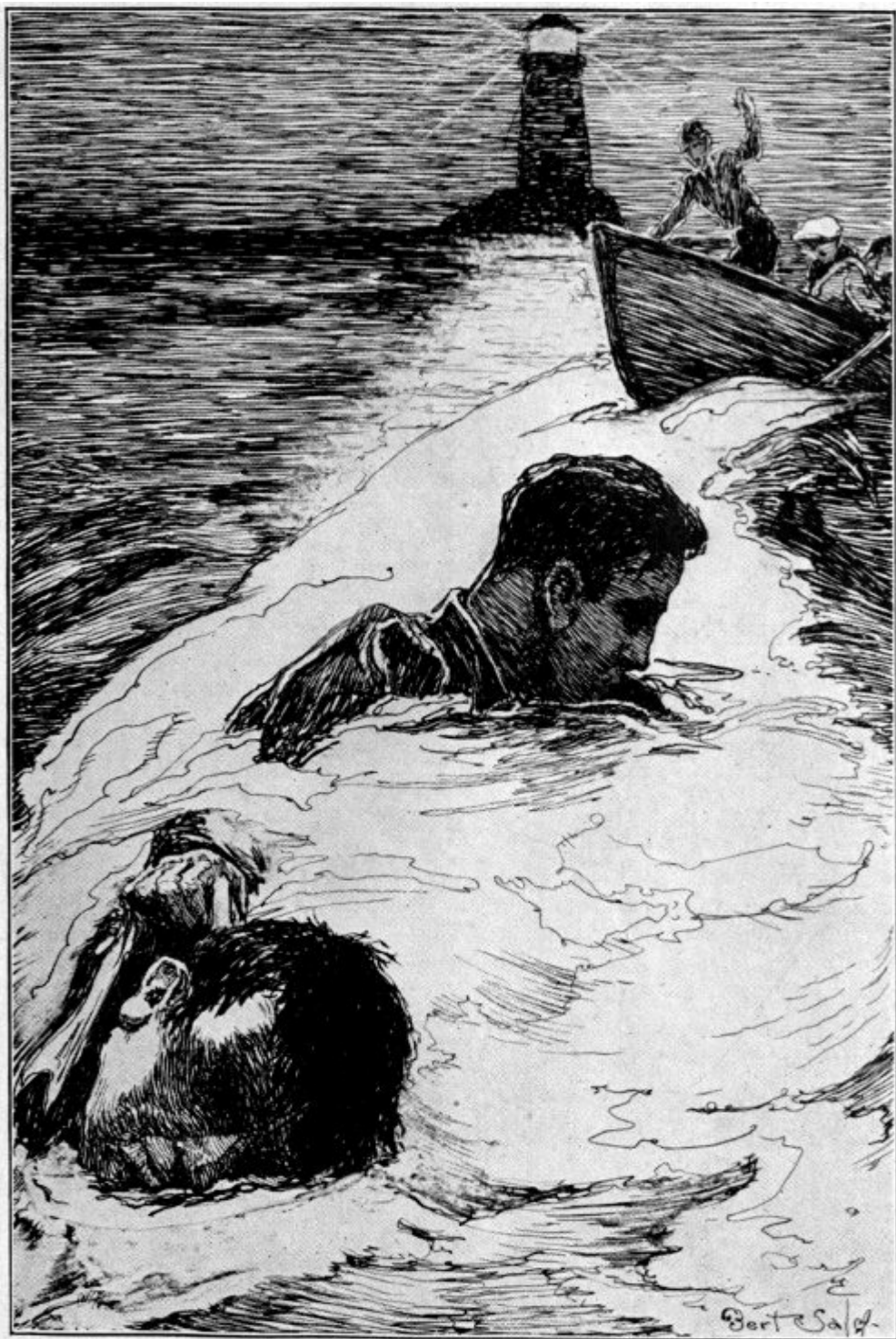
Hal waved a long muscular arm once to give him encouragement, then struck straight out. He purposely let the tide sweep him a few feet, then flung his slim, lithe body through each succeeding swell until his red curly head, vividly outlined in the range-light, came up soaking but triumphant, directly in the path of the man.

He noticed, not without a feeling of elation, that the boat was already launched and making good headway toward the bow of the tender. Satisfied, he dove into another swell and had but little struggle before he succeeded in grasping the

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drowning man's coat collar.

The real struggle was to come, however, for the few seconds following seemed an eternity in which Hal battled a stealthy undertow and valiantly resisted the relentless tide which threatened to sweep him and his semiconscious companion into an ocean grave. The men in the life-boat kept up a continuous din of shouting and their hearty cries of encouragement as they drew near, fell cheerfully upon his buzzing ears.



HAL STRUGGLED AGAINST A STEALTHY UNDERTOW.

Frontispiece

A half hour later, Hal, his uncle and Captain Dell were watching the man return to consciousness. Dry clothing and the warmth of clean woolen blankets soon gave to his swarthy cheeks some semblance of natural color. He stirred drowsily.

“He’ll be hisself ’fore long,” observed the captain softly. “Exposure’s what done it more’n anythin’. He didn’t have no water in his lungs ter amount ter anythin’—thanks ter Hal here.”

39

“No thanks to me, Captain Dell,” Hal protested modestly. “What could I have done for the poor chap without your men and your life-boat? Neither one of us would have had a chance of getting back to this tender without them. I realized that before I dove in to go after him. It was a case of heading him off before the tide swept him any further. Besides, I knew I’d have a rough go of it after I did head him off. Boy, it would have meant curtains for both of us if I’d tried to buck that devilish tide. I just had to be content and battle back on the undertow a few inches each time. Anyhow, they picked us up and here we are!”

“Here you are indeed!” Denis Keen echoed looking at his nephew admiringly. “I knew you’d succeed in keeping yourself and this poor chap here afloat till the boat got close enough, but I felt panicky more than once thinking about sharks.”

40

Hal laughed softly.

“I didn’t see any, so I didn’t think about them. Besides, I was too busy keeping my eye on this poor bird.” Suddenly his voice dropped to a whisper: “Look, he’s opening his eyes!”

They watched the man anxiously and saw his fluttering lids gradually open wide, revealing brown, startled eyes. He passed a brown hand over his face, then rose unsteadily on his right elbow. From one to the other his glance wandered, then rested on Hal’s handsome face, questioningly.

“Ye’re on the lighthouse tender *Cactus*, sir,” spoke up the captain. “That young man yer a-starin’ at is the feller what kept yer outa Davey Jones’ locker, believe *me*! He’s Hal Keen, fer yore information. I’m Cap’n Dell of this here tender.”

The man nodded politely, then turned his attention to Hal. He smiled vaguely and his full, mobile mouth expanded.

“Glad to know yuh, Keen,” he said in broad New-Yorkese. “I saw that red head o’ yourn pop over the bow of the tender an’ right away I felt better. Yuh sure held on to me coat collar. Well, some day I’ll do somethin’ for you, but it won’t be in the ocean I guess—I ain’t the swimmer what youse are! I gotta hand it to yuh.”

41

Hal waved away the compliment, giving due credit to those of the *Cactus* crew who had assisted in the rescue. Suddenly Denis Keen interposed and after introducing himself asked some questions: the man’s name, what he was doing aboard the wreck of the *Sister Ann*, and where he came from.

The man lay back on his pillow, a trifle disconcerted, Hal thought. For a moment the expression on his swarthy face was

sullen, but suddenly he looked up at his questioner and smiled that queer, vague smile.

“New York’s where I come from, Mr. Keen, sir,” he said respectfully enough, though still smiling. “Me name’s Danny—Danny Sears, and I’m an able seaman, shippin’ as second mate on me last voyage to Honduras. I come up from New York yesterday and got in Rocky Cliff village last night. I’m an old buddy of the lightkeeper at Skeleton Rocks. . . .”

42

“Who—*Barrowe*?” Denis Keen asked incisively.

Danny Sears ceased smiling for a moment and looked thoughtfully into space.

“Yeah—*Barrowe*,” he answered without glancing up. “I hired a boat at the village tuh take a trip over an’ see the old guy, an’ all of a suddint I see the wreck—I seen it in the light from the Rocks. So I just gets snoopy tuh see how bad she’s bein’ cut up at the reef an’ I climbs over her tuh look aroun’. You guys know what happened tuh me when I goes tuh git back in the dory.”

Denis Keen nodded absently.

“It’s quite a distance from Rocky Cliff village to Skeleton Rocks, Mr. Sears,” he said at length. “To undertake the trip at night and in a dory—your reason for wanting to see *Barrowe* under those conditions must have been urgent, indeed!”

43

Danny Sears nodded vehemently.

“I heard at the village when I got there that *Barrowe*’s buddy,

Hollins, was dead. So I thought I'd start out tonight an' keep him comp'ny instead o' going tomorrow like I figured to. That's how it was."

"I see." Denis Keen smiled and rose. "We'll be getting out of here so you can get some rest."

"An' termorrer mornin', Mr. Sears," said the captain, also rising, "yer kin continue yer journey ter see Barrowe. Yer kin go over safe an' sound in one o' the supply boats."

Mr. Sears smiled and thanked him, thanked them all, particularly Hal. His vague smile rested on that slim, red-headed giant and for a moment real gratitude gleamed in his brown eyes.

Hal spoke of it when he and his uncle were again alone in their cabin.

"He's a funny sort of bird, this Danny Sears," he was saying. "He seemed quite grateful though."

44

"Why, *though*?" queried his uncle.

"I hardly realized I was saying the word, Unk. As a matter of fact, I don't believe all that he said. Somehow I don't."

"Neither do I, Hal."

Hal wheeled around and faced his uncle.

"I half suspected it. For one thing, I noticed you didn't ask him why he ducked in his boat every time the light from the Rocks

hit him. That was suspicious in itself. He surely didn't act as if he wanted anyone on board this tender to see him. Why didn't you ask him about it?"

Denis was already stretched out in the luxurious warmth of his bunk.

"I didn't ask him because I knew he'd lie. That's reason enough, isn't it, Hal?"

"But . . ."

"But we knew when he was rowing toward the wreck that he didn't want to be seen, didn't we? Hal, Danny Sears had some very definite reason for wanting to get to the *Sister Ann*. I doubt very much that he was on his way to Skeleton Rocks."

45

"I had that feeling too, Unk. That smile of his . . . there's something wrong with that, smile. I'd give a whole lot to know just what it is."

Hal *did* give a whole lot to find out what was wrong with Danny Sears' smile. In point of fact, he risked his life to do so.

46

CHAPTER VI

GONE

Hal, lay in his bunk for some time afterward, watching and waiting with a sort of sleepy fascination for the regular flashes of light sweeping across the porthole. Too, he thought of the Rocks and of the man Barrowe, grieved no doubt by the tragic death of his companion, yet faithfully tending the great light up in the lonely tower.

Drowsily, his mind wandered to his rescue of the man, Danny Sears. It had been a tense period and he felt glad that he had been able to hold on until the life-boat came and picked them up. Happily, the incident had done no harm to him—rather it had had a surprisingly tonic effect, for the swim had been vigorous and the water icy cold.

He was wide awake again and felt as if he could get up and wait for the dawn. Coupled with this thought was a desire to go into Danny Sears' cabin and talk to him, and try and find out if possible the whole truth about the man's queer expedition to the wrecked *Sister Ann*. Eight bells pealed out forlornly, however, and he decided that it was an unseemly hour to catechise anyone, least of all a man who had almost drowned not three hours before.

47

Two hours later, he had reason to regret this decision and he determined in the future not to postpone acting upon any hunch no matter how impracticable it seemed at the time.

He had slept until six o'clock, dressed quietly so as not to

disturb his softly snoring relative and emerged upon the deck. There he met Captain Dell who was sauntering thoughtfully away from the pilot house.

“Morning, Captain,” Hal smiled.

Captain Dell smiled perfunctorily and nodded his gray head vehemently.

“Wish ter heaven we hadn’t picked up that there Danny Sears las’ night,” he mumbled. “Wish ter goodness yore uncle an’ you hadn’t laid eyes on the rascal when he was a-snoopin’ ’round the *Sister Ann*. Better ef he’d uv gone ter Davey Jones’ locker.”

48

“Why, Captain Dell!” Hal cried dismayed. “What’s the matter?”

“Matter enough, Mr. Hal,” the captain answered. “First thing I go on watch this mornin’ the mate reports ter me a dory’s gone—one of our best boats too.”

“*Gone? Gone where, Captain?*” Hal was plainly puzzled.

“I wish I knew, so I do.”

“Where on earth could it have disappeared? How?”

“Oh, there wa’n’t no ghost took it an’ it didn’t shake loose by any ghost’s hand nuther. Ef we knew whar this plaguy Danny Sears went to we’d know whar the dory is.”

“You mean Danny Sears isn’t on this boat—you mean he’s

gone?”

“*Jest* what I mean, young man,” the captain replied, wagging his gray head. “I went into his cabin first thing to see how he was. Well, that wasn’t a sign of him and his wet clothes what he’d insisted on keeping in the cabin with him to dry was gone too, so it looks mighty like he intended sneaking away from the first.”

49

“It sure does look that way,” Hal agreed, rubbing the palm of his hand back and forth across his shining hair.

“I don’t care about Danny Sears—plague take him,” the captain mumbled. “I’d just like to get my hands on that dory again, that’s all.” He strode away on his short sea-legs, grumbling.

Hal got back to the cabin in a few long strides. He burst open the door and startled his uncle into wakefulness.

“Well, Unk,” he shouted gaily, “you’ve got something to work on at the *Sister Ann*, do you know that?”

“No, I don’t!” Denis Keen answered with mock severity. His half-frown gave place to a faint smile. “What have I got to work on?”

50

“Danny Sears,” Hal replied with a significant wink. “And *boy, what work!*”

51

CHAPTER VII

DISCOVERIES

They set out for the wreck of the *Sister Ann* in one of the *Cactus* ' life-boats. A glaring sunrise had faded quickly in the early morning sky and left but a few streaks of pale, yellow light on the gray horizon. The water was calm, ominously so, for as far as the eye could see its green swaying surface was as smooth as glass.

“One has the feeling,” said Denis Keen as he scanned the water, “that there’s some sort of secret conference going on down in Davey Jones’ locker. Perhaps that’s where the bobbing whitecaps go to talk things over when we don’t see them around, eh, Captain Dell?”

“I wouldn’ be s’prised, Mr. Keen, sir,” the captain smiled. “They go somewhar, that’s a sure thing. Trouble is, it only means mischief, fer when they git outa conference, they go on a rampage an’ make things hum. That’s what’s a-goin’ ter happen ’tween now an’ ternight. Sun come up a-roarin’ an’ that spells trouble ’fore long.”

52

Hal laughed and shook his head with careless grace.

“Who cares about a storm! Not I, anyway. I’ll be as safe and as snug as a bug over there at Skeleton Rocks while Unk and you are tossing homeward on the briny deep.”

“Don’t be too sure that Captain Dell and myself will be tossing on the briny deep,” Denis argued with a sly glance at the

captain. “We may have escaped the worst of it by tonight. Don’t forget that we’ll be many miles from Skeleton Rocks by that time, Hal. You may be the one to be worried by the storm, even though you’ll be safe inside.”

“Better inside looking out, Unk,” Hal rejoined. “I won’t mind the storm for a starter—not a bit. It’ll be better than not having anything to look forward to. I was a little doubtful when I got thinking of spending my whole Easter vacation there; I was afraid of being bored to death. But now that the question of storms has come up—well, I realize that there’ll have to be at least a few storms while I’m there, so it cheers me up. I’ll have something in the way of excitement.”

53

“Sh!” his uncle said smiling. “Don’t talk of excitement, Hal. You may be inviting disaster.”

“What—out in that peaceful looking place!” Hal exclaimed, nodding toward the lighthouse. “Why, nothing exciting’s happened there in forty years, I bet. Anyhow, I bet there’s nothing thrilling happened since Barrowe’s been there.”

“What about Hollins?” his uncle queried.

“Suicide isn’t exciting,” Hal maintained. “It would have been more exciting to me if Hollins had died of indigestion or fell down the tower stairs and broken his neck.”

Denis Keen spread his capable looking hands deprecatingly.

54

“Now you can understand, Captain,” he said to the seaman, “that what I’ve told you about my nephew is true. He invites

trouble and when it doesn't come, he just goes looking for it. Usually he gets what he goes after."

Captain Dell emitted a hearty guffaw.

"He's jes' an adventurous young man, Mr. Keen, sir. Reckon we was all that way when we was his age, eh? But he needn't go lookin' fer trouble nor excitement at Skeleton Rocks 'cause he won't find it—no sirree! Barrowe ain't changed a whit since he was twenty-five. That's when fust he come ter the Rocks—he's been thar twenty year all told now an' I reckon one day's same's 'nother ter him. Like I told yer, he ain't much fer talkin', so if anythin's happened ever, he's kept it ter hisself."

"Then it's all settled that I don't get any excitement at Skeleton Rocks!" Hal said with a mock sadness in his eyes. "Good thing I didn't look for any. You better tell Mom to send me a few good books when you get back to Ramapo, New Jersey, Unk. I'll need something to make me sleep."

55

"I dare say you'll be able to get to sleep without the aid of a book tonight, Hal," said Denis. "There was little sleep for any of us last night and even less for you. No doubt the excitement of rescuing Sears kept you awake."

The mention of Sears' name brought their attention at once to the reef now lying very close to them. Just beyond was the wrecked schooner, *Sister Ann*, partly broken and mute in the gray morning light. Yet with all her wounds and her apparent helplessness, Hal was at once struck with her lack of appeal. He, for one, did not feel at all moved by her sad plight. Rather

did he experience a sort of contempt for the ill-fated schooner, which he could liken only to that loathing that wholesome, refined human beings have for sordid things.

And the *Sister Ann* did look sordid. One could not visualize her as ever having carried savory cargoes out of sunlit ports of the East and discharged them at the cool, sun-bright wharves of the West 'midst the hum and bustle of daylight activities. Rather did one feel in looking at the shabby, unpainted hull of the schooner, that her whole existence had been spent in transporting unsavory and illegal cargoes under cover of night, from the ports of the Orient to the underworld docks of the Occident. Stealth had been her watchword; stealth would be her death knell, for even then the great sea was silently and relentlessly drawing her down amongst the rocks which had wounded her.

56

A rope ladder dangled crazily from the starboard bow, swinging at intervals as the port side of the vessel settled farther and farther under water. Limited as his knowledge was of nautical matters, Hal realized that it was but a question of hours before the shabby *Sister Ann* would be gone to her final port.

Captain Dell confirmed this thought the next moment.

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“She won’t be here longer ’n sunset,” he said, wagging his head and sucking furiously on his corncob pipe. “Her keel’s grindin’ a-plenty between them rocks; I kin tell by the way she’s a-shiftn’. Wa’al, the quicker she gits it over with, the better.”

The man at the bow of the life-boat was now within reach of the rope ladder. They had made fast in a second, and while the sailors waited, Denis Keen, Hal and Captain Dell ascended the ladder in silence. A flock of gulls, startled by the trespassers, flew out of the tattered rigging, screaming and scolding.

The deck was littered with débris and the captain sniffed his displeasure.

“Proof enough what she was,” he said contemptuously.

58

“No up-an’-comin’ schooner could git this way jes’

’cause she hit the rocks—no up-an’-comin’ master’d leave her to bust up with her decks a-lookin’ like this either! She’s jes’ a miserable ole hull, fit fer a rotten dock whar she could rot with it. No sirree! This reef’s even too good fer her ter bust up on.”

Denis Keen nodded thoughtfully and smiled, but his attention was obviously on a cabin aft whose door stood ajar.

Instinctively he sauntered toward it, with Dell in his wake, while Hal loitered curiously at the starboard rail.

He gazed abstractedly at the two life-boats which the *Sister Ann* boasted and wondered why it was that they hadn’t been used on the night the schooner struck the reef. How, he asked himself, was it possible for a whole crew and captain to have been lost on a clear, calm night, particularly so close to a lighthouse? And to add to the mystery, he noticed several life-preservers lying in both boats. Surely, there was one at least among that ship’s company who had had time to avail himself of this safeguard against death in the open seas! But no, there had not been any such report. More than forty-eight hours had elapsed since the wreck and still there had not been one

survivor reported.

Hal shrugged his shoulders and proceeded to procure one of the life-preservers. Holding it out, he noted that the cover was shiny and new, and the letters spelling out *Sister Ann* were bold and outstanding from their recent printing.

59

He wasted no time in pondering over that, but quickly divested the preserver of its cover. He hadn't any real motive in doing so, but his curiosity was presently rewarded for he noticed immediately that the canvas-covered device bore the faded but still legible printing of another ship's name—that of the *Isle of Tortuga*.

Denis Keen and the captain emerged from the cabin aft just at that moment and Hal hailed them with a sonorous shout.

“*Unk!*” he called exultantly and held out the preserver. “You were right—and *how!* This thing proves that the *Sister Ann* was that old hag, *Isle of Tortuga*, huh?”

“Right you are, Hal,” Denis answered. He took the proffered device, gave it a perfunctory glance and handed it on to Captain Dell. Suddenly he looked up at his nephew. “Singular business this, Hal. Too bad you decided to stay on at the Rocks for you'd have followed an exciting trail on your Easter vacation if you had decided to come along with me. We looked in the crew's cabins—those that weren't under water, and we found that their belongings were all there undisturbed. In the captain's locker we found the door unlocked and open, just as the door of his cabin was. His clothes were just as he left them, but on the shelf there were marks in the dust as if a

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box had been standing there for some time and just lately had been removed. We found no evidences of such a box in his cabin, however.”

“What kind of a box, Unk?” Hal asked, interested.

“A square one, I fancy it must have been. Certainly not a very large one. That, of course, would not indicate anything extraordinary—I merely mentioned the box as missing, for it might be a clue if we knew what was in it.”

61

“What do you mean?”

Denis chuckled but there was no mirth in his eyes. They were deadly serious as they always were when he was baffled by some inexplicable happening such as this.

“I mean that Captain Dell and I also discovered that the log was missing,” he said quietly. “I remind myself of you when I say this, Hal, but it’s true nevertheless; I just have a hunch that that box has something to do with the missing log.”

Captain Dell, who was nothing if not a true seaman, had little sympathy with the ways of a secret service man at a time like this. He cared naught for clues nor mysteries—his sea dignity was outraged that a fellow seaman should not have kept his log where it was available in case of accident. And he said so in no mean terms.

“‘Sides,” he said in conclusion, “I s’pose the master of a hull like this can’t be expected ter act reg’lar. Jes’ a slip-slop like his schooner.” He stopped his harangue suddenly and glanced from one to the other of his listeners, thoughtfully.

62

“Even a slip-slop master’s got some notion of what his log means, eh? Mebbe he wa’n’t careless. Mebbe . . .”

Denis Keen nodded with understanding.

“Just what I think, Captain Dell,” he interposed. “I don’t think there’s been any case of negligence with the log at all. Whatever has become of it, it was done purposely, I feel certain. And whether the master of this schooner was that scoundrelly Doak or not, makes not one bit of difference. He was enough of a seaman to be faithful to his log whether he was faithful to anything else, I’m certain of that also. Wouldn’t he have jotted down all that happened concerning the wreck if he had had the time?”

Captain Dell affirmed this with a vehement nod.

“Jes’ from habit he’d a done it, Mr. Keen, sir. An’ I reckon he’d have hed time a-plenty ’fore this schooner lurched agin the rocks.”

63

“Then I dare say he jotted something down,” said Denis, more to himself than to his listeners. Suddenly he brought down his right fist against the palm of his left hand. “I *know* that that log could tell us much, particularly since we are sure that the *Sister Ann* is the old *Isle of Tortuga*. And that it is missing when the captain’s belongings are undisturbed . . .”

“Unk, I can’t see anything so mysterious in that—honestly, I can’t. Just a log . . .”

Denis Keen’s eyes were deep wells of purposed activity.

“*Just a log!*” he repeated patiently. “You don’t know the sea or you wouldn’t say that, Hal. And you don’t know the kind of a crew that usually ships with Captain Doak. For that matter, you don’t know Captain Bill Doak as my reports have permitted me to know of him. Bloodshed he’s known to have been guilty of, but the men whom he’s victimized fear him too much to bring him to justice. And so I don’t hesitate to say that a man like that would be hated by his crew, particularly the murderous lot that sail with him.”

“*Murderous?*” Hal asked. “Do you think . . .?”

“It all comes back to the missing log, Hal. Hate, suspicion, everything, Captain Doak would have recorded there. Then it’s quite likely, isn’t it, that the murderer would not leave such a record against himself if he tried to escape? It’s all theory, of course, and I wouldn’t have been able to build up this much of a case if it hadn’t been for one discovery.”

“What’s that, Unk?”

“One of the lockers was empty save for two things: a man’s scarf pin with the initials *D.S.* and a letter addressed to Mr. Daniel Sears in care of the Seaman’s Institute in New York City. We’ve heard of Sears before, I think, haven’t we, Hal?”

“I’ll tell the world we have, Unk!”

CHAPTER VIII

THE CAT COMES BACK?

There was a momentary silence in the life-boat as it weighed anchor and pulled away from the wrecked schooner. The sailors were busy at their task of righting the buoyant craft and the three investigators kept their eyes on several bundles of men's clothing piled neatly near the center of the boat. Duffel-bags and divers packages completed a collection which represented the entire possessions of the late crew and captain of the *Sister Ann*.

"It'll all help in identifying and checking up the men in this mystery ship," said Denis Keen. "It's our only chance of getting to the bottom of it."

"How about our friend, Danny Sears, Unk?" Hal inquired. "Isn't he at the real bottom of it?"

66

"He's concerned with the real bottom of it, that's certain. Checking up the identity of the rest of the crew will perhaps give us a better idea of what Sears' connection was with it. Meanwhile, there'll be a pretty thorough search for him. I'll start it and get on the trail myself before this day ends."

"And while you're having all the fun and excitement of being on the trail," Hal whispered to his uncle, "I'll be sitting over there in that wind-swept lighthouse, listening to what the wild waves are saying. Not so hot when you come to sift it right down, huh? You'll be getting all the thrills!" he added with a deep drawn sigh of regret.

Denis Keen's light blue eyes twinkled humorously.

“You’ve made your bed and you’ll lie in it at the lighthouse for two weeks,” he murmured. A soft chuckle escaped him. “Also you wanted to discover what it was that has kept Barrowe and poor Hollins chained to Skeleton Rocks all these years. If I quote you correctly, you wanted to see what it was that they saw . . . the mystery of the sea, etc., etc. You should certainly be able to get to the bottom of that in two weeks’ time. I know I’ll get to the bottom of this *Sister Ann* mystery in less than that or give it up for a bad job.”

67

“Then I’ll do the same, Unk,” Hal said with a good-natured smile, “only I’m hoping I won’t have to go to the bottom of the sea, mystery or no mystery. I guess I can discover all that’s to be discovered without getting wet or losing any sleep. So that’s comforting and it’s more than you can look forward to. Danny Sears seems to me to be the kind that will keep you awake nights, so I don’t envy you.”

“I don’t envy myself, Hal.” Denis Keen shrugged his shoulders and smiled. “But it’s all in the game and I like it. So do you, you rascal. You’re just jealous that you can’t go with me and trail Danny Sears, aren’t you?”

68

“Sure, I am,” Hal laughed. “Who wouldn’t be! But I can be a good sport—I’ve promised Captain Dell I’d go to the Rocks and stay there for two weeks and I’m going to do it, even if I fall asleep from sheer boredom each day!”

“That’s the stuff, Hal. I’ll wish you good luck and goodbye at the same time, for I see we’re almost under the nose of the

Cactus now. Now let me see—you'll want books and some heavy clothing, eh?"

"Yes, but aren't you coming over in the supply boat with me, Unk?"

"Can't, Hal—sorry. I have a half-dozen messages to send out from the *Cactus* right away, including one to your mother. The rest I'll have to stand by and wait for replies—they'll be from Washington. I've an idea they'll want me to take up the trail at once—right from Rocky Cliff village."

Hal nodded indifferently for his mind and attention were already centered on something else. It was a boat drifting rather aimlessly along on the tide toward the tender.

69

"Doesn't it look as if it's unoccupied?" he asked, after attracting the attention of the captain and his uncle to it.

They took turns in giving their opinion upon this important detail and those of the crew who were in the life-boat also scrutinized the bobbing boat without being able to give any definite answer to Hal's query.

"Wa'al, we'll find out in a jiffy soon's we get on deck," said Captain Dell. He turned to the crew. "Make her fast, men, 'n stay here fer orders! Yer may have ter go out 'n pick her up."

Two minutes later, he was giving just those very orders while he passed his binocular over to eager-eyed Hal. Denis Keen stood by also, arms resting on the port rail and anxiously watching the dory bobbing about out on the tide.

“What do you see, Hal?” he asked eagerly.

Hal leveled the glasses and looked through them for a full second before he answered.

70

“I see a dory without anything or anybody in it,” he said slowly. “But there’s some lettering on the prow that reads: *Property of Lighthouse Tender, ‘Cactus.’*”

“Yessir, it’s our property,” said Captain Dell musingly, yet withal keeping a sea eye on the life-boat which had eased away from the tender again, at his orders. “It’s the same dory, Mr. Keen, sir, what that rascal Sears commandeered this mornin’. Wa’al, anyway I’m glad ter see the cat came back.”

“Not the cat,” Denis Keen corrected, quizzically; “just the carcass.”

“So that the problem of finding the cat still remains, huh, Unk?” Hal interposed.

“Absolutely, Hal. So you see while the return of the carcass is a joy to Captain Dell, it spells nothing less than a sort of despair for me. It looks as if the mate of the *Sister Ann* was out to baffle me, eh?”

“Aw, don’t get feeling down about it, Unk,” Hal said comfortingly. “There’s some kind of bait with which to trap any cat, even Danny Sears’ kind.”

71

And Hal was right about that, for the bait that trapped Danny Sears was a complete revelation to Denis Keen himself.

CHAPTER IX

DILLIE AND . . .

Captain Dell accompanied Hal in the supply boat over to the Rocks. The crossing was calm, almost tranquil, yet it was destined to live in Hal's memory as one of the most vivid hours of his life. Perhaps it was because of the unsettled night through which he had passed and the subsequent discoveries in the early morning; he could not tell.

Be that as it may, two things stood out very clearly—his impression of the tender's black hull with his uncle standing above it and waving to him from over the rail, and the approach to bleak Skeleton Rocks, rising from the ocean waste like spectres.

He stared with deep interest as the supply boat drew nearer. Fifty feet in circumference and with a diameter of like proportion, the group of drab-colored rocks rose precipitously up out of the sea holding firm in their very center that graceful, white concrete structure known as Skeleton Rocks Light.

73

With the buoyant supply boat bearing them closer to the tiny rock island, Hal caught a glimpse of a tall, gawky youth not much younger than himself, coming hurriedly down the steel stairway leading down from the lower gallery. He was drawing a dark, heavy sweater over his head as he descended, and at intervals he would stop and look up at the light tower as if watching for someone.

Hal looked up at the light tower also and saw for an instant the dark outline of a man's face and form against the gallery window. Before he could distinguish it very clearly, however, the shadow had vanished and nothing was visible save the gleam of highly polished glass against the gray background of sea and sky.

Captain Dell grunted audibly and nodded his venerable gray head.

74

“That thar feller yer saw a-runnin’ down the stairway is Dillie—Dillie Rawson. He’s the one I told yer about. A little silly, but harmless an’ a good feller at that, I reckon. Hollins took him ter his heart—now he ain’t got nobuddy unless Barrowe keeps him, an’ I reckon he will. Barrowe’s a queer duck, he is, but he an’ Hollins was cronies so long I guess he’ll keep Dillie fer ole times’ sake.”

Hal’s warm and generous heart championed the orphaned and slightly defective Dillie from that moment on.

“The poor gink,” he said with heartfelt sincerity. “If this Barrowe isn’t so keyed up about keeping Dillie on, maybe I can talk him into it, huh?”

“Reckon so, Mr. Hal,” the captain smiled. “Reckon yer could make a dumb man git talked inter anythin’.”

“Thanks, Captain Dell,” Hal smiled. “That’s a compliment one way and a knock the other. Do I talk too much—is it as bad as that?”

75

“No sirree! Yer talk jes’ enough—jes’ enough ter make a man

like Barrowe answer whether he wants ter or not.”

“Then that’s different. Barrowe’ll find he can’t keep from talking to me—not if I’m going to be here two weeks!” He grinned, and then grew thoughtful. “By the way, did you see that man’s face at the light window?”

“Barrowe, I reckon. Nobuddy else here but him an’ Dillie.”

Hal nodded and watched with keen interest as one of the sailors nosed the bow of the supply boat up to the rocks. Over one of the huge stones jutting out of the spray, he threw a painter and made the boat secure.

Suddenly Hal was aware of a shuffling noise on the rocks above them. He glanced up to see the gawky form and strange, grinning face of Dillie Rawson peering down at them, his wide mouth agape and his sparse blond hair blowing in the wind.

76

“Marnin’, Cap’n Dell!” he said in a shrill voice. He shuffled forward on the precipitous slope a few paces, shaking his small, oddly-shaped head vehemently. “I’m ter sign fer the supplies this marnin’, I am!” he squealed delightedly.

“Barrowe says I should tell yer I kin, ’cause he ain’t feelin’ none too good an’ he wants ter sleep till noontime. He don’t want I should git him up fer nobuddy.”

“He don’t, eh?” Captain Dell said sharply. “What’s amiss that he can’t sign hisself, eh? Why can’t he sign when he’s up an’ a-doin’, eh? I seed him jes’ a minit ago standin’ up thar at the light winder!”

“He says I should tell yer he’s sleepin’ an’ can’t sign this marnin’,” Dillie said with a great squeal. For a moment he giggled, and then as if by rote, repeated the statement. “He says . . .”

“I reckon I know that by now, Dillie,” interposed the captain less gruffly. “Barrowe’s got one o’ his spells, eh? Wa’al, I got one o’ my spells too, an’ I reckon I’ll see Barrowe ’n’ tell him what I’ve got ter tell him ’bout this young man, or I’ll know the reason why!”

77

Feeling rather uneasy while this discussion was going on, Hal allowed his bright blue eyes to wander about the tiny stone island comprising Skeleton Rocks. After a moment, his gaze traveled to the tower, then rested on the gallery outside the light window and suddenly he saw again the same dark outline of a man’s face and form.

“Look!” he said, drawing the captain’s attention to it. “Isn’t that he?”

Captain Dell nodded and the next second the light tower window was bereft of any human form, Barrowe or otherwise.

“He ain’t sleepin’ no more ’n I am,” muttered the old seaman. “He’s jes’ got one o’ his spells.” Suddenly he grew thoughtful. “Funny, though,” he added, “that fer twenty year since I’ve been a-bringin’ supplies here an’ knowed Barrowe fer the queer duck he is, I ain’t never knowed him ter refuse ter come down ter say howdy an’ sign fer his supplies! No sirree, I ain’t! But mebbe Hollins going like he did has made Barrowe queerer than ever, eh?”

78

“I wouldn’t be surprised,” Hal answered.

Captain Dell turned and gave him a quizzical smile.

“Surprise ain’t the word ter use fer Barrowe,” he said. “He jes’ makes a body feel his queerness an’ that’s all thar is to it. But like I told yer, he cum from a queer family I heerd on good authority, so that tells yer all.”

But somehow at that moment, Hal had the odd conviction that that told him simply nothing at all. Barrowe, he felt instinctively, was going to be an unknown quantity.

CHAPTER X

ILL WINDS?

Dillie Rawson grinned broadly as Hal and Captain Dell clambered up the rocks. Despite his apparent mirth, his dull blue eyes had the look of a frightened dog's beseeching the attention of the approaching visitors.

"Yer a-goin' up ter see Barrowe anyways, Cap'n Dell?" he asked in his shrill voice. His thin body seemed to quiver as he waited for the captain to answer.

"I reckon Barrowe'll see me a'right, Dillie," said the old seaman with a smile. "Yer seem ter be a might worried 'bout it, eh?"

Dillie's eyes looked more fearful than ever and the meaningless grin faded quickly from his long, gaunt face.

"Barrowe ain't the same since Hollins is gone, Cap'n Dell," he squealed pathetically. "He don't talk the same—even he don't look the same. Sorta wild in his eyes he looks an' his hair's got white through it all of a suddint."

80

Captain Dell smiled upon Dillie and reaching over, patted his thin, bony shoulders.

"I'm terrible sorry 'bout Hollins, my boy," he said softly. "But don't yer git ter worryin'—it ain't jes' good fer yer. Barrowe'll come 'round, I reckon. He's jes' broke up 'bout Hollins, that's what. An' it ain't any wonder, eh? Them that's

been cronies fer years. I reckon *my* hair'd turn white through it all of a sudden an' my eyes git wild in my head if I come down frum the tower of a mornin' an' found thet my ole crony had taken hisself off ter Davey Jones' locker durin' the night. It ain't sech a pleasant surprise fer any human bein' no matter how yer look at it."

Dillie's dull eyes were misty with tears.

"Mebbe what yer say is true, Cap'n," he said choking back a high-pitched wail, "only I'd git more used ter Hollins not bein' here any more if Barrowe'd talk more kind like. Him that uster talk soft an' kind when he did talk, shouts 'round all the time when he ain't got nobuddy ter talk ter even. I get a-feered o' him since he's got actin' crazy like."

81

"Hmph!" the captain mumbled. "Jes' keep calm, Dillie, an' everything'll be a'right, includin' Barrowe. I reckon every time he's read that note over from pore Hollins . . ."

"He's mad about that too, Cap'n," Dillie interposed in his squealing voice. "He says it makes him mad 'cause he lost the note in the excitement, an' now he ain't even got that much of Hollins ter remember him by. I ain't got nothin', neither, 'cause Barrowe lost the note 'fore I got up that mornin'."

"Never yer mind, Dillie, lad," said the captain sympathetically. "Mebbe it's jes' as well. Yer'd allus remember how Hollins' handwritin' looked when he said he wuz tired o' livin'. I'll go up an' see if I kin git Barrowe quieted down. Funny how this trouble could start his tongue a-waggin' after him allus bein' so quiet. Wa'al, a body never

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knows what grief'll do, eh? Oh, Dillie!" he said, suddenly remembering Hal at his side, "here's Hal Keen what's a-goin' ter stay till the boss kin send a reg'lar man up from Portsmouth. Mr. Hal will be here mos' two weeks, I reckon, an' thar ain't a doubt but what he'll make yer fergit yer troubles, eh, Mr. Hal?"

"I'll say I will!" Hal exclaimed as he took Dillie's thin hand in a hearty clasp. His smile was never brighter nor more genuine than at that moment, for his heart went out to the poor, benighted youth. "Dillie's going to be my friend and buddy from this minute on."

Dillie forgot to giggle; he could do nothing but stare at this young man who had openly declared friendship for him. Save Hollins, no other human being had ever done aught but laugh at his defectiveness. Certainly no one had paid him the honor of calling him friend.

83

His hand quivered in Hal's strong clasp for a moment, and he looked up with an appeal in his dull, dog-like eyes.

"Yer ain't a-foolin'?" he asked pathetically. "Yer mean honest an' mighty yer'll be friendly ter me?"

"Never in my life have I meant anything more, Dillie!" Hal answered with a ring of sincerity in his voice.

And for the first time in his life, Dillie smiled without giggling. A young man nearly his own age had accepted him as a friend and an equal! A tiny light had penetrated the mist that clouded his brain, and Hal's generous mind took note of the fact instantly. He felt hopeful that some day, somehow, there would be no obstruction to that light at all; Dillie was worth an

experiment.

Hal's brilliant, friendly smile was a thing of wonder to Dillie, and for a moment he gazed speechless at this new-found, six-foot friend. Captain Dell, meanwhile, was striding determinedly up toward the tower on his short sea-legs, and save for the sailors transferring supplies from the boat to the Rocks, there was no other sound but the sea and wind murmuring constantly about them.

84

In all his adventurous existence, Hal had never given a serious thought to that old adage, "It's an ill wind that blows no good," notwithstanding all the ill winds that had blown his way. Now they gave him pause, these ill winds, for with his supersensitive mind, he felt their eerie currents at Skeleton Rocks and he heartily hoped that the ancient adage would make good in this particular instance.

He hoped then and there that some good would be blown the way of Dillie Rawson.

85

CHAPTER XI

SKELETON ROCKS

If hard and conscientious work is any indication of success, then Hal had every reason to believe that his initial tasks augured no small triumph for him at Skeleton Rocks. For, as he told his uncle some time afterward, he learned what was meant by earning one's bread by the sweat of the brow just in transferring the lighthouse supplies from the boat to the Rocks.

"A full day's work already," he confided to Dillie and the sailors whom he was helping. "How often do you fellows deliver supplies to this lonely spot?" He had just deposited a hundred pound bag of flour on the Rocks and stopped to mop his moist brow.

"We run up here just once a month, Keen," answered one of the sailors. "You don't mean to tell me you're tired, do you?" he asked, with a wink at his mates.

86

"No, I'm not tired a bit," Hal laughed. "I was just anxious to know when you were coming again so I could have the delightful exercise of carrying those hundred pounders. I don't get half enough exercise, you know. No, I'm terribly sorry I won't be here when you come by next month—I was never so sorry. . . ."

"And you never will be sorry that you won't be here next month!" laughed the sailor. "But never mind, Keen, you're a good sport just the same. Dillie'll show you how to balance those hundred pounders on your shoulder when you're going up

the tower stairs. It's a cinch after you once know how."

Hal made a gesture of despair.

"Do you mean to tell me that I have to help Dillie carry all this stuff up the Rocks and then up that endless flight of steel stairs to the tower?" he asked incredulously.

Even Dillie caught this spirit of raillery which his new friend had instituted on the mirthless Skeleton Rocks.

87

"It's more'n up past them stairs we hev ter carry them supplies," he answered with an abashed chuckle. "That lower gallery is whar the air pressure tanks is an' the fog siren, an' we hev ter go up another floor ter the storeroom. Some o' the things we carry up another floor whar the kitchen is, an' we set 'em in the pantry. But like the sailors told yer, Mr. Hal, I kin show yer a mighty easy way ter carry 'em, so I kin. An' if they's too heavy even then, I kin do it alone. I've did it a-plenty when Hollins an' Barrowe wuz busy."

Hal smiled and leaning forward ruffled Dillie's thin, blond hair.

"You'll do nothing of the kind, fellow. Not while I'm here. I'm not as soft and weak-kneed as that," he said doubling his muscular arms and displaying taut muscles. "In fact, the sea air has really braced me and made me feel like working. It was just that I was a trifle stunned by the thought of carrying these weighty things up to that miniature Empire State Building." He laughed deeply and looked at Dillie. "I'm just a lazy bird, Dill. Don't pay too much attention to me. You just lead the way, give me the low-down on how these things

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should be carried and watch me do my stuff!”

Dillie grinned delightedly and said, “Nobuddy ever called me Dill before. It shore makes me feel like a man, Mr. Hal.”

“Cut the *mister*. Hal suits me better. And take it from me, you’re just what you think you are. If my calling you Dill helps you to feel like that, why, Dill it will be from now on!” He turned to the sailors briskly. “Now it’s heave ho up to the tower with these things, huh?”

“And how!” said the loquacious sailor. “You’ll have some appetite for lunch, though. Sorry we can’t help you. Our job is to unload and that’s all. ’Nother thing, the boss is comin’ now, so we wouldn’t be able to give you a lift if we could. He wouldn’t be willin’ to wait, I can tell that by his face.”

89

All eyes turned instinctively to the approaching captain. Each step he took in his descent was determined and noisy as if he were trying to stamp out some annoying mental clatter within his venerable white head. His eyes and puckered weather-beaten brow bespoke stormy thoughts and seemed to vie with the frowning dark clouds that were gathering in the northeast.

“I never’d have believed a man cud change like Barrowe!” he thundered to no one in particular as he came up to them. “He wuz queer before, but now he acts crazy. Thar I found him in the kitchen a-settin’ at the table an’ when I cum up the stairs he stared at me wild-eyed like as if I wuz a ghost. Then right away he puts his hands up ter his face like an’ sits that way the hull time I wuz a-talkin’ to him.”

“He’s been a-doin’ that since the marnin’ he found Hollins’ note,” Dillie squealed apprehensively. “Don’t he act like crazy, Cap’n?”

“Reckon he ain’t far from it,” the captain answered, shaking his head. “But when I asked him wuz he crazy, he says no, he’s just shaken up the way Hollins went and done for hisself so sudden. He says he’ll git over it, but jes’ now he can’t look at folks but what he sees Hollins a-jumpin’ ter Davey Jones’ locker. Wa’al, I s’pose a body kin get like that after they’ve been cronies like he’s been with Hollins all these years. Anyways, it’s done one good thing fer Barrowe—it’s made him talk like he ain’t done since I knowed him. I got a chance ter hear what he really talked like an’ I wuz s’prised. I never knowed that the whisperin’ Barrowe cud talk in sech a husky voice. Wa’al, some folks fergit their grief a-talkin’, so I guess that’s his way. But I’d never a-knowed a man cud change so: his hair turned so white, ’n’ his eyes so wild an’ all! Ef I didn’t know Barrowe’s big face an’ his big body, I’d a-swore twan’t him, that’s how he’s changed.”

“You told him about me staying here until the regular man comes up from Portsmouth?” Hal asked anxiously.

“I shore did, son,” the captain smiled, “an’ it seemed ter please him. ’Bout the only thing what did please him. Mebbe it’s what he needs, a young man like you ter make him fergit his grief. Do all yer kin ter cheer him up, fer his sake an’ Dillie’s sake as well as yer own.”

“I certainly will, Captain Dell,” Hal promised. “I’ll do all I can. It’s too bad that the tragedy has affected him so.”

“It’s worse than too bad, Mr. Hal, sir,” said the captain thoughtfully. “It jes’ ain’t nacheral fer a man ter take on so, even over death.”

And those were Hal’s sentiments exactly—it wasn’t natural for a man to act like that even over the death of a dearly beloved friend and companion such as Hollins had been to Barrowe! Had Captain Dell thought of it that way too?

92

Hal thought of it more and more as Dillie and he stood watching the supply boat bearing the captain and the sailors back to the tender. And by the time the *Cactus* began to move gracefully away on her course, one burning question filled his active mind.

Was Skeleton Rocks steeped in anything more than the stinging brine of ocean spray?

93

CHAPTER XII

A CONFIDENCE

Hal never regretted his decision to stay at Skeleton Rocks, neither did he experience any symptoms of homesickness during the period he spent there. And yet, when he stood with Dillie watching the tender steaming farther and farther away toward the distant horizon he was seized with a queer, inexplicable urge to swim after it and leave this desolate pile of rocks to the fates that hovered over it.

He stared eagerly at the black funnel of the *Cactus* with its round rings of smoke curling constantly from it. For ten minutes perhaps he could see the black hull of the ship as she rode the dark swell. The shining white of the deckhouses looked cheerful against the gray morning light. But soon they too became obscured by distance, converging with a few fleecy clouds that lingered on the horizon. Finally there was nothing save dark sea and dark sky stretching as far as the eye could see.

94

A flock of gulls soon appeared out of nowhere and headed for the reef which was all but submerged now by the flooding waters of high tide. The wreck of the *Sister Ann* was still visible; painfully so, for her tattered rigging swaying crazily in the stirring breeze brought to Hal's mind Captain Dell's fateful prediction that sunset would see the schooner no more.

"What do you know of that wrecked schooner, Dill?" Hal asked suddenly. "What's Barrowe had to say about it?"

"I didn' know nothin' 'bout it," Dillie squealed and, shading his eyes in the trying gray light, looked in that direction. "Barrowe wuz too excited 'bout Hollins ter say much, 'ceptin' that he didn' hear nothin' durin' the night an' he didn' see nothin' till daylight."

"Did it strike him as strange that the schooner should run up on the reef on such a calm night?" Hal queried.

95

"He didn' say nuthin' like that; he said mebbe they wuz all drunk 'board the *Sister Ann* an' didn' look out. That's what he said."

"Mm, that's a suggestion, too. I never thought of that," Hal said thoughtfully, then: "Still, it took quite a few hours for that schooner to settle her port side under water, Captain Dell said. There were life-boats and there was time for the men to clear out with their things—plenty of time. . . ."

Dillie's giggle interrupted this recital.

"Thar wuz two life-boats taken off," the youth stated suddenly. "I know cuz I wuz at the reef 'fore sun-up, 'fore her port side wuz under water. Even I climbed up on her, I did."

"Tell me all about that, Dill," Hal urged him gently.

"We've got time to carry these supplies up, haven't we?

No hurry about it, is there?" He sat down on one of the boxes.

96

Dillie shook his head, grinned delightedly and answered, "No, us has all day ter carry 'em if we want. I make lunch an' Barrowe sleeps, even that's the way we did when Hollins wuz here." He choked audibly as he mentioned the name of his late

guardian and benefactor, then went on: “Anyways, like I told yer Barrowe woke me up at dawn the way he wuz actin’ so crazy like over Hollins. He told me ’bout the note an’ I got up an’ I went ter the winder. Then I saw the wreck, so I ast him ’bout it, an’ he didn’ say much like I told yer. Wa’al, I felt so bad ’bout Hollins I jes’ didn’ know what ter do, so I cum down frum the tower an’ got one o’ the dories an’ pushed off.”

“Toward the reef?”

“Jes’ what I did. I wanted ter git away frum how Barrowe looked, a-goin’ ’round with his hands up ter his face an’ a-shadin’ his eyes all the time. I wuz afeerd even worse how I felt ’bout Hollins. So I got ter the reef like I told yer an’ I made my dory fast after I called an’ didn’ see nobuddy about.”

97

“And you got up on deck?”

“Shore. I went a-lookin’ in the cabins an’ I seed how the captain’s locker stood open, but his things were there all right.”

“Tell me, Dill, did you see a small square box of any kind standing on the shelf? Or did you see the schooner’s log?”

Dillie shook his head vehemently, and he answered, “No, I didn’ see nuthin’ like that. The only thing I saw was a feller what wuz sound asleep in the next cabin, jes’ as nice as if the schooner wuz safe in dry dock.”

“A fellow?”

“Shore.” Dillie giggled delightedly. “He looked afeerd when I sneaked inter the cabin, too. But he wuz a’right after I told him

who I wuz an' told him all my troubles. He listened like anythin' he did when I told him how Hollins wouldn' be at the lighthouse any more, an' how wild an' funny actin' Barrowe wuz that mornin'. So he said ter me, the feller did . . .”

“Who was this chap, Dill?” Hal asked impatiently. “What did he have to say about himself?”

98

Dillie gave vent to a furtive giggle that lasted long enough to all but exhaust Hal's patience. Finally he paused:

“He give me a hull dollar that feller did, not ter tell nobuddy how I found him thar asleep in the schooner. He says ter me how I shouldn' 'specially tell anybuddy at the light thet I saw a human bein' on board the *Sister Ann*, 'cause he said the news might get ter Rocky Cliff village an' they'd make fun o' him.”

“*Why?*”

“'Cause he sez how he went out ter fish an' his boat got swamped an' he swum ter the wreck, he wuz so exhausted. So he slept till I cum inter the cabin an' then he got up an' says ef it wuz past dawn he'd better be gittin' back ter the village.”

“Did he tell you his name?”

99

“No sirree! He jes' kep' makin' me promise I wouldn' tell 'bout seein' him, thet's all. So he give me a hull dollar fer thet. But yore my friend, Hal, so I guess it's all right ter tell you, hey?”

Hal got up and patted the poor youth on the shoulder.

“It's all right to tell me anything you want to tell me, Dill,” he

said with a kindly smile. "It's better for you to tell me everything, I guess. Did this chap say anything more?"

"Nope, he jes' got up an' went to a locker an' he took out a bag an' put some clothes in. Then he cum out on deck with me an' he sez g'bye."

"And you went down and got back in your dory, huh?"

"Shore. The feller cum down after me an' got in the dory what wuz tied up under the prow. It belonged to the *Sister Ann* 'cause I could read that it said so."

"You mean that this dory belonging to the *Sister Ann* was tied up there when you first came along?"

100

"Shore. I forgot ter tell yer 'bout thet. She wuz ridin' at anchor nice as cud be. Anyways, th' feller cum down after me an' got in it an' went away jes' as nice."

"What did this chap look like, Dill?" Hal asked, rubbing the palm of his hand across his hair.

"He wuz short and hed kinder dark skin an' hair an' he hed a funny way o' smilin' at me. Like as if it wuzn't a smile, an' yet it wuz."

"I understand, Dill," Hal said, nodding his head. "I'm afraid I understand only too well."

101

CHAPTER XIII

BARROWE

Hal made a bargain with Dillie before half the supplies had been deposited up in the tower storeroom. He was to trudge the long, steel stairway until the rest of the boxes were safely stored away if only Dillie would start to prepare the noonday meal in the interim.

“Yer hungry?” asked the lighthouse youth solicitously.

“Don’t ask me that, Dill,” Hal answered laughingly. “Ask me, was I ever hungrier in my natural life! Boy, am I hungry! Now I know what the wild waves are saying!”

Dillie Rawson’s misty brain was incapable of comprehending just what Hal heard the wild waves saying. He giggled to be sociable, however, then hurried on up to the tower.

102

Hal fell to at once and kept diligently at his task until every last box was neatly piled around the circular wall of the storeroom. The final trip to the Rocks, he reserved for his own luggage which was modestly confined to one kit-bag and as this boasted little or no weight he sauntered leisurely up the tower stairs and stopped for a momentary inspection in the “fog room” as Dillie was wont to call it.

Hal hadn’t a mechanical turn of mind, exactly, but things mechanical always interested him. Moreover, he had never before seen just what it was that made the wheels go round

before a fog siren poured forth its warning blasts to puzzled mariners.

The tanks and levers served only to bewilder him and the only thing in the room he could understand was the big horn placed in an aperture in the circular wall where its mighty mouth could belch forth roaring nasal notes across a fog-bound sea. While he was gazing up at the horn his attention was suddenly attracted to one of the huge air-pressure tanks, for a dark shadow had moved behind it.

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Before he could speak he heard the unmistakable sound of footsteps and presently there emerged from behind the tank a great hulk of a man whose height would have about matched his own, had it not been for a certain peculiar slouch which he affected.

His feet were enormous, Hal noted as he came around the stairway, and he had an odd way of lifting them up and stamping them down noisily with each step he took. He was unshaven, unkempt, and his hair, so flecked with white, gave one the impression that it was continually standing on end. His dark flannel shirt and darker corduroy trousers were in a deplorably wrinkled state and he seemed to be conscious of it as he came to a stop before his visitor.

Hal stared, mouth partly open and his eyes wide with astonishment. He was conscious that it was a rude thing to do but he seemed not to be able to help himself. This man whom he had heard so much about was not at all as he had visualized the mild, whispering Barrowe to be. Instead, he was a man whose red, puffy face and wide, tight-lipped mouth

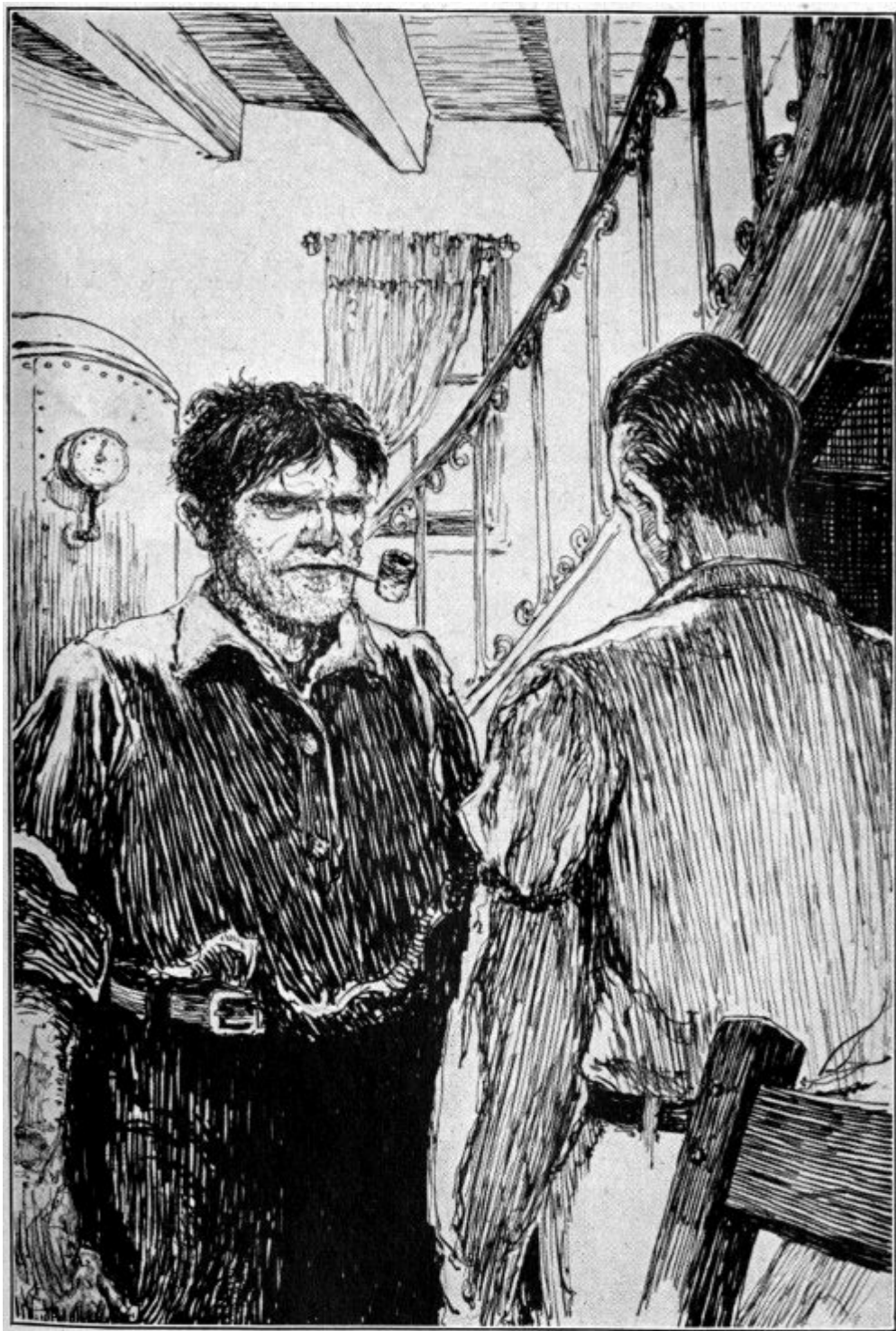
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bespoke cruelty and whose cold, black eyes conveyed but one impression to the beholder.

Sinister!

Hal tried to deny this impression to himself and he partly succeeded for the time. He was able to rouse himself also, and he managed a grin that he was far from feeling. The man repelled him utterly and he knew it.

“Yer the Keen feller what’s come ter help out fer two weeks?” Barrowe asked in a peculiarly husky voice. He surveyed Hal quickly with his cold, black eyes and suddenly his thin mouth wrinkled in a smile.



“YER THE KEEN FELLER WHAT’S COME TO HELP OUT?” BARROWE ASKED IN A HUSKY VOICE.

“I’m Hal Keen,” Hal answered at length, and tried to smile back naturally. But in vain. He could only add, “Hope I *will* be a help and not a burden!”

The smile had already vanished from Barrowe’s lips and raising both hairy hands to his face, he turned to go up the stairway.

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“Thar ain’t much but what a feller like yoreself kin learn in no time,” he said, his back already to Hal. “I’ll show yer termorrer. Fer today, Dillie kin show yer a few things—he’s good at that even if he can’t do ’em hisself.” He mumbled unintelligibly, then added: “Guess Dillie’s ’bout got grub ready.” With that, he stamped noisily on up the stairs toward the kitchen.

Hal followed in silence and arrived in that savory-smelling room just as the man flung himself down in a chair at Dillie’s neatly set table. He ground his elbows into the oilcloth on either side of his dinner plate and covering his face mumbled ceaselessly into his rough, calloused hands.

Hal set down his kit-bag and took one of the comfortable-looking wooden rockers that stood under the east window. He nodded, as cheerily as was possible under the circumstances, to Dillie who was at the oil-stove a few feet away, busily frying bacon. The youth tried to return the smile, but succeeded only in making tears well up in his dog-like eyes.

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“Yer’ll excuse me, hey?” he asked, brushing his hand across his face. “I’ll git over it same’s Barrowe will, but I wuz jes’ a-thinkin’ how nice ’twould be if Hollins walked in here ter eat this bacon.”

Barrowe’s hands dropped down to the table and in a flash he rose, white and shaking, like a man who has just looked upon the supernatural.

“*What?*” he screamed. “Yer say ’twould be nice if Hollins walked . . .”

He glanced furtively at Hal then, and seeing that young man’s astonished expression, dropped wearily down into his chair again and covered his face with his hands.

For the rest of that eerie, gray day, Barrowe did not speak.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PASSING OF THE “SISTER ANN”

Mid-afternoon concluded all chores in the tower and as Dillie announced that supper was always ready at five, Hal used this brief respite to make his initial tour of the upper tower. A howling spring gale was blowing out of the northeast, driving before it an icy rain.

He left Dillie in the kitchen, content and comfortable in the east window rocker which he rode vigorously while squealing with delight over a week-old Sunday supplement sheet.

Following the steep, iron stairway about the inner wall of the tower, Hal came to the room which Dillie had designated, not without some show of pride, as the “settin’ room.” It was a marvel of mohair and stiff-backed chairs trimmed sedately with starched white head rests. A bookcase and magazine rack held a profusion of reading matter, neatly piled and placed. The room was scrupulously neat and clean, having been kept in that condition by the late Hollins who, Dillie explained wistfully, “allus tended ter them chores—cleanin’ an’ the like.”

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The three bedrooms, one atop the other, Hal smiled upon in his leisurely climb. They, too, bore every indication of having been cared for by a practical housekeeper. Shining floors, clean rag rugs and the snowy coverlets on each white iron bedstead bespoke the homely, honest soul of old Bill Hollins, who had so recently hovered about his tasks in the quaint-looking rooms.

The first bedroom Dillie had taken over as his own for reasons of sentiment, as Hollins had occupied it until the night of his death. Hal, though having scorned any talk of the supernatural tendencies of suicidal lighthouse keepers, was just as well pleased that Dillie's recent bedchamber had been assigned to him. The uppermost chamber was Barrowe's own and he was in possession of it as Hal passed through on tiptoe up the stairs toward the light. Clad in undershirt and trousers, he lay atop the coverlet of his bed with his enormous stockinged feet hanging out over the floor.

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Hal did not linger there a second—in fact, he found himself taking two steps at a time in order to get out of hearing distance of the man's discordant snores. Asleep or awake, Barrowe repelled him.

After he had reached the next level, he thought that he heard a sudden cessation of the snoring and the sound of the man's heavy footstep on the floor. He did not stop to listen and make certain, however, but continued on up the steep, iron staircase until he stepped out on the metal floor, which was all but filled by the circular base of the great light itself.

He passed around it—"snooping" as he termed it, himself, and whistled aloud in amazement at the massive construction of the pedestal. But it was when he came to the great light itself, that marvel of glass and copper, that he stopped and stared in sheer surprise.

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For the first time since he had attained his full growth of six feet two inches, he felt dwarfed and unimportant. The immensely complicated set of hyper-radiant lenses were the

cause of it all, for they measured five feet in diameter and nine feet in height.

The black walls of the tower above which he had just emerged had blurred his vision and for a few seconds he stood squinting at the central bull's eye. Then, when his eyes became used to the light, he sauntered about it trying to count the great ribbons of cut glass winding around in successive circles.

The ribbons, thousands of yards of them, seemed to flutter with every color of the rainbow. As he watched them, a flash of lightning darted out of the north, making a fiery reflection in every prism, then dancing across to a clockwork contrivance encased in glass, and so on out to the gallery surrounding the light.

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Hal turned, following it with his bright eyes, and became suddenly aware of the breath-taking view which the gallery afforded.

Leaden-colored skies frowned down upon the sea and the rain lashed relentlessly against the windows. He was tempted to step out on the gallery but refrained when the wind drove before it a veritable onslaught of hailstones. Besides, the warmth of the tower was appealing and then there was the fascination of the sparkling lenses.

He had just stepped completely around it to get a better view when he heard the sound of Barrowe's heavy footstep coming up the staircase. Each footfall resounded loudly and as he came nearer Hal could hear him muttering to himself.

Hal made no deliberate move to conceal himself; he

simply stood where he was and waited. Barrowe, he guessed, was intending to light the lamp earlier than usual because of the stormy night which threatened them.

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The footsteps became louder, more determined. Suddenly Hal realized that the man seemed to be in haste and no sooner had he recognized this fact, than the lightkeeper stalked hurriedly past the other side of the light and stepped out onto the gallery, apparently unaware that there was another presence in the light tower.

“So she’s a-goin’ at last, eh?” he said aloud. “She’s a-goin’ at last!” A groan escaped him and he raised a hairy fist upward.

Embarrassed, Hal stepped around the light, making as much sound as he could in order to warn Barrowe of his presence. But the man paid absolutely no heed and stood shaking his fist in mid-air. Hal took another pace forward and looked over his shoulder and instantly discovered that Barrowe’s attention and strange agitation were concerned with the reef.

The wreck of the schooner, *Sister Ann*, he saw, was in its death throes at that very moment. Her tattered rigging waved crazily in the howling gale and her bow was even then rising for its final plunge.

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The next second she was gone, with only a flock of screaming gulls soaring above her to mourn her passing.

A shrill, sardonic laugh suddenly issued from Barrowe’s throat and he leaned forward, eagerly watching the spot where the *Sister Ann* had gone down.

“Cap’n Bill Doak is dead!” he shrieked in a sepulchral voice.
“Long live Ethan Barrowe!”

Hal felt himself instinctively recoil from the man. Unconsciously, he took a few steps backward, puzzled and yet not a little fearful of his singular behavior, and still more singular speech. There simply was no logical explanation of the whole strange episode which he had just had the misfortune to witness.

Misfortune? He was to realize that it was nothing short of misfortune for him to have heard and seen what he did, for the lightkeeper’s attitude toward his new helper was determined by that incident. And by that same incident was Hal’s peace of mind and safety threatened during the rest of his stay at Skeleton Rocks.

Barrowe turned his back on the sea at that moment and beheld Hal staring at him in mute astonishment.

CHAPTER XV

A LETTER

Barrowe's face looked gray and fear filled his cold, black eyes. But it was only for an instant, for in the next moment, under Hal's very eyes, the lightkeeper regained his poise, while a slow smile stole over his features and the color returned to his cheeks. His mouth, however, looked drawn and hard, and his thin lips were so compressed as to give them a peculiarly bloodless look.

"Wa'al?" he queried succinctly.

The color flooded into Hal's wholesome face and though it embarrassed him greatly he was able to look the other squarely in the eyes.

"I was up here when you came, Mr. Barrowe," he said in clear, ringing tones. "You seemed so preoccupied, you didn't notice me." He smiled to cover his confusion for the man's eyes were eloquent with accusation. "I tried twice to attract your attention. You were so interested in the *Sister Ann* going down that you didn't hear me. I didn't want to be crude about it and intrude, so I waited. . . ."

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"Nacherally," Barrowe said, and the slow smile vanished under his black, shaggy brows. His lips parted a little, showing large, uneven teeth yellowed from tobacco juice. That almost sinister expression which Hal so disliked came creeping back into his eyes, but when he again spoke his voice was huskily insinuating. "I don't like folks a-sneaking round an' I won't hev

it—*understan*’?”

“I understand, Mr. Barrowe,” Hal answered, bravely attempting to smile, “but your attitude proves only too well that *you* don’t understand at all. As I’ve tried to explain to you, you were so engrossed in your own thoughts that you simply wouldn’t recognize my presence. I had no intention of sneaking as you say; why should I want to sneak? But let me tell you that the more you talk like that the more you start my suspicions. Oh, don’t ask, *suspicious of what*,” he added in disgust.

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Barrowe’s stiffened features relaxed slowly and he smiled, though his eyes lost none of their wildness.

“It’s jes’ a mistake, young man, jes’ a mistake,” he said, and laughed lightly. “Reckon I wuz a bit jarred, ’count of I didn’ know yer wuz right behind me. Yer know how ’tis—I sorta felt I wuz seein’ a ghost or somethin’ an’ it jarred me fer the minute. Thar ain’t no suspicionin’ ’t all, thar ain’t. S’pose yer jes’ cum up ter hev a look at the light, eh?”

“Exactly, Mr. Barrowe,” Hal answered tersely. “I would have no other reason. I’ve never been in a lighthouse before. It’s only natural that the light itself would interest me.”

“Indeedy!” Barrowe chuckled softly. “Wa’al, do yer like it?”

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Hal nodded and glanced back over one broad shoulder at the gleaming lenses.

“They’re so shining and fine, I’d never tire of studying them. A

fellow that takes a job like this creates an obligation toward the light to my way of thinking. He should put all he can into it until his own light fades. I'm referring to Hollins, Mr. Barrowe. Since I've seen these gorgeously shining lenses I can't convince myself that a dyed-in-the-wool lightkeeper as Hollins apparently was, would desert them simply because he was tired of living."

"Jes' the same he did!" Barrowe said vehemently. His face was livid again and he swung a hairy fist in mid-air. "I saw the note what he wrote, I did."

"Did anybody else?" Hal queried mildly.

Immediately he was sorry for having asked that question, and while Barrowe stood stock still staring at him from under veiled lids, he was wondering what perverse imp inside him had made him say it. Nothing, he knew, could unsay it.

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"Nobuddy else saw it, young man," Barrowe said between his tight lips. "I lost it, I did, but I saw it an' thet's enuff! Now I got ter light the lamp so she heats up while we're a-gittin' our grub. It'll be dark long 'fore seven ternight. Dillie must have supper ready—I kin smell coffee."

"So do I smell it." Hal grinned as if nothing but pleasant words had passed between Barrowe and himself. "I'll stay and watch you light the lamp though. Won't hurt me to learn."

Barrowe said nothing but turned his back and went about his task in silence. A few moments later their descending footsteps echoed noisily down the winding iron staircase, but not a sound did their voices make, either then or through the brief

evening meal. Dillie's giggling and the continuous boom of the surf upon the rocks were the only sounds to be heard in the cheerful kitchen.

Hal helped Dillie with the dishes afterward. Barrowe had stamped noisily up the stairs toward the tower and a few minutes later the flash of the light shot out over the ocean. Before an hour had passed, Skeleton Rocks was at the mercy of wind, rain and darkness.

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Hal sprawled comfortably at the kitchen table and wrote two letters under the cheerful glow of the kerosene lamp. One was to his mother, to whom he explained at length what life at a lighthouse was like, particularly when one viewed the boundless ocean from the uppermost gallery. He wrote eloquently about the light itself, making it seem a thing almost animate.

Denis Keen, however, was to receive a missive which had to do with the human element at Skeleton Rocks Light. It was brief and lucid, yet distinctly Hal Keen, unfortunately, for Hal's beloved relative was never inclined to take him seriously when he wrote in such a vein.

"Now, Unk," he wrote, in part, "you may think I'm a little off my bean, but what do you think of Barrowe shouting that queer thing about Captain Doak being dead—long live Ethan Barrowe, etc.? I've had the hunch ever since I landed on this island of rock that there's some queer connection between the late schooner, *Sister Ann*, Barrowe and the late Hollins. What it is, I'm sure I don't know, but Barrowe's monologue on the light gallery was highly unusual. Even you

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would agree with me on that point . . . could it be that he is responsible in any way for the destruction of the *Sister Ann* and incidentally, the death of Captain Bill Doak? He flinches, looks almost as if he's going mad at the mere mention of Hollins' name . . . what is it, do you suppose? I fancy, somehow, that he's in fear of something . . . somebody . . .”

With that, Hal signed his name and addressed an envelope to his uncle at Washington, D. C.

CHAPTER XVI

SUSPICION

The force of the gale decreased within the hour and settled down to a steady, pattering rain. Hal went to the east window and rubbed its steaming panes with the back of his hand. He could see nothing but the black night and the broad, gleaming lane which the light created across the heaving ocean. After a moment, he dropped down into the rocker and glanced at Dillie who was sprawled out on the floor and again giggling over the past Sunday's supplement sheet.

"I don't think this rain will last all night, do you, Dill?" he asked abstractedly.

"Ef she don't last, we'll hev fog 'fore mornin'," the gawky youth squealed smilingly. "Reckon yer won't sleep much if Barrowe has ter cum down an' work the siren. She makes a pow'ful noise when she gits a-goin'."

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"Heavens, do I have to sleep over that noise!" Hal exclaimed laughing. "It woke me up on the *Cactus*; what will it do to me here!"

"Yer git used ter it," Dillie giggled. "Hollins, he allus hed that chore ter do an' I got so I never heerd him. She blasts away but I don't wake up 't all."

"What a sleeper you must be," Hal said. "Good thing it isn't up to you to work it."

“I kin work it jes’ the same, on’y Hollins wouldn’ let me. He said how that air pressure kin kill a man ef he ain’t got a good strong heart. The gov’ment makes all the lightkeepers git examined fer their hearts ’fore they’ll let ’em touch a lever ter blow the siren. So Hollins said as how he didn’ know how strong wuz my heart so I shouldn’ touch it nuther. But he wuz jes’ fussy ’cause I kin stand it a’right, I kin.”

“Well, I wouldn’t take the chance unless I absolutely had to, Dill,” Hal said gently. “Hollins, no doubt, felt responsible for you. If anything had happened to you the government would have looked to him for an explanation.”

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Dillie looked up at Hal gravely and shook his small, thin head.

“I never thought o’ that—I never thought ’twas ’cause Hollins cared fer me that he wouldn’ let me do it.” He paused for a moment while the tears trickled out of his dull eyes and down his gaunt cheeks, then: “He wuz good ter me, he wuz. Even he used ter tell me how he wuz savin’ fer ter git five thousan’ dollars what it would cost fer the doctor ter operate on my head an’ make it better. Thet shows how good he wuz, hey?”

“It surely does, Dill,” Hal answered. He leaned forward in the rocker, his lips slightly parted. “It doesn’t sound like a man who contemplated suicide.” And then because Dillie’s poor benighted mind seemed not to grasp the purport of that, Hal asked: “Did you ever hear Hollins say he was tired of living?”

“He never said nothin’ like that, he didn’. Once he said ’twuz his bizness ter live till my head got fixed so’s I cud go over ter Rocky Cliff village an’ act like other fellers,

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an' not laugh all the time like I do."

"He said that?" Hal felt a sympathy for the departed Hollins such as the living Barrowe could never have inspired in him. In his mind's eye, he saw what there must have been in the dead lightkeeper to have so championed the orphaned half-wit, Dillie, to have hoped and planned for the day when the youth would be like other youths who had their rightful heritage.

"He never said he wuz tired o' livin' like Barrowe said ter me he read in Hollins' note," Dillie chanted as if it was indelibly stamped upon his mind. "That's why I feel kinder sick when I think on it. Hollins allus told me things—he said he did it 'cause when my head got fixed I cud talk ter him like other fellers. Besides, he used ter say he didn' hev nobuddy else ter talk to 'cause Barrowe never talked then 'ceptin' ter say yes an' the like. Hollins an' him got 'long a' right on'y Hollins sed he allus liked a body ter talk back ter him good an' long. Thet's why he took a shine ter me, he said—I wuz comp'ny. Barrowe wuz nice ter me then, too. He never wuz gittin' cross; he jes' used ter make his head go an' smile even if he didn' say nuthin'. It ain't like now when he talks. . . ."

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"Barrowe must have changed into a regular Mr. Hyde," Hal muttered more to himself than to the staring Dillie. "I'm convinced of that now and as Captain Dell said, it isn't natural. *It isn't!*" He looked straight at the youth, then: "Tell me, Dill, what was Hollins like, huh?"

Dillie was delighted. He was always delighted when he could understand what Hal was talking about. It gave him a feeling of importance, particularly when he was

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questioned about his beloved Hollins and sometimes during these squealing recitals it seemed that behind that mysterious something which made Dillie *different*, a really fine brain lay dormant.

“Hollins, he had gray eyes that allus smiled at me, they did,” said the youth proudly. “His hair wuz gray an’ thin, an’ he wuz thin an’ small too, but his eyes were so big an’ smilin’ thet I used ter keep a-lookin’ at ’em while he talked ter me, an’ it made him seem like a big feller even if he wasn’t.”

Hal smiled and, rising, went over to Dillie.

“In other words, Dill,” he said, “Hollins’ big heart shone out of his eyes, huh? You poor kid—what a friend you had in him! Never mind, perhaps I’ve come here for some good reason. I couldn’t hope to take the place of a big-hearted fellow like Hollins, but I’ll do my darndest, Dill.”

Dillie seemed to comprehend, but he was too bewildered to speak. He cried a little, but in the next moment he was giggling hysterically again over the Sunday supplement.

Hal watched him a second, then went over to the table where the letter to his uncle lay sealed. He tore open the envelope, addressed another one, then proceeded to add a postscript to the letter itself.

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“Hollins,” he wrote, “never committed suicide. I know it! Dillie’s told me enough about him to prove it conclusively. And Barrowe’s changed so that even poor Dillie’s darkened mind recognizes the difference. Something’s caused it, Unk . . . perhaps the late Captain Doak isn’t the only person to have

made a Mr. Hyde out of Barrowe . . . what do you think of it?”

With that accomplished he put the letter in the fresh envelope and sealed it decisively. Barrowe, he was certain, had blood on his hands.

CHAPTER XVII

A HASTY VISIT

The wind died down shortly after eight o'clock and the rain subsided soon afterward. By nine o'clock there was no sound save the booming surf dashing up on Skeleton Rocks. Hal stifled a yawn and glanced across at the sprawling Dillie whose attention was still centered upon his beloved supplement.

"Do you like that so much, Dill?" he asked gently.

Dillie looked up, giggling nervously. His reply went straight to Hal's heart.

"They allus make me laugh, they do, an' I like ter laugh at somethin' else besides myself."

Hal got up and paced the room, taking long strides around and around. Dillie's defectiveness was so pathetic as to make him feel uncomfortable, particularly in the face of what he had heard poor Hollins had planned to do about it. Therein lay the mystery.

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He thought of it more and more and finally came to the conclusion that no decision could be reached in that manner. He decided to wait for his uncle's opinion in the matter when he should get a reply to his letter. Until that time he would continue to keep his eyes open.

He balked at the thought of keeping his eyes open right then,

however, for his need of a good night's sleep made him powerless to think of anything but the second bedchamber with its rag rugs, its gleaming wash-stand and snowy coverlet. The white covered bed was beckoning and he couldn't resist.

"I'm going to bed, Dill," he said, yawning, "and I don't mean maybe! What time do you usually go?"

"When I git sleepy," Dillie giggled. "But ternight I got somethin' ter watch out fer so I'm a-goin' ter stay up till midnight."

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"What is it that you must stay up for?"

"Hollins," Dillie answered mournfully. "He told me onct how he heerd that a man what wuz drowned allus come ter the surface whar he wuz lost on or after the midnight o' the third day. An' ternight's the third day thet Hollins' been gone so I'm a-goin' ter go down thar an' wait."

"But that's sheer superstition, Dill—I mean it isn't true that drowned people always rise to the surface after the third day. It's just one of those things that credulous, ignorant people believe just because it may have really happened a few times. But in this case, why, Hollins could be a hundred miles or more out to sea by now. The sentiment is beautiful but it's anything but practical, and there's no use losing your sleep over such a thing. From what you've told me of poor Hollins, he was far too concerned over your welfare to want you to do any such thing as that."

Dillie was adamant, however.

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“I got lots o’ time ter sleep, but mebbe I ain’t never again got the chance ter watch fer Hollins even ef he is drowned.”

“All right, Dill,” Hal grinned. “When you put it that way, I understand. Watch for him and luck be yours!”

He was about to say good-night then, and he had put one foot on the stair when he was startled by a rumbling sound on the steel stairway outside. It was the sound of a man’s footsteps.

“A visitor, huh?”

Dillie shrugged his narrow shoulders and looked almost frightened.

“We never hev visitors at night—we never hev visitors anyways. Barrowe let it out onct when he wuz over in the village thet he didn’ want any nohow, so nobuddy ever cums.”

“A nice sociable guy, huh?”

“I reckon it wa’n’t thet Barrowe didn’ like folks ter cum when he sed thet,” Dillie answered on the defensive.

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“He sed it wuz jes’ thet it made him feel sick sorta when they’d talk ter him an’ he couldn’ talk back. He couldn’ use the words what Hollins used—not them days anyways.”

“Well, from what I’ve seen of him since I’ve been here, he’s anything but tongue-tied or dumb. Evidently, it took poor Hollins’ death to make him remember that it doesn’t take many words to make a sound. But to get back to our visitor—listen. . .”

There was an urgent rapping at the lower gallery door. Hal made a move but Dillie had risen to his feet and was already on his way down the steep, winding stair. His long, narrow shoes flip-flopped against the metal and made a queer, hollow echo throughout the tower.

Simultaneously, Hal became aware of another echo, reverberating from the tower. Suddenly he was aware of Barrowe's noisy, determined stamp coming down the stairway and after a few seconds the man's enormous feet appeared, then his long, bulky legs encased in their shabby corduroys, and finally Barrowe himself reached the level of the room.

"Cum down fer some terbaccy," he mumbled, displaying a blackened corncob pipe and glancing about the room.

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"Clean fergot it ternight." Then, without raising his eyes to meet Hal's, he asked, "Whar's Dillie?"

"Down at the door to let someone in," Hal answered, watching him curiously. "Someone knocked pretty urgently and Dillie went down. Guess they're having a discussion considering the time it's taking. Must be somebody from a ship, huh? Dillie said that no one ever comes over from the village to visit you people here—he said you discouraged such visitors some time ago."

Barrowe said nothing at the moment but stamped noisily toward the kitchen cupboard. He got down his tobacco jar, filled his pouch and his pipe, then put back the jar.

"Folks like me is better without vis'tors," he mumbled at length. "I sez too much talk gets a body inter trouble."

“Oh, I agree with you on that point, Mr. Barrowe,” Hal said, with not a little sarcasm. He was remembering the strange talk he had heard from the lightkeeper in the tower, not many hours ago. “People talk too much for their own good, even when they think they’re alone.”

135

Barrowe’s eyes, so cold and sinister, swept him threateningly. Immediately, they were veiled again under his black, shaggy brows and he stamped back toward the stair, almost brushing Hal’s broad shoulders in passing. He was forced to halt at that moment, however, for the giggling Dillie’s thin, blond head came into view on the stairway.

“Here’s a feller what wants ter see you, Barrowe,” he squealed, delighted at finding the lightkeeper below. “He sez ’tis importint.”

Barrowe wheeled about on his bulky legs. Hal, too, turned his attention to the short, dark figure trudging up the staircase behind Dillie. The man’s face was swarthy and a vague smile was evident on his features.

“*Danny Sears!*” Hal exclaimed excitedly. “*You!*”

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The man so addressed had been staring at Barrowe and there was something akin to horror in his small, dark eyes. At the sound of his name, however, he seemed to draw himself up rigidly and as his glance rested on Hal he looked white and fearful.

In the next second he had turned his back upon them all and was racing down the steep stairway, two steps at a time. Then the lower door slammed and they could hear him running down

the outer steel stairway.

Dillie burst into an hysterical giggle. Hal could do nothing but stare down the dark stairway, his handsome face full of surprise and wonder. The lightkeeper, he felt, had not moved an inch and he turned slowly around to look at him, only to receive a shock worse than that which Danny Sears had given him.

Barrowe looked ghost-ridden and stood staring into space, ashen of face and trembling in every limb.

CHAPTER XVIII

DENIAL

“Mr. Barrowe!” Hal cried. “What is it—*what’s the matter?*?”

Barrowe seemed to spring back to life with the question. He was his old self in an instant and even managed to smile slightly. With a mechanical gesture he raised his corncob pipe to his thin lips and proceeded to light it.

“Are you all right?” Hal insisted.

“Course I am—why not?” Barrowe returned in an unsteady voice. “Why shouldn’ I be all right, eh?”

“I’m sure I don’t know,” Hal answered. “It was the way you looked at Danny Sears. . . .”

“*Who?*” Barrowe all but shrieked the question, while his red, puffy face became scarlet.

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“Danny Sears, the man who was just here—the man who said it was important to see *you!*”

Barrowe’s face retained its scarlet hue, but he looked at Hal squarely.

“I don’ care what he sez!” he said vehemently. “I don’ know him—I never saw him afore in my life!” With that he turned on his heel and stamped noisily up the staircase to the tower.

Hal looked after him, shaking his head. Barrowe, he knew, had deliberately lied.

“Thet feller yer called Sears he sez ter me he cum here ternight in a dory,” Dillie spoke out of the silence. “He cum here from Rocky Cliff. Ain’t it funny how he went away so quick after cumin’ all the way here?”

“It’s tragic, it’s so funny, Dill,” Hal answered and wandered back to the window. He rubbed the windowpane and after clearing a small oval, tried to see outdoors: “All I can see is rocks—not a sign of Danny Sears. Do you suppose he ran for his dory and beat it the way he came?”

139

“He musta went back in his dory a’ right,” Dillie squealed with delight. “Ain’t he a funny feller? Yer knew his name, hey, Mr. Hal?”

“As far as I know, it’s his name, Dill,” Hal answered, turning away from the window. “But the main thing, I know the man as Danny Sears and that’s something, huh?”

“Shore,” Dillie acknowledged, even though he did not comprehend. “I knowed him too—I knowed him fust yesterday mornin’ when I rowed over ter the wreck o’ the *Sister Ann*.” Dillie’s flat chest seemed to bulge as he proudly added: “Thet’s the same feller what gave me a hull dollar not ter tell it round thet I saw him on the boat!”

“*Danny Sears!*” Hal exclaimed. “The same chap you found sleeping, the same chap that took some clothes out of the locker and put them in his duffel. . . .”

“Shore, thet’s him,” Dillie interposed delightedly.

140

Hal stalked over to the table where the letter to his uncle still reposed. He took it up thoughtfully, reached for pen and ink and on the back of it, wrote:

“Unk, find out for certain if D. S. was a member of the *Sister Ann* crew . . . let me know soon as possible.”

That done, he put it in his pocket, murmuring, “There! That’s better than wasting another envelope!”

141

CHAPTER XIX

A QUESTION

Dillie dressed himself for the damp, night air and left for his self-imposed vigil at the Rocks. There was nothing left for Hal to do but to go to bed, and that he lost no time in doing. Barrowe was at his post, silence prevailed throughout the tower and the faithful light swept on tirelessly out across the sea.

Hal undressed in the dark and stood before his window looking out, absently. Once, as the light swept out, he thought he saw Dillie's gaunt figure against the foaming white spray as it dashed upon the rocks. He was too sleepy, however, to observe the faithful youth further, and contented himself with a prayerful wish that such fine faith would be rewarded. After that he jumped into bed.

For a long time he stared hard into the darkness, fascinated by the sweeping light outside and the insinuating, disconsolate murmur of the sea. He had had a difficult, wearying day, but he was glad that he had come to Skeleton Rocks. It was an experience such as he never again in his life was likely to have. Barrowe's strange behavior, his inconsistency in telling of Hollins' death and his evident fear when the dead lightkeeper's name was mentioned, all helped to make the wave-swept tower a place of delicious mystery and dread. And last, but by no means least, Danny Sears as the latest moving element in this real-life drama, contributed more than he had hoped for.

He had no illusions whatsoever about the situation.

143

While he loved it for its danger and was cognizant that it was just that element that had drawn him to Skeleton Rocks, he realized that something would be sacrificed before the mystery was untangled. And Barrowe, whom he felt certain to be the spider in the midst of the web, would not yield the secret without a terrific struggle.

He fell into a deep, dreamless sleep and slept peacefully until shortly before dawn when he was awakened by the blast of the fog siren. Startled, he sat up in bed covering his ears with his hands and looking about, bewildered.

The fog was thick outside his bedchamber window, so thick that he could just about discern a faint rim of light as it swept out of the tower. He was trying to determine how far the flashing light could penetrate in such weather when the siren belched forth such a blast as to shake his bed.

He wrapped the covers around his neck for a chilling draft struck him from below stairs somewhere. Fully five minutes passed and there was no sound from the siren. He stirred a little and peered toward the window.

The fog had not dissolved at all. Why then had there been no further blast from the siren? He stirred again and felt uneasy.

144

Suddenly he heard the outer stair door slam noisily. There seemed to be some muffled confusion below and after a few seconds of restless waiting, he could hear Dillie's shoes flip-flopping on the iron stairs. The youth seemed to be running up.

Hal got up, went to the shelf over the washstand, and got down the small kerosene lamp. He had it lighted and replaced it on the shelf just as Dillie made his appearance on the staircase.

“Cum down right ’way, Mr. Hal!” he said, gravely excited. “Barrowe’s keeled over ’count o’ the air pressure an’ I can’t bring him to. I found him b’low a-lyin’ on the floor when I cum in downstairs. I dragged him up ter the kitchen, I did. . . .”

“All right, Dill,” Hal said, drawing on his trousers as he spoke. “Here I am, and how!”

Barrowe was lying on the floor near the table, still and gray looking. All color had fled from his usually red, puffy cheeks and Hal’s first impression was that the man was dead. But his pulse, though weak, proved otherwise.

145

“Get me some vinegar, Dill!” he said, rubbing the man’s wrists. “And make some good strong coffee, quick!”

Dillie was a marvel of efficiency in the crisis. He went about swiftly and silently without making a mistake. After the coffee had been forced through Barrowe’s tight lips and he showed signs of reviving, Hal suggested that they carry him up to his bedroom.

“His heart’s taken a terrible blow from this, Dillie. He needs complete rest for a few hours. His bedroom’s best because I can watch the light till dawn and run down to see how he is between times. And if you’re sure you can stand it, you can manage the siren. Only you must tell me the truth about it, Dill—are you positively sure you’ve never felt any ill effects from that blasting thing?”

“Cross my heart I ain’t never been hurted by it!” Dillie squealed delightedly. “Kin I go now, after we carry him up?”

146

Hal assented and after Barrowe’s bulky person had been deposited on his own bed, Dillie lost no time in getting down to the man-sized task of blowing the siren. In point of fact, he was so puffed up with his own importance, that he forgot, for the time, his vigil for poor Hollins’ body.

Hal drew a chair beside Barrowe’s bed and watched the man’s faintly flickering eyelids. Color was slowly returning to his weather-beaten cheeks, and now and again he stirred slightly. Suddenly, he began to mutter aloud.

“Seven bells it wuz an’ he wouldn’ hear ter me stayin’ . . . that’s why I did . . . Doak is dead I keep a-tellin’ myself . . . *he’s got ter be!* Sears now . . . Edgar cud allus stand the siren more’n me . . . Edgar . . .” he groaned, then suddenly was fully conscious, wide-awake.

He stared at Hal for some seconds with fear-ridden eyes.

147

“Whar am I— *what did I do*, eh?” he asked excitedly. “What . . .”

He tried to rise but Hal warned him against it and told him what had happened. Barrowe listened intently, watching Hal’s face furtively.

“You’re all hunky-dory, Mr. Barrowe. Just rest and keep calm an hour or two. Only I wouldn’t attempt that siren any more if I

were you; it might kill you the next time.”

Barrowe stretched out his hairy hand and grasped Hal’s arm.

“Promise me yer won’t say anythin’ ’bout this, eh?”

“You mean about your fainting? Why?”

“The boss’ll cum up frum Portsmouth ter see me—it’ll make a fuss,” came the whining reply. “A body ain’t supposed ter hev a bum heart in the Service—see?”

“I know. Dillie told me that.” Hal watched him out of the corner of his eye. “You don’t want to see your boss from Portsmouth, huh?”

148

“No—er . . .” he faltered a moment, then looked up. “I don’t want to lose my job, I reckon,” he said almost gruffly.

“No, of course not,” Hal agreed politely. All the time there ran through his head Barrowe’s semi-conscious mumblings: “Doak is dead, I keep a-tellin’ myself . . . *he’s got ter be!*”

Doak . . . the Service boss from Portsmouth . . . Barrowe, himself! What did it all mean?

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CHAPTER XX

A RESCUE

Barrowe came around all right and by six o'clock he was able to polish the lenses and do his regular chores in the tower. The fog, too, had been dispelled in the rising sun so that Dillie turned from the siren to making breakfast and Hal hurried down the stairs sniffing at the savory smell of pancakes and sausage which rose from the kitchen.

Barrowe came down to his breakfast late and said not a word. After he had finished, he filled his pipe and left the room, stamping down the stairs and muttering to himself as he went. Then the outer door slammed and the two young men saw him descending the steel stairway to the Rocks.

“He took his pipe an’ went down like thet since the marnin’ Hollins wa’n’t here,” Dillie squealed, peeking out of the window after the lightkeeper. “He never did thet afore Hollins went, he didn’—he used ter go up ter the gallery fer his smoke an’ then go right ter bed.”

150

Hal stalked up and looked over Dillie’s head. Through the window, he could see Barrowe stamping about on the rocks in the brilliant sunshine and blowing great clouds of tobacco smoke up over his white-flecked hair.

“Hollins’ going has seemed to change everything, hasn’t it, Dill,” he said musingly. “You had your vigil for nothing, but then it was just as well you were up; you wouldn’t have found Barrowe otherwise.”

“I didn’ see nuthin’ all night ’ceptin’ the whitecaps, I didn’,” said Dillie mournfully. “But I ain’t give up—I jes’ hev the feelin’ that thar sea ain’t a-goin’ back on me. It’ll give me Hollins even ef he is drowned.”

Hal’s only thought was that this hallucination of Dillie’s was a result of his mental state. He wasted no time upon it, however, for there were numerous chores to be done about a lighthouse in the morning and his own immediate task was the making of the three beds and straightening up the rooms. He decided there was enough to think of in this work, considering the fact that he had neither made a bed nor straightened up a room in all his life.

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He was somewhat worried about the procedure but resolved to apply himself and work it out without Dillie’s help. Therein lay the foundation for his future success at Skeleton Rocks. The intricate problem of making beds required as much attention as did the strange mystery which enveloped Barrowe.

After the lightkeeper’s room had been straightened to his satisfaction, Hal made a hasty survey of the wardrobe.

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But there was nothing whatsoever which shed any light on the man’s strange behavior. Barrowe was nothing if not simple in his tastes for his wardrobe held but one change of working clothes and a good suit. Three pairs of his enormous shoes stood on the lower shelf, a southwester and oilskins hung on the door, and a pair of hip-boots just behind it seemed to complete all of his possessions in the way of outer clothing.

Hal hadn’t time to investigate any of the washstand drawers, for at that moment he heard the familiar flip-flop of Dillie’s

shoes coming up the staircase. He hurried down to meet the boy at the level of his own room.

“Yer been a-lookin’ out the winder, hey?” Dillie asked excitedly.

“No,” Hal answered, “why?”

“Thar’s a dory or somethin’ sou’east o’ the reef an’ she don’t seem ter be makin’ much headway. It’s turrible far an’ yet I kin imagine thet somebuddy’s in it a-wavin’ fer help.”

“Where’s Barrowe’s glasses?” Hal asked.

“Up in the tower,” Dillie squealed.

“Where’s Barrowe,” Hal asked, taking two steps at a time in Dillie’s lead. “Has he seen it, do you suppose?”

153

“Naw, I don’ reckon he has. He ain’t done nuthin’ fer the last hour but sit on thet big south rock in the sunshine with his head in his hands, an’ every once in a while, he looks off toward Portsmouth.”

Hal looked out of the gallery window at Barrowe while Dillie was hunting for the glasses. It was his first really fine view from the tower thus far and he made the most of it, all the way from studying the lightkeeper who made such a dismal picture as he sat slumped over on the shining south rock to the tiny speck of the dory bobbing along on a billowy sea.

“Now thar, take a look at thet, an’ see what yer kin see,” said Dillie coming up from behind and adjusting the glasses for

Hal's use.

Hal let his gaze travel from below the south rocks where three dories and a lifeboat were lying fast, out over the shining sea, south and southeast. He descried the dory, and through the powerful glasses it assumed its natural size. In it he saw the smallish figure of a man who seemed to be paddling with one hand and frantically waving at the lighthouse with the other. Without doubt he was in distress.

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"He needs help, all right, Dill!" Hal exclaimed. "Looks to me as if he's lost his oars or something."

Dillie was murmuring hysterically, eager to be of service.

"Kin I go—*kin I?*" he asked pathetically. "I kin swim—I kin manage a dory even in thick weather, I kin."

"I bet you can," Hal agreed, making for the stair. "Sure, you can go, Dill. Why not? Only we mustn't lose time."

Barrowe received the news indifferently, and puffed on his corncob pipe without moving from the rock. His apparent complacency, however, was somewhat belied by that wild, fearful look in his cold eyes which Hal was already familiar with.

"Reckon it's some smart-aleck city feller from Rocky Cliff, what's stayin' thar fer Easter," he grumbled. "Like as not he's afeerd he's lost."

155

"Then it's our job to go out and tell him that he's not," said Hal, untying one of the dories. He glanced up at Barrowe's

enormous feet shifting uneasily up on the south rock. “That’s what the Service is for, isn’t it, Mr. Barrowe?”

Barrowe grunted and glanced at Hal from under his shaggy brows.

“Mebbe,” he grumbled, “but it ain’t fer every smart-aleck city feller what gits cold feet an’ expec’s us ter tow him in every time—no sirree!”

“I don’t suppose so,” Hal said coldly, “but just the same, this smart-aleck, whoever he is, seems to be in serious trouble. Dillie’s help will be all I’ll need. You see, I happen to be a city fellow too, Mr. Barrowe, but I don’t get cold feet every time I’m in serious trouble. I just expect a helping hand the same as I intend giving this chap. Well, Dillie . . .”

Dillie fell to with glee and in another second had helped Hal push the dory off the rocks and into the surf.

156

Barrowe had not a word to say and looked on coldly, though none the less curiously. And after the two young men had righted both themselves and the boat, he got up from where he was sitting and sauntered up toward the tower.

“He’ll watch us through the glasses,” Dillie squealed. “I reckon he’s jes’ as anxious as we are.”

“I’d never know it, if you didn’t tell me,” Hal smiled. “The man’s so mysterious he makes me mad. Why he should act like that simply because we want to go to a human being in distress . . . oh, well, what’s the use of talking about it? It gets me absolutely nowhere.”

With a sure hand at the propeller, Dillie steered the dory safely out from the Rocks. The sleeves of Hal's windbreaker drew tightly about his muscles each time he strained at the oars until at last they were riding with the tide.

Not far from the Rocks, Dillie suddenly squealed and pointed a long, thin finger toward a dark object in the water not five feet distant.

157

"A shark!" Hal exclaimed, interested. *"Gosh, a shark!"*

The voracious fish was at least six feet long and, apparently oblivious of the two young men, was swimming swiftly toward the Rocks. Hal strained at the oars and swung the dory closer in order to get a better view.

"Him I call White Spot," Dillie said. "Him's been a-hangin' round the Rocks fer the las' few days now. I saw him fer the fust the marnin' Hollins wuzn't here. I jes' can't imagin' what he wants 'cause he didn' pay no more attention ter me than he does us'n's right now."

Hal leaned over and saw that the shark was of a darkish color with one gray spot near his head. The man-eater seemed not one whit disconcerted by this close observation of his deadly appearance. In fact, he swam straight on toward the Rocks and was soon lost to sight among the jagged stones that jutted out into the water.

158

Suddenly Hal was reminded of what Captain Dell had said of the waters thereabouts being full of sharks. Also, Dillie's remarks about "White Spot" hanging around Skeleton Rocks for the past few days brought to mind the bit of sea-lore that the

venerable captain had told them of the man-eaters coming back to the vicinities where they had claimed their victims.

It was a rather horrible thing to contemplate, particularly in the face of the present shadows hovering about Skeleton Rocks. And along with the thought of White Spot, the shark, there came into Hal's mind, two names—Hollins, and the missing Captain Bill Doak.

He dismissed the thought with a shrug of his broad shoulders for he was averse to believing anything so superstitious. The shark, he tried to tell himself, had absolutely nothing to do with the dead Hollins or the missing Captain Doak. It just happened that the man-eater fancied the vicinity of the Rocks and that was all there was to it.

159

Notwithstanding this decision he glanced at Dillie and asked, "Why do you suppose that murderous-looking fish never gave us a tumble, Dill?"

"He ain't hungry, I reckon," Dillie answered after a prolonged giggle. "When they's filled up, they ain't a-keerin' who goes by. Yer ain't fergittin' the *Sister Ann*, is yer? What he got the night she struck we kin guess, I reckon."

"Yes, yes," Hal said with a shudder. "Let's talk no more about it, Dill. It's too horrible!"

Dillie grinned but said no more and kept his mind on the propeller. They were getting close enough to the distressed dory to be concerned, especially since they could no longer see its occupant. They became aware of this simultaneously.

“Overboard—*drowned?*” Hal shouted. “I don’t see . . .
Dillie, stand up and see if you can see him!”

Dillie did as he was told, craning his neck toward the boat.

“He ain’t drownded, Mr. Hall,” he said. “He’s a-fallen on his face ’gainst the seats an’ he’s all stretched out like he’s fainted.”



“HE’S A-FALLEN ON HIS FACE, MR. HAL,” DILLIE
CRIED.

Hal said nothing but put all his energy to the oars. It was a task to head off this unmanned boat, left to the mercy of the tide, but he accomplished it and in ten minutes Dillie was able to lean forward and hook the dory to their own. The man, however, did not stir.

“Think you can make it?” Hal asked, excitedly. “Think you can get in and get him while I hold the oars?”

Dillie uttered a funny, squeaking sort of cry and Hal looked up to find that he was standing stark still and staring at the partly prostrate man, his face livid and full of pain.

Hal raised himself, and looked in at the man. His rotund body moved a little and though he was breathing it was evident he did it with great difficulty.

161

“He’s not dead, Dillie!” Hal cried. “Whatever’s the matter with him, he’s still alive—he’s . . .”

“I know, I know!” Dillie shrieked. “It ain’t that I’m a-cryin’ fer.”

“Then for heaven’s sake hurry and tell me what it is!”

Dillie sobbed and wrung his hands, then balanced himself as he stepped over into the boat beside the prostrate man.

“*It’s Hollins!*” he was screaming. “This here feller is *Hollins!*”

CHAPTER XXI

THE DEAD RETURN

Hollins' round head lay still in Dillie's lap for a few seconds after they were started back toward the light. His breathing was labored and loud and his face looked feverish. Hal, as inexperienced as he was about such matters, guessed that the man was a victim of pneumonia.

He had opened his eyes once or twice while they were lifting him across to their boat. He seemed too sick and weary to speak then, but Dillie's simple soul was filled with joy by a feeble smile and look of recognition from this man who had befriended him.

Hollins seemed to gain a little strength after that, however, and reached out his small, broad hand toward Dillie.

Dillie grasped it eagerly, barely able to see through his tears. Hollins smiled and opened his gray eyes wide, so that Hal saw for the first time the kindly look in them. He was all that Dillie had said of him and a great deal more.

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“Dillie, m' boy,” he murmured, “ter think yer come fer me! I couldn' o' made it alone—I wuz a-gettin' too weak after mos' four nights an' five days. The oars they both cracked on me an' I went driftin' out ter sea after I passed the reef.” He groaned pathetically, then went on, with a little chuckle: “I'm a human compass, I reckon, cuz I paddled my way back well's I cud with half a' oar. . . . Yer seen me from the tower, eh, Dillie?”

“Shore, I did,” Dillie answered, softly crying. “I cudn’t tell who ’twas, but I seed it wuz a feller in trouble. Then, Mr. Hal here, what’s been a friend ter me, Hollins, he sees it too through the glass . . . then we come . . . I didn’ think on it, it wuz you! Since yer been gone we been a-thinkin’ yer wuz dead, mebbe even in the shark, White Spot’s belly. . . .”

“*Dead?*” Hollins’ amazement made him too weak to speak for a moment. When he spoke again it was incoherently, for he was obviously delirious. “Fer why should I go ’way frum my boy Dillie ter die, eh? Fer why . . . so my Dillie cum ter save me . . . Barrowe, he wuz changed pow’ful when he got me outer bed . . . he . . .”

164

Barrowe’s name brought a hundred and one thoughts to Hal’s puzzled brain. Barrowe seemed to be the keynote of everything at Skeleton Rocks and the now fitfully sleeping Hollins seemed to hold in his fevered brain some light on the darkening mystery. His talk, both rational and delirious, was strange indeed: cracked oars after he had passed the reef, his obvious amazement that Dillie should think he was dead when he had himself written a note to that effect.

What was the answer to it?

He had no time to ponder upon the question for they were just then approaching the Rocks and it took one’s whole mind to watch that approach, particularly when the tide was ebbing.

165

Hollins’ breathing, though still labored, was no worse and he seemed to be sleeping quite soundly. Dillie whimpered

occasionally, clasping and unclasping the hot hands of his guardian. Suddenly, he pointed over Hal's red head significantly.

"Barrowe!" he whimpered. "He must o' been up in the tower like I told yer. Now he's a-comin' down the steers."

Hal nodded, but could find nothing to say. His heart was racing for some reason or other and he had a peculiar constriction in his throat that he usually got when some crucial moment was impending.

Barrowe, he felt instinctively, was the critical issue.

And Hal was right, for at that moment, as he paddled the dory through the spray and up to the rocky shore, Barrowe was hurrying down over the glistening south rock, his red, puffy face anxious and questioning. Dillie raised his thin hand.

166

"*It's Hollins! Hollins come back!*" he cried joyfully, yet sadly. "He's turrible sick!"

Hal steadied the boat at that moment and jumped lightly out of it onto the rocks. Still holding it, he turned partly around to greet Barrowe, but was astounded at what he saw.

All color had fled from the man's face and he was staggering, his hairy hands clutching at his heart.

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CHAPTER XXII

WHITE SPOT

“A doctor should be sent for right away,” Hal said to the still bewildered Barrowe. “Hollins is a mighty sick man—too sick to delay. He only spoke a little before he became delirious.”

“*What d’ he say?*” Barrowe asked almost pleading.

“Very little,” Hal answered, “except that he told something about his oars cracking and drifting out to sea. He seemed surprised when Dillie told him we all thought he was dead—he didn’t say anything about the note.”

Barrowe blanched, if that were possible, but he seemed, surprisingly, to have regained his poise.

“Jes’ the same I seed thet note, so he can’t say he didn’ leave it,” he said, his eyes wandering about the rocks uneasily. “Reckon he decided he didn’ want ter die after he found out how cold it wuz ter sea.”

168

“No matter what he decided, he’s a sick man right now,” Hal said impatiently. “One of us must go for a doctor and I guess it will be me. I’m afraid rowing over and back would be too much for you, Mr. Barrowe—your heart has had one too many shocks today,” he added with biting sarcasm.

Barrowe said nothing but reached down in a gesture to help Dillie carry the sick man. As he did so, he mumbled the directions to Rocky Cliff Village and told Hal to get any doctor

he could. The regular village doctor, he said, was laid up.

“Thar’s allus a doc vacationin’ at Rocky Cliff Inn, though,” he concluded falteringly. “The Inn’s up the beach—yer’ll see it fust thing.”

“K. O., Barrowe,” Hal said tersely. “Do what you can for Mr. Hollins till I get back with the doctor.”

169

“Anyways, *I* will, Mr. Hal,” Dillie said nervously. “I’ll git him a mustard plaster an’ things like thet. Hollins did thet fer Barrowe onct when he wuz laid up with thet pneumony, wuzn’t yer, Barrowe?”

“Eh? Er—yes, yes,” stammered Barrowe. “I wuz.”

Hal watched them carry Hollins up over the high south rock, then got into the dory. Just as he was about to shove off he noticed, wedged tightly between two of the step-like rocks, something glittering. Hastily he bent over and pulled at it until it came away in his hand.

It was a watch, apparently white gold and of recent make. Curiously, he turned it over in his hand, then snapped open its cover and for a moment stared in wide-eyed amazement at the inscription he found therein.

“To Bill Doak,” it read; “from Danny Sears, October 22nd, 1930.”

He snapped the cover back into place and put the watch in his pocket. He shoved off the dory and, sitting down, took up his oars and swung them determinedly on his way out

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from the Rocks.

“*Bill Doak—Danny Sears!*” he said aloud. “Bill Doak’s watch! What the dickens does it mean? Mean?” he asked himself again. “Gosh, what does it mean when one finds a missing man’s watch wedged so tightly in between those rocks that it would take some time for the sea to dislodge it? Or was it buried there—hidden there? I don’t know. . . .”

He let the little boat glide out past the last of the rocks. Gulls screeched overhead and one of their number dipped down to the rocks. Hal glanced back, more mystified than ever.

Suddenly, he was aware of something dark gliding past the dory and looking into the water, he saw a shark with one gray spot near his head, while the rest of his body was dark.

White Spot!

171

The name came to mind before he was conscious of it and he fell to wondering whether it was really the same man-eater that Dillie had so named. Certainly his behavior was the same, for he paid not one bit of attention to Hal and the dory, but swam swiftly past and disappeared under the rocks.

Captain Dell’s superstitious talk came rushing back and he could almost hear the venerable old seaman say, “Thar, I told yer how them sharks is sure ter cum back an’ hang round whar they’ve katched their victims!”

Certainly White Spot seemed to bear out this seemingly absurd superstition. The man-eater was a constant visitor at Skeleton Rocks. Hadn’t Dillie said that he had noticed the shark the

morning after the *Sister Ann* went up on the reef?

Hal remembered this with a visible shudder and he bent over the oars with twofold energy. It was a horrible thing to contemplate, but there he had some very gruesome evidence in his pocket if one were to admit that the shark was a link in the mystery.

172

He was positive on one point, and that was that the watch had been placed between those rocks by human hands—placed there deliberately. Where then was Captain Bill Doak, the owner of the watch given to him by Danny Sears?

Where was Danny Sears? Why had he run away in such an unusual manner the night before? And last but not least, where did Barrowe fit into all these puzzling problems?

“I’ll go crazy if I go on asking myself these questions, without getting any answer to them!” Hal muttered aloud. “I’ll just go crazy, that’s all.”

Nevertheless, he didn’t go crazy, for at that moment the watch in his pocket was the most convincing proof he had yet had. Danny Sears, he had glimpsed only the night before; Hollins was back, though under very strange conditions, and Barrowe he knew to be a living being. But Doak . . . where was Doak?

173

All that was left of the man was his watch, while the man-eating shark, named White Spot, still haunted the wave-swept Skeleton Rocks wherein he had perhaps claimed his hapless victim.

CHAPTER XXIII

ELISSA

The "Inn" as Rocky Cliff Village called her sole hostelry, was a low, rambling affair of white painted shingles. It gleamed brightly in the noon-day sun, and atop a shining white flagpole waved the Stars and Stripes, fluttering gently in a mild, ocean breeze.

Hal espied it as soon as he came within sight of the beach, which undulated clear back to the Inn, a distance of a quarter of a mile. Just beyond was another white frame building which he was to shortly discover as the home of Rocky Cliff's postoffice. A few other stores seemed to comprise the whole of the village so picturesquely situated overlooking the sea.

The rest of Rocky Cliff was hidden behind a veritable fortress of rock, and save for the bare-topped trees in the forest beyond, one would not have been able to discern just where the cliffs ended. Thin columns of blue smoke rose up from behind the towering rocks and finally dissolved in the clear, bracing air.

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Hal reminded himself that camp smoke usually meant meal time and he was fearfully hungry. The strenuous exercise of rowing in the clear sea air had put a keen edge on his appetite, and as he beached the boat on the dazzling, white sands he resolved to get something to stay his hunger just as soon as he reached the Inn.

Consequently, he blurted out the reason for his errand between

great mouthfuls of milk chocolate, much to the despair of the Inn's elderly Yankee clerk.

"Yer say yer want a doctor cuz someone's hollerin' over ter the light?" the bespectacled person shouted back at him. His hearing was not overly good.

"No," Hal answered, swallowing such a terrific mouthful, that he grew pale for the moment. "I said that Hollins—you know, *Hollins*—well, we found him just before—Dillie and I . . . he drifted out to sea in a dory. He's down with pneumonia, I think. . . . Anyway, is there a doctor here?"

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"Eh?" the clerk queried. "Oh, a doctor for Hollins! Then he didn't commit suicide Hollins didn', eh? Funny, thet he writ a note like thet an' then didn' do it, eh? Dillie gave out thet Barrowe wuz the only one seed the note. Barrowe, he's a queer one. He allus wuz quiet an' queer like, but now he's queer, quiet an' nasty, I heerd. Wa'al, so ye're the city feller what's over thar lendin' them a hand till Portsmouth sends a reg'lar man, eh?" He coughed. "Reckon it ain't a pleasant place ter bide in, eh?"

Hal was exasperated and his face showed it.

"Is there a *doctor* here?" he shouted so that the dining-room adjacent resounded to the question.

One of the diners stepped forth—a tall, portly looking gentleman of middle age. He smiled pleasantly through horn-rimmed glasses at Hal.

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"Did I hear you say you wanted a doctor, young man?" he

asked in a deep, bass voice.

“I guess the whole world must have heard that I wanted a doctor!” Hal laughed. “I want one, *and how!* There’s a man, assistant lightkeeper Hollins, over at Skeleton Rocks, and though I know darn little about sick people, I know *he’s* darn sick! He’s been drifting out to sea and back for the past four nights and five days—that explains it enough, doesn’t it?”

“Too much,” the portly gentleman smiled. “Young man, I’m Doctor Danforth from Portsmouth, at your service. Just a moment till I get to my rooms and get my bag and coat.”

Hal’s anger dissolved into a broad grin as he introduced himself. Suddenly, however, his grin became like something fixed for he espied behind the portly Doctor Danforth, such a vision of feminine loveliness as to stop the tongue of any young man of twenty-one.

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He stuffed the remainder of his milk-chocolate bar into his mouth and felt foolish. He stared, saw that her eyes were gray and her hair a delicious spun gold and guessed that she wasn’t any more than eighteen years old. Doctor Danforth did some guessing also, for he turned around smilingly and put his arm about the girl, paternally.

“My daughter, Elissa, Mr. Hal Keen,” he said with a low chuckle. “We’re Easter vacationing together.”

“And I have to drag you away from her and take you over to that dismal lighthouse,” said Hal, profoundly sympathetic, after having acknowledged his introduction to the fair Elissa.

“Oh, but you’re not dragging Dad away from me,” said the girl in a voice naturally husky. “And as for any lighthouse being dismal—how can they be when they’re lighthouses!” She laughed heartily, and added: “The only way I can tell if they’re really dismal is to go and see for myself— isn’t that so, Dad? Surely, you’re not going to let Mr. Keen drag you away to a lighthouse and not ask me along, are you?”

“But Elissa, it’s not such a pleasant ride in a dory,” said the doctor.

“The ocean’s like glass today, Doctor Danforth,” Hal said, suddenly inspired. “Besides, it balances a dory so much better to have a light weight in the center,” he added, noting that Elissa could not weigh more than one hundred pounds.

Elissa smiled at Hal, then turned to her father.

“And what’s more, Dad,” she said with mild reproof, “you promised to take me to a lighthouse the very first chance you got to go yourself. And this is the first chance!”

“All right, Elissa,” the doctor laughed heartily; “you win, without a doubt.”

Hal felt that he had not entirely lost out, either.

CHAPTER XXIV

A PLEASANT CROSSING

While Hal was waiting for the doctor and his pretty daughter, the clerk called to him in a low voice:

“If yer be Hal Keen,” he wheezed from behind the desk, “thar’s a telygram a-waitin’ fer yer ter the pustoffice next door. It come jes’ a few minutes back an’ the station-agent brought it down and left it thar, count o’ Dillie allus cums over fer the mail ’bout this time o’ day.”

Hal lost no time in getting to the postoffice next door. He mailed the letter to his uncle that he had been carrying in his pocket, then asked for the telegram, which read:

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“Gave message to your mother . . . she is delighted you are spending Easter vacation in such peaceful surroundings . . . suppose you’re bored to death by now . . . books and things on way . . . keep up your spirits. Department all agog over schooner *Sister Ann*. Report is Doak took off from Liverpool with fortune in uncut gems, crew and himself being disposing end of great smuggling ring working out of Capetown, S. A. . . . Scotland Yard apprised us yesterday . . . Schooner carried small cargo woolens only . . . no sign of jewels as you know . . . Sears only known member of crew alive . . . He checked out Rocky Cliff Inn at five o’clock this morning, supposedly headed for New York . . . if only one alive . . . has he jewels? Big reward for capture of jewel smugglers by the

government. Wouldn't you like to be with me on the trial?

UNK."

Hal tore the night letter into tiny bits after rereading it. His smile was broad as he flung the yellow pieces of paper into the street outside the postoffice, and as he walked the few paces to the Inn, he whistled.

Bored? How could he be after just meeting a vision like Elissa Danforth? Nor had he been bored before she loomed upon his horizon! How many moments had there been since his arrival at Skeleton Rocks when he wasn't puzzling his brain over some newly-developed complexity? He couldn't think of many such moments, for Barrowe dominated his mental picture too much, and where Barrowe was, there was always excitement, or at least something to keep one from boredom.

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Elissa Danforth trailed out of the Inn after her learned father, as fresh in her leather coat and hat as the bracing sea air itself. Hal joined them smilingly, and they made an interesting looking trio as they sallied down the beach to the dory.

Hal made a point of placing himself where he could see Elissa, but Doctor Danforth being obtuse in such matters, took the seat intended for his daughter, spreading himself comfortably for a "chat," as he expressed it. Consequently, Hal had to be content to gaze upon the girl's slim back with an occasional glimpse of her fair cheeks already pink in the ocean air.

"Well," said the doctor, when they were at last on their way, "I hear that the head lightkeeper over at Skeleton Rocks is a chap by the name of Barrowe, eh?"

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“Mm, that’s his name,” Hal answered, craning his neck to get a look at a reddish-gold curl that was blowing about Elissa’s white neck.

“D’ye happen to know if he’s one of two brothers whose father brought them up in the lighthouse at Devil’s Ledge?” queried the doctor. “It’s about fifty miles north of here.”

“I heard from the captain of the lighthouse tender, *Cactus*, that Barrowe was brought up in a lighthouse,” Hal answered. “But where it was, he didn’t say. Why?”

“I guess it’s the same chap, all right,” Doctor Danforth said musingly. “I knew him about twenty-five years ago when I was an interne in the Portsmouth hospital. His was a very interesting case—he was brought all the way down to us from Devil’s Ledge with a terrible skull condition.”

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“Oh, yes,” said Hal, interested. “Captain Dell said something about his having been hurt a long time ago. His brother did it, I think.”

“Yes, he and this brother never got along, he confided to me at the time.” The doctor drew his overcoat collar about his neck. “He would never say what the quarrel was about, but when he recovered he said that he would never forgive his brother, not if he was starving or dying at his feet. Quite a threat to make about one’s own flesh and blood, eh? But I couldn’t blame Barrowe—I saw what he suffered. He came as close to dying as he’ll ever get again. He had been beaten about the head and he had one crack that had to be trepanned.”

“What’s that?” Hal asked curiously.

“A fussy job in operations,” the doctor answered readily. “It would be difficult to explain to a layman, outside of telling you that it takes a small metal disk about the size of a quarter, which is put in the skull to replace the damaged bone. That is trepanning.”

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“And that’s what you did to Barrowe’s bean, huh?” Hal asked, unconscious of saying anything flippant.

Doctor Danforth understood and smiled.

“That’s what I did to Barrowe’s bean, as you call it, young man. I recall it vividly, simply because it was my very first serious operation. I considered it such an intricate job that I got the brilliant thought beforehand of inscribing my initials on the disk so that posterity would recognize my efforts. We had a good laugh over it at the time—Barrowe, poor chap, said he’d always have something to remember me by.”

“I should say he has had,” Hal laughed. “It’s a wonder though, that he was able to remember anything after such a deal as he got.”

Doctor Danforth nodded his head gravely.

“To tell you the truth, young man,” he said, “it made Barrowe a different person altogether. Before the injury he had been lively and good humored I understand, but afterward—well, for one thing it affected his speech. We kept track of him for a time afterward and we learned that he stumbled and stuttered so in his talk, that he resolved never to speak unless it was absolutely necessary. No doubt that’s why he took up this post at Skeleton Rocks—he probably wanted to

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escape being drawn into conversations.” The lighthouse was looming up before them then, lonesome and dismal-looking even under the bright sun of early afternoon. And with this impression in mind, the doctor added: “This looks as if he came to the right place to keep his silence.”

“If he started out with that intention,” Hal said stoutly, “he certainly isn’t living up to it now. I heard about Barrowe’s mildness before I saw him, but I got a very different opinion when I first laid eyes on him yesterday. And as for stumbling in his talk—the only time he’s done that in my presence is when he’s so mad that he can’t say all the things he wants to at once. Boy, he’s a wild guy if you want my candid opinion! He’s got a weak heart, and that’s all that keeps him from raising the roof. I think he’s scared of dying.”

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“Hmph! Age does have its effect on human beings, eh? Barrowe’s heart was in splendid condition twenty-five years ago; that’s all that pulled him through that ordeal of his. A heart condition now wouldn’t be extraordinary—many of us develop that in later life, although it isn’t usual if one has had excellent health and led an exemplary life. But his developing into a loquacious individual so suddenly . . . do you happen to know if he’s had any sudden shock?”

“There’s the rub, Doctor Danforth,” Hal grinned. “That’s what I’ve been trying to find out.”

“What?” cried Elissa exultantly, “you don’t mean to tell me there’s some mystery going on at that lighthouse?”

Hal could not resist telling his suspicions in detail to

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such a delightfully interested listener. The doctor, too, proved to be a good companion in the matter and gladly offered many suggestions born of his own mature wisdom.

“If you suspect that Barrowe is guilty of killing this Doak,” he advised Hal, “then don’t antagonize him with sarcastic remarks as you’ve led me to believe you’ve been doing. Lead him along, Hal—coax him gently, and when you think he’s about due to fall into a trap, send word to us through that half-wit boy, you call Dillie. In turn, I’ll send word to your uncle—this is too good a case to have spoiled by such a small town constable as Rocky Cliff boasts. Besides, it’s a government concern, for the lighthouse is on government property, eh?”

“Doggone, you’re right, Doctor Danforth!” Hal exclaimed vehemently. “Gosh, I’d be tickled pink if I could get Barrowe to fall for a ruse about Doak, hook, line and sinker. I know as well as anything that the mystery of the *Sister Ann* can be solved by Barrowe and Danny Sears. Unk thinks he’s tagging it by trailing Danny Sears from Rocky Cliff to New York. Well, if he asks me, I think the trail leads away from Skeleton Rocks and back to Skeleton Rocks again. But I’m going to keep it under my hat until I’ve as good as got the goods on Barrowe. Unk would never let me hear the end of it, if I telegraphed him now and the whole thing turned to be a fluke.”

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“Oh, please don’t make such a mistake as that, Mr. Keen!” Elissa begged prettily. “I’d like so much to see you come out triumphant in this. Your uncle will have to be proud of you then!”

Hal reddened with secret pride.

“Leave it to me, Miss—Miss Danforth,” he stammered. “I’m going to take things easy and do it right.”

“I know you will, Mr. Keen!” the girl said encouragingly.

“Only *do* be careful! If this Mr. Barrowe is the man you say he is, he’s not likely to give up without a fight!”

“I’ll say he won’t!” Hal agreed. “But I guess I can take care of myself. If you happen to see the light out one of these nights, you’ll know that something’s afoot. Either Barrowe’ll be knocked out or dead, or I will!”

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“Mr. Keen!” Elissa cried. “Please don’t tempt Fate so! It’s not exactly a wise thing to do when circumstances are as they are.”

“From the look in Keen’s eyes, I can tell he’s juggled with Fate before this,” Doctor Danforth said to his daughter. He chuckled with amusement, adding: “And judging from his size, Elissa, I don’t think Fate has much of a chance.”

“I’ll admit I’ve been able to hold my own,” Hal said modestly. “But there always comes a time in everybody’s life I guess, no matter how strong they are, when they find that the odds are against them. Perhaps my time will come for that too—perhaps it may be this time! Who knows?”

Hal himself was to know before another day dawned.

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CHAPTER XXV

DOCTOR DANFORTH'S OPINION

Barrowe was asleep in his room when the trio arrived at the tower. Dillie received them eagerly, reporting at once that Hollins was resting more comfortably from his faithful attentions and seemed not to be breathing so laboriously.

“I give him mustard plasters, I did,” he squealed proudly. “I give him plasters on his back an’ his chest an’ I give his feet a mustard bath an’ everythin’. He sez he felt a hull lot better after thet.”

“I bet he did, Dill,” said Hal encouragingly. “Now take the doctor up to Hollins. I’ll wait down in the sitting room with Miss Danforth and if you need me for anything just whistle.”

“I can’t whistle, Mr. Hal,” squealed Dillie.

“But I can,” the doctor said with a hearty chuckle. “If there’s any help needed, I’ll do the whistling.”

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But there seemed not to be any help needed for they heard no whistling summons. A half hour passed and Hal was beginning to feel that he could go on talking to Elissa Danforth all his life. When fifteen minutes more had gone and he heard the doctor and Dillie coming down the stairs, he felt not a little resentful toward them for being the means of terminating the most pleasant chat he had ever experienced.

Doctor Danforth looked thoughtful and grave, but it soon

developed from his talk that Hollins was not responsible for this attitude—that unfortunate man was “sick enough” as the physician expressed it, but he had every chance of recovering with good care. It was Barrowe, that stormy petrel of Skeleton Rocks, who was occupying the doctor’s thoughts.

“Dillie here told me not to go up to his room and disturb him,” said the doctor. “But I said shucks, I wasn’t going to be in the same building with the first real patient I had twenty-five years ago, and not see him! It didn’t make any difference that I do intend coming over here tomorrow morning bright and early—I wanted to see him today. Well, I did!”

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“Oh, oh!” Hal laughed. “And you found him pleasant and hospitable?”

Doctor Danforth shook his head solemnly.

“It amazes me sometimes what Time does to people,” he said suddenly. “But in this case it astounds me—simply astounds me! Entirely aside from the medical mystery of his ability to talk normally within the last few days, I’m quite puzzled by his attitude. He actually acted as if he resented my reminding him of his terrible predicament twenty-five years ago.”

“Just how did he act?” Hal asked, interested.

“When I went up the stairs into his room as Dillie directed me, I saw at once that he was pretending sleep. He was sprawled out on his bed, his shoes off and trousers on. I called him by name and he made a good job of pretending to be startled. I introduced myself, thinking that the name would bring some sort of recognition into those peculiarly wild eyes

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of his. But it didn't. He acted positively stupid about it. Even though I'd changed, I was certain he'd remember the name instantly. It took him quite a while to remember me. I had to go into detail and tell him that I was the doctor who had patched up his old skull."

"Then he remembered, huh?"

"Only grudgingly, Keen. That's the word for it —*grudgingly*. His talk was all in the same manner. I asked him, as a doctor's privilege, if I couldn't look at the scar I had helped to heal there after these many years. Perhaps you can understand my motive—professional curiosity, that's all. All of us like to see what our incisions look like whether it's a year old or twenty-five years old. A doctor's vanity, I suppose, and no worse than the author or artist who never tires of standing off and gazing at the results of his labor. Well, he was really insulted that I asked to look at that head scar of his. It's absurd as I tell it, but the man almost reminded me of some over-modest spinster, who'd have some reason to refuse such a request, but a man like Barrowe . . . that illiterate hulk of a man! He shouted at me that he wasn't on exhibition to anybody, not even the doctor who had once 'operated him' as he so intelligently expressed it."

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"The mean old grouch!" Elissa exclaimed. "I wouldn't ask him again, Dad."

"I don't intend to," Doctor Danforth chuckled, his old self again. "Nevertheless, the man interests me. I shall see him at any rate, for my visits to poor old Hollins will be bringing me over here for a week at least. Well, Elissa . . ."

“Isn’t it possible for me to visit the light tower?” the girl interposed, pleadingly. She asked her father, but her eyes were actually upon Hal.

“We’d have to pass through Barrowe’s room, my daughter,” the doctor answered. “It would be more pleasant to wait until tomorrow morning. We’ll come here bright and early and let Dillie and Hal take us about, eh?”

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Elissa nodded and drew her coat about her, ready to depart.

“Frankly, Dad,” she said, “from all I’ve heard of the man, I’d be just as pleased if I never laid eyes on him.”

And Hal, putting his hand in his pocket at that moment and coming in contact with Doak’s watch, wondered if that departed soul had expressed the same wish.

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CHAPTER XXVI

THE CLUE

Hal had insisted on rowing the doctor and his daughter back to Rocky Cliff. Dillie, he had assured them, was much more efficient around the sick man than he was, and could be trusted to obey orders implicitly. Besides, the youth's love and anxiety for Hollins was so great that it was obvious that he wanted to wait upon his beloved benefactor himself.

Unconscious of any selfish motive, Hal was nevertheless honest enough with himself to admit that Dillie's devotion to Hollins had not operated in the matter at all. He simply wanted to be with the lovely Elissa a little longer, and though his muscles were already sore from too much rowing, he was willing to subject them to still more strain just for the privilege of the young lady's company.

Consequently, when he again rowed into Skeleton Rocks, he was utterly weary and half-famished. So much exercise and not a bite of lunch! Strange, he hadn't thought of food since he stuffed the last of the milk-chocolate bar into his mouth over at the Inn. That was when first he saw Elissa—it seemed an eternity ago. Why, he knew the girl as well as he knew his own mother—well, not quite, but almost!

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He paddled the boat through the dashing spray and maneuvered her skilfully in. Then he jumped out and dragged her up on the slippery rocks where she could be tied along with the others out of reach of the swift tide. That accomplished, he scrambled up over the south rock, which was of gigantic size and bore

odd crevices filled with slimy growths of sea-weed.

It was because he felt so fatigued that Hal slipped—top-heavy, he termed it. Be that as it may, he tripped just as he scaled the big rock, and in doing so, kicked out of place a small stone, losing his balance besides. The next second he found himself sitting upright, with the stone in his hand.

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He laughed softly, being more frightened than hurt, and looked about for the fissure in which to replace the stone. Suddenly he saw it, a gaping hole right at his feet, and he leaned forward with the stone, only to find that some of the other stones about the hole seemed to be loose.

Without any conscious intent, he picked one up. It came away easily, and he picked up another, and another. He had picked away a dozen or more small stones, all in the same area, when he discovered with something of a shock a square metal box lying in a breach which the loose stones had covered.

He drew the box out quickly and saw at once that it bore the initials, W.D. He tried to open it but in vain; it was locked. Hastily, his eyes darted back again to the breach, only to discover a longish sort of book lying there in the dark hiding-place.

His hands trembled as he drew this out. It felt slimy, probably because of its waterproof cover which had a glazed finish. For a moment he fumbled with the metal clasp which held together its contents and tried to tell himself that it was but a dream and not an actual reality that he saw printed on the cover.

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He suddenly lost all sense of his surroundings, everything, and was fumbling eagerly at the metal clasp. As it came open, he saw on the very first page, a record of the ill-fated schooner signed by Bill Doak, Master. He shivered, and turned at random to another page.

“Thick weather all day,” it read; “had to use the pumps. She’s been listing most all day. Better tonight . . . crew drunk and messy.” Her position and the weather was given as usual and in a small, cramped hand, Bill Doak had again signed his name as master.

Hal turned the pages, his ears pounding and his heart beating rapidly. He came at last to a page in the log-book, the page where the last day’s record was entered—the day on which the schooner *Sister Ann* had lumbered into her last port—the reef at Skeleton Rocks.

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“Crew drunk as usual,” was one of the entries; “they seem to have the pick on me—specially Danny Sears. I give him one in the jaw and he sez he’ll git even—ha! ha!” Farther down in the same day’s entries was recorded the time: “It’s three bells and we’re outer luck. That storm two days ago started puttin’ us on the Fritz—now we *are* Fritz . . . the crew ain’t able ter do a thing fer me. . . . I shouldn’t have tried ter save expense by makin’ this cruise with bum machinery . . . it’s my fault. . . . We’re off Skeleton Rocks Light, Maine . . . driftin’ an’ they don’t seem ter see us . . . headin’ straight fer the dum reef with the light showin’ us the way. . . . Ain’t that hot . . . jes’ tumbled the crew outer their bunks an’ they sobered up sorta when I told

em . . .”

Hal looked up at the warm sun shining down on the rocks. The sea was wailing and dashing up but a little distance from where he sat and the sharp cry of gulls in their hunt for food now seemed but part of a dream. It was only the log-book of the schooner *Sister Ann* which was a reality and the schooner itself drifting toward the reef without one hope—he could actually see it, feel the dark, starless night in which she was going to her death and that bright, flashing light from Skeleton Rocks which typified life and safety and taunted her with thoughts of what might have been.

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He lived through that night while he read, and felt all the terror and lost hope that the crew and its captain must have felt in that dark, dismal hour when the master wrote:

“We struck the reef aright and we’re fast. . . . The crew lost their heads an’ scrambled in one of them port-side dories which wuzn’t any too strong. . . . They smashed on them rocks everie mother’s son of ’em. Danny iz here that’s all so he’s going ter take a dory an’ go to the light an’ tell ’em what’s happened. . . . I’ll stay here cuz she’ll stay fast mebbe fer days. I’ll stay here till he cums back. . . . I ain’t seen one man cum up yet. . . . I guess I never will now. . . . It’s not a cold night. . . . It’s five bells. . . . Danny’s cumin’ I think. . . .”

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Hal stopped short, then looked down again at the page. The entries had terminated with that sentence; Bill Doak had written his last record without so much as a signature to complete it. It had ended as abruptly as the man himself. Who else could have written the *finis* to that fateful day’s record?

Could he or they, have told on that page, the dark fate which
even then must have been awaiting him?

When five bells tolled out over the dark ocean wastes,
he was writing—a creature of life, blood and animation!
Was he cold and limp in death, his hands stilled forever, when
six bells tolled mournfully forth from the ill-fated schooner?

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CHAPTER XXVII

ACCUSATION

Hal snapped the book shut and replaced the metal clasp the way he had found it. Hastily, he slipped it back in the dark, gaping breach and laid the metal box on top of it. The box he could not hope to open for it had a peculiar lock. Curious as he was to inspect its contents, he knew that nothing else would open it save the key that was made for it. And who possessed that key?

Barrowe?

He was carefully replacing each stone while he thought of it. He had never in his life been so puzzled nor so excited as in the past few days. Suspicion had run rampant ever since the tender *Cactus* steamed in sight of the wrecked schooner and Skeleton Rocks. But no actual clue had he found until now. The watch—well, anybody could lose a watch, or have it stolen from his person—the watch wasn't a definite clue, to his way of thinking. But a log-book was another matter indeed!

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Captain Dell had declared that a man's seamanship had nothing whatever to do with his character. And he had added that no matter how great a rogue Captain Bill Doak was reputed to be, his first thought and last thought would be of his schooner and of the log-book, which was a word picture of his responsibility to that ship. No true seaman would relinquish that responsibility unless death took it from him. In other words, Captain Dell had said, where a ship's master was, there was

his log-book also.

“And the question still remains,” Hal murmured, putting the last stone into place, “where is Captain Bill Doak? Or better still—where isn’t he?” He stood straight up to his full height and shook back the hair which had tumbled down over his forehead. “This is a case where the log-book is evident, but not the master. Oh, well!”

He turned about and glanced at the uppermost gallery of the lighthouse. No one was in evidence at any of the windows and he wondered then if anyone had been watching him. Time had passed, he knew—but just how long he was at a loss to say. If Barrowe had awakened and looked out, he couldn’t have helped seeing him. Had that really happened?

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He suddenly realized how reckless he had been to expose himself in broad daylight. Why, when he had discovered what lay hidden under the loose stones, he hadn’t quickly replaced them and waited for night to shield him from Barrowe’s watchful eyes, he didn’t know. It would have been just as simple and certainly less dangerous.

But the thing was done now. Barrowe had seen him or he hadn’t, and Hal was hopeful that he hadn’t. Be that as it might, he trudged up to the stairway, whistling with a nonchalance that was intended to disarm the suspicions of any person he might encounter.

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But his apprehensions were groundless for upon encountering Dillie in the kitchen, he learned that Barrowe had been snoring steadily for the past two hours. He needed only such assurance

as that to set him planning what next move he would make to find a hiding-place of his own for the log-book and the metal box. Barrowe, he firmly resolved, was not to lay his hairy hands upon them again.

However, nothing could be attempted again in the daylight. The coming of dusk would be his cue for action, for Barrowe then would be safely in the tower and watchful of the light. And dusk wasn't so far off now. Dusk almost upon him and he hadn't yet eaten his lunch!

Dillie was most solicitous and soon had a snack ready for his famished guest that more than stayed his appetite until supper. After that Hal and he repaired to Hollins' bedroom.

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The sick man had been sleeping soundly since Doctor Danforth had attended him, and showed signs of stirring after the boys had been in the room for some little time.

"Has he talked at all?" Hal asked softly.

"Only delirious like," Dillie answered in a whisper. "The doc he sez he'll talk nacheral when he wakes up. Look, he's a-openin' up his eyes now!"

The sick man's gaze sought Dillie at once and his kindly gray eyes widened in a feeble smile. He put out his hand and patted the youth on the arm, then looked at Hal sitting nearby, and nodded.

"Feeling more like yourself, huh, Mr. Hollins?" Hal asked.

“Reckon I do, young man, an’ thankee too,” the man returned in a feeble whisper.

“Yer remember Mr. Hal, Hollins, hey?” Dillie asked anxiously. “Yer remember him an’ me cumin’ ter save yer, hey?”

“I do, Dillie—I do. I’ll never fergit it—I reckon it wuz too much fer me when I saw I wuz really a-goin’ ter be saved. I jes’ got all faint an’ weak like—I wuz so glad. Reckon I *do* remember who saved me an’ I reckon I remember who sent me out ter my death. ’Twuz nuthin’ but luck what saved me frum thet death, Dillie—thet an’ the good God what knew yer cudn’ do without me yet!”

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Dillie was too choked with emotion to speak. All he could do was to reach over to the bed and press Hollins’ reddened hands in his own. Hal had all he could do to keep his own eyes free from tears.

“It must have been a terrible experience, Mr. Hollins,” he said sympathetically. “I don’t know how you stood it as you did.”

“It’s cuz the good God wanted me back ter watch over Dillie, Mr. Keen!” Hollins said with a vehemence that all but exhausted him. “Nobuddy kin send me ter my Death till Dillie’s able ter take care o’ hisself—*nobuddy*! Not even a wolf in sheep’s clothing like Barrowe’s a-been all these here years! I wouldn’t o’ believed he cud turn on me an’ want me ter die—even now I don’t know why he wanted me ter die. But them oars wuz sawed through jes’ as nice as cud be. An’ Barrowe sed he hed the dory ready fer me—oars an’ all! He hed the oars ready—ready fer me ter die—ter freeze an’ starve

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ter death out ter sea—thet’s how he hed ’em ready!”

“You don’t mean to say . . .” Hal was aghast. “You’re sure those oars had been *sawed* through so you’d be utterly helpless and left to the mercy of the sea?”

Hollins nodded his round head vehemently.

“Jes’ what I *do* mean, Mr. Keen, sir,” he answered.

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“They broke ’fore I got ter the reef—both of ’em. I wouldn’ accuse no man of sech a thing, ’ceptin’ I seed with my own eyes thet them oars had been sawed fresh. Trouble wuz, I seed it when it wuz too late, fer the tide wuz a-carryin’ me outer reach by thet time. Yes sirree! I seed it with my own eyes!”

Hollins’ voice, under the stress of his emotion, had risen to such a pitch that Hal wondered if Barrowe did not hear it.

“Don’t exert yourself too much, Mr. Hollins,” he begged.

“You’re not well yet by any means. Too much excitement . . .”

“Mr. Keen, sir,” interposed Hollins, more calmly, “I kin think o’ nuthin’ else but thet outrage an’ I’ll be excited like yer call it till I find out why I wuz sent on thet errand ef Barrowe meant me ter come ter my death out ter sea!”

“Errand?” Hal asked, excited now himself. “What errand, Mr. Hollins?”

“I woke up thet night outer a sound sleep, sir, cuz I heerd my name called. When I opened m’ eyes I seed a feller a-standin’ over my bed thet wuzn’t the same Barrowe I’d knowed when I

went ter bed. It wuz seven bells about when he waked me, an' I couldn' believe my eyes it wuz Barrowe in the flesh when he talked an' told me ter git up right away."

"What change had taken place in him, Mr. Hollins?"

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"Thet's jes' it, sir, I couldn' put it ter words—I jes' felt it sorta, like the feelin' a body gits when a storm's threatenin'—yer know, sad an' afeerd like? Thet's how he made me feel when I looked up—sad an' afeerd. It wuzn't thet his face er his body hed changed—it wuz the way he looked outer his face different an' the way he held his body different frum the Barrowe I'd been seein' an' a-talkin' ter (mostly doin' the talkin' myself, cuz he never said only what he hed ter) fer twenty year an' more. He got stooped like in them few hours since I'd got ter my bed an' his eyes looked like he'd jes' seed a ghost." He coughed, then went on: "An' what wuz funnier than thet, his hair hed turned most white all of a suddint. When I seed him at supper it wuz brown with some gray in jes' like mine."

"And what did he say?"

"Thet's it, sir—what did he say—how did he say it? Not like the whisperin' Barrowe I'd knowed all these years, but like a man what's gone crazy of a suddint an' shouted hisself hoarse! Thet wuz how his voice sounded when he talked ter me. An' like I told yer he sez ter me ter get up an' go take one o' the dories ter Rocky Cliff quick as I cud get thar."

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"An' yer didn' write no note thet yer wuz tired o' livin' an' wuz a-goin' ter jump inter the sea?" Dillie squealed pathetically.

Hollins turned his round, pale face toward the youth.

“What yer talkin’ bout, Dillie, m’boy?” he asked gently.

“Barrowe said you left a note saying you were tired of living,” Hal interposed. “It was supposed to be a suicide note—none of us saw it. Barrowe said he had misplaced it.”

Hollins’ face became livid and his eyes dilated so that the whites of his eyes were completely obscured.

“I kin see it all now!” he said, his voice trembling. “He *did* want ter do fer me, eh? An’ what’s more, he wanted ter make it ’pear I wuz takin’ my own life, eh?” He seemed to be talking more to himself than to his listeners, for he added: “We’ll see a’right, we’ll see, I reckon! So I wuz s’posed ter leave a suicide note, eh?”

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Hal had the feeling that he was sitting atop a volcano. Hollins’ frequent digressions almost drove him distracted, and he waited in suspense, to hear Barrowe’s dastardly plot against his partner recited to the end. It was a great relief to him when the sick man finally took up the loose thread and continued,

“Wa’al, like I wuz tellin’ yer, I got up an’ Barrowe sez ter me in thet different husky voice o’ his, thet a schooner hed hit the reef an’ wuz fast an’ thet her master wuz brought over an’ wuz sick so I should go ter Rocky Cliff an’ git the doc—Doc Stebbins, I thought he meant. So I told him how he knowed Doc Stebbins wuz layed up with rheumatiz—I come from the village only thet mornin’ an’ told him. So he sez he don’t care what doc I gits, but ter hurry. So I sez fer him not ter worry, I cud allus find a doc or so at the Inn, shore, ’count o’ one is allus vacationin’ thar. Then he goes ter the door an’ sez

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how he'll untie a dory fer me an' push her off, holdin' her till I git thar."

"And that struck you as being extraordinary for him to do, even under such circumstances?" Hal asked.

"It did more'n thet, young man!" Hollins said vehemently. "It struck me dumb, fer Barrowe never touched a dory hisself afore in twenty years since I knowed him! He never goes ter Rocky Cliff more'n once a year an' thet's becuz he has ter take the train frum thar ter git ter Portsmouth whar he allus goes on his vacation."

"And what of the master of the schooner—did you see him?" queried Hal eagerly.

"I never seed him, young man. Barrowe wuz up the stairs agin by the time I wuz gittin' inter my boots an' pea-jacket. An' I couldn' help a-seein' how funny his hair stood up like a cat what's skeered. But he kep' his eyes down like an' sez he'd take me down an' not ter make no noise. So I asts him ef Dillie's awake an' he sez no. So down we go quiet like, an' the light's a'right an' it's a calm night—thet's all thet saved me, I reckon—calm weather. Wa'al, he takes me right down an' helps me inter the dory, an' gives me a push. So I noticed he hed a funny look in his eyes when he did it, an' another thing I noticed, cuz th' light wuz sweepin' round us an' made it bright as day."

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"What was that?" Hal asked in a whisper.

"His hands, young man," Hollins answered. "Both his hairy hands wuz stained with blood!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

AN EAVESDROPPER

“Tell me one thing, Mr. Hollins,” Hal asked, after the sick man had rested a little while. “Had anything ever occurred between you and Mr. Barrowe to cause hard feelings? Would he have cause to . . .”

“Mr. Keen, sir, we ain’t been nuthin’ but good friends fer twenty year! Never a quarrel or nuthin’. He jes’ *wouldn’t* argue with me! Never talked ’bout nuthin’ nor nobuddy—his folks cud o’ been a pack o’ wild Injuns fer all I knowed. He wuz jes’ the same day ter day. Reckon he jes’ broke loose or somethin’, but I ain’t got any idee what it wuz—no sirree!”

“Then it certainly is a mystery why he’d turn on you all of a sudden, isn’t it? There would be only one explanation that I can think of, Mr. Hollins.”

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“What’s ’at, young man?”

“That he’d committed some crime and wanted to get rid of you, knowing that as close as you always were to him, you’d soon detect it and stand ready to accuse him.”

“Mr. Keen, sir, I reckon thet sounds like common sense talk. Yer a-thinkin’ ’bout what I sed o’ the blood on his hands, eh?”

“Well, it’s a rather significant fact in view of what else you’ve told me. He’s probably known you from so many years of constant association, as a law-abiding man. And knowing that,

he'd realize that you wouldn't hesitate to give over to the law any man who had wilfully committed a crime, even if that man was your own friend. Mr. Hollins, this may be a mere conjecture on my part, but it seems to me that everything points to the fact that Mr. Barrowe has committed a crime wilfully. Else why did he so cleverly think up that way to get rid of you as a likely accuser? Friend or no friend, a mind at ease and his own life, mean more to him than your friendship and even your life."

"Dillie sez he looked skeered ter death when yer brought me up in th' dory. He sez as how Barrowe acted fer a minute like he wuz a-goin' ter die himself."

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"*And how!*" Hal agreed, then: "Have you ever read Macbeth, Mr. Hollins?"

"Thet feller Shakespeare's book?" returned the man, wagging his head. "Many's the time I hev, sir, an' every time I read it, I reckon I like it better. What a divil that Macbeth feller turned out ter be, eh?"

Hal nodded and smiled.

"It was a case with him of one good crime deserved another. His hands got so steeped in blood that a little bit more couldn't blacken his soul any worse than it already was. It's a pretty strong simile, but there have been plenty of Macbeths since Shakespeare's time and who knows but what Barrowe may be one of them?"

There was a shuffling sound on the staircase and they all looked toward it, the echo of their voices still hovering

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about the suddenly silent room. Hal felt his strong body grip the chair tenaciously, and the sudden cough which Hollins gave pierced the air like the crack of doom.

None of them had heard him descending, but there Barrowe stood on the darkly painted stair, like a great hulking ghost in the shadow.

Hal could not see whether he looked glad, sad or angry. His puffy face was in the shadow as was the rest of his body, and all that was plainly visible was his sharp eyes, burning out of a void like live coals and staring straight at Hal.

His wide, tight-lipped mouth twitched at the corners once or twice, and after a moment's dead silence, he stamped noisily on down the stairs, headed for the kitchen.

CHAPTER XXIX

A NOTE

Barrowe sat like a ghost through supper and said not a word. Neither did he do so much as give Hal or Dillie a glance but sat eating hurriedly and noisily. When he had finished he got up from his chair, stretched his brawny arms and walked toward the stair. Stamping one foot down noisily, he turned half about and looked straight at Hal.

“Thar seems ter be some feelin’ here, eh, Keen?” he grumbled huskily. “An’ it seems ter be ’bout me. Wa’al, even a condemned prisoner gits his chance fer appeal, eh? *Eh?*” he repeated, his voice rising.

“Of course, Mr. Barrowe,” Hal answered, feeling not a little uncomfortable. But being nothing if not courageous, he asked, “What is it you’re trying to say?”

Barrowe leveled his cold, cruel eyes upon Hal and a shadow of a smile played about his lips.

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“Ye’re a right clever feller, Keen, yer know it? I got ter hand it ter yer. But even the best of us kin git fooled, eh? Yer think frum what Hollins has told yer, thet it’s all over but the shoutin’ ter put me behind the bars, eh?”

“I haven’t thought anything of the kind, Mr. Barrowe,” Hal answered honestly and fearlessly. “I’ve just been surmising—putting this and that and the other thing together, you know. There’s quite a difference between the two, I assure you.”

“Wa’al,” said Barrowe, with a swaggering motion of his powerful shoulders, “jes’ the same, yer been hevin’ somethin’ in yore head ’bout me. I cud tell it right along. Yer got it in yer blood, I s’pose, bein’ the offspring of Secret Service folks. So it’s becuz yer thet kind of a feller thet I ask yer ter wait an’ hear my side uv it, eh? Yer don’t wanta make a mess o’ things ter find out I ain’t hed no chanct ter say yes or no, eh?”

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“I’d hate to think I deprived any chap the chance to speak up for his own rights, Barrowe,” Hal answered coldly. “You’ve only to tell your side of what happened the night Hollins told us about.”

“I shore will, Keen,” Barrowe said, starting up the stairs. “At dawn termorrer the light goes out an’ I’m free ter talk, ter do what I please. But now—ternight, the time ain’t mine—I got ter keep my mind on the light—see!”

“And you want until dawn to declare yourself, huh? Well, Barrowe, I don’t know why not. Things look pretty black against you, but if you can be decent, then I can be also. What kind of a chap would I be if I didn’t give you the benefit of the doubt when you stand up like that and ask for it?”

Barrowe nodded his enormous head and smiled slowly.

“Thanks, Keen,” he said. And when he got half way up the stairs, he called: “Till dawn, eh?”

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“Why not?” Hal returned.

Dillie turned to him fearfully, after Barrowe’s heavy tread had

ceased in the tower.

“I feel funny ’bout Barrowe,” he squealed. “I feel more funny ’bout it than afore. Mebbe yer better git away frum here while yer got the chanct, hey? I cud tell the way he looked at yer, he didn’ like yer, Mr. Hal, an’ I’m afeerd fer yer. Yer been so good ter me an’ now ter Hollins!”

“Dill, there’s nothing to be afraid of, at all. You’ve got yourself all excited about this thing and no wonder. We’ve had a day of it! But there’s one thing more that I want done, and I’m afraid under the circumstances that you’ll be the only one to do it.”

“What kin I do, Mr. Hal?” Dillie asked, delighted.

“It’s to be absolutely secret, Dill,” Hal whispered close to his ear. Then he walked to the stairs, looked up, and listened for a moment. When he came back, he said: “I want you to take something over to Rocky Cliff for me tonight. It’s a most important errand, Dill, and the things you take you must guard as your life. You’re to go to the Inn and give them to Doctor Danforth and no one else—outside of his daughter, of course.” He smiled. “Hollins must not even know you’ve gone. I’ll do the dishes while you fix him up for the night. Then he can sleep, which the doctor said he’ll do after he takes that medicine at six o’clock. It’ll be dark soon after and you must get away so that Barrowe won’t see you.”

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“I kin fool Barrowe, I kin,” said Dillie proudly. “He won’t see me an’ I’ll git back afore yer know it. Whar’s them things yer a-wantin’ me ter take, hey?”

Hal listened for sounds above, but hearing nothing, whispered

to Dillie.

“After dark you’re to go to the south rock. There’s a square in the right hand corner of it, as you come up from below. Feel around for loose stones, Dill. Pick them out one by one until you can reach down and get a metal box and a longish book that’s hidden in there. Replace the stones carefully after that and hurry for your life with that book and that box into the dory. Then off with you to Rocky Cliff as if your life depended on it! And Dill, I ask you as a special favor to keep those things under your very feet. When you get to the village put them under your arm and run straight to Doctor Danforth with them.”

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Such implicit trust as Hal had shown in the simple youth was not without its reward. Dillie looked up at him with dog-like devotion.

“I’ll git thar with ’em, Mr. Hal, an’ nobuddy kin stop me—not ef I hed ter die ter do it.”

“Oh, it won’t be that bad, Dill,” Hal said soothingly. “I wouldn’t send you if there was any danger. Nothing will happen if you wait until dark and do as I tell you. My staying here and acting as if you weren’t away at all will prevent any suspicions. Now you go up to Hollins. I’ll do the dishes and have a note written which you’re to deliver to Doctor Danforth along with the things.”

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Dillie was on his way upstairs to Hollins, beaming. Hal got down to the dishes and made a fair job of them. When they were out of the way and the table cleared, he got some writing paper, pen and ink and hastily wrote a few lines:

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“Things progressing as Dillie’s deliveries indicate. Found them hidden under rock out here . . . no need to tell you to hang onto them. Notify Unk and tell him to be at Rocky Cliff with a couple men by tomorrow . . . think I can promise him something interesting. Tell him not to pile here before I give some sign or he’ll jam things maybe. Will tell you what signal I decide on when you and Elissa come in the morning (I mean Miss Elissa) to see Hollins. One thing more: will you wire to Washington and find out, if you can, complete history of Barrowe family while in the Service at Devil’s Ledge? Tell them to wire right back and sign my uncle’s name. Maybe you’ll have news of that when you come tomorrow . . . hope so. Thanks a lot. Tell Miss Elissa I said hello and goodnight.

HAL KEEN.”

And when he had placed the missive in an envelope, he fell to wondering whether Captain Dell would still insist that nothing had happened at Skeleton Rocks for the last fifty years!

CHAPTER XXX

RETURN OF DANNY SEARS

Hal went up to his bedroom at about seven o'clock and after a few moments made a great pretence of calling down and talking to an invisible Dillie below. Barrowe was silent in the tower, and apparently listening.

"I'll be down in a sec, Dill!" he was calling. "Just want to get into a pair of slippers. You go and stretch yourself out for an hour or two. I'll sit and watch Hollins. Won't want to go to bed till nine myself."

The ruse worked and Hal sat down alongside the sleeping Hollins. Barrowe did not show himself and at about nine o'clock, Dillie's shoes flip-flopped up the stairs from the kitchen. Hal hurried down on tiptoe and met him half-way, and together they stepped into the living room.

Dillie's face beamed with success. He slipped Hal a note and nodded his head delightedly, displaying a crisp dollar bill which he whispered that the doctor had given him.

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Hal smiled and patted him on the shoulder.

"That's fine, Dill," he said softly, "and I know it makes you happy ter get a dollar bill. What I'm trying for is to make things happen so I can give you many dollar bills—so many that poor Hollins won't have to worry about saving up for that five thousand dollar operation of yours."

“Yer mean mebbe Hollins wouldn’ hev ter worry no more if yer give me a hull lot o’ dollars?” the youth asked, awed. “Yer mean it’ll be so much dollars?”

“I mean I’m trying for that, Dill,” Hal answered, smiling. 232
“And usually, if I try for anything hard enough, I’m bound to get it in the end. Keep thinking that I’ll get it anyway, won’t you?”

“I shore will,” Dillie squealed.

They said goodnight, Dillie creeping in to see that his beloved Hollins was comfortable and Hal taking two steps at a time toward his bedroom. Once there, he read the note under the light of his little lamp.

“Deliveries safe—messenger excellent. All your wishes duly noted and will be duly carried out. See you in the morning. . . . Elissa says take care of thyself and goodnight, *Hal!*

DANIEL DANFORTH, M. D.”

Hal’s handsome face was radiant with a smile as the note burned to a crisp brown nothingness in the lamp’s yellow flame. A few seconds later the light was out and he crept into bed, visualizing in his mind’s eye Elissa’s goodnight message to him. Take care of himself, she had said. How could he do otherwise when a girl like Elissa had said that!

He slept soundly, dreamlessly, hour after hour until the sound of voices awakened him. He rose slowly and

glanced sleepily at the luminous hands of his watch. They were just upon the midnight hour—not a moment before, not a moment past.

He rubbed his heavy-lidded eyes and listened intently. The voices came from the tower, quarrelsome, though with a manifest attempt to sound subdued. Barrowe's husky voice could not be mistaken, but the other one he could not distinguish. Certainly it wasn't Dillie's pathetic squeal.

His first thought was of Hollins, that perhaps the man had taken a bad turn. He got into a pair of slippers, pulled his bathrobe about him and descended the stairs softly as he did not hear any sounds from below and it was dark.

He stopped at Hollins' bedroom, looked in and listened. The tiny flame of the night lamp flickered in the breeze from the opened window and the sick man was lying comfortably in his bed, sound asleep and breathing regularly.

He did not bother to go down any farther, but turned about and went back upstairs. Just as he reached the level of his own bedroom, the voices from the light tower became audible again and so aroused his curiosity that he couldn't resist the temptation to go a little higher and get an inkling of what it was all about.

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The voices became more subdued as he came up just under the floor upon which the base of the light rested. He listened, tense and silent, leaning against the black painted wall of the tower. Barrowe's husky voice trailed down to him, clear and distinct.

“Wa'al, Danny, what kin yer do 'bout it, eh?” he asked in a

defiant tone.

“Unless yer divvy up them jools wid me, I kin put a nice death sentence in yuh way—see? Just ’cause yuh knocked me overboard and thought I was drowneded, don’t say I was. I swum around nice an’ quiet an’ I saw that only one o’ youse left the *Sister Ann* alive. That one was *you*! I saw yuh drag him into the dory after yuh an’ when yuh got near the Rocks here yuh dumped him off like as if he was a bundle o’ rubbish! Yuh didn’t think I saw that, hah? Well, I did an’ what’s more, it’ll take half them jools or what they’re worth tuh keep me from telling what I saw!”

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“So yer blackmailin’ me, eh, Danny Sears?” said Barrowe ominously.

Danny Sears evaded that question, and ambiguously replied: “What would yuh rather do—*swing*? They’d git yuh for attempted murder on me an’ . . .”

“Listen, Danny,” Barrowe said, suddenly insinuating, “quit sech foolish talk. I wuz outer my head thet night an’ yer made me crazy when yer tried ter stop me. . . . I’m sorry—reckon I can’t say no more’n thet, eh? I wuz outer my head thet night—all night! I don’ know what I did. You an’ me allus got along afore, eh?”

“What yuh tryin’ to say, hah?” Danny Sears asked sarcastically. “Get down tuh facts—I wanta know whar I stand!”

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“Now don’t git mad, Danny,” Barrowe said, surprisingly pleasant. “Come ter think on it, you an’ me is too smart ter git

mad on each other—special when thar’s the question o’ jools ’mountin’ ter fifty grand, eh? Now, Danny, it takes two smart men ter git rid o’ thet much jools uncut, special when Barney Voss an’ his gang is a-waitin’ board the *Vengeance* down at Pier 58 in New York, eh? Guess they still got hope that Cap’n Bill Doak’ll show up with ’em yet, eh? Wa’al, they’ll go on hopin’—ha ha!” He laughed guardedly. “But if I wuz ter show up in the city with the jools myself an’ try ter git rid uv ’em, yer’d see Barney an’ his gang git busy mighty quick. Barney’s been takin’ smuggled jools too long ter let me git the best uv him.”

“Don’t I know that!” Danny snapped. “There ain’t a fence in Noo York that wouldn’ give Barney Voss the tip if yuh tried to git rid uv ’em yourself. So what’re yuh goin’ tuh do with ’em, hah?”

Hal moved up the stairs until he could see the small, squat form of Danny Sears, standing a little distance from the light and facing Barrowe, who was sitting on a stool near the gallery windows. Both wore the heavily smoked glasses and during a moment’s pause, stared at each other, caustically, while their heavy breathing and the slight swish of the lens as it turned and turned about the narrow room, were the only sounds to mar that pregnant silence.

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“Wa’al,” said Barrowe at length, “this here place is the best hidin’ place in the world, Danny.”

“Yeah, youse seem tuh think so. But that ain’t gittin’ down tuh the jools.”

"I wuz a-comin' ter it, Danny. How 'bout you an' me a-goin' ter Chicago once in a while till we git rid o' 'em, eh? We kin go frum Portsmouth by aryplane an' thet won't be thought nuthin' of, cuz even a lightkeeper likes ter try these new-fangled ways o' travelin' once in a while, eh?"

"It listens good," Sears answered grudgingly, "but who's goin' to put up the lucre fer them trips? Hah?"

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"*Me*—who else?" Hal could almost feel the sinister grin Barrowe gave when he added: "I come by a little extra money, Danny. Not a fortune, but it ain't bad, an' when we git rid o' them jools between us, we'll be right comfortable!"

"Mm. Yuh want me tuh bargain 'round Chicago fences with them jools, hah? Is that it? I got tuh do that dirty work—that's why on second thought I ain't bad tuh have around, hah? Well . . ."

"Yer know people in Chicago, Danny. I heerd yer say that onct. 'Sides, it ain't safe fer a man like me ter show myself too much jes' now. I got the feelin' thet thar's a pow'ful lot o' investigatin' a-goin' round 'bout the *Sister Ann*, an' thet Keen feller what's here ain't safe ter hev about. If he don' see trouble he smells it out an' jes' now he's thinkin' too much 'bout me. Wa'al I kin . . ."

"Yuh kin use yuh're head, that's what!" Danny Sears interposed angrily. "Yuh'll keep on till he does git wise an' then where'll yuh be, hah? He's a wise kid, I'll admit, but he saved me from Davey Jones' locker an' I don't mean maybe! I'll never forget that! Treat him nice an' he won't be so nosey

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—he won't be here long anyways, hah?"

"Not if I got anythin' ter do with it!" Barrowe mumbled.

Hal felt a little chilled, both mentally and physically, upon hearing this declaration. He pulled his bathrobe up about his neck, then suddenly sneezed, so loudly that when he reached his bedroom, he seemed to hear the echo of it still lingering above stairs.

CHAPTER XXXI

A CHALLENGE

Hal was in his bed with the covers pulled tight about his neck when he heard the stamping sound of Barrowe's footsteps hurrying down the stairs. When he reached Hal's room, he stopped.

"Hope yer not a-gittin' cold, Keen," said he. Then, with a soft chuckle, he added: "I called thet out ter yer afore, but I reckon yer wuz a-runnin' down here too fast ter hear me."

Hal was too good a sportsman not to take up the challenge. He rose, got out of bed and walked over and lighted his lamp. Then he turned to Barrowe.

"All's fair in a situation of this kind, Barrowe," he said, eyeing the lightkeeper coldly. "If a hasty exit seems wisest for me, then I'll make it. In this case, I seemed to be wrong. We all make a mistake now and again. But if you surmise that I ran because I'm afraid of you, you've got something to learn. I ran because there's still a little more I could learn about you. Your conversation with Danny Sears wasn't quite enlightening enough—understand? And I didn't want to expose myself before I'd learned all I expect to learn, that's all. But as long as you've trumped this particular card of mine, I find that I don't care about learning anything further. As Danny said, I know enough right now to make you swing, so why bother!"

Barrowe stood and stared, his puffy face pale and twitching,

while his eyes were narrowed to mere slits on either side of his slightly hooked nose.

“Keen,” he said huskily, “yer got me all wrong. I ain’t never thought yer wuz afeerd o’ me—not once! I takes it yer ain’t afeerd o’ nobuddy. But ter git back ter yerself; if yer wanta know what I think about yer, I kin tell yer in a few words, fer of all the men I’ve seed in my time, I’ve never seen the likes o’ yourself. Yer got six feet an’ more o’ brass in yer an’ I ain’t mistakin’ it, but jes’ the same yer not a-goin’ ter be the means o’ me swingin’, not as big as yer are!”

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“A threat, I see, huh?” Hal smiled, sitting comfortably down on the edge of his bed. “If you have plans, Barrowe, I’d be tickled to hear all about them.”

“I shore will oblige yer, Keen,” Barrowe said with a slow smile. “My plans are thet if yer try ter leave this lighthouse, ye’ll never live ter tell it! *Them’s my plans!*”

“And playful plans they are too, Barrowe,” Hal grinned. Suddenly that strong, square jaw of his shot out and his brilliant blue eyes became like pin-points of steel. “But you’ll be surprised to find out the way I can kick these playful plans into bubbles. *You’ll* be surprised, Barrowe!”

“Not if I know it, Keen!” Barrowe grumbled, and stamped on down the stairs.

Hal turned out his light after a moment and went back to bed. His mind was a blank and he wanted it so, for there were a few hours yet before dawn, and with that much rest for his body and mind, he would be ready to grapple all that came

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his way on the morrow.

When he again awakened, it was past seven o'clock and a gloomy, stormy day. Rain lashed about Skeleton Rocks, driven by a whistling gale and the boom of the surf sounded disconsolate, despairing. He could not help feeling as he opened his eyes that if his day's hopes were to be determined by the weather, then the outlook was not very favorable for him.

Certainly he did not get off to a very good start, for the moment he got out of bed, he saw that Danny Sears was sitting on the stairs, watching him and smiling. A rather significant bulge in that squat person's pocket told Hal eloquently the whole situation.

"Lo, Keen," he said pleasantly. "I'm here at Barrowe's orders, so I hope youse won't make any trouble fer me. You know I owe you somethin' after the other night—*gee!*"

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"Forget about it, Sears—*please,*" Hal smiled pleasantly, getting into his clothes. "I'd have done the same for anybody. And rest your mind about me making any trouble for you." He laughed aloud. "I'm never troublesome anyway until after I've eaten a good breakfast. That's what makes little Hal perky—*food!*"

Sears laughed genially and shook his head.

"Fer cryin' out loud—*little Hal!*" he roared. "Hones', they don't come no bigger nor better 'n you for that matter. I ain't got nothin' against you, Keen. I'm sorry you got mixed up in it—honest! But I got to stick it out now—I'm in it too!"

“And you were meant for bigger and better things, Danny,” Hal said with a note of seriousness in his voice. “Oh, well—we were talking about food.”

“That nut Dillie’s bringing your grub up now, I think,” said Danny, getting out a cigarette and lighting it.

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“Barrowe’s waitin’ downstairs—he’s goin’ over to get that doc this mornin’.”

“What has that to do with me?” Hal asked nonchalantly.

“Nothin’,” Danny replied, “only that Barrowe’s sendin’ up paper and pen for you to write a note to the doc and his girl to say that you’ve gone fishin’—see? Then they won’t want to stay long and snoop all over the place if you’re not supposed to be here, Barrowe thinks.”

“In other words, I *will* be here, only Doctor Danforth and his daughter won’t know it, if she comes along too, huh?” Hal asked, lighting a cigarette also.

“That’s the proposition, Keen,” Danny answered amiably.

“When they arrive, you’n me are to cram up into the light tower, and I’m to cram you back out of sight while I start up a hammerin’ so’s they’ll think repairs is a-goin’ on an’ nobody’s admitted to the light in that case—see?”

“Oh, perfectly,” Hal answered, thinking hard. “I see too well, Danny. In fact, I see quite a little ahead of you.”

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“I wouldn’t be s’prised, Keen,” Danny smiled.

He made way, then, for Dillie who came up the stairs and into

the room, laden with a tray. The youth was plainly frightened and he glanced at Danny fearfully in passing, then set down the tray on the bed.

“Mr. Hal, please,” he said in a trembling voice, “Barrowe sez as how you’re to write a note to Miss Danf’th an’ tell her yer gone a-fishin’. He sez yer shud do it right off now cuz he’s a-waitin’ ter go ter the village an’ git the doc.”

Hal looked at Dillie and met those dog-like eyes of his with a question. Dillie’s eyes, however, were still full of trust and Hal smiled, assured that Barrowe had not wormed anything out of him concerning the previous night’s secret errand. But, on the other hand, it was evident that Barrowe’s plans had included the simple youth and he was a prisoner at Skeleton Rocks also.

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He sat down and wrote the note, knowing that Barrowe’s cold eyes would scrutinize it well before it reached the fair Elissa’s hands. Time was going and Danny was watching and there was nothing for him to do but to write:

“Just a nice day to go deep-sea fishing . . . how about deferring visit here till tomorrow, for it wouldn’t be pleasant crossing for a lady in such weather?” Then he got an idea, and he added, hopefully. “Watch for me on beach tonight. . . . maybe I’ll say hello!

HAL.”

After Dillie had taken it from him with trembling hands, and departed downstairs, Hal asked Danny a question.

“If I’m supposed to be deep-sea fishing today, what of tomorrow? Where am I supposed to be then?”

Danny shook his head, not a little gloomily.

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“If youse want to know the truth, Keen,” he said slowly, “Barrowe was all for shoving you out to sea in a dory without any oars even. . . .”

“Barrowe’s old dory game, huh?” Hal observed flippantly.

“But I told him to lay off that—that you’d done me a good turn,” Danny continued, apparently unmindful of the interruption. “But I can’t talk him out of everythin’—he says you know too much, an’ o’ course you do, but I says it’s better to let a guy go an’ do a little talkin’ instead of havin’ his blood on yer hands. I says youse can beat the law for a long time but youse can’t beat what’s on your mind.”

“Very sensible, Danny,” Hal said soberly. “So Barrowe’s thinking of doing me dirt, is he?”

“Not if I can stop him, Keen,” Sears answered dolefully.

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“But he ain’t got no conscience, that guy. I wouldn’t speak to him if it wasn’t that he owes me a bunch of lucre and the only way for me to get it is to stick to him till I get it! He’s puttin’ off things till tomorrow dawn, ’cause he says it’ll give ’em time to send a man up here. The light’s got to be kep’ on, he says.”

Hal began to examine the savory things on his tray. Between bites he sipped at his cup of steaming coffee and thought what a strange man was Barrowe. A man who had no regard for human

life, individually, was willing to risk apprehension and a certain death penalty, merely because he had regard for human life, collectively.

“Who was it, Danny,” Hal asked, stuffing a buttered muffin into his mouth, “that said: ‘there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of’?”

“Say, Keen,” said the literal Danny, “this trouble ain’t makin’ youse sick or nothin’, is it?”



“SAY, KEEN,” SAID DANNY, “THIS TROUBLE AIN’T
MAKIN’ YOUSE SICK, IS IT?”

CHAPTER XXXII

FAIR EXCHANGE

Hal was about to resign himself to a day of inactivity, when from the rocks below, his attention was drawn to Barrowe, who was in a dory about to depart for Rocky Cliff. The man was shouting and making violent gestures with both hands. Suddenly, he leaned down and made a lunge at something from over the side of the boat.

“Looks like he’s just made a slam at a shark,” Danny said excitedly, looking under Hal’s arm. “I betcha anythin’, that’s what it was. *Look!*”

Hal looked—indeed he hadn’t taken his eyes from Barrowe’s powerful physique for the way he had just harpooned a man-eating shark with but little effort, set him to wondering. What would Barrowe do to a helpless human being?

251

Conscious of his own strength, he grinned at the thought. Two years of hard work on “the team” hadn’t made him such a weakling either and he felt confident that he could hold his own against Barrowe at any time.

The shark interested him greatly, however. Danny, too, was watching intently, for Barrowe was now dragging the creature by its tail up onto the rocks. Suddenly he lifted an oar in his powerful arms and brought it down upon the man-eater’s head, looked at it a moment to make sure it was dead, then got back in his dory and set off for Rocky Cliff as he had originally

intended.

Dillie made his appearance presently, and ran toward the lifeless shark, squealing with delight. His fears, anxiety, everything, was forgotten for the time, and his child-like mind reacted to this recent conquest with such suddenness that Hal was reminded of his own resolve to help Dillie, somehow, someway.

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“How’s Hollins?” he asked, turning away from the window and leaving Dillie to investigate the shark.

“He’s comin’ along great from what Barrowe tells me,” Danny answered pleasantly. “Barrowe ain’t seen him; the kid told him. He’s restin’ all the time.”

Hal nodded and sat down, wishing that the rain would stop. He wanted Elissa to come, even if he couldn’t talk with her. Just to watch that buoyant step of hers coming up the rocks would be enough.

“I suppose you know what Barrowe did to Hollins?” Hal asked suddenly.

“Listen, Keen,” Danny said, turning his back. “I know too much about that guy a’ready. I know everythin’—that’s the trouble. Just like I told you—I’d like to plug him myself, if he didn’t owe me money. Besides, I got a conscience—I ain’t never plugged a guy in my life and that’s a fact.”

“You’ll get your reward in heaven, Danny,” Hal smiled.

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Dillie’s shuffling steps broke in upon their conversation then.

He came into the room excitedly, holding out to Hal what looked like a small, silver coin about the size of a quarter.

“I found it, I did,” he squealed. “I found it stuck in White Spot’s jaw!”

“*White Spot?*” Hal echoed.

“Shore, thet wuz him what Barrowe jes’ harpooned afore. He got ’im jes’ as he started ter shove off thet first time. Anyways, I found a quarter in his mouth, I did. It wuz stuck in the fat part like an’ I pulled it out. Now I got two dollars an’ a quarter besides,” he said, grinning significantly at Danny.

“So White Spot is no more, huh?” Hal asked musingly. “What a strange coincidence that he should give up the ghost today.”

“What?” Danny asked, scratching his black head, puzzled.

“Let me see your quarter, Dill!” Hal asked, so deep in his own concerns that he seemed not to hear Danny’s question.

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Dillie handed it over willingly, and while Hal was examining it, he asked: “Yer’ll give it back ter me, hey, Mr. Hal? I’m a-helpin’ Hollins ter save up fer my operation.”

Hal looked up, his face thoughtful and grave.

“This isn’t a real quarter, Dill,” he said, his voice deep with emotion. “It’s just a silver disk like and—well, it interests me. Sort of a souvenir of White Spot, you know. Here,” he said as he reached down into his pocket, “I’ll give you another dollar

for the quarter—how’s that for fair exchange?”

Dillie took it, smiling with delight. Danny too, enjoyed the situation, but was immediately plunged into gloom again, when he saw Hal putting the disk into his pocket and looking actually ghost-ridden.

CHAPTER XXXIII

BETWEEN THE LINES

The remainder of the day was the most restless that Hal had ever spent. He was allowed to stay in his room only until Barrowe was sighted coming across in the dory with Dr. Danforth. Then he repaired to the light tower with Sears, where he felt himself quite helpless and his predicament all but hopeless. He could think of nothing to do or to say, but had to stand, playing his part in the hoax and listening to Danny hammering away upon some imaginary repairs.

Barrowe, he knew, would see that Dillie and the doctor were not left alone to talk. The lightkeeper's husky voice could be heard constantly and Hal could imagine him hovering about the stairs and watching Dillie covertly. What Doctor Danforth had thought about the note and what he now thought of the sudden change in Barrowe's hospitality, could not even be imagined.

256

He hoped fervently that the doctor or Elissa would be thrown into confusion about that note. He hoped that they would guess instantly that it was written under duress and act accordingly. But would they? People never understood those things when one wanted them to. His only hope was in that last sentence to Elissa. Would she remember what he had so jokingly said about the light that time? Would she remember that it would be that that he meant when he said for her to watch for him on the beach that night? He kept telling himself in one breath that she would understand all that, but in the next moment, he was afraid she wouldn't. Girls were stupid when you didn't want

them to be.

Dillie came up to tell them, after an hour's agonizing wait, that the doctor had gone away, being quite satisfied with Hollins' condition. Barrowe, of course, had rowed him back, and had left whispered instructions that the prisoner and his guard could come down for lunch. 257

The thought of food was hope in itself and Hal descended to the kitchen, lighter of heart than he had been in hours. Dillie's face told him plainly, as he expected, that the doctor and he had had no verbal communication. But a note had found its way between them, and this the faithful youth ingeniously placed under Hal's plate.

Hal got a glimpse of its contents, but only a glimpse, for Danny Sears, though amiable enough, was a critical guard, and in an off moment when Hal was trying to transfer the missive to a safe hiding-place in his shoe, Danny glared at him suspiciously.

"Dropped a piece of potato, Sears," he grinned, stooping down and rolling the note into a round, white ball. He picked it up, put it into his mouth and smiled, disarmingly. A sudden intake of breath, and he had swallowed it.

Dillie, aware of the ruse and its dire consequences, shook his head mournfully from behind the watchful Sears. But in leaving the kitchen after the meal was over, Hal was able to whisper some words of confidence. 258

"I read enough to tell me what I wanted to know for certain, Dill," he murmured, patting the youth on the shoulder. "The rest of it, I'll just have to hope was good news." He had in mind the

arrival of his uncle at Rocky Cliff.

The day dragged on. Storm, wind and the continual screeching of the gulls outside his window drove Hal almost distracted. Consequently, when supper was over and Barrowe gruffly ordered him up to the tower he was moved to shout with joy, so glad was he for this diversion.

It soon proved to be anything but a diversion, however, for Barrowe and Sears sat close together most of the time, murmuring in low tones and looking at each other significantly through their glasses. Hal watched them from behind his own heavily smoked glasses, wondering what they were talking about and feeling more helpless than ever. 259

Darkness drew on and from his stool at the gallery window, he saw a lone gull flying swiftly home toward the murky horizon. The wind had died down after the sunset hour, and now the rain was beginning to subside while a slow mist seemed to be rising up from the billowy ocean.

Rain and wind all the day long and now that impenetrable mist. It was all beginning to get on his nerves and he told himself that he would welcome a showdown no matter what it meant to himself. Danny, he knew, would incapacitate him with a well-aimed bullet, if he made any attempt to escape. He had known it all day, even though he was certain that the man would never wound him seriously. After all, Danny had a pot of gold in mind, and a simple bullet wound would not affect his conscience any.

Hal was also certain that Barrowe was armed and he

was not taking a double chance of having his uncle Denis give him the “ha-ha” as he called it, just because he wanted to bring things to a climax too soon. He had been feeling instinctively all day that danger lay in wait for him if he made any reckless move. Hal was convinced that whatever he did was to be done cautiously and carefully.

Sears and Barrowe kept up a constant murmuring and in the intervals when the swishing of the lenses was not so pronounced, Hal could hear a word or two of their conversation. In one of those intervals, he heard the lightkeeper mention the box and the log-book.

“It’s safe thar, Danny,” he murmured. “When we git ready ter leave—I know whar ter find it.”

Hal gave no indication that he had heard. He looked out of the window into the rising mist and his heart pounded joyfully to think that Barrowe had not yet discovered his loss. When he *did* discover it—*what of that time?* Hal had lots of time to wonder what the answer to that would be.

261

Out of its rocky depths the ocean boomed incessantly. Around and around in the narrow room, the lens swished tirelessly and there was no relief from the dazzling light, while out into the thickening mist it would flash but three-tenths of a second with an eclipse of but two seconds.

Suddenly out of this tense silence, Barrowe spoke.

“Reckon I better go down an’ see thet Dillie gits ter the siren,” he grumbled. “Can’t do it m’self, ’count o’ my heart.”

He turned to go down the stairs and Hal called to him.

“That’s right, Barrowe,” he said, with a broad smile, “watch out for yourself—the State of Maine would hate to lose you right now, not saying how the government would mourn of your esteemed services if you were to give up the ghost right now!”

Barrowe glared and stamped downstairs. Danny, in that moment, was slightly off his guard for he looked after the lightkeeper with that vague smile of his, enjoying Hal’s well-pointed thrust. 262

Hal was not off his guard, however, and taking advantage of this excellent opportunity, he sprang from the stool with all the agility of a cat. Sears, too surprised to utter a sound, found his arms pinned behind him and in the next moment he was relieved of his gun.

Hal stepped backward, smiling, and leveled the gun at the astonished Danny.

“All’s fair, Sears,” he said softly. “You’d have been white with me and I’ll be the same with you. But if you open that mouth of yours to call Barrowe, I’ll give you a bullet that will prevent you from sleeping well for a night or two. I’m not such a bad shot.”

“I believe youse, Keen,” said Danny putting down his hands with a sigh of relief. “Now what do you want me to do, hah?”

The siren blared forth its warning just then and they felt the vibration of it through their bodies. Hal waited for it to cease before he spoke. 263

“Do you know anything about this light, Danny? Do you know how to put it out?”

Danny Sears stared as if Hal were crazy.

“The gov’ment—why, yuh can’t do that?”

“The government would approve on this occasion, Danny. It’s to send a message so that the most cold-blooded criminal you ever have known may be apprehended as he deserves to be. A six second eclipse of the light won’t wreck any vessel, I’m certain. Besides, it’s got to be done, Danny. Put out that light—*now*—this very minute!”

Danny did as he was told and Hal stood with his back to the gallery windows, his heart beating, despairingly one minute; and hopefully the very next. If Elissa should remember his playful warning, then all would be well. If she didn’t . . . he did not like to think of that.

They stood there in the dark while Hal watched the luminous hands on his watch ticking off those precious seconds. He could see Sears’ outline and he kept the gun leveled accordingly. At length he gave him the signal and they were suddenly in the glare of the light again, while the lens swished around and around with monotonous precision.

264

Great beads of perspiration stood out on Danny’s brow and he took a handkerchief to wipe it off. Hal smiled reassuringly and started for the stairs, backing slowly down with each step.

“No noise now, Danny,” he warned. “I’m going down to see Barrowe and if I should hear you coming before you’re called,

it'll be just too bad for Danny—understand?"

Danny *did* understand, only too well.

CHAPTER XXXIV

DEATH, THE CHEAT

Hal, met Dillie on the stairs just as he reached the kitchen level. The youth was white and trembling and all color had left his thin lips.

“What in heaven’s name, Dill . . .”

“Come—come, Mr. Hal!” he squealed pathetically.

“Dill, tell me what’s happened?”

“Barrowe, he come down ter show me ’bout the siren . . .”

“Yes, yes, I know he did. What of it, Dill?”

“Reckon he thought I wuzn’t a-doin’ it right, Mr. Hal. He come over ter show me hisself an’ all of a sudden I saw him fall ter the floor. His heart, Mr. Hal . . . it ain’t beatin’ no more like it did the other night when we picked him up. It’s . . .”

“*Is he dead?*”

266

Dillie nodded, then glanced up with a look of radiance in his face.

“He won’t make us afeerd no more, hey? Hollins, he won’t be afeerd nuther!”

“No, I guess not, Dill. You go up to Hollins and if I were you, I wouldn’t say anything. Let him sleep on tonight without

knowing it. You can come down to the siren when I call.”

Dillie was only too glad to forget the subject of Barrowe. Hal watched his shoes flip-flopping up the metal stairs until he was out of sight and then went on downstairs to look upon a man for whom he could feel nothing but contempt even in death.

Barrowe’s temporary bier was on the south rock. Hal had carried him down and covered his now white, puffy face with his own coat. Dillie was at the siren again, and its blare shook out across the water once more while Hal stood in the mist, forgetful of Sears waiting anxiously in the tower, and listening intently for a welcome sound.

Suddenly he heard it, during a lull of the siren—the chug-chugging of a powerful launch. He felt a sense of defeat then, for the man they sought had cheated them of his life. If it hadn’t been for the siren . . . if . . .

267

He smiled, for it occurred to him that Elissa had seen his message in the eclipsed light and had spread the warning. He could stand the defeat of Barrowe’s death in knowing that Elissa had turned out to be the sort of a girl he had hoped her to be. There was a girl who could read between the lines!

Suddenly, he saw the running lights of the launch as it turned in toward the rocks. He scrambled down to meet it.

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CHAPTER XXXV

TO THE VICTOR

The doctor and his pretty daughter, Denis Keen and two of his trusted men, and Hal all repaired to the lighthouse kitchen to talk it over. Denis Keen, particularly, was greatly disturbed over Barrowe's death.

"You see, Hal," he was saying, "the reason we got to Rocky Cliff a little later was because I hunted up the Barrowes' history at Devil's Ledge. Doctor Danforth wired it all to me to save time and it was just as well as things have turned out."

"You found out?" Hal inquired.

"I certainly did, Hal. You may be surprised to know that I discovered the fact that Captain Bill Doak was none other than Barrowe's own scapegrace brother—his twin brother, Ethan Barrowe. Barrowe killed Doak. He had reason enough and he had threatened to do that twenty-five years ago, if he ever again laid eyes on him."

269

"He may have threatened to do it, Unk, but he never carried it out," said Hal quietly. "I have excellent proof that Doak killed his brother, Edgar Barrowe, on the night the *Sister Ann* struck the reef. Danny Sears came over here for help and the real lightkeeper, Barrowe, went back with him to the helpless ship not knowing that his scapegrace brother was its master, Captain Doak."

"What reason have you to think such a thing?" Denis Keen

demanded.

Hal got out of his pocket the little silver disk which Dillie had only that morning found in the dead shark's mouth. He handed it over to Doctor Danforth, smilingly.

"Isn't that a trepan plate, Dr. Danforth?" he asked. "And aren't those initials yours on there—D.D.?"

"By Harry!" gasped the doctor. "The very plate I put in Edgar Barrowe's skull twenty-five years ago. Where . . ."

270

Hal told them in a few words of the incident of the shark, also of the conversation he had heard between the lightkeeper and Sears only the night before.

"Sears accused him of throwing some one overboard from the dory as he came toward the rocks," Hal said, "and he didn't deny it. So I've figured it out that Captain Bill Doak first attempted to get Sears out of the way by throwing him overboard, and then killed his brother right in his own cabin. It was an excellent chance to take his brother's place . . . his crew was gone where they could never tell. . . . Sears, he thought then, was safely out of the way . . . he could take the jewels and live as Edgar Barrowe. His hair was a little whiter than his brother's—but then didn't lots of people find their hair turned white overnight? He was the same size as his brother only a little more stooped and his voice was a little husky and he talked . . . well, his next obstacle was Hollins. Hollins might detect something, so he attempted to get rid of Hollins, but he was fooled in that as you all know."

“A typical Macbeth!” cried Elissa, horrified.

271

Hal smiled across the room at her, admiring her more than ever for that remark.

“But what about Doak coming into a lighthouse and taking charge as if he were his brother?” one of Denis Keen’s men asked.

“They were brought up in a lighthouse,” Hal answered with a grin. “They knew their lighthouses, the Barrowes. And as cold-blooded a skunk as Doak, or Ethan Barrowe, was, he was faithful to the light—gol darned if he wasn’t!”

“Well, Hal,” said Denis Keen, “you’ve pieced the darn thing together pretty plausibly. When did you first think there was something wrong?”

“From the first time I ever set eyes on him! No man could ever get the look in his eyes that he had without having had his hands in blood.” Hal shrugged his broad shoulders. “Everything that happened made me more and more suspicious . . . little things, you know . . . then Danny Sears coming and finally when I found his watch and a few hours later, the log-book. I remembered what Captain Dell said that no matter how great a rogue a ship’s master was, he’d stick to his log-book to the last. And Doak (I can’t seem to think of him by any other name now) kept his log-book near him all right. I reasoned that if Barrowe had killed Doak, he’d have chucked the log-book into the sea. And don’t forget what I saw when he raved about the *Sister Ann* going down—remember? He seemed like a fiend incarnate to me that night!”

272

“He must have been!” Elissa cried. “To kill his own twin brother after having not seen him for all those years! And to feed him to that terrible shark!”

“And I don’t think he gave a hoot about any of it!” Hal declared. He shuddered with the memory of it. “I’ll shiver every time I think that I ate and slept in the same building with that fiend! In a way, I’m just as glad he’s dead. We’ll forget him that much quicker.”

273

At that juncture, Dillie came hurrying upstairs, announcing that the mist was lifting and that his presence at the siren was no longer necessary.

“I better be a-goin’ up ter the light,” he said, a little abashed by the presence of so many people.

“Whew,” Hal said. “I forgot all about leaving Sears up there!”

“But he ain’t thar, Mr. Hal,” Dillie squealed. “He came down an’ went out when yer wuz helpin’ the folks in frum the launch. I didn’ think yer wanted him . . .”

“Well, he’s gone by this time,” said Denis Keen, “and I can’t see that he’d have been so much help. The real offenders that the government is anxious to apprehend are down at a certain pier in New York aboard a ship called the *Vengeance*. Eh, Hal?”

“That’s right, Unk,” Hal grinned. “After all, Danny Sears was a pawn. The men that make murderers out of the Captain Doaks are the Barney Voss’s, huh?”

274

“Exactly, Hal. And that’s the man we’re going to get.”

“I’m so glad these things have happened without Hal getting hurt,” Elissa smiled. “Dad and I were so worried and suspicious this morning, especially the way Mr. Barrowe acted when he came over for Dad. And that note—I kept reading that last line over and over and wondering if it had any connection with what you jokingly said about the light being out. Something told me, so Dad and I patrolled the beach as soon as it got dark. Then the light went out and your uncle and the men came. I’m glad I didn’t fail!”

“You couldn’t fail!” Hal grinned. “You’re great!”

Dillie shuffled uneasily, and turned to go up to the tower but Hal detained him by asking:

“Dill, you know that three dollars you’ve saved?”

275

“Yes, Mr. Hal?”

“Didn’t I tell you that Hal suits me just as well, Dill?”

“Reckon it does, Mr. Hal.”

They all laughed and Hal went over and put his arm about the trembling youth.

“All right, kiddo. But about that three dollars—you take it and blow yourself to the movies in Rocky Cliff every day this week because you won’t need it to pay toward your operation.”

“I won’t, Mr. Hal?”

“Nope, you won’t need it. You’re going to get many more dollars than you’ll need for that operation. Some day after you get well, perhaps Hollins and you will want to go on a vacation and you’ll need it. Gosh knows, you’ll both deserve it! Go up and tell Hollins that I’ll explain it to him later.”

Dillie went obediently and Doctor Danforth demanded to know what Hal was getting at. Elissa too, was mystified.

“The government offers a reward for smuggled jewels,” Hal explained. “And there’s fifty thousand dollars’ worth of them in that metal box.”

276

“Which is safe and sound where I can get it,” Denis Keen chuckled. “Twenty-five per cent of that money the government allows as a reward for their return. Hal says he doesn’t need it—his mother and he have enough of worldly goods, and Dillie, poor boy, has a chance to talk and think and act like the rest of us if they can get five thousand dollars together for an operation. There’s a sure chance for cure and no maybe about it, I understand, so that twenty-five per cent of fifty thousand dollars . . .”

“Will do the trick,” Hal interposed, with a broad grin. “So figure it out for yourselves, folks, just figure it out for yourselves!”

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[The end of *The Clue at Skeleton Rocks* by Percy Keese
Fitzhugh [Hugh Lloyd]]