

The
**POWDER DOCK
MYSTERY**

REED FULTON

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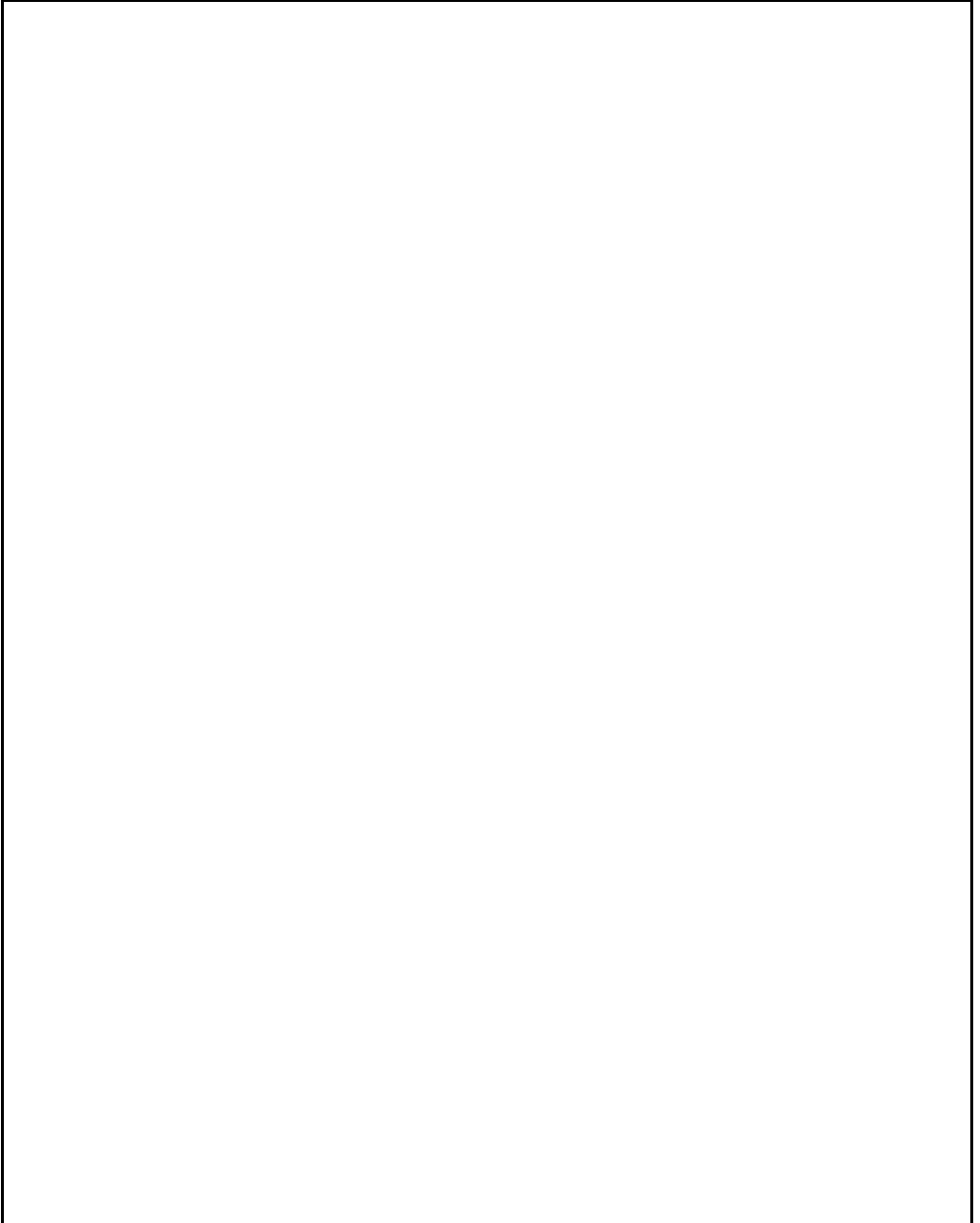
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REED FULTON

*I'm going to drop down there, Sis, and have a look. You
aren't afraid if you have the rifle, are you?*

(frontispiece)



THE POWDER DOCK MYSTERY

A Story for Girls and Boys

BY
REED FULTON

ILLUSTRATED BY
MANNING DeV. LEE



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To
MY THREE GIRLS

INEZ
ELAINE
CELESTE

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THE POWDER DOCK MYSTERY

[1]

CHAPTER I

A LAUNCH PUTS IN

Clementine Fargar, seated on the timber that edged the small dock, watched her nineteen-year-old brother lift the box marked **BLACK POWDER** from the floor of the dock and slip it gently onto the miniature railroad car. For some minutes she had observed the care with which Dave handled each box. The most delicate china could not have asked for more gentleness.

The crew on the red-flagged boat that had left the boxes had not been so respectful in working with the powder. Several times Clem had gasped and hurriedly started away from the dock, but the laughter of the men had made her stand her ground. Still, she had heaved a sigh of relief when the powder tug steamed away. Her imagination insisted on picturing what might follow the dropping of a box although Dave had more than once assured her that there was no danger.

“What would happen, Dave, if the powder house were to explode?” As she questioned, her shaded eyes were turned to view the length of dock reaching, first to the beach, and then at right angles toward the squat log building lying in the shadow of the tree-covered cliffs. [2]

The powder warehouse was a fascinating place perhaps because it reminded the girl of pioneer forts built to repel the savage attack of painted Indians, perhaps because of the terrible power resting within its rough-hewn walls. Years before, Indian workers had dovetailed the ends of the heavy

logs so cleverly that very little mortar had been necessary to close the space between the logs. The rafter poles were crossed with cedar boards and covered completely with “shakes” or long shingles cut by hand from cedar blocks. Such a building would withstand the elements for an indefinite period, but, in case of fire, would burn like a resin torch. To reduce the fire hazard as much as possible, five barrels filled with water were kept standing on small platforms built on top of the warehouse. A ladder at each end made rapid ascent to the barrels possible.

Clem found herself wondering if she would dare climb to the water barrels if flames were licking any portion of the powder-filled building.

Dave, brown and stalwart, surveyed Clementine with a broad grin. Although only two years her senior, the early loss of both father and mother had developed in Dave a somewhat superior attitude toward his sister. He felt his position as head of the family of two. [3]

Pausing in his labor, Dave wiped away the perspiration from his forehead, and chuckled. He was apt to chuckle unless the joke was pointed too directly at himself. His general good humor had helped him hold his position of responsibility despite his youth.

“Clem, the teachers must be glad you’re out of high school; you ask questions faster than old Bunte can pull in dogfish, and he’s the champion for this part of the Sound. A teacher with you in his class would have as much chance as a cross-eyed Igorot in a beauty contest. It’s a good thing your eyes went back on you,

else your skull would have started to bulge or you'd have come down with 'questionitis.'"

Dave laughed loudly at this possibility as he bent for another box. The seventeen-year-old girl clasped her hands over her khaki-covered knees and waited solemnly for Dave to have his laugh out. When the chuckles had died away to an occasional snort and head-shaking, she spoke again, with a note of perseverance in her voice.

"But, Davie dear, what would happen? You mustn't get so stuck on your humor that you forget to answer a lady's question."

Her brother's smile vanished abruptly. The young man ran [4] his fingers through his dark matted locks and frowned severely.

"Look here, Sis," he cautioned in an undertone, "I've asked you time and again in the past two days to cut out that 'Davie dear' stuff. If those fellows on the powder boat, or even those fishermen going by, ever got wind of that, they'd plague the life out of me."

Clem glanced first at the neat powder boat that had lately slipped mooring from the dock, then at the half-dozen fishing launches that were getting under way for the morning run to the salmon banks, and finally at the comfortable looking yacht anchored some distance out.

"Shucks!" smiled Clem. "The powder boat is out of hearing and I doubt whether those white duckers on that yacht care one tiny bit whether I call you 'Dave dearie' or 'Cut-Throat Hank,'

so there! You are too particular, brother dear. Much too particular. Now tell me what would happen—if you can without choking.”

The genial grin crept once more toward the lad’s generous ears. It had been so long since he had had Clem with him, it was rather pleasant now to have her boss him.

“Clem, if the powder in that warehouse went off, the whole end of Whidby Island would be pulverized and you and I would be selecting our harps before the first echo got back.”

The girl pulled the cap from her short-cut hair and jumped [5] to her feet with an answering laugh. Slender and pale she was, and yet there was something about her pose that suggested unbounded energy. Tortoise-shell glasses rode defiantly on a pert nose that counter-balanced the serious lines of the mouth and chin. White middy, red tie, khaki knee trousers, cotton stockings, and tennis shoes—the costume gave her a look of alert readiness.

“I don’t fancy your job, Dave. Sounds too much like fireworks and a ticket to another world but I appreciate the chance it has given me toward a schooling, and if these traitor eyes of mine _____”

“Forget it!” ejaculated Dave. “You’ll build up fast—swimming, hiking, and cooking. I’m mighty glad you’re here, Sis; won’t be so lonesome this summer.”

“Lonesome! With the Sound and the boats and the mountains?”

Her brother’s glance swept the blue waters of Puget Sound,

dotted with a score or more of fishing boats; the distant mainland; the jagged outlines of White Horse, Pilchuck, and Index against the eastern sky.

“Fine to look at, Clem, but hard to talk to.”

“At least, the mountains don’t ask questions, Dave. Now tell me, aren’t the fishermen and the summer campers afraid of the powder?” [6]

“Bunte is the only fisherman I have heard say anything about it in the eleven months I have been here.”

“Is Bunte that leather-faced old fellow you pointed out yesterday—the one who earns a living catching dogfish for the fertilizer plant?”

“Yes,” Dave answered, beginning once more his task of loading the tram; “I think Bunte is responsible for the crazy idea that, if we ever get just the right weather conditions, the whole shooting match will go up of its own accord. Last summer the story got going down there at the colony of city folks and they have been stewing about it ever since. Sent the postmaster to look the place over and report. Mr. Fowler, the postmaster, is a square shooter. He went over the place carefully, saw all the care I take of the warehouse, and reported back that there is mighty little danger. Still, he said, he thought the log warehouse ought to be replaced with a sheet-iron structure. I wouldn’t be surprised if the company does make that change although some people are against sheet iron because they say it will attract lightning. What they really want is to get rid of the place altogether and that means my job

would evaporate.

“Well, Mr. Fowler kind of quieted them down, but they [7]
figger on taking it up at the legislature to see if they can get
the place abandoned. I can’t say that I blame them. I can see the
way they look at it, but there’s got to be some place to store
powder. In this new country, where there are so many stumps
to blow out and so many roads to make, people just have to
have powder.”

“Dave, what did Bunte say to the report the postmaster made?”

“Huh!” grinned Dave, “he just shoved his wad of tobacco into
his cheek, cocked his head up at the sky, and said—I can’t give
you his funny talk but he says: ‘Some day, everything will be
just right, then—whoof! Maybe tomorrow—maybe five years.’”

“Why, Clem, it’s plain ridiculous. The way I keep this place
slicked up it’ll never explode unless somebody sets fire to it.”

“Dave, have you ever been afraid of that? No one has ever
attempted——?” Clem watched her brother’s face as she
trailed her last words.

“Oh, no,” he replied quickly, too quickly, Clem thought. “Of
course sometimes people get careless. A fellow has to keep an
eye on the summer crowd down the bay, and on the fishermen,
too, for that matter.”

“What would you do if it did catch fire?”

Dave shrugged his shoulders and shook his head as he [8]
thought of the responsibility that was his. “Of course I’d

do my best to put it out.”

“Even when you knew you might be blown sky high?”

“I wouldn’t be able to get far enough away to keep from going up so I might as well do my best to put the fire out. That’s a case where you can’t keep from being brave. But the fact that the person who sets the place on fire will hardly escape himself is the very thing that makes the warehouse as safe as it is. I’ll confess that the job has its drawbacks, and that there have been one or two odd things happened since I came, but you’ll find out about those things soon enough.”

“Well, I can help keep the dock slicker than ever. I’ll share your responsibility taking care of the warehouse.”

“Stick to the cookin’, Sis; stick to the cookin’.”

“But, Dave, I want something else to do: I wish there was some way for me to earn money. If my eyes let me, I’m going back to high school next fall; I’ve got only a half year’s work left. I’ve been thinking I might get a job earning some money down at the summer colony.”

Clem turned toward the half mile of summer cottages that lay a mile farther up the beach away from the head of the island. She could see the dock, the warehouse, and the general store, where Dave purchased his daily supplies.

Dave looked at her in amazement.

[9]

“You’ll do nothing of the sort!” he thundered. “There’s enough around the house to keep you busy, and you can take care of the

chickens until I get time to ship them to Seattle, and——”

“There, there, dear, don’t get so excited; I’m not sure I could hold a place as a maid, and to tell the truth I’m not eager; I’d rather be my own boss. Don’t worry about my not helping with the house and the chickens, but that’s work that Twasla has always taken care of. I want to do something new, something that will be a real contribution of my own.”

“If we manage, Clem, you’re going to finish high school and go on to the university when you’re ready for it, but you’re goin’ to loaf this summer—swim and row and fish.”

“Well, I’ve thought about the fishing, but I don’t suppose I’d catch enough with just a rowboat.” Clem’s foot was busy pushing bits of gravel to fall down through the crack between the heavy boards of the dock. She could see the pieces strike the cool green water to send widening ripples outward. Occasionally a lazy fat perch would rise to investigate the disturbances.

“Enough?” exclaimed Dave. “We want something to eat besides fish.”

“Oh, I mean enough to sell,” replied Clem gently.

“You catching fish to sell! That’s good! Say, I never supposed the sun was hot enough to addle your thinker this morning. I’ll have to toss you in the bay to cool you off.” [10]

“Won’t matter, brother, I’m going to jump in as soon as the tide gets up a little higher, so there.”

The young man put his shoulder against the loaded tram and started it along the iron rails toward the log warehouse. Clementine walked alongside, helping push. For a dozen paces she whistled a popular tune, then came another question.

“How much do fishermen make, Dave?”

“Maybe ten to fifteen dollars a day—maybe fifteen cents.”

“Why the difference?”

“Some people can catch fish, I guess, and some can’t.”

“But, brother, can’t anybody put a hook and line over the end of a boat?”

“Sure, and you ought to know by this time that you can row until your back cracks and not even get a strike. We’ve tried it often enough.”

“You think it’s luck, then?”

The tram had come to a halt in front of the open warehouse. Dave turned to his sister with mock desperation.

“Turn off the faucet, throw off the switch! Back up a minute while I get even with you.” He advanced toward her with threatening finger, talking rapidly. [11]

“Tell me, young lady, how many teeth has a hen? How long is a piece of string? How far is it to the moon and halfway back? How—how—— My, you’re dumb! And *my* sister, too; I can’t account for it!”

Clem made a move as though to bite the extended finger, laughed, and turned away. “Just for that I’m going to tell Twasla to give you nothing but onions and fried jellyfish for dinner; and I’m going to leave you to unload your boxes without my help. I’ll be back to the dock, though, as soon as I get my bathing suit on. I’m going to beat your diving record today.”

“Yes, you will—*not!*” jeered Dave. Yet he looked with pride after the departing figure, for under his brotherly roughness lay a real love for Clementine.

As Clem walked along the path that led to the five-room bungalow provided by the powder company for the dock tender, she thought back upon the three happy years she had spent at West High. She had worked for her board and room, but she had managed to get good grades and some experience in the school activities. Everything had gone splendidly until late hours over her studies had brought on trouble with her eyes. The doctor’s orders had been imperative: she must leave books for a year at least; she must keep herself active out of doors.

The last command had made it impossible for her to go on with a position offered her in a department store. So she had said good-bye with tears close beneath the laughter, and, after a four-hour voyage up the Sound, had scrambled down the gangplank at the powder dock into the hands of her one close relative, Dave. A few minutes later, Twasla, the old Siwash woman, housekeeper at the powder dock since its erection, had given her a cautious welcome. [12]

It was nice to see Dave, but it had been hard to keep up her cheerfulness these first two days. She could not rid herself of a feeling of uselessness. Up to this time she had led an active, independent life, but now, apparently, she was doomed to months of virtual idleness.

With a little gripping of the heart, Clem sighed and wished once more that her sunny-faced mother and her gallant father had been spared from the wreck so many years ago. How different her life would have been! But such thoughts were seldom with Clementine; she realized how fruitless are regrets for the past. Her mind leaped promptly to the present as she climbed the steps to the broad porch. She hesitated a moment at the doorway, viewing in silent contemplation the interior. The arrangement of the rooms was not bad but there were matters of curtains and wall paper that worried her artistic soul. If she only had the money—there was the rub! Of course something could be done—some of the things that one couldn't expect an old Indian woman to think of. Certainly Clem could make the rooms more homelike, and the task would help her overcome the pessimism that threatened her. [13]

“I can't lie around,” she said to herself, as she slipped into her bathing suit; “I've got to do something that will keep me out of doors and bring in some money. Oh, boy! I know what I'd like to try. It would be exciting, but I—haven't—even—a starter. My, if I could make a go of it, by the time I'm ready to go back to school I'd be able to get some real clothes to wear.”

Pulling on a light coat over her bathing suit, Clem ran down the steps toward the inviting blue water of the Sound.

“Well, it’s wonderful to be here with Dave,” she murmured. “I’m going to love it, even though I feel like an exile, and even though that old powder house does sit over there like an evil spirit brooding, waiting for the proper hour. I’m not going to pay any attention to that crazy idea; there’s lots of beauty to be seen—all the funny sea things along the beach, those marvelous saw-edged mountains stuck up in the sky, and that shiny yacht lording it over those dingy little fishing boats. It’s all beautiful!

“Now I wonder why that launch is coming in from the yacht?” [14]

The launch in question was larger than the ordinary yacht tender. So large, in fact, that it must follow the yacht from place to place on independent power. Clem had noticed the trim boat before, lying alongside the yacht. On the afternoon previous the launch had made a trip down to the base of the cliffs that marked the head of Whidby Island, a mile away. Toward evening Clem had seen the launch return and drop anchor close to the yacht.

Clem adjusted her sun glasses and pulled the green shade still lower. As she passed by the warehouse, she called in to Dave: “Somebody from the yacht is coming to see you; don’t let them keep you from your swim. I’ll wait on the dock.”

While she sauntered farther out, the launch dodged its way between the fish boats and headed as though to beach some hundred feet below the dock.

“Funny,” thought Clem, “that they don’t come alongside the dock. It wouldn’t be as hard to land here as it will be on the

beach.”

In the craft, a white-haired man and a young girl were visible; the latter could be seen at the wheel through the plate-glass window that formed one side of the graceful cabin. [15]

Admiration was in Clem’s face as she stood on the edge of the dock and watched the launch cut through the clear water. So well proportioned were the lines of the *Gypsy*, it appeared more a native of the water than something made by man. Suddenly Clem’s expression faded to one of alarm.

“Look out! Look out!” she screamed, waving her arms. The boat was headed straight for a barnacle-covered snag now just below the surface of the rising tide. From her elevated position, Clem could see the dark outline beneath the water, but the little girl at the wheel of the launch saw nothing save the slightly rippling surface.

“Turn out! You’ll strike!” With clenched hands Clem strained for an answering movement that would swing the boat from its present path.

[16]

CHAPTER II

THE SINKING CABIN

Something above the purr of her motor must have been audible to the child at the steering wheel. She glanced up at Clem, saw her gesticulating arm, smiled, and waved a greeting. At the same moment, the other occupant of the craft pulled himself erect and leaned aside to catch a glimpse ahead. Before he could more than comprehend the danger, the *Gypsy* struck with a muffled crash and tearing sound. The prow reared sharply into the soft June sunshine as the keel rode the snag; then with a side lurch the boat tilted and slid free.

Clementine screamed again as she saw the man lose his balance, pitch out into the Sound, and go under with a gurgling shout. She knew that the victim's terrified call would draw the water into his lungs and befuddle his brain still more. As she tore the coat from her shoulders, tossed the amber glasses and eyeshade atop the coat, and poised on the edge of the dock, she noted that the boat was still forging ahead in a groggy fashion, settling more and more with every revolution of the screw. The little girl who had been steering was not to be seen.

Had she been knocked unconscious, to lie imprisoned in the rapidly filling cabin? Could she be gotten out before the launch sank beneath the surface? Could the old man be saved? [17]

When Clementine Fargar struck the water and flashed her arms in the racing stroke that had made her a second-place

performer in the Camp Fire water sports she was not sure that she could cope with the desperate situation, but she was sure that she could reach the floundering man well in advance of her brother, who was racing madly from the warehouse. Straight for the terror-stricken face—gasping mouth, popping eyes, plastered white hair—Clem held her pace. The old man could not be far from the submerged tree stump; if she could get him to it, he might be able to hold on and keep his breathing until Dave arrived.

She had heard tales aplenty of the grip of a drowning person, so she ducked under as the man's fingers writhed toward her. As she dove beneath the thrashing arm, the girl twisted, seized the man's coat tails and came to the top beyond reach. Backward she towed for the submerged stump. A long minute of tiring effort and the grasping hands of the old man closed on the sharp barnacles perhaps six inches beneath the water. He was choking badly but was still able to keep his head above water.

“Hang on! Dave's coming!” instructed Clem breathlessly. [18]
Then she whirled and was off for the sinking boat drifting a dozen yards away. A feeling of inadequacy pulled at her heart. How could she hope to save the child from the sinking cabin? Then, oddly enough, a phrase from her father's lips flashed to mind: “Do your best—angels cannot do more.” And with that thought came a swelling courage. She would do her best. Some Power above would give her strength.

When Clem came alongside, the *Gypsy's* gunwale was nearly level with the Sound. The hole in the prow had sucked in the water with appalling rapidity. The final plunge could not be far

off.

Through the plate glass, Clem caught a picture of the little cabin. In water up to her hips, a girl not more than nine years old was struggling weakly to wrench open the miniature door. Clem was never to forget the look of helpless appeal that was thrown at her in answer to a sharp rap upon the glass. The child rushed through the water to the window and beat frantically upon the pane, screaming aloud with every futile blow.

For a second Clem held to the launch watching the water [19] creep up the wall inside the cabin. She must act quickly. Dave, in the rowboat, was nearly to the sunken stump. It would take him several minutes to get the old man in. He would not be able to save the child from the plunge. Whatever was to be done, she must do.

Two strokes brought Clem to the back of the boat. Half crawling, half swimming, she got herself aboard the back deck. When she struggled to her feet, the water was still around her knees. A moment later she was banging her shoulder against the cabin door.

“I mustn’t get caught myself, in the cabin. The boat’s going down!” she mumbled to herself as she felt the door give.

She half realized the danger she was placing herself in but the rush of action gave her no chance for deliberation. Here was a child to be rescued—she must do all that she could regardless of what might happen.

Seizing the casing to prevent being washed into the trap, Clem swung the door with her foot and leaned in toward the frantic

child just as the water swirled over the gunwale. The screaming child fastened a grip of desperation upon Clem's arm. Clem jerked backward through the cabin door.

The next few minutes went in a whirling haze of clinging [20] child, engulfing water, and down-sucking boat. But somehow Clem managed to free herself and the child from the eddy that marked the sinking of the *Gypsy*. She did no more than enough to keep them afloat, after the crucial struggle. Fortunately the child had lost consciousness. Clem could hear the encouraging cries of her brother and the laboring sounds of the rescued man. Still, it seemed an age before the rowboat swept alongside and she felt Dave's strong grip on her arm.

A moment of effort and the child was in the boat in the arms of the white-haired man.

"I won't try to get in, Dave," said Clem. "I'll hang on to the rear. I'm a bit winded, but all right just the same."

So with words of brotherly commendation, Dave settled to his oars and drove hard for the near-by shore.

Five minutes later Clem sat wrapped in her coat in the hot sun that beat down on the sandy beach. The white-haired man was breathing regularly once more, thanks to Dave's ministrations. The little girl of the cabin was sitting close to Clem, evidently none the worse for her strenuous experience except for a ruined frock.

"Soon as you feel like it, I'll row you out to your yacht," volunteered Dave, with a keen glance at the old man. "Better get into some dry clothes, Mr. Morgan."

A flash of animation came from beneath the overhanging eyebrows.

[21]

“How did you know my name, young man?”

“That’s easy; I’ve seen your boat anchored off the Point a good many times; the Morgan Powder Company’s annual catalogue carried your picture as president. Someone sent me a copy a few days ago.”

“Huh!” snorted Mr. Morgan. “No trouble in guessing the sender. I may as well be frank with you; I’ve been trying to buy this storage place from the Pondeux people for six weeks. They wouldn’t even let me look it over, so I decided to stop off on my cruise back from the San Juan Islands. They sent you my picture and told you to keep me off, I dare say. Huh!”

“Well,” smiled the young dock tender. It was a matter he had no desire to argue over. The letter from the Seattle office had gone so far as to say, “Kick him off if he is insistent,” and Dave was reluctant to save an elderly gentleman one minute and then boot him off the beach while the water was still dripping from his clothing.

“I don’t mind saying, Mr. Morgan, that—of course you may not have had a hand in it—that you can’t scare me into leaving the powder dock.”

Clem looked at Dave in surprise.

“What have I said,” replied Mr. Morgan testily, “that could be interpreted as an effort to scare you?”

[22]

“Maybe I’m just shooting in the air, Mr. Morgan, but I’m referring to certain things that have happened since I took over the place.”

“Huh!”

The snort this time was accompanied by an effort to rise. As Dave helped him gain his feet, the little girl ran and took a slightly trembling hand in her warm clasp. The old gentleman turned toward Clementine.

“Who—er—who is that young lady?”

“My sister, Miss Fargar, Mr. Morgan.”

“Er—you’ve done a brave deed to-day, young lady. Er—you’ve saved an old man not much worth risking yourself on, but—er—you’ve saved his chief reason for living when you pulled Helen, here, out of that cabin. I won’t forget it.”

He wheeled about and stumbled in the direction of the boat, leaving Clementine Fargar with a new sensation. She was entirely at a loss for words.

But as Dave was pushing off with his two passengers her questioning powers returned with a rush. She jumped up and ran over the warm sand to the water’s edge.

“Your launch, Mr. Morgan, the *Gypsy*. Won’t it be stolen or stripped? Low tide will leave it high and dry, you know. Shall we watch it for you until you can send for it?” [23]

The white-haired man gazed out to the spot where the boat had

gone down and then glanced back at the girl upon the beach.

“Going to be here all summer, aren’t you?” he questioned.

“Yes, I——”

“Launch is yours. Man will be over to-morrow from Seattle to fix it up. Come, young fellow, get to rowing.”

“Mine!” ejaculated Clementine. “You don’t mean——”

“Good-by, Miss Fargar,” cried the child. “I’m goin’ to make Grandpa bring me to see you sometime this summer. Good-by.”

Dave swung the boat in line for the yacht. He could hardly repress the laughter that showed in his twinkling eyes and twitching lips as he viewed President Morgan hunched in the rear seat shutting his ears to the protestations from Clementine.

Clem watched the boat widen its distance from the beach. The *Gypsy* was hers! That trim brass and mahogany yacht tender with its powerful engine and englassed prow was hers to use as she pleased. The girl’s countenance beamed in the joy of the moment. Not more than thirty minutes ago she had seen no way clear to carry out the plan she had conceived, and now——!

The languor that had followed the excitement dropped from her like a cloak. The minute Dave returned with the rowboat, they would go out over the *Gypsy* and get some idea of the condition in which the launch rested. To-morrow the repair man would come and before many hours she would be able to commence her experiment in money making. She would give it a trial despite Dave’s protests. Of course he would put

up a howl, but she would show him that she could plan for herself.

The possibilities offered by the summer fairly staggered Clem. No longer need she think of spending her time caring for the chickens and helping keep up the cottage; no longer was there the urge to hire out at the summer colony. Instead, a summer of wonderful adventure, as alluring as any fast-moving tale of the Spanish Main, lay before her.

“Sail on, and on, and on! I am the captain of my fate!” chortled the girl, thereby mixing two very sane poets in a decidedly insane fashion.

“I’ll hoist the Jolly Roger and sail the seven seas until I’ve loaded the good vessel to the guards with loot. Yo ho! Forty men on a dead man’s chest——”

Clem executed a mixture of sailor’s hornpipe and Highland fling with a flurry of bare toes and silvery sand, and with a last wave in response to Helen’s handkerchief she hurried up the path to her dressing room. Twasla, who had seen the rescue from the porch, waddled aimlessly about just outside the bedroom door, evidently intending to speak, but when Clem stepped out in her earlier attire, the old Indian woman wheeled about and hustled back into the kitchen. [25]

“She hasn’t said a dozen words to me in the two days I’ve been here,” smiled Clem to herself; “I wonder if I’ve won her approval. My, I hope I don’t have to go through another such experience in order to bring her to actual words. I guess she thinks I’m just one more to cook for, and really not worth

wasting the food on. I'll show her that I can get food as well as eat it. Just wait until I get started with the *Gypsy*."

Clem reached the beach just as her brother stepped out of the rowboat. He stood looking at her as though from a new point of view.

"Sis," he exclaimed, "you're a knockout! Better than I thought. Gosh, I was proud of you when I saw you had the little girl. I thought she was a goner. And now that ringtailed speed boat is yours—if it can be gotten out."

"Why, can't we get it at low water?"

"I'm afraid not in time for the repair man to-morrow. [26]
Tides change to-day. Low tide comes sometime in the small hours of the morning."

"In the night!" responded the girl. "That's provoking. Well, you go on about your work, Dave. You're not to be bothered with *my* launch." With a laugh, she pushed the skiff from the beach and stepped in.

"I'll bet you, Davie dear, there's some means to get the *Gypsy* ready to be worked on by to-morrow. I'm going to find a way if I have to dive down and bail the launch out myself!"

"You've done enough diving for one day; you——"

"Tut, tut, brother, I may have to wear blinders over my eyes and amber glasses, but I'm no invalid as you'll see when I start business with the *Gypsy*."

“Business! What fool idea have you hatched out now?”

“Never you mind, Mister; you’ll know in plenty of time to get in more than enough kicking. I’m so interested in getting started on the launch I’m not going to ask a single one of the questions about Mr. Morgan that I’m fairly sizzling with.”

“Well, sorry I can’t help you, Sis, but I’ve got to get
[27]
around in time to catch the afternoon boat up island to Wilton. I want to talk to Tom Trent about Morgan’s visit. I can’t figure out just why Morgan is so anxious to get this warehouse, but something has come up recently to put him on edge. Maybe it’s just a step to expand; maybe there are other reasons. He claims he wants to control this end of the island for a hunting and fishing place even if the legislature does away with the powder warehouse. Maybe so, but I want to get Tom Trent’s idea. I think it’s important enough to run the risk of leavin’ you in charge of the dock. Of course actually I don’t think there’s any risk in leaving.”

“Who’s Tom Trent?”

“He’s sort of a salesman and inspector for the Pondeux people. I’ll bring him back with me, perhaps, so you can ask him yourself. I’ll be back in the morning. You’ll be all right with Twasla, but see to it that you don’t run any crazy risks over that sunken tub.”

“You’ll get gray hairs from worry and then you won’t be half as handsome as you are now, Davie dear,” cooed Clem as she started the skiff from shore.

“You’d better row!” shouted Dave, lunging at the boat. “I’m

going to have to strap you in the Devil's Swing an' start you from the roof of the warehouse if you don't cut out that blamed sissy name."

Clem threw a tormenting glance over her shoulder as she [28] swerved the boat. "Run along and tend your knitting, little boy. I'll not ride the Devil's Swing until I'm good and ready."

"You're afraid, aren't you?" grinned Dave.

"Maybe some would call it that, but——"

"But what?" demanded Dave, irritated by her calm indifference to his teasing.

"But others would say I have better sense than to run a risk for nothing."

"Bah!" exclaimed Dave.

"Sure, 'Bah' is just what you should say!"

"Why?" yelled Dave, falling into his sister's trap.

"Why, because you're the goat!" laughed the girl at the oars.

Dave waved his hand in a long-suffering gesture and hurried up the beach toward the dock, while Clem pulled for the spot where the *Gypsy* had bubbled down to the tide flats.

CHAPTER III

SALVAGE

Peering down through the glass-green water, Clem could see the hulk of the *Gypsy* lying on its side ten feet below like some stricken inhabitant of the deep. The thought of raising the launch made it loom larger than before. She had undertaken, empty handed, a task that men might shy at unless amply provided with hoisting tackle. True, she had spent much of her past vacation time on or in the Sound, and her observing eye, together with her ready questions, had done something toward preparing her for such an emergency.

“A tugboat could catch on to the *Gypsy* and drag it in farther, but pulling it over the stones would scratch it up a lot and probably break the cabin glass,” thought Clem, holding the skiff against the current. “Still, I don’t see how else——”

“Well, gal,” came a voice so close that the girl jerked her head over her shoulder in surprise. “I heerd you be in the salvage business. He-he! Men, kids, en boats.”

Small, dark, and wiry, the speaker seemed lost in the overgrown rowboat in which he stood. Clem smiled as she recognized Bunte, the fisherman who held the queer idea concerning the powder warehouse. [30]

“I’m afraid I won’t be so lucky saving the boat,” she answered.

The old man pulled hard on his oars and then gazed down at the

sunken launch. He spat reflectively and squinted up at the sky.

“Ef thet sun could pull ez strong ez the moon, mebbe it ’ud bring the hull off’n the bott’m. Thin it cut drift nigh enuf t’ shore t’ be patched when the tide be out.”

“But Mr. Sun won’t pull——”

“Gal,” interrupted Bunte, as his boat drifted farther away, “thet sun raised trees from seed specks, water helpin’ things along, an’ I reck’n them logs floatin’ over there ’ud be glad t’ pass the favor on by raisin’ yer boat fer ye, ef ye kin git the water t’ help out agin.”

He laughed his high-pitched cackle as he settled to his oars.

Clem sat in perplexed silence. For several minutes she waited, allowing the tide to carry her boat slowly along, while she watched the back-bent fisherman pull his way down the bay in the direction of the Head. Evidently Bunte had seen a way. He had told his plan in his queer fashion. Surely she could make use of the suggestion to get the logs and the water to raise the *Gypsy*. Her brows knit in the intensity of thought. [31]

“I wonder,” she mused, “how many logs it would take to lift the launch. If I had enough of the drift logs right over this place at low tide, and could get them fastened down close up to the *Gypsy*, then, when the tide comes in, the water would lift the logs higher and the boat would have to come with them. And the current would take it all in closer to shore to where she’d be exposed when the water went out again at low tide. I’ll bet that’s just what Bunte meant!

“If I’m going to work that scheme, I’ll have to have a good stout rope.”

Her glance traveled back to where a giant alder tree reared its slanting trunks aloft just above maximum tide and in line between the powder warehouse and the water. From a sturdy branch that projected parallel with the beach high up on the main trunk hung two long, heavy ropes that terminated in a swing plank about three feet from the earth. Clementine had gasped two days ago when she had beheld her brother, on the roof of the warehouse, pull the swing seat in its long arc by a cord until he could seize the ropes and step off from the roof upon the dangling plank. Judging by the sweep of the swing far out over the water, its pause at the dizzy height of the ascent, and the sickening backward passage, it had been well christened the Devil’s Swing. Clem had made a fervent, though unvoiced, vow that she would never take that ride.

Her sole interest now lay in the ropes. As soon as her brother was gone she would climb the tree ladder, made by spiking pieces of two-by-fours to the upper part of the slanting trunk; she would slip the iron rings from their fastenings, and later use the ropes to lash the raft to the sunken launch. [32]

It was a big job, all right, but doing it herself would save money and besides there was a wonderful thrill in attempting such an engineering feat. Clem bent to her oars with an eagerness she had not felt in many weeks. Dave would have the surprise of his young life when he returned in the morning.

To chronicle the details of the afternoon would be to picture

Clem's eager energy fading to weariness before unforeseen obstacles. The ropes on the giant swing proved so heavy that it was only after a prolonged struggle at the top of the tree ladder that she managed to unhook the ring closest to the trunk. Back to earth once more, she found it difficult even to drag the rope to the water's edge. Then, before she had much more than a nucleus for the raft, the bay became so rough she was forced to abandon her attempts. She could do nothing with the uneasy logs.

Nursing her protesting hands, Clem wandered to her [33]
favorite seat on the dock. The steamer, plying once a day between Seattle and Whidby Island ports, had picked Dave up some time ago. The small fishing launches had pulled anchor and slipped out to the fishing banks below the island for the flood-tide catch. Twasla had finally withdrawn to the kitchen to prepare the evening meal. As the forlorn girl watched the sun push the cliff shadows out of their noonday retreat, she tried not to think of the remarks Dave would make over the failure of her boasting.

And then the glorious idea took substance from thin air. What a fool she had been to attempt to build a raft when moored to the upper side of the dock was a loading scow of medium size. There was the very lifting power she needed.

With renewed confidence Clem set about to place close [34]
in shore an anchor of gunny sacks partly filled with sand that would hold the scow and swing the water-filled boat. With a number of empty sacks and a short-handled shovel, Clem took up a position on the beach somewhat above the place where the *Gypsy* lay. Then she began shoveling gravel and

sand into the bags. In a few minutes three partly filled sacks were ready and a hole in the slanting beach was proof that Clem's back had a right to ache. She spread open the fourth bag and thrust her shovel deep into the pit. As she raised the load, something in the sand sparkled. Clem dropped the shovel and seized the object with an exclamation of astonishment. She turned it over slowly in her fingers. It was a diamond ring—the gold band dark with tarnish and the stone dulled by its burial, but unquestionably a diamond of value.

For several minutes Clem could do nothing but stand in amazement. What strange turn in Fortune's wheel had thus bestowed a launch and a diamond ring in the same day?

"I can't believe it," muttered Clem, half aloud. "How could that ring have come here? One of the prongs is broken and—yes, there are the initials 'A. C.' inside the band. Must have been an engagement ring; perhaps some woman lost it at a picnic."

And now chance had directed her shovel to the spot where the ring had lain for years. Clem wished that Dave were with her to exclaim over the find. His eyes would pop out in the morning when she laid the ring in his palm and told him where she had found it.

Well, that pleasure must wait. In the meanwhile there was work to be done on the *Gypsy*.

Reluctantly Clem pocketed the diamond and turned her attention to getting the scow in place. This proved easier than she had expected for, once the flat wooden platform was

free from the dock, the current carried it in the right direction. Clem, with a rope around a post on the deck, warped it into a position where she was able to make it fast to the anchor and still have it ride over the *Gypsy*. Occasionally she paused to rest and to reexamine the diamond ring.

At last the amateur engineer succeeded in getting the heavy rope aboard the scow. One end she made secure around the stubby side post on the scow; the other, weighted by the iron ring, was allowed to sink in such a way that with the hook on the long pike pole Clem was able to catch the ring and pull the rope under the sturdy shaft between the propeller and the hull. When the ring was once more in her hand, Clem heaved a sigh of relief. At least one end of the boat was now attached to the scow. To draw the rope taut at the other side of the platform and arrange it so that it could be tightened quickly at low tide was a matter of minutes.

Twasla had to beat the steel triangle three times with increasing impatience before Clem heeded the supper call. The rope under the front end of the *Gypsy* had been obstinate in its determination to slip off each time it was tightened; but finally it caught behind a tying iron and held firm.

“There,” exulted Clem, as she headed the rowboat for shore, “I’m all ready for low tide. I hate to come back here so late at night to shorten those ropes, but it’s the only way.” [36]

Twasla’s supper of oddly flavored brown bread, steamed clams, and boiled potatoes was on the red-clothed table when Clem finally washed her blistered hands and stepped into the

dining room. The Indian woman came in from the kitchen as Clem sat down and placed a cup and a pitcher of milk at the girl's elbow.

"You hungry?" queried the old lady, pausing with her hands on the back of Dave's vacant chair.

"I am, Twasla," declared Clem; "hungry and tired. I wish you would sit down and tell me about yourself while I eat this dandy supper. Have you eaten yet?"

"Me no wait. Plenty eat in cook-room," replied Twasla.

"Well, just sit down to keep me company," insisted Clem, waving her slice of buttered bread toward the chair. "How long have you lived here, Twasla?"

The Indian woman seated herself on the edge of Dave's chair obediently. "No can count. Heap moons."

"Were you here before the powder house was built?"

Twasla smiled. "Long time!"

[37]

"What did you do then?"

"Me wife fisherman Jim Novak."

"You were the wife of a fisherman? What became of your husband?"

"Gone," replied Twasla, with a dramatic grunt.

“You mean he died?”

“Gone!”

“Do you think he is still alive?”

“No can tell.”

“Well, don’t you worry about him, his being gone so long?”

“Me no worry. What’s use? No bring back.” Twasla laid one wrinkled hand over the other in resignation.

Clem eyed the woman with a new light. Twasla was a philosopher worth knowing if she could speak thus of her husband’s disappearance.

“Haven’t you any idea what became of him?”

“Maybe him go dead in water; maybe get tired powder dock; maybe Wynaults catch him.”

“Twasla, what do you mean—the Wynaults?”

“Injun from Vancouver way. Him no scalp. Him take all head. Him head hunter.”

In her interest Clem almost forgot to eat. “But you don’t mean to tell me that they were real head hunters?”

“Huh!” grunted Twasla, pushing back the calico sleeve of her dress and exposing a ragged scar across her arm at the elbow. “Me know.” [38]

“Did you—did they—did——” Clem’s words stumbled over her tongue. “How did you get that scar, Twasla?”

Twasla’s only answer was to roll up the other sleeve to reveal a companion scar on the other arm.

“But tell me, Twasla.”

“Me no tell. He know.” The Indian woman pointed a fat finger toward the bay.

“What do you mean?” questioned Clem in perplexity.

“Man in water.”

“The man I helped? Mr. Morgan?”

Twasla’s head nodded twice and then she slid from her chair and ambled into the kitchen leaving an astounded girl to finish her meal.

How could Mr. Morgan have any knowledge of the cruel scars that circled the Indian woman’s arms? Was there any connection between Twasla’s scars and the unexplained remark Dave had made to Mr. Morgan regarding some effort made to scare Dave out?

This problem occupied Clem’s mind for the remainder of the meal. Just as soon as supper was over, Clem went into her bedroom, placed the diamond beneath some clothes in the bureau drawer, set the alarm clock for two-thirty, and lay down with her clothes on. The tide book listed the slack water for three o’clock so she would have several hours of rest [39]

before the final adjusting of the tackle that was to swing the sunken launch inward with the rising tide. Within three minutes she was lost in sleep in a dream of a moonlit beach spread with diamonds as large as hen's eggs.

To the girl it seemed but minutes when the insistent alarm brought her to her feet. She rubbed her drowsy eyes and groped through the hall to the porch. In the faint light diffused from the moon already behind the cliff, the warehouse, wharf, and beach objects took on unfamiliar outlines. The mast lights riding on the quiet bay told of the return of the fishing fleet. Most of the owners had no doubt forsaken their boats for their shacks down the beach. Some, perhaps, bunked board the crafts. Within another hour they would commence preparation for the dawn fishing.

Clem hesitated on the porch steps, wishing she had thought to look up a lantern; for some reason her customary confidence had oozed from her, yet she knew that she would go through with her plan now that so much depended upon it.

As she started down the dark path that led past the Devil's Swing a sudden sound stopped her in her tracks. [40]
Low voices were coming from the direction of the *Gypsy*. Clem's heart leaped to a pounding rhythm; she strained her glance through the darkness toward the scene of her afternoon labors. Dimly she made out two blurred figures upon the scow.

Instinctively Clem crouched low beside the Devil's Swing in the night gloom and tried to make out the words coming from the two vague figures. From the sounds, she judged that the marauders had discovered her plan for floating the *Gypsy* in

shore and were now engaged in tightening the ropes.

“The thieves!” thought the trembling girl. “They’re going to drag the launch into deep water and make their getaway with it. All my work, all my plans for nothing! Oh, if Dave were only here! He would—now just what would he do? Would he rush out and shout an alarm? Would he hurry for aid either up bay to the summer colony, or down to the fishermen’s shacks? One thing sure, he would not lie hidden in this fashion and allow the boat to be taken without a protest.”

Suddenly she turned and started back up the path on her hands and knees, prompted by the remembrance of what stood in the corner of her brother’s room. There was an answer to her questions. She *could* save her untried launch and her rosy dreams—if she possessed the courage. As she neared the steps she half rose erect and slipped like a shadow into the house. [41]

One minute passed—another—and then she reappeared clutching close an automatic rifle. Clem knew that it was loaded for emergency and she was familiar enough with its mechanism to know that she could spray the scow with a dozen bullets before the thieves could more than collect their thoughts. Now the question that bothered was: Ought she to fire at a human being under the circumstances?

“I’ll warn them,” said Clem grimly to herself, “and if necessary I’ll put a shot or two over their heads. They’ll probably row for dear life—I hope they do—I sure don’t want to capture them.”

“That’s done,” came tones of satisfaction from the figures.

Clem steadied herself against a log, with the rifle ready, and shouted in clear accents: “Get off that scow! I’ll give you one minute before I start shooting.”

There was a startled movement out on the water and an astounded voice answered, “Gosh, Sis, don’t shoot. It’s Tom Trent and Dave—that’s all.”

With a little cry of relief, Clem leaned the rifle against the log and plumped down abruptly. For several moments she sat with her head resting upon her drawn-up knees. Then, as her thoughts ceased their dizzy whirl, she listened to her brother’s remarks as the boat came to shore. [42]

“One of the fishermen who stopped at Wilton on his way back from the Straits offered to bring us down. So we came, instead of waiting for morning. His engine broke down and we’ve spent half the night drifting. Finally he got the engine fixed. We spotted the scow when we got here and wanted to look over your arrangement. When we saw your ropes, we figured we’d save your coming out. Thought we’d tighten them and get back to the house before you showed up.”

“You haven’t met Tom Trent, have you, Sis?” continued Dave, when he and his companion stood beside the log. “Tom decided to check up with me before returning to Seattle. He’s from the Pondeux office, you know, but he didn’t expect to have any powder tried out on him.”

Tom Trent laughed as he took Clem’s extended hand.

“Seems an unhealthy spot for boat thieves, Miss Fargar. I don’t blame you, though, for getting out the firearms, after all the work you must have put in on that sunken launch. Smart plan you have for raising her.”

“Fine, Sis, and it’s all ready now to swing in with the tide. I think you have plenty of lifting power to turn the trick. We’ll have to get out early and unhook the scow so that it won’t be left on top of the *Gypsy* when the water ebbs again.” [43]

“Well, I’m glad you’re here, Dave,” breathed Clementine; “much obliged to both of you for fixing those ropes. I intend to get up in the morning and get the scow away. My, you gave me an awful scare. I thought I’d shake right out of my shoes when I first heard the sounds out there. I never dreamed of your being here or else I might have recognized your voice.”

“By the way, Clem, did you notice any other unusual noises when you first came out, or before?”

“No, I was dead to the world until the alarm went off. Why?”

“Oh, nothing much; hike on to bed like a good girl. We’ll see you at breakfast.”

Clem tried to decipher her brother’s expression in the faint light, but failed. Whatever it was that had occasioned his query, he apparently did not wish to discuss it at present. So she said good-night and retired to her bedroom. Her last impression, as she plunged off to sleep, was that the light from the living room still penciled a crack at the base of the door and that low voices still came from the young men.

CHAPTER IV

MOCCASIN SHOE

When the alarm summoned Clem once more, the sun, with the aid of a few lazy clouds, was staging a spectacular color display above the Cascades. Once she was on the beach, the girl was glad that necessity had brought her forth in time for the radiant picture spread before her. Even as she eagerly noted that the scow had swung at least ten yards farther in shore, she was conscious of the golden roadway of fresh sunlight that lay in dancing invitation across the bay. Beyond the grass line, a salmon leaped, poised, and splashed back in flashing exuberance; a kingfisher forsook his solitary piling to chatter a course northward; clear calls from birds in the alder groves found a throbbing rejoinder in the girl as she pulled the rowboat from the sand and pushed off.

“That salmon jumping in the sea of gold—I wonder if it means more good luck for me,” murmured Clem. “I don’t see how yesterday’s luck with a launch and a diamond can keep on. Of course the ring isn’t really mine yet. I’ll put an advertisement in the papers and wait a while before I do anything with the diamond. I must show the ring to Dave the minute he gets up. Oh, it’s great to be alive on a morning like this.” [45]

Thoughts of what the summer might mean to her flooded in while she loosened the scow from the *Gypsy* and patiently tugged on the dock line until the floating platform was well away from the launch.

“Now, when the tide goes out my launch will be left high and dry! Hurray! Then I’ll get it all bailed out and ready for the repair man.”

“Dear one, the world is waiting for the sunrise,” came the words of a song to Clem’s mind. She hummed the chorus thoughtfully.

“The sunrise won’t do the world so much good if we’re asleep when it comes; I’m for meeting it halfway if it’s always as wonderful as it is this morning. I guess I will be meeting it, if I make a go of my plan. Make a go of it? I’ve got to. Dave’s a dear—unselfish and everything, but he’s got to save for himself. It’s a shame for him to have me on his hands when he ought to be getting more education himself or starting in some business.

“Let’s see, to-day’s the nineteenth of June. July, August, [46] maybe September—say three months. About ninety days, and if I could only make ten dollars a day. Mercy, that would be \$900! Why, even if I made only half that much, I’d have enough to last me for two years at school, if I worked part time also. I don’t suppose that I could make that much, but just the same funny things happen sometimes.”

Clem stretched herself at full length on the scow. It was a luxury to lie thus with the water close on all sides, to feast her eyes upon the glorious colors of the sunrise, and to pile up daydreams higher than the topmost bank of tinted clouds. In the background of her musing certain events glowed and faded in turn—the way Mother had put her hands on Father’s shoulders the morning after the store had burned; the visit of Great Aunt

Emma, just over from some funny little country in Europe; the excitement felt but not understood by Clem over a bundle of letters from Aunt Emma's trunk; the terrible day in her eleventh year when she had been told that her parents would never return——

Clem abruptly forced her thoughts into other channels. She turned on her back, brought the cap well over her eyes, and swept the high cliff with a glance.

Alders and ferns had been quick to clothe the walls [47]
except in some sheer spots where winter rains had
sloughed off the outer sand and clay. The ravine, just up bay
from the warehouse, seemed one impenetrable growth of dark
green. Along the top edge of the island, second-growth
evergreens had hidden most of the dreary, blackened stumps.
Only here and there the relic of a forest veteran reared its
skeleton branches above the green. A flock of crows, whose
harsh cries came plainly to Clem's ears, were making their
flight along the edge of the island top toward their morning
feeding grounds. The irregular flying order was scattering
suddenly over one particular tree. Clem's attention centered
upon that tree's sparse branches.

“Wonder why those crows are scattering when they come to
that old tree; must be something unusual in the branches. I
should have Dave's binoculars——”

Simultaneous with that thought, Clem saw a movement of what
she had taken as part of the main trunk. The form of a man was
outlined for a moment. A short-handled flag flirted up and
down from an extended arm and then dropped into the foliage

below. Then the figure let itself lower until it, too, was swallowed in the sea of green branches.

At once the girl turned on her side to search the Sound to the south. Not a craft of any kind was visible beyond the anchored fishing boats. Perhaps the signal was intended for someone in Useless Bay on the other side of the island tip. Apparently the figure had been facing to the south, however; certainly a signal had been given and yet there was no clue as to whom the signal was intended for. [48]

“Men don’t climb trees this early in the morning just for the fun of waving a flag in the fresh air. That fellow is up to something! Can that have anything to do with what Dave was suspicious of last night?”

Clem dropped off the scow into her rowboat and hurried for shore.

When Dave yawned into the living room in answer to his sister’s low call, she recounted briefly what she had seen.

“That’s funny, Sis; can’t imagine—unless——”

“Unless what?” demanded Clem impatiently.

“The Morgan-Pondeux scrap has been threatening to boil over ever since I came here, but last night and to-day are the first times I’ve thought that there would be any more to it than letters and office meetings. Now I don’t know what to make of it. The old man, Morgan, may have someone planted on top the island. Can’t see just why. Then, of course, what you saw may have nothing to do with the powder dock.”

Dave, with Clem at his heels, strode out to the end of the porch and stood eying the slope of the cliff in perplexity. [49]

“Can you keep an eye on the warehouse while Tom and I take a look over that ridge up there? Isn’t likely that any boats will call in the hour or so that we will be gone.”

“How are you going and when?”

“As soon as we get something to eat. We’ll take the old trail up the gulley.”

“Wish I could go along.”

“Wouldn’t do, Sis; besides, you’ve got to be here to boss the job on the *Gypsy*.”

“Do you think that you’ll run into any danger?”

“Naw,” scorned the lad; “we’ll be back in a couple of hours. I may pack the shotgun along. Might see a grouse.”

“Anybody live on top of the island?”

“Not up above here; the flat is too narrow. Useless Bay cuts way in on the other side and helps form this kind of a neck that is called Possession Point.”

“I guess that Twasla and I can manage the powder dock all right unless this is the day it’s going to blow up.”

“Gosh, don’t you go to talking like Bunte. He’s half crazy.”

“I’m not so sure of that. He said some pretty wise things to me yesterday.”

“Long as he sticks to fish and boats he’s all to the good, [50] but he sure is a numbskull when it comes to powder warehouses.”

“Didn’t he say that when conditions were just right, the place would explode?”

“Sure.”

“Well, perhaps he didn’t mean weather conditions; he may have meant something about this trouble with the Morgan company.”

“Might have, but I don’t put any stock in his prophesying. We’ll climb the hill and have a look for ourselves. I’m going to wake Tom up.”

“Oh, Dave,” exclaimed Clem, thrusting her hand into her pocket, “I almost forgot. Look what I found in the gravel yesterday while you were gone.”

Dave took the offered ring with a grunt of surprise. “You found it? Where?”

“I was making an anchor by putting gravel in gunny sacks. I had three all done. I was thinking to myself how wonderful it would be to unearth an old pirate treasure with loads of jewels, and then, all of a sudden, there was this ring in my shovel.”

“Looks valuable, Clem. That ought to sell for around a hundred dollars.”

“Well, I’ll have to try first to find the owner. Some [51]
person must have felt terribly bad over losing that
diamond. ‘A. C.’ are the initials inside. I wonder what the full
name is.”

“How are you going to find the owner, huh? It must have been
buried in the sand for years. Like as not someone dropped it off
when she was going by in a boat and you’ll never find out who
it was.”

“Just the same, Dave, I’ll feel better if I advertise and put up a
sign down at the post office.”

“Then you’ll have everybody claiming it,” snorted Dave.

“I guess not everybody will be able to describe the ring.
Unless you go and tell the whole island about the initials and
the broken prong, Davie dear.”

“There you go again with——”

The door behind Dave opened and Tom Trent stepped into the
room.

“Now, now,” he laughed, “we can’t have a family quarrel so
early in the morning.”

Dave grinned sheepishly and promptly changed the subject by
giving a rapid-fire description of the finding of the diamond
ring and of Clem’s discovery of the man signalling from the

tree-top. He concluded with a question.

“Now, Tom, what do you make of the situation?”

“Well,” replied Tom Trent thoughtfully, “if Morgan has any funny work on hand he’s going to get a warm reception. He ought to have sense enough to know that he can’t get away with any gang stuff. In fact, I can’t make up my mind that he has anything to do with this man your sister has seen. I’ll tell you what I’d like to do. Let’s take a run up on top the island and if we find this fellow we’ll see if we can’t get to the bottom of things. What say?” [52]

“Just what I told Clem I want to do.”

“All right. Breakfast first and then ‘over the top.’”

“You know, Dave,” said Clem, after Twasla had put the mush and strawberries on the table and returned to the kitchen, “I found out that there’s some connection between this man Morgan and Twasla! She told me that Morgan knows how the scars got on her arms.”

“Scars!”

“Yes, around her arms at the elbows.”

“And she told you that Morgan knows how it happened?”

“Just that.”

“Oh, shucks, she’s just filling you up with Indian blah!”

“No, she was serious.”

“Well,” put in Tom Trent, “President Morgan may have more of a past than we thought for. I wonder if it’s because of his past that he is so anxious to get possession of this end of the island.”

Thirty minutes later Clem waved good-bye to the young men as they disappeared into the ravine, and then she hastened down to where the ebbing tide was exposing the *Gypsy* foot by foot. Here she remained, engrossed with her plans, eagerly viewing each detail of the *Gypsy* as it came to light. [53]

The whistle of the Seattle boat sent her hastening to greet the repair man Mr. Morgan had promised to send. Clem introduced herself to the tall, sandy-haired man in working clothes who came down the gangplank with a box of tools in his arms.

“Name’s Hawkins,” he declared, as he set the tool box on an empty chicken crate and swallowed Clem’s extended hand in his mammoth paw. “Somebody or other called me up late last night and says I’m to come to the powder dock on Whidby Island and fix a launch in first-class condition. So here I am, Missie.”

“I’m glad you came, Mr. Hawkins,” replied Clem. “You look as though you could fix up anything, no matter what had happened to it. I’m afraid you’ll find this a very particular job because there’s quite a hole, and you see it’s my first boat and _____”

“Don’t start worrying before you hear the sound of a [54]

hammer, Missie. Just you show me the wreck an' I'll do the rest if there's enough pieces left to make out the shape. You see they've put off some special lumber for me to work with."

"The launch is right over there; see it?" replied Clem, leading the way along the dock.

As he worked, Mr. Hawkins answered Clem's unceasing questions in a good-natured way. In fact, he seemed pleased with an audience that appreciated his remarks on bracing, patching, and fitting. He even went so far as to draw diagrams on an old envelope, illustrating his explanation of the gas engine: how it works and how to work it.

Clem drank in the information like a small boy absorbing a strawberry soda. She felt that much of her later success depended upon an understanding of the *Gypsy*, although only an oracle might have glimpsed the moment when her very life would rest upon her knowing how to put the launch through its fastest paces.

"This here's a fast little tub, Missie," observed Hawkins, pausing to fill his pipe. "What are you shaping to do with it, eh?"

"Well," replied Clem, "I've a plan. I haven't told my brother about it because he's—well, he has plans, too, as to how I shall spend the summer. I need to earn some money and I think I can catch salmon out on the banks just as well as these fishermen, after I've had some practice."

"Turnin' fisherman, eh?" commented Hawkins, with a twinkle in his eye. "I've heard tell that salmon are all-

fired particular customers, but seems like you ought to get their trade with a fancy boat like this one.”

“Can you fix some poles on the *Gypsy* like those on the regular fishing boats?”

“Easy enough, Missie. And if fishing ain’t profitable, you ought to be able to hire the *Gypsy* out to the people down below at the summer cottages.”

“I could, couldn’t I! I never thought of that.”

“I have an idea that most of their boats are too small for ridin’ out in the middle between the head of Whidby and Point Nopoint on the mainland. So like as not when they get tired fishin’ ’long the grass line you could step into the *Gypsy* an’ run ’em out to where the whales are.”

“Oh, listen, Mr. Hawkins! Maybe I could organize picnic parties for trips to different parts of the island. Wouldn’t that be fun? I could charge so much for the ride and if they wanted me to, I could furnish the lunch, too.”

“Ho! Ho! You’re loaded to the gunwale with ideas,” laughed the boat carpenter. “You’ll make some money with the *Gypsy*; I can see that. I’ll have to hurry up ’cause every minute the launch is laid up you are losing a carload of profit.”

“Oh, I hope I can persuade Dave!” cried Clem. “I don’t think he wants me running around by myself on account of something that he’s worried about. The powder dock is a load on his mind, and some funny things have happened. He’s up on the top of the island now trying to find out what is at the bottom [56]

of some of the things.”

At noon, Clem began to wonder why Dave and Tom Trent had not returned. Her uneasy glance sought the mouth of the ravine more and more as the afternoon wore on.

At four-thirty, a placid incoming tide gently floated the repaired *Gypsy* and Hawkins gathered his tools to depart.

“There you are, young lady, as pretty a piece of patchin’ as ever I did, barring none. To look at her ridin’ there you wouldn’t know that she’d ever been under water with a hole in her bow. Ain’t she a peach?”

“That’s just wonderful, Mr. Hawkins. Do you suppose we could try the *Gypsy* out now? Right here in front of the camp? You can’t get away before seven. I’ll expect you to eat dinner with us. My brother and Mr. Trent ought to get back any time.”

“Well, now, I don’t know as I care. I can see you’re [57] plumb anxious to get the contraption to runnin’, and I wouldn’t mind putterin’ with the engine myself. Here, we’ll put up this plank from the beach to the boat. Now, can you shinny up on deck?”

Clem forgot her anxiety concerning the boys in the excitement of learning to adjust and start the motor. Their first trials were not successful because of the wetting the machinery had had, but, after considerable fussing, the occasional cough from the cylinders changed to a steady hum.

“Take the steering wheel,” instructed Hawkins, as the *Gypsy* moved forward.

“This is just wonderful!” exclaimed Clem. “Lots more fun than steering a Ford. Now let me try starting and stopping all by myself.”

After several attempts, she succeeded in the performance with no aid from her instructor, and steered a hazardous course to a landing alongside the powder dock.

“There, we didn’t bump so very hard, did we? I wish Dave had been here to see me do it. You know——” Clem paused.

“Mr. Hawkins, I’m—I can’t see why—when Dave left he said they would be back before noon.” She broke off in distress.

“What made ’em go, eh?”

“Oh, there has been some trouble over the powder dock and this morning I saw a man signaling from that tall tree up there, so Dave and Tom Trent decided to investigate.”

“We’ll tie up the launch and then, if you like, Missie, [58] we’ll climb the trail to the top of the island and spy out the land. Like as not your brother has just gone on a bit farther than he expected to.”

“Thanks, Mr. Hawkins; you’ve said just what I hoped you would. Let’s hurry and go before we eat.”

They fastened the *Gypsy* below the dock and then walked rapidly up the path, past the powder dock, toward the thick grove that marked the mouth of the ravine. Clem was silent, busy with disturbing thoughts. As they circled the bungalow, Twasla appeared on the back porch.

“Me hear dog—heap bark——” She pointed up the trail.

“A dog!” ejaculated Clem. “No dog belongs near here that I know of. When was this, Twasla?”

“Soon,” replied the old woman, pointing once more at the dense green.

Clem cupped her hands around her mouth and shouted at the silent cliff: “Who-o-o! Who-o-ooo! Dave!”

With the echo came a short emphatic bark. The listeners whirled toward the trail and waited breathlessly. A powerful-looking hound trotted into view dragging something at his side.

Running forward, Clem met the animal halfway and bent over the object he dropped at her feet. [59]

“Oh!” she gasped, drawing back and half turning to Hawkins. “It’s a shoe—Dave’s moccasin shoe!”

[60]

CHAPTER V

THE NIGHT LAUGH

“What can have happened? What?”

There was a catch in Clem’s voice as she asked the question. Dark misgivings loomed before her as she cast a glance up the brush-choked trail down which the hound had come. Had she failed in her duty in not having started after the boys earlier? What terrible thing had befallen them that an unknown dog should drag home Dave’s shoe?

“Here, pup,” persuaded the carpenter, “let’s have the shoe. That’s a good dog.”

“Come on, hurry,” implored the distracted girl, watching Hawkins turn the shoe over and over in his rough hands. But one idea was present in Clem’s mind: Dave was in trouble and she must get to his aid with all possible speed. The remembrance of Dave’s guarded remarks regarding strange events was strong upon the girl as she started impatiently toward the mouth of the ravine.

“Now, Missie, just keep cool. Let’s study a bit. The boys are quite some distance away. I reckon I’ll miss my boat back to Seattle ’fore we come up to them.”

[61]

“But, how can you——” Clem walked nervously back to where Hawkins stood.

“How can I tell? See them teeth marks? The shoe’s fair

covered with 'em. That boot's been set down and took up a lot of times. That means that the pup came more than just from the top of the cliff. I reckon this ain't the first time he's packed things down to this end of the trail."

"Do you think that anything has happened to Dave?" Clem's voice to herself sounded like distant echoes.

"Steady now, Missie. Don't be borrowin' no trouble. Who do you suppose told the hound to come with that there shoe, if it wasn't Dave? Trent would have sent his own shoe."

"But if Dave could take his shoe off, why didn't he come himself?"

"He didn't take his shoe off; the man who left did that."

"The man who left?" repeated Clem in bewilderment.

"Didn't you say that some queer things had happened since your brother came here? Here's another sample or else my name ain't Hawkins."

"We must be going——"

"See here, Missie, tell the Injun woman to keep an eye on the powder warehouse. Get the rifle that you was tellin' about and while we are hustlin' along I'll explain to you how I figgered out the way things may be. Say, bring a chunk of bread or meat for the pup. He's earned his supper." [62]

"All right," cried Clem, bounding toward the cottage.

Hawkins crouched beside the hound, patting his head and talking to him in a low voice. Taking a strand of rope from his pocket, the carpenter tied it about the dog's throat in a knot that would not slip.

"Pup, whose dog are you, eh?"

The animal whined, wagged his tail vigorously, and tugged on the rope as though to pull Hawkins with him into the green glade ahead.

"He's goin' to lead us all right, Missie," said the carpenter, as Clem rushed up with the rifle in one hand and a piece of ham in the other. The dog gulped down the meat offering and whined his thanks.

"Suppose I pack the gun and you lead the dog. He'll do the leadin'."

Clem took the rope from the carpenter's hand and they struck into the mouth of the ravine.

"Tell me more about the moccasin," Clem demanded over her shoulder. "What man do you mean? You said that he left."

"Just that; after he tied the boys up and tried on their shoes, he pulled his anchor and left 'em." [63]

Clem, busy keeping the swishing alder branches from her face, did not speak until they paused for breath halfway up the trail that clung to the side of the ravine.

"Guess you've read detective stories, Mr. Hawkins."

Her companion laughed, glad to have her mind busy with other things than the possibility of danger to Dave. “Sherlock Holmes is a cousin of mine. He used to go over the crimes with me before he let Conan Doyle write about ’em.”

“But, Mr. Hawkins, I can’t see why you are so sure that the boys are safe.”

“I’m not sure, Missie, but I never did see a case where borrowin’ trouble helped to meet sure ’nuff trouble when it came. We’re doin’ all a body can do. Might just as well laugh while we can.”

“Well, I can see that the dog wouldn’t have come with the shoe, if his owner had been around to prevent it, and I suppose that the only way for Dave’s shoe to be off would be for the man to take it off. He’d hardly take it off of his own accord. If he intended to send something to attract our attention he would have used something lighter and he would have tied it to the dog.”

“Fine, Missie, now can’t you do some detectin’ yourself?”

[64]

Clem held Dave’s shoe by the lace at arm’s length, and allowed it to twist slowly. A twinkle replaced the worried expression in her eyes.

“I’ll bet the boys are mighty thirsty!”

“Thirsty? How do you get that from the shoe?”

“Look how its tongue is hanging out.”

For the rest of the climb, Hawkins chuckled over Clem's answer.

"You'll do," he said finally. "If you don't make money with the *Gypsy*, you can start up business against Sherlock Holmes. Wouldn't surprise me a mite if the mayor of Seattle was to demand that you start right in as Chief of Police."

They paused again where the trail opened upon the plateau that spread its brush-grown, tree-spotted area out like the toe of a narrow boot set down with Powder Dock Bay on the left and Useless Bay on the right. For several minutes they peered ahead over the ferns and blackened stumps searching for some sign of Dave and Tom. The hound, impatient at the delay, urged them forward with tugs on the rope.

"Ever been up here before, Missie?"

"No, but Dave said there aren't any settlers until you get back on the broader part of the island." [65]

"Trail heads right along toward the Point. I'll amble along in front with the dog. You can keep close behind so as to ward off a rear attack. That's where the sharpest eyes are needed."

Clem used her eyes the best she knew how as they made their way along the seldom-used path. She tried to identify the exact tree from which the man had signaled that morning. Certainly here was an ideal place from which to send flag messages in three directions. Boats running far out in the channel, or launches lying near some sheltered shore to the north, might readily pick up the story the flags told.

Despite her anxiety, she could not refrain from an occasional glance of awed admiration toward the glory of the setting sun as seen against the blue range of mountains far across the Sound toward the west. Nor was she immune to the gorgeous colors spreading, blending, and fading in the reflection above the Cascades. But not a thing of importance to the search did they see until, nearly at the end of the land, the level dropped suddenly about eight feet to a particularly wild acre or so and then fell away in the steep bluffs of the promontory.

At this point, the hound leaped forward so quickly that he freed himself from Hawkins and raced down the slant, away through the ferns, toward a small moss-covered cabin that centered a tiny clearing. [66]

“What do you make of that, Missie?” asked Hawkins guardedly, as he held a position screened from view.

Clem wormed her way on hands and knees to where she could lift fern fronds at the edge of the slant and survey the scene before them. The dog had circled the cabin and now stood barking on the far side. Presently he trotted into view, wagging his tail, and uttering sharp barks as though inviting Clem and Hawkins from their hiding place.

“I’ll bet that Dave and Tom Trent are in that cabin,” exclaimed Clem, scrambling to her feet. “We can’t find out standing here.”

“A good scout always takes time to draw a long breath ’fore he closes in,” cautioned the carpenter; “he figgers he might have to do some running and he wants to be ready. But seems like

Mr. What's-his-name hasn't showed his riggin' again, so we'll follow the pup."

Two minutes later, when they rounded the cabin, each [67] broke into exclamations and rapid action. Standing with his back to the log wall, his hands fastened outstretched above his head, his mouth gagged, was Dave Fargar. Two slashes with the carpenter's knife released the young man's arms and in a moment his mouth was free. Without a word he wavered and slumped to the earth.

While Dave lay with his head in Clem's lap in a stupor of exhaustion, Hawkins, in answer to a call, hurriedly kicked in the cabin door. On the floor lay Tom Trent trussed up like a boy ready for a game of cock-fighting.

"How's Dave?" came the question when Hawkins bent over Tom.

"You'll see," replied his rescuer, busy with his knife.

Tom got to his feet awkwardly and stumbled out to where Clem was working over her brother.

"How is he?"

"He's rousing some now. Oh, what has happened? Who did this?"

"The strangest thing I've ever heard of," began Tom, rubbing his rope-cramped wrists. "Wait until we get Dave back to the house before you ask for the story."

“But at least tell us how many of them there were.”

“I felt only one.”

“What did he look like?”

“I did not see his face.”

“You mean——”

“His face was covered with a mask—a mask that was [68]
apparently made from the skin of a fish.”

Dave groaned and opened his eyes. He worked his lips and jaw, but words were slow in coming to the gag-tortured mouth. Pulling himself to a sitting position, he gazed about, at first in a groggy fashion, and then with startled eagerness. Words came.

“Didja see him?”

“No,” responded Clem and Hawkins in one breath.

“Then he must have done it!” exclaimed Dave.

“What, Dave?”

The three tensed themselves at the look of remembrance that twisted Dave’s countenance. Their glances followed the direction of the gesture he made toward a spot on the rim of the cliff where an outcropping of rock formed a place for observation.

“The last time that I saw him, he was standing on that rock. The

sun caught my eyes. I blinked, and—the next moment he had disappeared. It must be five hundred feet to the water. I listened, but I didn't hear the splash. I don't know that I could have, though."

With one idea Clem, Tom, and Hawkins made for the flat [69] rock. Clem whistled a single note of surprise as she glimpsed the scene from the edge of the rock. Bushes, rock ledges, clay patches—a vertical drop to the deep-water cove below.

"You think he jumped from here?" she called back to Dave.

"What else could he have done? One second he was there as big as life and the next there wasn't a sign of him. Only the dog was left."

"See here," interrupted Hawkins, "this yarn will keep for later. Let's strike for home or else we'll have to make it in the dark. The seven-o'clock boat whistled some time ago. It'll be dark in another half hour. Better caulk your mouth up again, young feller, and put your strength into getting near some grub."

"That's sense, Dave," agreed Tom Trent. "Think you can walk it, old man?"

Dave got to his feet and tried his limbs.

"I'm all right, except that I'm hungry enough to finish chewing that shoe the dog carried. You're a good one, pup! Hadn't been for you, I'd still be tacked up there on those logs like a drying deer hide. Gosh, if the guy that got us ain't spattered on the beach, I'm sure strong for meeting him."

Clem resolutely gulped back her questions and with a call to the dog, started the procession for home. "I'm going to see that this big boy of a doggy gets at least one good meal for what he's done," she announced. "But I can't see how you got him to come clear down the ravine with that shoe." [70]

"We'll tell you the whole thing, Sis, after supper. How did you get along at the powder dock and with the *Gypsy*? It's a dangerous time to leave either one, but of course you couldn't do otherwise."

"I'm wondering," suggested Tom, "if tying us up was just a trick to get everyone away from the dock in order to——"

"I'll hike on ahead," volunteered Hawkins, and he lengthened his stride into a lope. Within a minute he was lost to sight behind a turn in the trail.

"I'm inclined to think that Twasla will take care of things at the powder dock. She looked pleased when I asked her to take charge," said Clem, before launching into an account of the events of the day from the time the boys left in the morning up to the moment of the rescue. Her story took the remainder of the journey back down the path. As they appeared at the mouth of the ravine in the deep twilight, Hawkins greeted them with a shout of reassurance.

"Everything's shipshape; guess their plans didn't work out, supposing they figgered on mischief. Your cook's got a meal waiting for us so pipe yourselves into the fo'c'sle."

The invitation did not have to be repeated. Tom and Dave attacked the food Twasla put before them as though [71]

starvation had had them on the rack for a week.

Clem finished before the others and busied herself getting a blazing fire burning in the big fireplace, for no matter how warm the day might be, evening brought a chill that made welcome the cheer and heat of the driftwood flames.

By nine o'clock the four were comfortably settled in front of the blaze and Dave had commenced his story.

"You remember the trail runs about a hundred feet through the alders before it starts to climb the hill? Well, right there's where we laid eyes on that dog. He was sitting in the path first looking at us and then staring off into the brush. We scouted around a bit in the direction he was looking but didn't scare up a thing. Fish-mask must have been hiding there somewhere, Tom."

"He must have been," said Tom, "and he had some shorter way than that regular path of getting to the top of the island."

"Yep," continued Dave, after he had raised one of the windows, for Clem's fire was proving too effective; "we hurried on to the top and searched all around the place where you thought you saw somebody signaling from a tree, Clem."

"*Thought* I saw somebody! Say, have you an idea I was [72] trying to fool you this morning, Davie dear?"

Dave picked up his narrative with an abruptness that caused Tom and Hawkins to smile.

"We decided we'd follow down to the Point. Everything went

fine until we got to the place where the ridge drops down to the cabin. I was surprised to see the place, can't be seen from the bay and I never was down that far on the ridge before.

“Well, Tom and I were standing there looking pretty careful, for the place struck us both as being a fine place for a hangout or a signal station, although a bad place to get caught in unless there's some way down the cliff to the water. All of a sudden I felt something jam me in the back. Tom was just ahead of me so it couldn't be him. I twisted my head and there was the blamedest lookin' face. My jaw dropped down. I couldn't even stutter. A big salmon skin had been stretched over the face, I guess when the skin was fresh, and when it was dried—— Say, with eye-holes it sure made a scaly mask. The fellow had an old knit sock pulled over his hair, and the black slicker hid the rest of him except the hand that held the revolver.

“I gawked and he motioned for me to drop the shotgun, [73] which I did without any written invitation. I got the idea right away that anyone who'd wear such a mask would just as soon put a bullet in me.

“Tom spun around when the shotgun hit the ferns and there we were——”

“Dave's face,” interrupted Tom, “was a match for a ripe tomato; I thought I'd die for wanting to laugh, between that fish mask and Dave's——”

“To tell the truth, Tom,” put in Dave, “your own map didn't look as pretty as I've seen it.”

“Stop bragging on each other's good looks,” insisted Clem,

“and get on with your story.”

“Huh,” snorted Dave, with a grin, “Fish-mask made Tom fasten me up the way you found me. He stuck the gag in himself. He made Tom take off my shoes and his own and then he ordered Tom to go inside the cabin.”

“Yes,” said Tom, “he stayed outside and after I was inside he made me stick my hands out the window while he tied them together good. He didn’t want to run the risk of my jumping on him when he laid the gun down. Then he came in and finished the job with that old broom handle. Made me grab over my knees with my tied hands and then he shoved the broom handle through between my wrists and the crotch of my knees. He wasn’t a bit lady-like the way he jammed me around.”

“What did he have to say?” queried Hawkins.

[74]

“Never a word the whole time. Jabbed me once or twice with the gun when I didn’t savvy what he wanted. I found out fast enough then.”

“He came out of the cabin after tying Tom and tried on our shoes. His own looked as though they were about all in. Mine were too small for him, and Tom’s were too big so——”

“Ho! Ho!” yelled Tom Trent in ridicule of the statement Dave had made.

“Guess the disappointment was too much for him,” went on Dave. “He whistled to the dog and walked out on the rock. Then’s when he disappeared, but the dog was busy locating a flea and didn’t seem at all interested in taking the jump.”

“But,” said Clem, “if you were gagged, how did you make the dog carry your shoe?”

“I didn’t; Tom did.”

“But——”

“I’ll tell you, Miss Fargar,” said Tom Trent, “I managed to work my gag loose by rubbing my face against my knee. I could hear the hound sniffing around and I began asking Dave questions. I’d say, ‘Is the dog where you can see him?’ and Dave would kick against the wall in answer.”

“Wore a blister on my heel answering Tom’s questions,” declared Dave.

“One kick was No and two meant Yes,” continued Tom. [75]
“After a bit I got a time when the dog was near the shoes so I started yelling, ‘Pick it up and get for home; pick it up and get for home.’ I had a hunch that perhaps he’d go back to where we saw him first. Of course it was just one chance in a thousand, but it worked.”

“Yes, it surely worked,” nodded Clem. “You’re a wise doggy, aren’t you?”

The hound whined and pounded his tail on the floor in approval of the remark. Then rousing from his place, the dog ambled toward Clem’s inviting hand. He paused, looked around the circle of fire-lit faces, sniffed suddenly, and turned to the open window.

Dave leaped to his feet and slipped toward the door. The dog

bristled and whined again.

“Do you suppose that——” began Clem.

A high-pitched laugh, hideous in its tone, wavered in through the casement. Starting close beneath the window, it faded with startling rapidity in the direction of the cliff.

The group, paralyzed in strained positions, gasped in chorus as the hound threw back his massive head and howled mournfully.

The next moment, Hawkins, Tom Trent, Dave, and Clem [76] were out on the porch trying to pierce the moon shadows in the direction the intruder had taken. The hound bounded down the steps, stalked a few yards toward the cliff, and howled once more.

“Stop it, pup,” commanded Clem. “Come here.”

“See anything, boys?” demanded Hawkins.

“No chance,” replied Dave. “Say, didn’t your hair curl straight up when that sound came in the window? I felt just like I have felt in a nightmare. I wanted to run but I couldn’t get started for a minute. If that had been the first time that I had heard it I don’t know what I’d——”

“Have you heard that laugh before, Dave?” interrupted Clem.

Dave was silent.

“How about it, Dave?” asked Tom Trent.

“Yes,” answered Dave slowly, “I heard it once the first week I was stationed here. It was on just such a night as this. The moon was touching up the bay and flooding all this beach and the cliff with a sort of yellow-orange. The shadows showed up just as they do to-night. I was sitting here on the porch railing thinking how blamed lonesome I was, when suddenly I heard that laugh a long way off. Sounded like it was on the top edge of the island maybe.”

“Just hear it once?” asked Hawkins.

“That’s all—quite enough, too!”

“Some practical joker, eh? Some fellow down at the summer colony what wants excitement?” went on Hawkins. [77]

“Once or twice I’ve thought the postmaster might pull a stunt like that. He likes a joke, but I can’t imagine any fellow in his right mind runnin’ the risk of having a shotgun bangin’ at him just for the sake of a joke. Of course he is anxious to get rid of the warehouse on account of the trade the summer folks bring and he might have some idea of scaring us out.”

“Doesn’t sound likely, but I’m going down to the post office to-morrow,” said Clem. “I want to put up a sign about the diamond. I’ll have a talk with the postmaster and sound him out. Perhaps I can get some idea from him. He’s been here a long time, you say.”

“Oh, Fowler’s been here ever since the island was cool enough to live on,” said Dave, as they returned to the cheerful fireplace blaze. “I can’t seriously think that he is the fellow that

does the laughin', but you can see what he has to say, Clem. And, say, while I think about it, I wish that you would remember to tell him that I'm going to crate up those chickens of ours and ship them to Seattle. Tell him I won't need any more feed."

"I'll try to remember," replied Clem, "but with to-day's [78] experiences on my mind I'm afraid that crated chickens and cracked corn haven't much of a chance. This has been the most trying day I've ever put in, I do believe. I'm so tired I know that I've got to get to bed, but I doubt if I get a wink of sleep. Can you fix Mr. Hawkins with a place to sleep, Dave?"

"Sure, I'll look after him, Sis. You take the dog into your bedroom. Let him sleep under the window and I guess you'll get a good rest."

"Come, Big Boy," called Clem.

The hound moved reluctantly away from the door and followed the girl from the room.

CHAPTER VI

THE GRASS-LINE FIGHT

“Lonesome!” laughed Clem, sinking to the sand beside Dave and Tom, on the morning after their experience with the man in the fish mask. “I thought you said this place was lonesome, Dave.”

“Was—’till you came!”

“Blame me for the *Gypsy* excitement, but it wasn’t I who tied you two and jumped over the cliff. I didn’t do the signaling from up there on the island, and I wouldn’t be able to talk this morning if I’d been the one to let loose that hideous laugh last night. My, I woke up twice trembling all over from dreaming of that sound. I’d have been scared stiff if old doggy here hadn’t been sleeping on the rug at the foot of my bed.”

Bending down she wrapped her arms around the big hound’s neck.

“You’re going to stay right here with me until somebody claims you, aren’t you, Big Boy?”

The big dog pushed his head up against Clem’s face and licked her cheek. Clem stood up abruptly with a laugh and wiped the spot ruefully.

[80]

“You mustn’t be so damp with your affection, doggy dear.”

“Doggy dear!” exclaimed Dave slyly. “You poor pup, I can

sympathize with you when that young lady starts calling you that. She'll lead you a dog's life."

The hound stretched prodigiously, cocked his ear first at Dave, then at Clem, and barked sharply.

"Isn't he the wisest looking pup you ever saw, boys? My, I hope I can keep him all the time I'm here."

"He won't be here long, Clem. I'll bet that he belongs to that fellow that was listening under the window last night."

"You know, Dave," put in Tom Trent, picking up the binoculars from where they lay on a log, "we haven't seen a thing suspicious this morning, although we've searched every foot of the cliff with the glasses. And yet I can't give up my idea that the fellow who got us yesterday was the same one that let out that terrible laugh last evening."

"But, Tom, when I was tied to the side of that cabin, I saw old Fish-mask jump——"

"No, you didn't, Dave! You said you turned your head and the next minute he was gone," said Clem. [81]

"Now look here, Sis, where could he have gone? I'd swear he didn't come back away from the rock."

"You have been down to the foot of the cliff this morning, boys. Did you see any signs?"

"No—o."

“Well, then, maybe he tossed a piece of rope up in the air and climbed.”

“Bah! This isn’t any Arabian Nights story. Be serious, Sis. Something is breaking loose around here that won’t end in a laugh. We’ve got to get busy and plan something.”

“Dave,” cried Clementine, suddenly serious, “how do you explain that man?”

“I don’t know unless it is a move on the part of Morgan or the summer people to scare us out of staying here. I suppose they would like to have me pull out and leave the Pondeux company with no dock tender.”

“How do you feel about staying, Dave?”

“Staying! Say, do you think I’m scared out that easily? The more this fellow pulls his funny stuff, the more anxious I am going to be to stay around and find out who he is.”

“Have you the slightest idea who——”

“No, I haven’t *yet*——”

“Listen, boys,” exclaimed Clem, “I’ve a guess at least. [82] Twasla told me the other night that her husband, Jim Novak, disappeared some years ago. Isn’t it possible that he has drifted back, and——”

The two young men looked at each other in surprise.

“I’ve heard her story,” declared Dave thoughtfully. “I suppose

that anything's possible, but——”

“Well,” said Tom Trent, with decision, “the minute I hit Seattle I'll start getting a line on Old Man Morgan. Our big boss, Mr. Hammer, won't hesitate to have Morgan shadowed. A few days may bring a lot to light. If there's any connection between our capture by the man in the tree that your sister saw and Morgan's efforts to get the powder dock, we ought to unearth it between us, Dave.”

“Aren't you counting me in?” queried Clem, with a smile.

“Man's work, Sis; too dangerous for——”

“You shouted that yesterday when you started up the gulch, but just the same Mr. Hawkins and I had to hunt you up and bring you home.”

“There's one thing you can do better than Dave,” [83] suggested Tom. “You can keep an eye on that ridge up there where you saw the fellow wave the flag. If you were out on the bay you would be safe enough, and you could pretend you were fishing. Nobody would think anything of your being there.”

“Pretend to fish! No, sir! I'm really going to fish. I can troll and play spy at the same time. I'm going to fish because I can get seven cents a pound for salmon and nearly twice as much for trout. The fellow that runs the fish dock will buy all I can catch.”

“Yep,” snorted Dave, “and he won't run out of small change, either. Sis, you don't know beans about fishin'. You never

liked fishin'. You never caught anything but bull-heads—and a cold."

"Well, Davie dear, you might as well know—I'm going to be a professional fisherman this summer. I mailed my check for a license before you got up this morning. Mr. Hawkins took the letter on to the boat with him. He told me how to fix up the *Gypsy*, and if these ignorant Italians and Swedes can catch fish, then I can also."

Dave's smile spread into a grin. "About one day will be enough to cure you, Sis. You'll find out that these men may not have any schooling but they have an education so far as catching salmon goes. Books aren't the only place to find out things."

"I can learn," replied Clem doggedly. "I'd be out there right now if the *Gypsy* weren't on the tide flats."

"Tom and I'll drag the rowboat out for you. The sooner [84] you get a taste of rowin' and fishin', the sooner you'll get the fool idea out of your head. I've done a lot of trolling and never had enough fish to sell any."

"Sure, we'll put the rowboat out," chimed in Tom. "You can troll and watch while Dave and I finish checking up in the warehouse."

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Sis, I'll give you a half a pound of candy for every pound of fish you catch this first time out."

"Jelly beans, I suppose."

“No, sure-enough chocolates.”

“Dave, let me go in on that,” said Tom Trent. “We’ll match every pound of fish with a pound of candy and, if your sister doesn’t get a single fish, she’ll cook us a special dinner to-night. How’s that?”

“That’s the stuff, Tom. What say, Sis?”

“All right, gentlemen. I’ll show you that I can cook—provided I come back fishless,” laughed Clem.

The boys kept up their bantering while they pulled the rowboat over the expanse of mud flats that reached nearly to the sea grass. Dave offered some parting advice about the fish line and sinkers that he produced from under the back seat and Tom polished the brass “spoon” that hung just ahead of the salmon hook. Then they started Clem on her adventure with a shove that sent the boat gliding through an opening in the partly exposed grass.

“Be sure you come back in time to start dinner,” cautioned Dave. “Biscuits and fruit salad, and everything.”

[85]

Clem dipped her oars into the water. “Keep an eye on the dog, won’t you, Dave, and don’t go away without telling me where you’re bound for. I can’t help feeling a bit nervous after all that happened yesterday.”

“Well, believe me,” called Tom, “it’s no joke with us either. Nobody’s going to catch us napping again.”

“Better beat it for shore if any strange boats come into the bay, Sis, and don’t get so busy pulling in the fish that you forget to use those binoculars once in a while.”

Clementine started her trolling line over the end of the boat and bent to her oars. Dave had advised her to hold the end of the line in her teeth in order to detect a bite, but the possibility of having a front tooth loosened by a sudden pull caused her to tie the cord to her ankle.

“I’m going to get Bunte, or one of the other fishermen, to [86] take me out in the *Gypsy*,” thought Clem. “He’ll give me some pointers on fishing. Of course I can’t stand this rowing very long, but in the launch it will be different. Most of the boats go way out beyond the Point so probably I haven’t much chance in here; but I’ve heard it said that the fish feed on the grass so I’m going to try just as close to the fringe as I can. Funny the way the grass grows in a line just on the edge of the jump-off. My, the water gets deep in a hurry. I’m not more than fifteen feet from the grass now, but I can’t see bottom under the boat. Seems like there’s a regular ledge that drops a way down.”

Pulling, as she was, toward the Point, Clem had a perfect view of the powder dock, the long warehouse with the barrels of water on top in readiness for fire, the green-mantled cliff broken just back of the cottage, by the gulch, and the tree-edged rim of the island extending northward in a long half-moon that carried the eye to a point where the curve of the island merged into the lighter blue of the distant mainland.

“I’ll be better acquainted with the island after I have run

around in the *Gypsy* for awhile. There's room in the cabin for a bunk. I guess that is what the broad seat is for that lets down just below the window. Perhaps Dave can get away sometime and we will take a trip around the island. It will be a long trip, but a wonderful one.

"Now what was that pulling on the line? Didn't jerk, just pulled. Well, I'll have to bring it in and see."

Clem slid the dripping oars in, dropped forward on her knees and started bringing in the line. For a moment it resisted. Then it came easily. [87]

"Nothing but sea grass!" exclaimed the girl in disgust as the long trailing strands of green came alongside. And a dozen times in the succeeding hour she exclaimed in growing petulance while the warmth of the sun added to the discomfort of rowing. Back and forth she went, halfway down to Possession Point, back again to a place opposite the dock, until finally pride alone kept her from heading for shore.

"I'll go down and back once more," she muttered, pausing to examine her blistering palms. "Just before I turn around, I'll take a rest and use the glasses again. Hasn't been a thing stirring up on the island far as I have seen. Maybe our going up there yesterday has scared them out—whoever they are. I'd like to go back up to the old cabin and look around some more—but—I—guess I won't go alone!"

The trip down brought no more response from the fish than before, although now and then commotions near the grass gave proof that there were fish to be caught.

“Certainly I am going to get some pointers from Bunte before I try again,” groaned Clem as she extracted the hook from a mass of weeds. “Well, I am going to rest. I might as well plan what I am going to have for dinner. I suppose that Dave and Tom will never let up on their teasing.” [88]

She left the fish line coiled on the back seat and eased herself into the bottom of the boat with a sigh of relief. A summer of fishing seemed less like a wonderful lark than it had appeared yesterday.

Just beyond the near-by grass line was the beginning of the mud flats that ran for three hundred feet to the gravel beach now that the tide was low. Behind the beach rose the massive cliffs of the storm-battered island head. Directly beneath the distant ledge of rock from which Clem had gazed yesterday, the mud flats were not to be seen, for deep water ran directly to the cliff base.

After she had removed her amber-colored glasses and pulled her cap well down to shade her eyes, Clem turned the binoculars on the cliff that shielded the old cabin from sight. The cliff was of sandstone formation splotched with clay and patches of green growth, five hundred feet from top to base. The tiny cove of deep water running in to the base of the cliff had enabled the restless tides to slush out several holes of varying size that stared out on the water like vacant eye-sockets.

“I wonder if it is possible for a man jumping from that rock up yonder to strike in the deep water? And if he did, would he come up alive? The way that rock comes out——” [89]

What's that?"

Into the focus of the glasses had walked a dog. At the very edge of the rock he paused, surveyed the scene with interest, and suddenly barked. The sound drifted down to Clem several seconds after she recognized from his movements that he had barked.

"That's Big Boy!" exclaimed Clem. "I told Dave not to let him get away, but there he is and, from the way he is acting, there is somebody in the clearing behind the rock. I don't believe it is the boys. They would not have gone without letting me know."

The big hound had crouched down with only his head visible above the edge of the rock. It seemed almost as though he intended to spring outward from the ledge. Clem swiftly searched the adjacent bushes and the tangle along the cliff for some distance. Not a thing unusual was visible, but when the binoculars swept back to the rock, the dog was no longer to be seen. Clem glanced down the surface of the cliff half expecting to see the dog in midair, but there was no sign.

"Well, if that isn't the funniest thing. That rock seems to swallow up men and dogs alike. There's something uncanny about the way the man in the fish mask disappeared and now Big Boy does the same thing. As soon as I can get Dave away from the warehouse I'm going to look that rock over. I was standing on it yesterday but nothing happened. Well, the boys may know something about the dog's leaving. I'll work back to the powder dock. Far as fishing is concerned I guess the morning is a failure. I'll have to plan for the dinner I promised them in case I came home empty handed."

[90]

Clem pushed out from where the incoming tide had drifted the boat and commenced the row for home. Far out from the point she could see a number of black spots—the fishing boats working the tide rips. Before noon they would be back at the fish dock with the long boxes of cleaned salmon ready for the market. Thinking of her empty boat, the girl sighed regretfully.

“While I’m rowing I might as well have the line out and I’ll keep far enough away to miss the grass. If I could even catch a trout, it wouldn’t be so hard to face Dave and Tom Trent.”

Fifteen minutes later the tired girl twisted the boat at right angles to run in through the break in the grass line opposite the cottage. Inside the break the water shallowed promptly to the mud flats not more than five yards away.

Just as the skiff was drifting over the passage-way, [91]
Clem’s leg was jerked abruptly to the gunwale by the sudden tightening of the fish line. In the effort to keep her balance, the girl lost her hold on one of the oars. Down it slipped into the Sound unnoticed at the time because of the cutting pain from the jerking, swishing line. Fifty feet out in the bay a giant tyee salmon broke the surface in a fury of spray.

If Clem had had a knife in her hand at that moment, she would have followed her first instinct and severed the line that held her fast to the big fish; but the best she could do under the circumstances was to haul in enough slack to take a half-hitch around an oarlock. This gave her temporary relief. Then she seized the remaining oar and paddled toward shore with all her might.

Almost at once her first fright gave way to a wild desire to land that salmon at any cost. Here was her opportunity to turn the laugh on Dave and Tom. How was she to manage? Her first fish—she must not lose it! She ought to play the salmon; haul in the line when the fish rushed toward the boat, ease it out when necessary, working cautiously until, tired out, the prize would come alongside. Yes, she knew how it should be done—how Dave would do it—but she would never be able to lift such a creature over the side of the boat. She would have to get to shore. Once on the mud flats she might manage to haul the tyee into shallow water where she could capture him. Clem resisted the impulse to call for help. The triumph was to be hers alone. Dave and Tom! Wouldn't their eyes bulge!

For a second fortune favored her. The line slackened. The boat slid through the opening in the grass line into water [92] about three feet deep. With a jerk Clem pulled the line from the oarlock, leaped to her feet, and jumped overboard into the waist-deep water, sending the boat away from her by the push of her leaving. In her eagerness she could think of nothing but getting a footing on land.

At the same instant that her feet struck the water, the big fish started out into the bay with a rush that upset Clem and sprawled her in the water—the tied foot straight out behind, the other digging frantically in the mud. With arms striking the water into foam in a desperate effort to keep her face above the surface and to resist the outward pull of the line, Clem felt the mud flats sink beneath her. Her foot no longer touched. The pull on her other leg turned downward. Slowly but surely she was drawn toward the deep water of the jump-off.

Then her mind cleared and she struck into the swinging movement of the crawl stroke. It did not seem possible that she, an excellent if not expert swimmer, should not make headway against the pull of a fish half her weight, but the flat strands of sea grass coming abreast of her and edging on into her line of vision were proof that she was losing ground. How soon would the fish tire? Was he apt to dive deep and drag her under? Had the boys at the powder dock observed her struggle? [93]

In a side stroke, her hand encountered the grass; she gripped first with one hand and then with the other. The pull on her ankle swung to the north and abruptly ceased.

“He’s off!” flashed Clem in an odd mixture of relief and regret. She hesitated before loosening her grip on the grass and then, convinced that the tyee had torn the hook from his mouth, she lunged in the direction of the tide flats.

The cord tightened viciously. The salmon had only been sulking and Clem’s movement brought on the fight once more. Clem could hear the splash of the fish behind her and then from her forward progress she knew that he was submitting to the pull of the line. No sounds indicated that the boys were coming to her rescue. Her one hope lay in out-pulling the great salmon.

Ten feet more to go—eight—five; every stroke she expected a renewal of the fight. She reached with her free foot and touched bottom. Another moment and Clem was seated at the water’s edge with feet braced and line in hand. Her eyeshade floated near the drifting boat but her amber glasses still rode her perky nose, and despite wet clinging clothes and [94]

aching muscles, life held one purpose—to land that fish!

Renewed confidence and the probability of losing the salmon if it became entangled in the grass brought Clem to her feet. Carefully she drew the unprotesting tyee toward the break in the grass.

“Cracky! He’s as big as a submarine,” exulted Clem, as she saw the salmon weaving through the gap in sullen obedience to the pull on the line. On he came until he touched the mud; then he burst into a paroxysm of flopping that sent Clem into a panic.

“Dave! Dave!” she screamed, and pulled violently on the cord to rush the fish in. With a throbbing gasp she felt the line give suddenly. The hook had finally pulled out. There in the shallow water floundered her reputation as a fisherman; every pound worth a pound of chocolates. Nothing would bring Dave and Tom to believe her story unless she had the positive evidence. Apart from that, Clem wanted that salmon more than anything in the world. She could not let it slip back into the bay.

With a run and a dive that would have done credit to a football star Clem landed on the struggling tyee in a flurry of water and mud. [95]

A damp fish is never easily embraced. Clem failed miserably in her first effort to gather the great fish to her bosom. Surges of fish and girl, muddied water, shrill cry of disturbed sea gulls, deep barks from landward mingled with excited voices—all merged into a violent confusion in the mind of the fisher girl. On her hands and knees she strove desperately to grip the

heaving silvery fish.

Finding that she could retain only the scales of the fish by grappling with it, Clem abruptly sprawled herself flat upon the salmon with arms and legs outspread. There was a moment of spasmodic upheaval and then the struggle ceased. By sheer weight she had managed to down the salmon. If necessary she would lie there for the rest of the day. The giant fish was hers!

The sound of nearing voices came to Clementine.

“Holy smoke! Dave, see what the girl’s gone and done.”

“She sure has gone cuckoo! Hey, Sis, are you taking a mud bath for that schoolgirl complexion?”

Clem raised a mud-plastered face and gazed at the hilarious boys. “If this is going cuckoo, then I don’t want to be sane,” she gasped.

Carefully she gained a grip on the gills of the salmon beneath her and slowly got to her feet. With difficulty she managed to hold the tyee partly off the mud. Shouts of blank amazement greeted the display. [96]

“The great granddaddy of them all,” bellowed Dave.

“If he doesn’t weigh fifty pounds, I’ll quit guessing,” gasped Tom, as he tried his hand at lifting the broad, thick fish. “A regular hog.”

“Dave,” exclaimed Clem, pointing at the hound which stood with lolling tongue, observing the fish, “how did Big Boy get

away?”

“He wouldn’t let me tie him up——”

“Dave, I saw him not more than thirty minutes ago, standing on the rock where you saw that fellow last; and see—he’s all wet. Could he have made the jump from the rock into the water?”

The two young men looked at each other in silence.

“I don’t believe he could have,” said Dave finally; “but I can’t tell you how he got here otherwise.”

“I’m at sea,” declared Tom Trent.

“Well, that will have to wait, I guess,” went on Clem. [97]
“Do you know, like a fool I jumped out of the boat with the line still on my ankle and that fish mighty near pulled me out into the bay. My, that was a narrow squeak I had. There were several minutes when I sure thought that I’d end up as fish food. But instead, I got this big fellow to turn into chocolates.”

Again the boys were silent.

“I’ll leave the fish and the boat for you to take care of while I get into some dry clothes,” laughed Clem, “but be sure you weigh the fish before you clean it.”

“Chocolates, Tom!” groaned Dave. “Can’t you see fifty pounds of them piled up and Sis gloating over them?”

CHAPTER VII

THE POSTMASTER MAKES A SUGGESTION

“I’ll pick out the chocolates when I go down to the store to see about the diamond,” cried Clem. “And this time I’m going to make sure of Big Boy by taking him with me. You young men are altogether too careless with my property. Come on, Big Boy, we will leave them to count up their pennies to see if they can pay for our candy!”

With a laugh, Clem plowed her way across the oozy tide flats toward the cottage, with the dog at her heels. Once there, she tied Big Boy to the porch while she hurriedly changed into dry clothing.

“If I’m going to get ducked every day,” thought Clem, “I might as well live in my bathing suit and save filling the clothesline with wet duds. Perhaps it is just as well though that I haven’t anything left but that blue pleated skirt and my white middy since I’m going to the store. I don’t want the summer people to think that I’m a boob just because I live at the powder dock.”

When she was fully dressed in her middy suit, with a red tie, sailor fashion, and her hair circled with a band to match the tie, Clem took the diamond from beneath the paper in the bureau drawer and ran out on the porch. Big Boy greeted her with a joyful bark and reared up to plant his paws upon the spotless waist. Clem jumped back with an exclamation.

“No, you don’t, Mr. Big Boy. I can’t play now, not in these

clothes, and besides if you're going with me to the store you must be a dignified doggy. We must make the very best impression possible."

The big hound whined wistfully and shook himself as though in preparation for the coming occasion. Clem released him and they took the path which led behind the powder dock, along the edge of the beach, toward the combination post office and general store nearly a half mile away. The dog stalked solemnly ahead, resisting all impulses to investigate inviting spots among the drift logs. Clem wished that she had a leather thong to fasten to Big Boy's collar. She pictured herself being pulled along like a member of high society out for a stroll at some exclusive summer resort.

"Of course," she remarked gaily, "you, Big Boy, should [100] be a Russian deer hound with a silver-mounted collar and a blue bow under your left ear and it might be better if I had on a simple little thousand-dollar frock—tra, la, tra, la!

"I guess I'm as well off as the rich—with diamonds—a diamond, I mean—and a private speed boat, and pounds of chocolates! Eh, Big Boy? Still, I guess I don't want all that candy. I'd rather have something more practical. The candy would be all gone in a few days. All there would be left would be a stomachache. I can't let the boys spend their money foolishly, but I'd just as soon they would buy me some—— Oh, I know! I'll turn the bon bons into fishing tackle."

Plans for the purchase of proper tackle held Clem's attention as she neared the tiny settlement at the first end of the half mile of summer cottages.

The general store was a two-story structure housing the bachelor postmaster, Mr. Fowler, in the rooms above, and large enough below to hold a typical variety of food, dry goods, and hardware. A gravel road from the top of the island wound its way along the beach for a hundred yards, passed in front of the store and the small shingle mill, to an abrupt ending at the warehouse on the dock. At this dock the Seattle boats stopped regularly, while at the powder dock they paused only in case a passenger desired to be put off.

As she stepped upon the narrow porch that fronted the store, Clem recognized one of the two men whose chairs were tilted against the window ledge. It was Bunte, whose oddly worded advice had enabled her to raise the *Gypsy*. This would be a good chance to secure his help in selecting the fishing tackle, provided he could be lured from his argument. [101]

“I tell ye, Abe Crager, there be sich a thing as spont’nus combustin,” Bunte’s voice was as earnest as his gestures. “Ain’t I read it time a’ter time?”

“Me’be so,” replied Abe Crager, blowing a wreath of smoke from his thin lips, “me’be so, *an* ’ me’be not! I reckon things don’t explode with no cause. Allays there’s a cause, Bunte; mark my words on that.”

“Cause enough, Abe Crager, when the sun’s jist right an’ the air’s jist right.”

That much of the conversation Clem caught as she crossed the porch and entered the store with Big Boy behind her. The hound hesitated on the porch with something between a growl

and a whine in his voice. Clem turned and spoke to him sharply. The dog moved forward through the door with a side glance at the two men.

“Lie down,” instructed Clem, indicating a place beside the counter. “Now wait until I’m through shopping.”

As Clem moved off to the food counter, Big Boy settled [102] himself deliberately with his big head dropped forward on his paws. For a moment his glance rolled back toward the door. Then he began to take idle inventory of the store. A row of vegetable boxes leaned against the opposite counter; a big sheet-iron stove occupied a central position a half-dozen feet away; cornered between the stove shield and the counter a large yellow tom-cat was calmly engaged in licking its paw.

Big Boy’s ears pricked with interest. He lifted his head and cocked it to one side to better view the cat’s actions.

“Me—o—ow.”

Something in the tom-cat’s contented tone stirred the hound’s resentment. Always in his experience cats were putting themselves first with their “Me—oow.” Big Boy hesitated for a fraction of a second, perhaps because he recalled Clem’s instructions that he must be dignified. Then with a sudden bound he skidded noisily within a scant foot of Cæsar’s nose.

The yellow cat shot as high into the air as his legs would propel him, since there was no other choice of direction, and at the same time squalled his frank opinion of dogs.

Big Boy, having thus performed his duty, wheeled about [103]

to take his former position. Unfortunately the wheeling movement placed his haunches directly beneath the now descending cat. As the yellow cat landed, his claws sank deep in the dog's hide.

The pain was too much for the startled hound. With a husky howl, Big Boy bolted for the open doorway.

At the same moment Clem saw the postmaster appear in the door.

“Eh, what?” exclaimed that portly gentleman, sighting the comet headed for him. Like a streak of greased lightning, the dog whizzed between Mr. Fowler's fat legs. The cat was swept off in the action and went down with the postmaster in a struggling heap. For a second, while the hound's woeful howl faded away toward the powder dock, Cæsar kept footing on the man. Then, using Mr. Fowler's stomach as a spring board, the yellow cat leaped for the top of a glass showcase standing on the counter.

But peace and contentment were not to be found there! The leap landed Cæsar squarely in a sheet of new fly paper.

With a squall that sent shivers down Clem's back, the yellow cat rolled and wrenched and tore and clawed in an insane effort to rid himself of the sticking paper. Off the showcase he tumbled plump into a five-pound tin of powdered marshmallows. There was a brief eruption of marshmallows in every direction and then a whitened Cæsar, still partly draped in fly paper, streaked down the aisle, sailed over the prostrate postmaster's head, and disappeared beneath the warehouse in a

final puff of dust.

Mr. Fowler, his fat hands supporting him in a half-sitting posture, relaxed his head from the strained position necessary to view Cæsar's disappearance. With a sigh he turned his gaze upon the girl before him.

"Heh! Heh! Heh!" he exploded, his whole frame quivering with laughter. "Lucky I ain't fatter'n I am, else that pup'd never 'a' got between my legs, and if he hadn't, I s'pose I'd 'a' been tore limb from limb in the fracas."

"Are you hurt any?" questioned Clem sympathetically.

"Nothin' more than surface damage, young lady," answered Mr. Fowler, getting to his feet. "Ain't you Dave Fargar's sister, eh?"

"Yes, and from what he has told me, you must be the postmaster."

"Right you are, an' if I remember Dave's letters correct they've been addressed to Miss Clementine Fargar, eh?"

"That's my name," replied Clem with a smile.

"Pretty fancy name for as sensible a lookin' girl as you."

"I was named after a great aunt, Mr. Fowler."

"Well, then, you ain't to blame if the name don't fit you." [105]

"Most people call me 'Clem.'"

“That’s a better name for you, young lady, and if you don’t mind, I’ll start right in bein’ friendly by callin’ you just that.”

“I hope you will, Mr. Fowler, and I’m awfully sorry my dog upset you. I’m sure he wouldn’t have done so if the yellow cat hadn’t lit on his back.”

“Can’t say that I blame the pup. I guess I’d ’a’ done the same thing if I’d been in his place.”

The postmaster had squeezed his way behind the counter beside the little section of post-office boxes and was thumbing over a handful of letters.

“Here’s a letter from the Pondeux Powder Company for Dave, but not a one for you, Clem.”

“I didn’t come in expecting a letter myself,” said Clem, as she took the long envelope addressed to Dave. “I came to show you something I found in the sand the other side of the powder dock and to ask your advice about it.”

While speaking, Clem had slipped the diamond ring off her finger. Now she extended it to Mr. Fowler.

“Eh? What’s this? A ring?”

The postmaster took the ring and turned to the window. [106]
For a moment he examined the jewel and its gold setting, then he shot a look over his glasses at the girl. “Where was you, young lady, when you found this?”

Clem told with care the story of her discovery. While she was

speaking, the postmaster rolled the ring over and over in his palm with quick shakes of his head and an occasional “click” of his tongue.

“A mighty interestin’ story, young lady,” he declared when she was through. “An’ I persume you done right in mailin’ an ad to the papers though like as not nothin’ will come of it. Finders keepers, eh? Or how’d you like to sell the ring to me right now? I kinda taken a fancy to the thing.”

“No, I don’t care to sell now, Mr. Fowler, thank you. I wouldn’t think of that, at least not before I had tried to find the owner.”

“Well, that’s the fair thing, all right.”

“You know, Mr. Fowler, the ring may have meant a great deal to someone and perhaps it still does.”

“Can’t say, but like as not the person as lost the ring has clear forgot it by now.” The postmaster busied himself with the weighing of an over-plump envelope.

“Do you remember seeing anyone years ago who might have been engaged?” asked Clem.

“Well, now,” began the postmaster, a twinkle returning to his eye, “seems like I maybe have sometime or other. [107]
The young ’uns once in a coon’s age get off of the boat and stroll down the beach holding hands and acting like as if they maybe was engaged. I don’t know that I ever out and out asked ’em if ’twas so.”

“Oh,” laughed Clem, “you know what I mean!”

“Sure,” assented Mr. Fowler. “I know what you mean, but I have to have my joke.”

At that remark Clem’s thoughts reverted to what Dave had suggested regarding the postmaster and the mystery of the night laugh. Was it possible that this jolly-looking, middle-aged bachelor might have had anything to do with that hideous laugh? It seemed scarcely possible, yet Clem resolved to make inquiry on the whole matter. So as she looked at the fishing tackle which she had made up her mind to get in place of the chocolates, she edged the conversation to the affairs of the powder dock.

“Tell me, Mr. Fowler, what you think about the powder warehouse. Is it really very dangerous, having it so close?” Clem picked up a lead sinker and weighed it in the palm of her hand. Unfortunately Bunte had departed sometime before so she could not call on him for advice concerning the tackle.

The postmaster leaned his bulk back against the shelving [108] and pulled his glasses down his nose in order that he might squint at Clem more directly. For a moment he chewed at a resurrected toothpick.

“You know, young lady, I been chairman of a committee appointed to see that powder house moved. Me, myself, I’ve been livin’ within eyesight of the place long enough to get used to it, but as chairman——”

Clem involuntarily filled in the pause with the thought: “As chairman his pride would urge him to anything in order to get

rid of the warehouse, even to the point of trying to frighten the keepers away.”

“As chairman,” went on Mr. Fowler, “I’m obliged to say that a summer resort attracts more people an’ has more peace an’ good will in the atmosphere when there ain’t no powder dock closer’n a thousand miles.”

Clem decided in favor of the heavy sinker and picked up a hank of fish line. “Well, tell me, are there any queer people around here?”

The postmaster made pretext at looking the store over carefully. “Heh! Heh! I don’t see none except ourself, an’ I guess we ain’t ready to admit how queer we are.”

Clem smiled. “We would be queer if we were to admit it. But something peculiar happened yesterday up our way and I thought you might have some explanation.”

Mr. Fowler’s attitude revealed his interest at these words. “Suppose you give me the main facts, young lady, and see if I can raise an idea.”

[109]

Clem perched herself on an up-ended orange box and rapidly sketched the events of the past days.

“Hm—m!” mused the man when she was done. “Part I could have expected. Course I’ve heard once or twice of some things not just common like an’ if you was to ask me point blank for an explanation I might be sorta put to it. But I ain’t without my suspicions. Did your ol’ Indian cook ever say anything about a feller named Jim Novak?”

“Her husband?”

“Well, maybe so. Well, if you’d known this Jim Novak you would see right off why, when you ask me that question, I get to thinkin’ of him an’ wonderin’ if he’s really dead.”

[110]

CHAPTER VIII

THE GYPSY'S CARGO

When Clem reached home, Dave and Tom Trent were busy in the warehouse. Their muffled voices droned softly out on the hot afternoon like the murmur of yellow-jackets in their nest. Big Boy stuck his nose from under the cottage porch and whined for sympathy. He was not yet recovered from the shock the yellow cat had inflicted upon him.

“If you wish, Big Boy, you may come aboard the *Gypsy* with me,” cried Clem, laughing at the forlorn figure the big dog made as he crept out of his hiding place. “You’ll have to behave yourself better than you did at the store. I can’t have you racing around in my nice boat.”

On her way into the house Clem stuck Dave’s letter in the railing where he was sure to see it. She wondered what new instructions it contained from the Seattle office.

Big Boy waited on the porch until Clem had changed into her old clothes. Then he trailed along to the skiff and obeyed Clem’s instructions carefully in the journey out to the graceful *Gypsy* riding at anchor over the tide flats. Clem assigned the dog to a place on a cabin seat. He settled himself with his head on his paws and watched Clem as she went about the pleasant task of straightening out the cabin to her fancy. [111]

A perfect thrill of delight rushed through her veins with the thought of her ownership of this slim, beautifully fitted launch.

In her mind, the boat represented her return to high school and a means for helping Dave achieve something better than his present position. A few fish like the one she had smothered that morning would make a profitable day—thirty-eight pounds at seven cents——?

Out on the fishing banks she might well catch a hundred pounds a day. Just how she could handle so many was not clear to Clem, but she was sure that Bunte would be able to show her the best methods. Then, if she found she could not manage alone, she might persuade Twasla to help as she had done with her fisherman husband, Jim Novak.

Since Clem's recent talk with the postmaster this last name carried a new meaning. Jim Novak, alive, might tell a story that would lift the veil of mystery that clung to yesterday's events. Mixed with her thoughts of the unusual occurrences were plans concerning the boat—plans that she voiced now and then for the benefit of the big hound.

“With that dandy gasoline stove to cook on, with the comfortable seat to bunk on, with food and water and gas, and my books, I guess the *Gypsy* is my castle,” muttered Clem. “I feel wonderfully safe in her. I can outrun most of the boats unless I am mistaken, and in rough weather I could slide into some cove and drop anchor. In this cabin the rain wouldn't bother me. I do wish that I had a girl chum to share this with me, then the summer would be perfect. But at least I have Big Boy, unless his owner shows up.” [112]

The dog's answering whine indicated his contentment in such an arrangement. Whatever his past might have been, he seemed

more than willing to give it up for life with Clem aboard the *Gypsy*.

Clem ran her hand over the little shelf of books she had installed. She hoped to put in some time each day on her French, and there would be spare hours for pleasure reading also even though she must be careful with her eyes. Six books she had taken from the Seattle library for the summer. There was *The Dark Frigate*, a sea story that Dave had already demanded access to; *Judith Shakespeare*, recommended by a high school chum; *The Blue Lagoon*, and *The White Company*—pictures in these volumes had caught her eye. Then came an autobiography of Theodore Roosevelt, and *A Daughter of the Middle Border*. She could not read much at a time, but there would be a few minutes a day with these trusty friends. [113]

“If no one ever shows up for that diamond,” went on the girl, “I’m going to sell it and use a little bit of the money, at least, to start a library of my own. Library books are nice but there are some books I’d like to have for my own. When I’ve laughed and cried and thought with the folks in a wonderful story, I just hate to take them back to the public library.

“Is that the way you feel about your friends, Big Boy?” Clem paused to pat the smooth head. “Now, why didn’t you remind me to bring hammer and nails from the house? I want to fix a place to hang my slicker and my heavy coat. Well, I guess we’ve got time to go after them. I sent word for Bunte to come at two. If he’s here then, we’ll make it out to the banks in time for the tide change.”

Clem peered out toward the fishermen shacks. Bunte was not in sight. With him along, the *Gypsy* could make its maiden trip out to the fishing banks. Dave had given his consent to such a program.

“Want to stay here, Big Boy, or go with me?”

The hound promptly forsook his place to follow Clem [114] out of the cabin. Presently they were back on the beach. Big Boy became interested in a scarlet jellyfish slopping in the edge of the water. Clem hurried on to the house for the hammer and nails.

“Stay right where you are, old fellow, if you expect to go back with me,” cautioned Clem, as she ran up the steps.

In the house Clem was detained by Twasla for several minutes to give instructions regarding the evening meal.

“I’ll give the boys an extra good feed even though they lost their wager this morning,” thought Clem.

The planning done, she ran out of the house and down the path with the hammer and a sack of nails in her hands.

“All right, Big Boy,” she cried, and then stopped short.

The dog was no longer on the sand. He was nowhere to be seen.

“Well, what do you know!” exclaimed Clem. “That dog comes and goes like a phantom. I might think he wasn’t real flesh and blood if I hadn’t seen him with that cat on his back. Oh, well,

Bunte might think him a nuisance. I won't try to hunt him up."

And so she rowed back to the launch alone. There she [115]
busied herself with more work on the cabin until Bunte
presently came alongside in his big rowboat. Clem started the
engine and heaved up the light sand anchor while the old man
was getting his boat fastened to a near-by float. Then she
picked Bunte up and, with a good-by wave to Dave who had
emerged from the powder warehouse, she advanced the speed
and headed for deep water.

"Hear that your men folks ran into trouble on top the island,"
chuckled Bunte, as he busied himself preparing the tackle.

He continued his submerged mirth while Clem, above the hum
of the engine, related the story of the affair at the old cabin.

"He! He! I could 'a' told ya to keep clear, an' I would of ef I'd
any idee ya was goin' atop the island. I watched Dave when he
jist came here, but he warn't no hand to dust around so I never
told him 'bout the old nut who built the place up there."

"Tell me, Mr. Bunte. Tell me while we're getting out to the
banks."

The old man had rigged the lines to the poles that the carpenter
had fixed with hinged ends to swing clear of the boat. Now he
fumbled in one of the fish boxes he had brought aboard and
produced several pieces of polished brass—"jiggers," he
called them—that he had shaped himself. A strong hook
dangled from each.

Holding them up for admiration, he exclaimed, "Ef there [116]
be fish runnin' these beauties will land 'em. A salmon

can't no more resist the Bunte jigger than a dog can keep from chasin' a tom-cat. Two things ya need to know to catch fish: just what ta catch 'em with an' where to catch 'em. That's all."

"Oh, I wish you could have seen what happened at the post office just after you and the other man left the porch. I know one dog that I'll guarantee will not chase tom-cats for several days," said Clem, smiling in remembrance of the morning.

"D'ya mean that hound ya had with ya at the store?" queried Bunte. "Can't say I like the looks of the animil. Be I you I'd git rid of the critter."

"Oh, no! Big Boy is a darling."

"Here, now," said Bunte, as he worked, "keep yer eye peeled fer what I'm doin'."

Clem gave as much attention to his ways of rigging tackle as she could spare from the steering. Questions, now and then, added to her store of information. She did not press the old fisherman for the story of the cabin, for she had a feeling that it would come out in due time.

They had passed the Point and were running west toward the mouth of Useless Bay when Bunte instructed Clem to slow down to a "walk." When the speed suited him, he tossed the heavily leaded lines into the water and took the wheel. [117]

"Seen how ta fix them four lines, ain't ya? Well, now, look at them sea gulls. See how they line out right ahead of us? See the fuss they're makin', the way they swing down to the water?

They're following a school of herrin'—fish 'bout three-four inches long—an' where there's herrin' you can bet there's salmon. Salmon eat herrin' the same as you gobble down potatoes. Jist watch them lines while I swing along the edge of the ruckus."

As the *Gypsy* edged past the spot occupied a moment before by the gulls, Clem's pulse quickened. She could see the quiet water rippling with the swarm of small fish. Not many feet below the surface the brass lures were twisting back and forth in invitation. Was Bunte's faith in his jiggers well founded? The violent jerking on an outer line, followed by the jingle of the little warning bell on the other side of the boat, answered Clem's thought.

"Mr. Bunte!" she screamed, wringing her hands in excitement, "we got some! We got some!"

"Put on them canvas gloves an' bring 'em in," replied [118] the fisherman, grinning at her commotion. He caught the wheel with the tie cord and hurried to where Clem crouched on the low deck.

"Bring that line in. Needn't worry none 'bout playin' the fish 'till ya git him 'longside," spoke Bunte, picking up a long-handled gaff hook and stooping at the deck edge.

Clem, fairly quivering with excitement, pulled away steadily on the strong line. In a moment she had hoisted the five-pound sinker over the gunwale. Close behind she could see the salmon.

"Right up 'longside," shouted Bunte. "Now hold her."

The fisherman's arm dropped lower; a quick striking motion, an upward heave, and a silver salmon lay twisting on the deck.

"Isn't that a beauty!" exulted Clem, on her knees beside the fish.

"No time to be admirin' fish scales," declared Bunte. "Can't ya hear that starboard bell? Ef ya don't git 'em in ya'll lose 'em. Try gittin' this 'un in without no gaff hook. When ya git 'em next the boat, don't jerk, just a steady hoist over the side, an' see ya don't make me use the gaff ta git you out of the bay."

In the next five minutes, seven salmon, ranging from four [119] to nine pounds, were heaved on to the deck by the excited girl. The fish were small compared to the giant she had caught in the morning but they were as large as the usual run. Bunte stood by and issued instructions, but Clem took the thrill each time—the jerking, swishing line, the glimpse of the fish just under the water, the weight of the dangling beauty, the flash of silvered sides as the salmon flopped upon the deck. As fast as she could put the lines out the thrill was repeated until the seven were caught, and then the biting ceased abruptly.

Clem, her hair flying in the light breeze, cheeks flushed, eyes alight with the new experience, plumped down on the deck to rest.

"Why did they stop?" she called to Bunte, who was fussing with the engine.

"We ran out of the school, gal, an' unless I'm mistook we ain't goin' to pick it up very soon."

“Why, what’s the matter?”

“We’re outta gas from the looks of things. Didn’ ya git some ’fore I came?”

“Nope.”

“Well, blast my ol’ hide, I just s’posed Dave had fixed ya up, an’ I never thought ta say nothin’.”

“What’ll we do?” exclaimed Clem, rising in consternation. “It must be a mile at least to shore.”

“Now don’t git het up, gal. We’ll be all right. Course [120]
we’ll lose out on the fish to-day but they’s no cause ta
worry so long as ya’ve got a boat like the *Gypsy* under yer feet.
We’ll hist a signal on one of these here poles and set tight for
one of them other fishin’ boats to come alongside. Good time
now fer ya to git them salmon ready fer sellin’. Ya might as
well learn the hull business ef ya be goin’ ta be a fisherman.”

“Yes, and while I’m doing that, won’t you tell me about the old cabin up on the island point? You can boss the job and tell the story at the same time. And, say, Mr. Bunte, I just want you to know how much I appreciate your coming out with me. I’ve never had so much fun in my life as I’ve had in the past half hour.”

After he had run up a red bandana handkerchief for a signal, the old man seated himself on a fish box. As he filled and lit his pipe, he directed Clem in her work on the salmon.

“Go on with the story, Mr. Bunte,” she urged.

“Ain’t it enough for ya ta know that ya’d better steer clear of the old cabin?”

“But we ought to know—Dave and I—they’ve been trying to make the Pondeux people abandon the powder dock and——”

“Good thing ef it warn’t there,” put in Bunte, scratching the back of his gnarled hand. “Why don’t ya get Dave to pull anchor an’ leave ’em without a dock tender?”

“Dave can make more money on this job than he can at anything else. It’s good honest work——”

“Dangerous, gal, dangerous! Some day that warehouse is goin’ ta scatter the Point all over this part of Puget Sound, an’ yer brother an’ mebbe, you, too, ’ll never be found.” [121]

“I’m not afraid unless this man in the fish mask might set the place on fire.”

Bunte spat reflectively into the green water and eyed the side of Clem’s head. “I’ve heard that he wears a face coverin’ but I ain’t never seen him with it on. Seems he vowed he’d never be ’round the cabin or the rock—after he did it—without havin’ his face covered.”

“After he did what?” questioned Clem.

Bunte did not appear to hear the query. He shaded his eyes and looked out toward the boats that circled and recircled in the distance. It might be some time before one of them observed the distress signal, and no fisherman was likely to leave his

work so long as the catch was on. The *Gypsy* would have to wait until the fish stopped biting. That would probably be close to five o'clock.

"I've got a dogfish line set over there by the kelp bed," muttered Bunte, half to himself. "Ef I could get the launch over there I'd take a look at thet line. Save me rowin' out here to-morrow mornin'."

Getting a story out of him was like pulling teeth, thought Clementine. He either did not want to tell what he knew, or else he wanted to be coaxed. She slid the second cleaned salmon into the box and slushed a pail of water over the gunny-sack covering. The story of the old cabin might help a lot in solving the mysterious happenings of the last few days. She had hoped to aid Dave and Tom Trent in the clearing up of the situation. This was the time to pump the old fisherman if it were ever to be done. [122]

"The old house didn't look like it had been lived in recently. Where do you suppose the man in the fish mask lives?"

As she finished her sentence, Clem looked up at Bunte. The old man sat bent over, his elbows on his thin knees, his pipe held idle between yellow snags. A vacant expression had fixed his gaze upon the deck.

An uneasy feeling stole over Clem.

"Mr. Bunte!"

"Eh? What's that?" cried the fisherman, leaping to his feet as though aroused from slumber. He stood dazed for a moment

and then dropped back to his seat with a low chuckle.

“You’ll never be content ’till you hear how old Ward shoved his pardner off’n that rock, so I might as well let ya have it while we be waitin’.”

CHAPTER IX

CHASED

Pushed from the rock above the cove! Falling hundreds of feet to water or boulders! Clem shuddered and watched the old man settle himself for the story.

Her casual glances had taken in only the thin face, lined and tanned with years of exposure; the faded shirt with sleeves rolled halfway to the elbows; the denim trousers held with a strap knotted around a slender waist. But now something in the manner of the man as he refilled his pipe and squatted down against the cabin wall sent a rush of pity over the girl. What a lonely life he had lived! A beachcomber. A fisherman. Few friends, no books, no family.

“Always been goin’ ta tell somebody ’bout Ward—and his pardner Blackie—but never jist got where I could, or would,” began Bunte. “Maybe it’ll ease my mind ta give ya the yarn, gal; but I’ll have ta tone it down from facts. No, I can’t give it ta ya just the way I got it. I been packin’ the facts in my skull fer many a year now, an’ maybe they kinda foamed up a bit, but I can’t ferget ’em—not me!”

As the old man looked up, Clem dropped her gaze and went on with her salmon cleaning. An odd specimen he was. Viewed through the wrong end of a telescope, he would be a gnome fresh from a mushroom bed. Under a magnifying glass, he would prove to be—— Clem’s thoughts trailed into Bunte’s next sentence. [124]

“Don’t never let yer thoughts bottle up tight in yer skull, gal. They git ta frothin’ an’ foam’in’ an’ first thing ya know—*pop*—an’ then where be ya, eh? Where be ya then?”

“I don’t know,” answered Clem obligingly. Her glance sought the distant fishing boats.

“I know,” asserted the old man positively, emphasizing his points with his pipe. “Ye’d be in the same skiff with the feller what tied yer brother.”

He puffed a cloud of smoke into the warm midsummer breeze.

“Musta been forty years ago—accordin’ ta what I’ve heard—thet Ward an’ his pardner, Blackie, first made camp over there on the beach. Well, they done some Siwash tradin’; maybe Ward turned squawman. They had some narrow squeaks from losin’ their scalps, but each time they managed ta git hid out in time.

“Can’t tell ya all the ins and outs—even ef I did know [125]
’em. They seen the powder house put up—thet was ten years ago—right smack on land they figgered was theirs. Maybe ’twas theirs. I ain’t goin’ ta say as ta thet. There was the warehouse anyhow, an’ from what Ward told me, he an’ Blackie had it back an’ forth time after time as to whether they should set fire ta it as soon as ’twas finished or wait ’till it had been loaded up with powder. Blackie was so mad he was for waitin’ an’ blowin’ everything sky high. Ward, he warn’t so anxious ta kill ’em as was runnin’ the place. He figgered thet there was a plenty of ghosts a ridin’ the winds ’round the Point already.

“Wall, one night inside a year after the warehouse was done, a schooner tacked in ’longside the dock and put off a hundred boxes of powder. E’ry one in these parts watched the torch flares an’ wondered how soon the hull island was goin’ sky’ards. Blackie watched the unloadin’ from out on the rock that sticks out over the cove, an’ Ward watched the unloadin’, too, watched that an’ watched Blackie!

“Blackie had a bottle of red licker which helped him git red-hot over the cornin’ of the powder. He fin’lly got so wrothy, accordin’ ta the way Ward allays tells the yarn, he got so het up, he tells Ward ta get outta the way an let him off’n the rock for he’s goin’ to sneak down’n touch off the hull works. Wall, they had words back an’ forth—words led ta a scuffle while they was standin’ on the rock, an’——”

The pause was so long, Clem resumed the work she had [126] forsaken in her interest in the story. She must do nothing to shut off the narrative at this point. She felt, rather than noted, the tenseness of Bunte’s posture as he finally uttered the closing words.

“An’ Blackie slipped on a patch of moss an’ over he went!”

“Oh, what a terrible way to die!” ejaculated Clem. “Did they find the body?”

“Next mornin’ Jim Novak found what was left of him lodged in one of the cliff holes where the tide had swished it.”

Bunte’s set expression caused the girl to make conversation hurriedly. “You’ve lived here a long time, Dave says. You must know a lot of interesting stories about this part of the

island. I can see how that man—Ward, you called him—would feel awfully bitter against the powder dock and no doubt that’s why he resented the trip the boys made to the old cabin. I suppose that he lives farther back on the island and only visits his old place occasionally. I wonder where——”

Her remark was interrupted by Bunte’s rising words: “Well, now that yer curiosity be satisfied—ef it ain’t, it’d better be—I’m goin’ ta oar the *Gypsy* over ta my dogfish line.”

While he took up his slow task, Clem eased the last fish [127] into the box, tidied up the deck, and slipped into the cabin. With a sigh of comfort she dropped down on the bunk. What eventful days these were proving! How different from the even tenor of life as she had lived it during the winter. No football game at West High or rapid moving picture could increase the thrill she had experienced in landing the giant tyee and the seven salmon. It had been hard work, but, oh, it seemed as though she could go on indefinitely in the part of a fishergirl if to-day were typical.

The gentle rocking of the boat under the action of Bunte’s oar, together with the drowsy influence of the French text which she had picked up, drooped Clem’s eyelids in a nap that lasted until the old fisherman’s shout awakened her.

Through the window, she could see one of the fishing boats approaching rapidly. On deck she found her companion standing in a circle of fish net fresh from the water and the end of the *Gypsy* piled with the ugly carcasses of dogfish.

“Good haul, eh?” greeted Bunte, as Clem came on deck.

“Tomillo is comin’; I’ll git him ta tow us in ta the fertilizer plant. I’ll sell ’em my catch and we’ll git enough gas to take us back to the warehouse. Hey, Tomillo! The gal’s short on gas; pull us in ta the plant, will ya? Here’s a rope.”

With surprising agility Bunte made his way to the fore of the boat and tossed the rope end to the Italian. [128]

“How much did you catch?” shouted Clem to Tomillo as his boat idled past.

“T’o hundred pound,” grinned the fisherman, pointing to the long boxes on the deck.

“About fourteen dollars for him,” thought Clem. “I wonder how much I’ll make out of to-day’s work. I guess, counting the big tyee this morning, and these seven in the box, I ought to make about six dollars this first day. Pretty good, considering, too, that I’ve got some results as a detective also. I know something about the man in the fish mask. To-morrow I’m going to fill that gas tank full and get out by myself, and I’m going to rig up a scheme for keeping track of where the school of salmon is, so that there won’t be so much aimless running around. I’ll take some of those big corks like Bunte uses to float the top of his net; I’ll fasten a little flag to each one, put a small weight on the bottom of the cork to hold it upright, and then when the first fish bites I’ll toss a signal over. When I see that they are quitting, over will go another flag. Then I’ll square the *Gypsy* around and run back between the flags because I’ll know that that’s where the fish are. I’ll bet a sugar cookie that’ll get results.”

Busy with her thoughts, Clem helped at the fertilizer [129]

dock in unloading Bunte's catch of dogfish and in securing several gallons of gasoline. Bunte became suddenly uneasy when the money for his catch was placed in his hands. After some minutes in the little shack that served as office, he returned to the dock with an announcement that if Clem thought she could run the launch home, he would remain at the plant until morning.

"He's found out he can buy some liquor here, probably," thought Clem, "and he can't resist the temptation. Well, I'm better off without him in that case."

"May be a bit rough on the bay 'fore ya git 'round the Point," said Bunte, "but ya'll make it all right. Ef worse comes to worse, just git out from land an' shut off yer ingine. The *Gypsy*'ll never sink. Not much use of yer trollin' on the way back. Better hike along fer home so's ta git there 'fore it gits dark. Your brother'll be worryin' like as not."

The prospect of running the *Gypsy* home was pleasing if somewhat alarming. "I'll make it all right," cried Clem as she leaped nimbly from the dock to the deck of her launch and caught the cast-off line from Bunte.

When Clem turned the nose of the *Gypsy* out of Useless Bay, her first elation at being alone in her own boat was slackened by the increasing throw of the waves. Wind and tide were combining to transform the level surface into a choppy array of white-capped waves. Thanks to the snug cabin, she was able to operate the boat in comfort despite the spray that drenched the launch repeatedly. [130]

The sun, sinking behind the purple Olympics, was making the most of the cloud banks that were hurrying up from the Pacific. The pink reflection on the waves flashed and faded in the roll of the water; windows in a distant steamer danced in color for a moment; the island cliffs took on a regal splendor, transitory but impressive.

As Clem enjoyed the beauty of the colored waves breaking at the foot of the cliff, her attention was suddenly taken by a low-lying gray boat that was edging out from the island as though to run across the course of the *Gypsy*. She seized the glasses and scrutinized the stranger carefully. It was not a fishing boat. On its foredeck it carried a cargo of some sort under a canvas. Only one person was visible aboard, and he was busy scanning the *Gypsy* through his binoculars.

Remembrance of the man she had seen signaling from the top of the island, and rumors she had heard of the activities of smugglers, brought Clem's heart into her mouth. She took rapid survey of the surrounding Sound. Tomillo was already rounding the Point in the twilight haze. No other boat, save the far-distant steamer, was to be seen. She was alone, unfamiliar with her launch, in a rough sea, with an unknown boat slipping out from a shore reputed as a stopping place for speed boats on their illegitimate run from Canadian waters. [131]

The seventeen-year-old girl did some hurried thinking. If she should turn back to the dock she had left ten minutes earlier, the strange launch had an equal chance of heading her off. If she continued her course, she might find herself presently in a dangerous predicament. The *Gypsy* would be a pretty prize for smugglers. A few hours' work in some hidden cove would

alter the outward appearance of the launch and the chances of recovery would be very slight. What they might do to *her*, Clem could not say.

The oncoming boat was built on speedy lines; just what [132] the *Gypsy* could do in speed was still to be seen.

Jumping to the wheel, Clem prepared for flight. Her pounding heart had made the decision. Better to run for it than to face the possibilities that her imagination pictured. She seized the speed controls. The purr of the engine rose to a driving whirr; the spray from the prow suddenly spread wide. The *Gypsy* darted forward through the waves with a speed that astounded the girl and brought immediate response from the stranger. There was no longer any doubt as to his intent to head off the *Gypsy*—if he could.

Clem's course to round the Point necessitated steering against the wave run at such an angle that occasionally the boat was caught in the trough and rolled alarmingly. Each time she straightened the boat out, the stranger gained a few feet, until not more than a hundred yards separated the two crafts. Above the roar of the other engine, Clem heard threatening shouts. A side glance through the dusk showed the dark hull drawing closer off on the left. Unless the girl could get on the inside track for the Point, the superior speed of the *Gypsy* would do her no good. As things were going now, it would be but a few minutes before she would be caught.

The time ticked off second by second on the little clock close to the steering wheel. Clem was getting every ounce of speed from the engine that she knew how to produce, but the wave handicap was too great. The other boat, running more nearly

with the waves, was bound to come alongside eventually.

Perspiration formed beads on Clem's forehead; she [133]
found herself pushing ahead with all her might against
the steering wheel as though to increase the speed. Each time a
wave struck against the plate glass before her face she flinched
involuntarily and veered the boat a little more. There was no
time for definite resolution, but in the back of Clem's mind was
the thought that if she ever got to land again, heaven and earth
could not persuade her ever to embark. She would follow
Dave's advice and take up cooking or some other land
occupation and hold to it forever more.

"Lay to, hey you! Lay to!" The words were faint but emphatic.

In desperation, Clem spun the wheel over and swung the *Gypsy*
straight with the wave run, straight for the rocky beach. The
new course would enable her to cut in behind the stranger,
perhaps, and gain the inside track for the Point that loomed just
ahead. It was a dangerous move, yet in it lay her one chance of
escape.

In the back of Clem's mind was running a refrain that had
originated with her to still her fears in early childhood: "God
is with me all the time; I am not afraid." There was comfort
and calmness in the thought.

The change in direction had caught the other boat by [134]
surprise, so that the *Gypsy* hummed past toward the
beach before the unknown could block the move. Running with
the waves, it seemed to Clem but a moment before the rock
foam at the base of the cliff was beneath her bows. Again she

swerved the *Gypsy*, this time back toward the Point, and gasped with relief as her launch cleared the side of a partly exposed boulder.

The other boat had turned and once more was steering to head her off. Fortunately the waves were not running so high in the lee of the cliff and so, when the *Gypsy* sped for the Point two hundred yards away, she had a fighting chance for escape. Once around the end of the island, it would be a straight-away run to the powder dock, with the current aiding, and Clem was sure that she could out-distance her pursuers under those circumstances. Nearer and nearer the goal! Oh, if the *Gypsy* would only keep up its gallant fight, if that engine would not hesitate in its sweet purr!

Something was happening aboard the unknown launch. A vague figure was outlined for a moment on the foredeck where Clem had noticed the canvas-covered cargo. Then a streak of flame spat from the strange boat. There was a sharp report and a splash just ahead of the *Gypsy*. What the girl had taken for cargo was a mounted gun; "Lay to!" came the hoarse voice over the waves.

The next shot would no doubt be aimed to hit. Between [135] the two evils, Clem turned and slowed down the engine. She felt the mist gathering in her eyes, and a queer wobbly feeling came into her knees.

"I guess I can at least show them that I'm no baby," she muttered in self-encouragement. "I've done my best."

"Hey, you, steer around the Point into the first cove and stand

by to be searched,” bellowed the voice; “and don’t make the mistake of dropping anything overboard.” With this warning came a broad beam from the stranger’s searchlight that held the *Gypsy* in its center during the short trip around the head of the island and into the deep water cove at the base of the cliff.

“So it isn’t smugglers! It’s the patrol boat! Then I’m safe as can be,” thought Clem in relief. “They must take me for a smuggler, and I guess they had reason for suspecting me because of the way I tried to run away.”

“That’ll do. Shut off your engine,” was the next command.

Through the window Clem saw the revenue boat’s number, 263, when the craft came alongside. She shoved the engine control into neutral and stepped out on the deck. Here they were in the deep pocket almost directly beneath the rock from which Blackie had slipped. The *Gypsy* was close to the cliff, the cutter near on the outer side. Clem’s glance swept over the cutter, down the island to the lights at the powder dock a mile away, and then up the side of the dark cliff. Far above, the jutting rock stood out against the star-sprinkled indigo of the heavens. For a second Clem’s thoughts dramatized the struggle of many years before on that moss-covered rock and the swift descent of Blackie in his death plunge into the very cove where the boats now rode. [136]

Was that a pin point of light that had leaped out from the top of the island? It looked almost like a shooting star. A startled exclamation from the cutter drew her attention: “It’s a girl we’ve caught this time! Hey, you, what’re you carryin’ that makes you so anxious to leave us? Eh?”

And then, from the darkness just beyond the revenue boat, there came a deafening *boom*, and Clem's staring eyes made out a veritable geyser of water springing skyward.

CHAPTER X

THE MAN IN THE FISH MASK

Clem, thrown to the deck by the force of the concussion, heard the shouts of the men aboard the revenue boat: "We've been tricked! Full speed ahead!" She lay quietly, watching the line of the cliff above her as the searchlight went out and *Number 263* leaped away with frothing stern from the side of the drifting *Gypsy*. The light she had seen a minute earlier had not been mere imagining. The bomb had come from the cliff.

Someone on the top of the island, in league with the rum-runners perhaps, had seen the revenue boat put into the cove and hoped to settle scores against it with a well-placed explosion; or it might be that the crazed man that Dave and Tom had encountered was responsible for this attack also.

Before the cutter had traveled its length, another spark twisted out in a long trail and shot downward to explode in a burst of dull light before striking the water. The illumination revealed the revenue boat speeding outward, a stream of sparkling foam in its wake.

Clem, still uninjured, scrambled into the cabin and rushed the *Gypsy* along the cliff as close as she dared. [138]
For fifty yards she risked contact with submerged rocks before she swung away from the shore. Then she streaked down the bay without lights as fast as the boat would go. There was no third explosion. Evidently the bomb thrower had given up his efforts in disgust at missing twice.

When the girl looked back at the dark outline of the island tip standing calmly in the dusk as it had for centuries, she wondered whether or not she could make Dave believe her story of wild adventure. The blood-red moon, edging the horizon line, looked out with calm indifference; the molten path on the waves rocked with choppy motion; the fishing boats rode drowsily at anchor. There was no evidence here of racing vessels, cannon shot, and sizzling bombs. Dave might well marvel at her tale.

Within hailing distance of the dock, Clem sent out a call that brought a vigorous answer from the shore. A few minutes later she was gripping her brother's hand, with a crowd of excited fishermen gathered around.

“Oh, Dave, there's been more excitement! Did you hear the explosions? Those bombs lit within fifty feet of the *Gypsy*. I've been chased by a government patrol, and now——”

The shrill siren of the revenue boat, approaching a V of phosphorus, cut short the exclamations. The boat's searchlight picked up the little group against the background of the powder warehouse. *Number 263* rushed to a landing alongside and two armed men jumped to the dock. [139]

“Tricky, eh, girl?” shouted the advancing leader. “Well, you haven't made your getaway yet. Snap the——”

The big hound growled and stepped suddenly into the light.

“Hey, you,” bellowed Dave, shoving Clem behind him, “how do you get that way? What do you think you're goin' to do with my sister?”

“A plenty,” retorted the officer, “she come as near giving us a ticket to Davey Jones’s locker as anyone ever——”

Clem emerged from behind Dave and laid her hand on Big Boy’s neck. No more than a child she seemed—a child with a green eye-shade atilt over one ear and amber glasses that hid the flash in her eyes.

“You wait a minute,” she burst out. “You chased me
around over the Sound; liked to scared the life out of me. [140]
I came close to being blown up because somebody was trying
to get even with you; and now you rush up here to arrest me
without as much as asking me for my story! Now, you put up
those guns of yours—I’m not as dangerous a character as you
think. Turn out that spot light, and if you can behave like
gentlemen for ten minutes I’ll let you stay while I tell Dave
about the time I’ve had this afternoon.”

Seated on an empty powder box, her face lit up by the mellow rays from a lantern in the center of the group, the girl told the story of the afternoon’s happenings: Bunte’s explanation of the man in the fish mask, her trip alone from the fertilizer plant, the attack from the unknown boat and, finally, the bombs beneath the shadow of the cliff.

“Men,” exclaimed the revenue captain, when Clem was done, “I want a posse of a dozen to scour the end of the island to-night. Who will volunteer? No, Fargar, you must remain here and look out for your sister, positively. There’s enough without you and you ought not to be away from the warehouse. And, Miss Fargar, I apologize for my abrupt action. We get rather touchy in this sort of business.”

Despite protest from those left behind, Captain Main armed only fourteen of the assembled men, spoke a few words of instruction, and led the way up the gulch path with the big hound on a lead chain. If the dog belonged to the man in the fish mask, then perhaps the animal would lead the way to the man's haunts.

Clem watched until the last flicker of lantern light had disappeared. "Dave, they've gone on a wild-goose chase. I suppose that they wouldn't be content not to try, but they'll never catch the fellow that did that throwing by rushing around through the underbrush at night. He's too clever to be caught that way. I'll bet that old Fish-mask is the one—Ward, was what Bunte called him—and from what Bunte told me, he has a place where ordinary hunting won't find him." [141]

"I think you're right, Clem," answered Dave. "If I'd thought there was much use in going, I'd have wanted to be taken along. Not necessary for me to stay to look after you! You've shown that you can take care of yourself, although I must say that I think you are infernally lucky."

"Oh, Dave, I have been fortunate. I guess it's more proof that there is a Power that looks out for people who just do the best they know how. I haven't had time to really think about it, but when things were happening over there beneath that cliff, I couldn't help wondering whether I'd ever see you again." She gave his arm an affectionate squeeze as they started toward the warehouse. The others who had been left behind by the searching party had already departed for their homes.

"Aren't you dead tired, Sis?"

“Tired? Say, I’m going to sleep ’till noon to-morrow and I [142]
hope those fellows don’t wake me up when they come
back from thrashing around up at the cabin.”

“I found the letter in the railing, just after Tom had left for
Seattle.” Dave tried to make the remark seem casual.

“Who was it from?”

“From Hammer, the head of the Seattle office.”

“Something more about Morgan?”

“Nope, it’s about me.”

“Dave! I’ll bet they’re going to promote you.”

“You guessed wrong, Clem. The Pondeux people are going to
abandon this warehouse, Sis. The campers have brought
pressure on the governor.”

“And that means that you——” Clem’s voice faltered.

“It means that I’ll be minus a job the first of the month.”

“Next Monday! Oh, Dave!”

“I—well—Sis, I hate to say it, but your going back to school
doesn’t look very promising. Jobs aren’t the easiest things to
pick up, and——”

Brother and sister had dropped down on the steps that led from
the dock to the house path. A rising moon dusted the trees, the

house, the Devil's Swing, and the dock timbers with mellow brilliance. The waves broke softly on the beach below.

“Dave, don't worry about me. Oh, I'm sorry for your sake, Dave, but I had already made up my mind not to take anything more from your earnings. I'm sure that I can make enough at fishing to put me through the rest of high school. I'll tell you what—come in as a fishing partner for the rest of the summer. That would be wonderful, Dave.” [143]

“I'd thought of that, Clem,” replied Dave in low tones. “It will help out and give me a chance to look around for another job.”

“You ought to get into something where there is more of a future for you, Dave. You are right at the age when you ought to be making yourself work hard in some direction. This job will never get you anywhere. Of course it is good honest work, but you've got a brain that should be working more than it had to here. My, I'd like to see you in business for yourself. What would you like to do, Dave?”

“I like the water, Sis. I wouldn't be surprised but a fellow with some money could have a boat and go from dock to dock on the Sound buying fish direct from the fishermen. The steamers handle the trade now, but they aren't fixed for it especially. I've thought that I might take a try at being a middleman in the fresh fish business.”

“Dave, is the *Gypsy* big enough for that sort of thing?”

“Afraid not, Sis.”

[144]

“Well, Dave, I wouldn't be surprised if it proves a good thing

that you've lost your job. It's dangerous, and with this crazy loon loose you can't be sure what might happen."

"They'll get him, Clem. Not to-night, but Captain Main won't let up until he has that fellow."

"I hope he won't. I want to go up there and see what I can uncover at the old cabin. I'm mighty interested in that rock."

"I'm with you on that, Clem. We'll go Saturday. Hammer himself is coming to kind of look things over and decide what he wants done with the place."

"Do you suppose we could rent the cottage from him for the rest of the summer?"

"He may want more than we can afford."

"Then we'll get a couple of these little army tents and live on the beach. We can cook over an open fire. I wonder what Twasla will do. She has been cook here for so long. It will be hard for her to find another place."

"She can get a place with some of the summer campers. [145]
Say, you're a dandy, Clem. Here I was as glum as could be because I am fired, and now you make me almost glad it has happened. We may be able to make a good thing out of the *Gypsy*. What luck did you have fishing this afternoon?"

"Oh, I left that out of my story, didn't I? Listen, Dave, I had the biggest fun I've ever had. I caught seven salmon! Seven! And I nearly forgot—they're out in the *Gypsy* now. Won't you take care of them for me? I had rather just sit here and watch the

moon.”

“Sure, Sis, I’ll take care of the fish,” said Dave, rising.

Clementine laid her eye-shade and glasses aside and leaned back against the railing with a sigh. In such a beautiful world as that revealed by the climbing moon, how could there be such things as tired eyes, and jobless boys, and men with twisted minds?

Lazily she scanned the dipping lights on the fishing boats, the gleam of a camp fire far down the beach, the uneasy path of moonlight on the waves. Her ears picked up Dave’s movements on the *Gypsy*, the slap-slap-slap of the water against the piling at her feet, and another sound, vaguely familiar, that caught her puzzled attention—a slow twisting creak.

The girl raised her head to locate the sound. It could not come from the Devil’s Swing. Everyone had gone home. Besides, no one save Dave would be apt to ride the swing. Impossible, and yet the creaking was just the same as that made by the long, heavy ropes rubbing over the thick alder branch. Clem’s glance slowly penetrated the shadows beneath the big tree a dozen yards away. Something was moving there. Funny! The swing was under way, gaining motion rapidly. Someone was in the seat. Must be that one of the young boys from the summer camp had stayed to await the return of the posse. [146]

The girl relaxed and idly watched the arc of the swing lengthen. Presently, when at its fullest reach, the swing would carry its rider to a point a few feet above the warehouse roof

and rush back, far out over the water.

“That you in the swing, Sis?” called Dave from the outer end of the dock.

“Not me, Dave. I’ve told you I’m not going to ride that affair.”

“Hey,” shouted Dave, as he sauntered toward the place where he had left Clem. “Who is it, there in the swing?”

The answer brought the girl to her feet with a leap. From the lips of the dark figure, rushing back and forth through the moonlight and shadow before their very eyes, came the same wild, hysterical laugh that had floated from beneath the cottage window twenty-four hours before.

Clem felt a tingling at the roots of her hair and the next moment she had a firm grasp of her brother’s arm. [147]

Brother and sister stood as though rooted to the dock. Clem could hear Dave’s rapid breathing and she knew that her own knees were shaking. There was the weird man, sought after by the men on top of the island, the man who had perhaps tried to sink the revenue boat, he who had wrestled with his partner on the moss-covered ledge years ago. Each time the swing bore out over the water, the person was outlined against the moon for a second. Each time the hideous laughter woke the echoes from the somber cliffs.

“I knew they wouldn’t catch him at the cabin.”

“Moon-madness? He’s as crazy as a loon,” muttered Dave.

“He knows he’s safe from us as long as he’s in the swing.

We’ve got to keep him there until Main and his men get back.”

“I’ve read that lunatics get worse in the full of the moon, but whatever possessed him to get into the Devil’s Swing?”

“He probably saw the men go up the ravine and this is his crazy method of showing what he thinks of our efforts to locate him. I wonder if I can bluff him with the rifle. I’d hate to shoot at him.”

“You mustn’t kill him, Dave; that would be awful.”

“He came close to killing you when he was after the revenue cutter, but still I don’t want his death on my mind.” [148]

“Get the gun, Dave, and we’ll wait for him. He can’t swing for ever. Captain Main might hear you if you were to shoot several times into the air and, at any rate, the men who didn’t go with the posse would probably come.”

“Stay here and watch him while I make a run for the rifle,” instructed Dave quietly. Then, seeing Clem’s reluctance to loosen her hold on his arm, he added: “Don’t worry. I can get to the house and back long before he can possibly stop the swing.”

Dave took the flight of steps leading down to the path with one bound, and raced for the cottage. Clem, with a glance around for possible flight, stood tense with excitement, her attention riveted upon the strange scene before her.

The laughter ceased abruptly as Dave sped up the path. The swing swept inward in a mighty arc up to its peak a yard above the warehouse. Suddenly the figure left the seat. There was the

sound of the sharp impact of hands and feet against the shingles, and before Clem could recover from her surprise, the ape-like form had scudded up the gentle slope of the roof, over the ridge pole, and out of sight, with a final fit of rasping laughter.

“Dave!” screamed the astounded girl. “Dave, he’s gone!” [149]

Determined to observe the direction taken by the man from the Devil’s Swing, Clem broke into her swiftest pace down the broad platform fronting the long warehouse. At the end, she dropped upon her knees and peered around the end of the warehouse. The ground was at least five feet down. Dave was coming from the other side. The man must pass beneath the spot where Clem was perched.

“Which way, Clem; which way?”

And then, from under the platform, within arm’s reach, appeared the form of the strange one enveloped in a long slicker. The head turned for a moment and Clem saw the fish mask.

“Here, Dave!” she cried, as the figure rushed away toward the alder grove at the base of the cliff. “There he goes! You must not shoot him.”

Tossing the gun into the sand, Dave tore away in pursuit of the mocking laughter. Clem jumped to the ground, caught up the rifle, and pumped three rapid shots into the air. She listened for an answering shot but none came. She could hear the crash of dry ferns and underbrush that marked the progress of the race

as it died away toward the point of the island.

Should she follow? Was there any likelihood that Dave [150]
would come to grips with the man in the fish mask? Of
what assistance could she be in a rough-and-tumble fight?

Voices on one of the fishing boats decided her. "Hurry," she
shouted. "Help! Hurry!"

A small boat shot in to shore from the direction of the fishing
boat and two men tumbled out.

"Dave's just gone that way, chasing him!" Clem exclaimed.

"Chasing who?" demanded the men.

"The fellow in the fish mask!"

The two quickened their pace to a run.

"If Dave has only kept him in sight," whispered Clem to
herself, "they ought to get him this time. It isn't far to the end of
the beach with the tide in the way it is and no two-legged
animal could make an escape up the side of the cliff. There is
no way for him to escape unless he has wings. But he has
turned up in the unexpected place once before to-night, so I
guess I'll go on up to the house and keep Twasla from getting
frightened."

The old Indian woman was sitting beside the kitchen stove in a
rocking chair when Clem entered. Cries, laughter, rifle shots
had failed to bring her to the door.

“I was so close to the man in the fish mask I could have touched him with my hand,” said Clem, as she proceeded to help herself to a lunch from the pantry.

“Ump!” grunted Twasla.

[151]

“There are men on top the island hunting for him and others are chasing him down the beach. He can’t get away from them.”

“Me try hit fly, him not there!” replied Twasla.

“I don’t see how you sit here through it all, with all this excitement right on your front porch.”

“Ump! When gun shoot, good time no be seen.”

Clem laughed. “That’s true enough.”

The girl was busy with a glass of milk and a sandwich a quarter of an hour later when the sound of returning voices brought her to the door with a rush.

“Did you get him? Dave, did you?” she cried, as the three came into the light from the doorway.

“I tell you, Sis,” ejaculated Dave, rather wildly, “I was right at his heels when he threw himself into the water alongside the cliff. He splashed out up to his waist and then seemed to strike a hole. Down he went and he never came up! We waited and watched for ten minutes.”

[152]

CHAPTER XI

THE UNCLAIMED DIAMOND

Clem groaned, clawed desperately at the bedclothes about her throat, and twisted around in the agonies of a nightmare.

Creeping toward her, in dripping garments, was the man in the fish mask. His hands were raised to seize her. With a frantic surge in the opposite direction, Clem awoke to find herself sprawling, in a riot of sheets and blankets, on the rug between the bed and the commode.

Big Boy, the hound, was whining nervously in front of her. It was broad daylight. She blinked and raised herself to a sitting position. The dog whuffed his pleasure and cut short Clem's yawn with a too-affectionate lick of his rough tongue.

"Ugh! Get out!" exclaimed the girl, struggling to her feet. The dog retreated to the door and stood with his head cocked to one side as though expecting a continuation of her wild gymnastics.

"Hey, Sis," came Dave's strong voice from the front porch. "Morgan's yacht just anchored off the Point."

Clem came to full wakefulness with a start. She answered her brother's call and hurried about her dressing.

[153]

So Mr. Morgan, who had given her the *Gypsy*, was back again. Had he heard that the warehouse was to be abandoned? Did he still desire to get control of the place? Had he brought his

small grandchild with him? It would be pleasant to have someone to take walks with, and now that a day had passed with no sign of the man whom Dave had seen disappear beneath the Sound at the foot of the cliff, Clem felt that the danger was past.

Ward—the man in the fish mask—had met his fate near the very spot where his partner Blackie had plunged into the bay. Yes, old Fish-mask had jumped into the water thinking to make his escape by swimming, but the treacherous hole had claimed him. The possibility that the postmaster was the cause of the midnight laughter was shattered, although Dave still maintained that Mr. Fowler could solve the mystery definitely if he had a mind to.

“He knows the secret or else I’m off,” had been Dave’s firm assertion.

Friday morning now, a day since Captain Main had left in *Number 263*, convinced that the bombing episode was closed, a day since Dave had been informed that his work was nearly over.

Thursday morning Bunte had come by in his big rowboat and stopped at the *Gypsy*. He had listened with deep interest to Clem’s account of her adventures. He had shared Clem’s belief that Ward’s fate had been an appropriate one, and had shaken his head solemnly as he said: “One thing only I reckon ta regrit—his goin’ thet way means a restless spirit; one as may hant the Point fer years.” [154]

What an idea for a person to have! And yet no more absurd

than that of the warehouse exploding in certain weather.

In the afternoon, Clem had made an uneventful trip to the banks, following upon the heels of the regular fishermen. She had brought in nine salmon, none more than five pounds, to show for her afternoon. The buyer at the fish dock had dropped \$2.16 into her eager hand and later she had made entries in the notebook which reposed beside the diamond ring in the bureau drawer.

These were the items:

Wednesday \$7.05

(This will pay for a pair of brown oxfords)

Thursday \$2.16

(The sleeve of a winter coat)

Clem had paused in her dressing as she thought over yesterday's events. She had produced the notebook from its hiding place to gloat over this concrete evidence of success.

"I'll make the fish put me through school yet!" she [155]
announced to the hound. "I'm going to finish making those flag signals before I go out again and then I'll show those professional fishermen a thing or two. Maybe by to-night I can put another coat sleeve in my bank."

"And if no one claims the diamond—well, then! H-m-m, let me see how I'll spend the money from that. Some is going for new curtains for the living room, and I'm going to get a good thick rag rug for in front of Dave's bed. No! Why can't I remember! We probably won't be living here for more than a few days more now that Dave's job is going to end. I guess that means

I'll be getting curtains for our tent windows!"

Clem laughed. "Tell me, Big Boy, what color curtains would you suggest for our tent windows?"

The dog sat down on his haunches and gravely offered to shake hands.

"You're a wise old puppy." Clem ruffled the hair on his neck.

"Hey, Clem, I'm going down to the post office in the rowboat. Want to go 'long?" called Dave from the breakfast table.

"Sure I do," replied Clem, running a comb through her hair as a final touch to her preparations for the day. "Someone may come in answer to my advertisement about the diamond."

"Well, as soon as you have had your breakfast come on [156]
down to the boat," instructed Dave. "I've some things to get ready and I want to keep an eye on what Morgan is doing."

"I saw Bunte pulling out toward the yacht just now," said Clem as she came into the room.

"Well, chances are that he's going to take Morgan out for a fishin' trip while the tide's right. I think we can get away long enough to take the run up to the store all right."

"If I get half a chance I'm going to ask Mr. Morgan what he knows about Twasla," said Clem.

"Huh!" snorted Dave from the door. "Pretty ticklish question, I should say, Sis. If you've got to keep up with your question

asking why don't you sound Twasla out regarding Jim Novak?"

"I have, Dave. I don't think she knows whether he is alive or not. Say, Dave, why don't you see if Mr. Morgan won't give you a job? He might have a place——"

"Not much chance after the way I had to treat him the other day. But I'm willing to tackle him. I'm afraid that jobs are about as scarce as hen's teeth."

"Well, Dave, don't get discouraged so soon. You're a husky young brute! I may hire you myself as a chauffeur for the *Gypsy*."

"Suppose you'll want me to wear knee britches and a full-dress suit and say, 'Yes, ma'am'!"

"Of course, and occasionally I'll have you step out in the bay and walk around the *Gypsy* to see if there are any flat tires." [157]

Dave snorted as he rattled down the porch steps to load the rowboat for the trip to the post-office dock. Clem proceeded to eat her breakfast in haste.

"May Big Boy go along?" she called from the open door after she had devoured the last piece of toast.

"Sure, bring him along," was Dave's answer.

Twenty minutes later Clem sat on the post-office dock waiting for Dave to conclude his business. In her hand was a portion of a newspaper. Her attention was centered on a small

advertisement.

FOUND: Diamond ring long buried half mile south
Wilton, Whidby Island. Inquire Clementine Fargar.

Clem eyed the advertisement with satisfaction. She had a feeling that her name rather stood out on the page of the newspaper. For a moment she forgot her surroundings. The chickens in the crate upon which she was sitting thrust craning necks unmolested through the cedar slats. The big hound stretched his long limbs upon the rough planks of the dock and permitted one eye to close. With the other he kept up a desultory search amongst the boxes and bales of the warehouse for any trace of the yellow tom-cat that had so misused him on a previous visit. Several men and women stood in groups upon the dock patiently awaiting the arrival of the passenger boat that even now could be seen working across the channel from the mainland.

“Hey, Clem!”

[158]

The shout failed to penetrate.

“Hey, Clem, you’ve got a letter!”

The girl’s glance left the thumbed copy of the Seattle paper, passed over the blue expanse of Puget Sound, and finally focused on the figure running out on the dock from the direction of the post office.

“What’s that, Dave?” questioned Clem.

“Letter! Wake up!” answered Dave Fargar as he came to a halt beside his sister. “About the diamond, I’ll bet. It’s from Seattle. I’ll open it for you.”

“Hold on,” protested Clem, snatching the envelope from Dave’s hand. “Davie dear, who gave you license to open private mail?”

“Private!” Dave snorted. “Don’t put on airs with me, young lady.”

Clementine, busy with the letter, paid no attention.

“Who helped you fix up that ‘ad’ for the paper? Huh?”

“Dave,” exclaimed Clem, “she’s described it to a ‘T.’ Broken prong, and initials ‘A. C.’ See here! Reward!” [159]

Dave seized the letter and read half aloud:

“From your advertisement in the last *Herald*, I am sure you have recovered the engagement ring which I flung from a rowboat twenty years ago. Since I am anxious that the ring never find its way into certain hands, I shall follow this letter on the next boat. I can identify the ring by the fact that one of the prongs that held the stone is broken, and also by the tiny initials ‘A. C.’ engraved inside.

“I shall bestow a reward of \$100 upon the person who found the ring.”

Dave whistled.

“Some money! A good thing since my job will soon be gone. Lucky! Look, she signs herself ‘Anna Campbell,’ and out here to one side she underlines ‘Miss.’ Stayed single, didn’t she?”

“Had a fight with the person she was engaged to, I suppose, and up and tossed the ring overboard. My, I’d never do that!” ejaculated Clem.

“Suppose you’d throw the fellow over instead, eh?”

“Sure, and pawn the ring,” laughed Clem.

“Here comes the Seattle boat now. Maybe the woman is on the *Clatawa*. Give me another squint at the ring before the boat gets here.”

“Go on! You’ve worn half that diamond off already looking at it.”

“Never mind; let’s see it.”

Clem reluctantly produced from her tied handkerchief [160] the small gold ring set with the diamond which the postmaster had pronounced to be worth close to two hundred dollars. Interest had run high up and down the beach over the discovery of the diamond and the placing of the notice in the Seattle paper. So much so that all of the children and most of the men and women found it necessary to be at the dock at boat time. The opening of the letter had started the gathering of a questioning group which crowded closer as the long-buried diamond was displayed in the finder’s palm.

“Now get an eyeful,” cautioned Clem.

“Aw, let me——”

Clem moved her hand playfully.

Dave yielded to youthful impulse and snatched at the engagement token.

The girl jerked her hand and leaped backward at the same instant. Her knees struck the corner of the crate of chickens. She lost her balance, struggled wildly for a moment, and then lit shoulder first on the watersoaked loading slip that slanted abruptly to the bay.

A sickening moment of suspense in which Dave threw himself upon the dock alongside of the slip and tried in vain to grasp his sliding sister. Then Clem disappeared over the edge of the slip.

A gasp from the onlookers. A splash as the girl struck the water head first eight feet below. [161]

Clem was slightly stunned by her fall upon the slippery slant. She was not sure what had happened until the water closed about her, then automatically she curved her body for a shallow dive. She felt her hip grazed by some rough object. She had turned just in time to prevent a head-on collision with one of the dock supports. Upward she swam, lungs protesting, heart pounding; with eyes open she was keenly aware of darting fish, a rope trailing downward to the postmaster's crab trap, and the swaying shadow of the dock in the green water about her.

A muffled sound increased to a heavy churning and at the moment that Clem's head came to the surface in the space beneath the dock, the Seattle steamer nosed up to its landing place. The girl clutched a piece of sharp barnacle projecting from one of the supports and hung on, gasping.

A confusion of shouts and much running about came from the dock above. Bells sounded from aboard the *Clatawa* and the boat began to back out cautiously.

As the white side of the boat swept past, a yard away, a deck hand stuck his head out of an opening, beheld the exhausted girl and sent up a megaphone shout: "I got her!"

Five minutes later Clem was seated once more on the crate of chickens, her clothes drying rapidly in the hot sun. Most of the new arrivals from the steamer and the passengers had joined the crowd on the dock. The general attention had put Clem in a comfortable glow. [162]

And then came Dave's worried question: "The ring, Clem; where's the diamond?"

Raising her empty hands, Clem gazed at them blankly.

"Haven't you got it, Dave?"

Dave shook his head without a word.

The diamond was gone!

A chorus of inquiries and guesses burst from the crowd. Was the ring now resting on the floor of the Sound beneath the dock?

Could a diver possibly find it? Might not the ring have been tossed by the girl in such a way that it now lay somewhere upon the dock?

Fifty people began searching the surrounding space.

With a cry, Clem jumped up from where she sat and pointed down at the cackling hens.

“I remember! When I tripped backward, the hand I had the ring in hit on top of that crate. Felt like just over a crack. The ring’s either in the crate or in one of those chickens.”

As the people crowded in around the hens, Dave jerked [163] the address tag from the end of the crate and thrust it into the hands of the postmaster.

“You know the fellow that owns these chickens,” Dave spoke in a rapid undertone, “you’d better take charge of them for him.”

Dan Fowler’s mouth twitched as he read the tag. He pushed back a gray forelock and gazed around at the expectant group.

“’Twon’t take but a jiffy to see if the ring’s in the crate. We’ll just move the hens into this empty crate. Dave, you hand ’em over to me.”

With much squawking from the chickens and crowding from the onlookers, the change was accomplished, but the bottom boards revealed no trace of the missing diamond.

“See here,” demanded a thin-faced young man who had been

one of the first to come down the gangplank of the *Clatawa*, “Swain’s my name and ’fore ya go any further, I just want ta say that this here diamond belonged to my old man. He seen the notice in the paper an’ sent me ta get the rock for him. I’m prepared to post a reward just as soon as I lay eyes on the ring.”

Clem fingered the letter in her pocket and exchanged a glance of amazement with Dave.

“Can you describe the ring?” asked the postmaster, as he straightened up from the chicken crate.

“Sure; it’s an old-fashioned settin’. The old man was campin’ over here ’round twenty years ago. He had the ring on a string ’round his neck. He was out cleanin’ a fish one mornin’ an’ when he noticed a bit later, he seen the ring was gone. The string had broke and the diamond was lost in the sand.” [164]

“So that’s how it come in the sand!” exclaimed Dan Fowler. “By gum, I been figgerin’ an’ figgerin’ on how that diamond ring could ’a’ got where Clem found it. Seems like it should ’a’ been——” Mr. Fowler’s remark trailed off into contemplation.

“Dave,” said Clem, “do you think one of those chickens swallowed that diamond?”

“Guess it could have, but I don’t know whether it did or not.”

Clem caught Dave’s shirt and pulled him to one side. As they whispered together, the general conversation continued.

“See here, Mr. Postmaster,” went on the new claimant as he lit a cigarette, “you know who owns these hens?”

Dan Fowler pulled out the address card and surveyed it solemnly.

“Yep, I know the fellow that’s shipping these birds and I know the fellow they’re goin’ to.”

“Sell ’em to me for your friend. I’ll give you two dollars apiece for them. That’s more’n twice as much as what he’d get in the market.”

“Wait a second,” put in Harry Young, captain of the *Clatawa*, “I’ll take a chance on that diamond. Since it’s lost I guess that the person who finds it ought to get something out of its sale. I’ll give you two and a half a piece for the chickens.” [165]

“Mr. Fowler,” exclaimed Clem, “let Dave and me speak to you a second.”

The trio withdrew to the edge of the dock to talk in vigorous undertones. Apparently Clem protested once, but was overruled. Then the postmaster chuckled and turned to the impatient audience.

“Just a minute, boys; just a minute!” laughed Mr. Fowler. “Dave here is goin’ to auction off these here fowl one at a time. Understand, we ain’t goin’ to guarantee that the ring’s in the craw of one of these fool hens. You buy at your own risk—puttin’ up the money as you take the chicken.”

“Well, snap it up,” complained Captain Young; “we pull out of here in twenty minutes. I can’t hold the *Clatawa* any longer than that.”

“Hey, you got no right sellin’ ta anyone but me, seein’ I’m the rightful owner,” declared Swain, with a show of indignation.

“You haven’t proved it yet,” retorted Clem flatly. “Your [166] description of the ring was the same as saying, ‘The cow had a tail.’ I’ve a letter here that comes a lot nearer proving who owns the diamond. Guess she didn’t come on the boat _____”

“Who didn’t come on the boat?” interrupted Dan Fowler, suddenly serious faced.

“Say, young lady,” yelled Swain, elbowing his way toward Clem, “do you mean to say I’m lyin’? Huh?”

“You won’t get the ring now without paying for it,” said Clem.

“The two of you keep quiet and give Dave a chance with these hens. The ring’s lost and whoever finds it is going to have the deciding on what’s to be done with it,” emphasized Captain Young. “If the fellow who gets the ring is honest, he’ll do what he can toward finding the real owner just as this young lady has been trying to do.”

The general backing given the captain’s remarks by the crowd helped Swain to calm himself and turn his attention to Dave who had mounted an empty box and was exhibiting hen Number One.

“Fine for fryin’,” began Dave; “place your bids, ladees and gentlemen. Reported to have inside information on the whereabouts of a \$200 diamond. What am I offered?”

“Two dollars.”

“Three.”

“Three-fifty.”

“Four.”

[167]

The fact that there were still nine hens in the crate caused the bidders to hesitate.

“Goin’—goin’—gone for four dollars to Mr. Pain. Step up, Mr. Pain, and give the postmaster four dollars.”

“My name’s Swain—not Pain,” growled the thin-faced bidder, as he paid over the money.

He retired at once to the warehouse accompanied by nine tenths of the crowd. A hatchet and a block of wood made short work of the suspense—Mr. Swain had drawn a blank.

The second chicken brought seven dollars and, a minute later, several specially selected words from Captain Young. A pool of summer colonists took Number Three at nine dollars, and Number Four at seventeen dollars, thanks to a wave of excitement.

Swain paid twelve dollars to satisfy his curiosity regarding the fifth hen. Number Six dropped to eight dollars and Number

Seven increased the bulge of the postmaster's hip pocket with fifteen dollars. The theory was that "seven" would be a lucky number—it wasn't.

Bidding wavered on the eighth chicken. Some had lost faith in the idea that the ring had been swallowed, others felt that their chances were increasingly good now that only three hens remained.

"Don't pass this opportunity to secure a special Sunday dinner," shouted Dave, imitating the style of a side-show barker. "Here's an eighteen-carat hen guaranteed to boil, roast, or fry. Who'll make it eleven dollars?" [168]

"I'll make it eleven," answered Clem. So far she had refrained from bidding. Dave turned in surprise, waved the chicken toward his sister, lost his hold upon the fowl, and the next moment the hen was hitting the high places across the heads of the crowd in a spectacular escape.

"Get 'em, Big Boy, get 'em!" bellowed Dave to the hound who was drowsing quietly within the circle.

The dog whirled to his feet, caught a fleeting glimpse of the chicken through the opening lane of befeathered people, and spurted forward in pursuit.

The deck hand who had pulled Clem out of the Sound, and who had been lounging near the outer rim of the crowd, lunged at the passing hen. The movement unfortunately placed him directly in line of passage. Unable to swerve aside, the dog piloted a lightning course between the fellow's legs. Backward the victim rolled in an abrupt sprawl. From some portion of him

something flashed in a tiny arc, zigzagged for a moment across the rough dock and came to a stop beneath the astounded eyes of Dave Fargar.

The lost diamond lay glittering in the sun.

[169]

Acting on the same impulse, Swain and Dave flung themselves at the ring. Dave hit the boards first, Swain on top of him, and the next second the two figures were heaving and tossing like devil-ridden wild-cats in the renewed circle.

Big Boy in pursuit of his feathered siren and the thieving deck hand were forgotten in the excitement as the crowd milled and shouted.

“The ring!”

“Did Dave get it?”

“I’ll bet it dropped through the crack.”

“Go it, Dave. Attaboy.”

“Where’s the diamond?”

These and a hundred other cries sent the sea gulls winging from the ridge pole of the warehouse and caused a solitary figure in the doorway of the post office to hurry toward the dock. Clem stood spellbound by the rapid action at her feet. She felt no alarm for Dave. Her confidence in his strength was supreme, but nevertheless her pulse quickened and she found herself swaying to and fro in unison with the wrestlers.

When Dave had felt Swain's weight strike him, he had [170]
hunched his back, jerked up one knee beneath himself,
and had shot his elbows into Swain's body. The poolroom
loafer's left arm flashed down around Dave's neck for the
vicious hammer lock, but Dave seized his opponent's wrist
with both hands and dropped forward upon his own shoulder.
The fall caught Swain's elbow squarely on the funny-bone; the
arm went limp, and, in response to a prompt upward surge
from Dave's shoulders, Swain rolled off with a groan.

"Stop it, you men! Stop that fight!" came a strong feminine
voice from the outskirts of the group.

Clem darted a glance up in time to see a small woman in a blue
dress forcing her way in. The rolling pair separated and rose
automatically to glower at each other.

"Is one of you Clementine Fargar?" questioned the woman,
advancing to the center of the crowd and glancing around at the
faces. "I expected to be directed by the postmaster but he is
gallivanting around neglecting his duties. Which one of you is
the——"

A roar of laughter caused her to whirl about. Fat Dan Fowler
had suddenly forsaken his hold on Swain and was headed for
the warehouse on his hands and knees. As the lady turned, he
gained his feet and sprinted between the onlookers.

"What on earth possessed that fat old freak?" exclaimed the
woman in astonishment.

Clem caught her breath and jerked the letter from her pocket.

“Are you Miss Campbell? Did you write this letter?” [171]
she sputtered.

“I am Miss Campbell,” replied the woman rather primly and with emphasis upon the “Miss.”

As she spoke, Dave ejected something from his mouth into his palm.

Stretching out his hand he spoke, “There’s your diamond ring, Miss Campbell!”

With an exclamation of emotion, the little lady in blue bent over the extended hand. Her fingers clasped together tightly but she made no move to pick up the ring. A silence fell upon the dock as Miss Campbell gazed upon the long-lost diamond. Then her head began slowly to shake.

“Isn’t it yours, Miss Campbell?”

“Of course it ain’t hers,” shouted Swain; “it’s my old man’s and I’ve got reward money here to pay over.”

At the sound of the new voice, Miss Campbell straightened and turned upon the poolroom loafer. He quailed beneath her glance.

“The ring is mine beyond question,” Miss Campbell said quietly. “I have already identified it completely in my letter. Whoever this rowdy man may be, he is an impostor. No doubt he saw the advertisement and schemed to secure the diamond by giving a small reward.”

As she paused, Swain elbowed his way toward the steamer's gangplank.

[172]

"Take it, Miss Campbell," said Clementine, picking up the ring from Dave's palm. "I'm sure that it is yours."

The lady in blue slipped a roll of bills into Clem's hand.

"There, Clementine Fargar, is the reward, but in return for it I must ask you to do with the ring precisely as I direct. I never want to touch it again."

As the woman caught her breath, the crowd came still closer in fear of losing the quiet words.

"I want you, Clementine, to step to the edge of the dock and throw that ring as far as you can, out into the Sound."

A gasp of amazement went up from the audience.

"But, Miss Campbell——!"

"Listen, Clementine," the little woman laid her hand on the girl's wrist, "there is the broken prong and inside you see the initials 'A. C.' just as I described them. You are convinced the ring is mine. I have given a liberal reward. Years ago I threw that engagement ring away in a fit of anger. I am no longer angry, but I wish the past to remain buried and I can imagine no happier burial spot than that sun-kissed stretch of blue water. Can you refuse my request now?"

"Well, Miss Campbell, seems—like—seems like——"

Clem gave up her attempt at expression and scuffed

[173]

reluctantly toward the edge of the dock at the prow of the *Clatawa*. She raised her arm to throw.

“Wait, Clem! Hold up a minute!”

It was the voice of the postmaster.

CHAPTER XII

“A. C.” ASKS A QUESTION

The postmaster's face was pale; perspiration stood out on his forehead as he walked from the warehouse straight toward the lady in blue.

A curious expression came over Miss Campbell's countenance as Mr. Fowler came into full view. It was the look of one who glimpses the past, the present, and the future, and is bewildered.

“Annie,” pleaded Mr. Fowler, “Annie, if you like, throw away again the ring I gave you, but, Annie, forgive me for bein' the cause of it all!”

Miss Campbell drew a deep sobbing breath.

“Dan Fowler, all these years you've stayed here?”

“Yes, Annie. Thinking of you every time I sorted the letters.”

As they stood looking into each other's eyes, the crowd [175] melted like snow under the warmth of June. Dave Fargar, behind the couple, made a vigorous gesture at Clem. Clem's face broke into a smile. Quietly she tiptoed back of the postmaster, slipped the diamond ring into one of Mr. Fowler's generous hands, and, with Dave, hurried for the post office. A dozen paces and they were halted by the voice of the postmaster. There was a new happiness in the tone.

“Dave, come here and get the \$72 your chickens sold for. Lucky for you that you decided to ship ’em to Seattle to-day! And, Clem, I want you to meet my sweetheart, Annie Campbell.”

“Oh, Miss Campbell,” gasped Clem, her eyes sparkling with near tears. “Aren’t you thankful I was so slow when you wanted me to throw the ring?”

The little lady in blue eased herself from the postmaster’s detaining arm and abruptly kissed Clem’s cheek. “Of course I’m glad, child, although ten minutes ago I wouldn’t have believed it possible for me to feel as I do this minute.”

“The ring looks so nice on your finger. I’m so glad it isn’t lying out there in that cold water. I do believe it’s got a new sparkle to it just since you put it on,” exclaimed Clem, thrilled with the romantic incident she had witnessed.

Miss Campbell gazed at the ring with a faint flush on her cheek. Then, with a glance toward Dan Fowler, who was transferring the chicken money from his pocket to Dave, she whispered to Clem: “Perhaps the ring is reflecting some of the light in my heart, dear.”

“Why have you never come together before, Miss Campbell?” asked Clem, in a low voice. [176]

“Dear, just because we’ve both been too proud, or too submissive to circumstances.” The woman’s voice wavered. “People are foolish that way sometimes—allow a silly something to cut away the best years of their——”

The postmaster turned from Dave with a laugh.

“I had a hard time, Clem,” he cried, “not to let on when you showed me the ring the other day. ’Twas a shock to have that diamond and those initials dropped in my hand. Like as not that is one reason you came in answer to the advertisement, Annie—me thinking about you so hard.”

Miss Campbell smiled as she answered: “One thing you may be sure of, Dan Fowler, I had no idea that you were here or else——”

“There now, Annie,” interrupted the postmaster, “let’s not get started again. We might not be so lucky twenty years from now. Clem might not dig up the ring again.”

“Oh, Mr. Fowler, would you mind if I were to invite Miss Campbell to spend a week with me?” said Clem eagerly. “I’d just love to have her.”

“Mind?” replied Dan Fowler. “Nothing would please me more, if you can persuade Annie to stay where I can see her. No more than fair for her to have a chance to get acquainted with me again ’fore I ask her to tie herself for keeps to a poor postmaster.” [177]

“*That* was decided, Dan, when I let you put that ring back on my finger, but I would enjoy a visit with you, Clem. There’s nothing to keep me from staying right now,” said Miss Campbell.

“Lovely,” exulted Clem. “I’ll take you down in the rowboat. Dave and Big Boy won’t mind walking, and Mr. Fowler can

come down for dinner this evening. Can't you, Mr. Fowler?"

"Say, now, I'd like to see anybody try to keep me away. Won't even let that fish-mask laughin' hyena scare me out."

"I wonder," thought Clem, "whether there *can* be any night laughs with the postmaster indoors? If there is anything to that suspicion, I'd hate to have this sweet little woman marry him."

Then in her mind she tried to identify the figure that had leaped from the Devil's Swing to the roof of the warehouse with the figure of the stout postmaster. She found the task a difficult one although she admitted to herself that the moonlight plays strange pranks and that madness might make a heavy person agile. "I'll have to tell her," thought Clem regretfully, as the preparations for the return to the powder dock were being made. "Dave thinks the man in the fish mask is done for—maybe he is——"

"How'd it be, Clem, if I fix up the dessert for the celebration to-night?" asked the postmaster, standing with his big hands swinging like those of a lad overrun with joy. "There's a brand-new freezer of strawberry ice cream. I'll bring the whole thing down." [178]

"Attaboy!" chimed in Dave. "Maybe for once in my life I can stow away enough ice cream."

"All right, Mr. Fowler," said Clem with delight, although not quite so ready as Dave to voice her inner feelings about the ice cream. "Bring a good appetite also. We'll have a tip-top meal even if all the hyenas in the world play ring-around-the-rosie with our house as the center."

“Come early, Dan,” said Miss Campbell, as she moved toward the rowboat.

“Let’s see,” the postmaster produced a silver watch, “nigh eleven o’clock now. If Clem’s to have the meal at six, I’d better commence getting ready now to shut up the post office.”

“Ho! Ho!” laughed Dave, “must be you’re goin’ to shave and everything.”

“Come on, Clementine,” smiled Miss Campbell, “these men will keep up their joking until Judgment Day.”

Except for an occasional word, Annie Campbell [179] allowed Clem to furnish the conversation during the row home. Clem watched the new friend from under her eyelashes. Miss Campbell was small of frame yet seemingly of untiring energy. The gray edges of hair around her face softened into a darker hue beneath the small roll-rimmed hat of blue; gray eyes, that had the interesting habit of opening wide when the owner spoke, dominated the straight nose and firm chin.

“I can understand,” thought Clem, “why she tossed the ring away. She must have been impulsive and determined when she was a young girl, but she seems to have got control of herself since then. There is such a kind look about her mouth, I’m sure that I shall just love to have her with me.”

After lunch was over Clem and Miss Campbell settled themselves on the front porch of the cottage.

“There must be some mending I can help you with,” suggested Miss Campbell, as she sank into the rocking chair.

Clem brought out a work basket piled with stockings. “You know I don’t mind doing stockings when I have company to talk to, but when I’m alone stockings are the last thing I take up.”

“I say, Miss Campbell,” grinned Dave, who was [180]
lingering at the porch step, “that’s another good reason why I’m glad you’re going to visit us.”

“My,” said Clem, “to hear him talk you would think I had been abusing him for years, even though I’ve only been here a week.”

“Well,” replied Dave, as he moved away toward the warehouse, “it seems like a couple of years—so much has happened since you came.”

“You haven’t found it monotonous, have you, dear?” said Miss Campbell. “Won’t you tell me about yourself? Just begin back as far as you can remember.”

“Well, there isn’t much to tell up to ten days ago. You see the really important part has been happening since I arrived here.”

“That’s just the way with life, Clementine,” exclaimed Miss Campbell, with a tinge of exasperation; “years will spin along smoothly and then, all of a sudden, a thousand and one things happen. It seems more than odd that a chance glance at a newspaper advertisement has brought me here and reopened the past as it has.”

“What I’m wondering, Miss Campbell, is how much [181]
longer my days are going to be crowded. Really, I don’t blame Dave for saying that it seems like a couple of years so

far as events are concerned. I guess I'll have to go back to Seattle for a rest." Clem's laugh burst forth.

"Go on with your life story, dear," suggested Miss Campbell.

"Well," commenced Clem, "I was in the dumps when I landed here. The eye doctor wished these glasses on to my nose and cut short my senior work in high school. I thought at first that the end of my world had come. I was moping around at Dave's heels out on the dock wishing for some way to earn money when the *Gypsy*—you can see it anchored out there now—left Mr. Morgan's yacht to land here on the beach. That's Mr. Morgan's boat off the Point—the white one with the red line."

"What Morgan is that?" asked Miss Campbell, lifting her work glasses to gaze in the direction that Clem was pointing.

"Thomas Morgan, president of the Morgan Powder Company."

"Tom Morgan! Has he a high forehead and heavy eyebrows?"

"Yes, Miss Campbell."

"Then that's the very one who was in these parts when I was no more than a child. Seems like there was two brothers. Used to trade with the Indians. But pardon me for interrupting your story."

"Mr. Morgan gave me the *Gypsy* because I managed to help him and his granddaughter when the boat hit a submerged stump. And now I plan to spend the summer as a professional fisherwoman. Dave will be out of a job in a day or so. The powder warehouse is to be abandoned, you know. [182]

So he may join me at fishing.”

“Do you intend to have nets and——”

“Oh, no, we’ll just troll. That’s what most of the fishermen around here do. Only once in a while the purse seiners come into the bay. I hope that one comes while you are here. We’ll row out and watch them work their nets. Won’t that be fun?”

“I would enjoy that, Clementine,” answered Miss Campbell.

“I had a frightful time raising the *Gypsy*,” went on Clem, “but an old fisherman named Bunte gave me an idea that helped out. Then the first time I went out to fish I ran out of gas and Bunte helped me again. Coming home that time I was chased by a government boat—I didn’t know until they caught me that they were after rum-runners. We were both pretty nearly blown sky high right down there at the Point when they were going to search the *Gypsy*. There’s somebody who has been doing some mighty funny things around here—a fellow who wears a mask made of dried fish skin. He tied up Dave and Tom Trent at a cabin up on the Point; he tossed two bombs down at the federal boat and the *Gypsy*, and he took a ride in the Devil’s Swing that same night when Captain Main was on the island hunting for him.”

“You don’t say!” exclaimed Miss Campbell, resting her [183]
mending in her aproned lap as she looked across at Clem.

Clem wondered if this were not an opportune time to hint of the possibility of the postmaster’s knowing the secret of the man in the fish mask. She felt it her duty, and yet she dreaded to voice

the suspicion since it was no more than an ungrounded idea. After all, ought she to do anything that might separate the two again? Still, would it not be better for this impulsive little woman if she knew that Dave thought that beneath Mr. Fowler's good nature was a scheming mind that held the secret of the fish mask?

Clem hesitated. "Mr. Fowler says that there used to be a fellow employed here named Jim Novak," she said slowly.

"Yes," replied Miss Campbell, "and a wild Norwegian he was if there ever was one. I think that I'd know him if——"

"Mr. Fowler thinks that Jim Novak may be the man in the fish mask; may have returned to get even with the powder company for firing him, but Twasla—she was Novak's wife, you know—says he will never come back."

"Well, if Dan Fowler thinks that, I wouldn't be surprised if——" Miss Campbell broke off her sentence abruptly. "What does your brother think?" she demanded. "Seems to me from what you have said that Dave's guess ought to come nearer than anyone's." [184]

Clem had been asked a point-blank question upon the very matter that she had debated with herself. She could not avoid the question. She fumbled in her mind for words with which to put Dave's theory as gently as possible. Gazing out over the bay, restless at falling tide, she noted the landing of several rowboats bringing ashore men from the fishing boats.

"I wonder what luck the men have had to-day," she said, in hopes of putting off the evil moment.

One of the men had detached himself from the group and was lumbering up the path past the Devil's Swing. He doffed his hat and climbed the porch steps holding between thumb and forefinger an envelope.

"You're Dave's sister, ain't ya?" said the man to Clem.

The girl nodded.

"This here letter is for ya, then."

Clem took the white envelope mechanically. As the fisherman departed, she glanced at the address:

MISS CLEMENTINE FARGAR

Nothing more.

CHAPTER XIII

OUT OF THE PAST

Clem sat for a moment in silence. She was glad of the interruption that put off the answering of Miss Campbell's question. With this feeling of relief was mingled surprise over the letter in her lap. Who was there that might have sent a letter to her? Had Mr. Fowler found something to prevent his coming to dinner? Whether any of the rowboats had come from the direction of the post office or not, Clem had not noticed.

"Why don't you open it, dear?" asked Miss Campbell.

"I can't imagine——" began Clem as she tore the envelope open. She glanced hurriedly down the page. "Oh, it's an invitation for Dave and me to take dinner to-night aboard Mr. Morgan's yacht! Oh, isn't that——"

"Now, my dear," said the little woman quietly, "there's not a thing to prevent——"

"But," interrupted Clem, "I wouldn't think of letting anything interfere with our dinner here."

"Listen, Clementine," said Miss Campbell, "you won't think me 'bossy,' I hope, but why couldn't Dan Fowler and I go right ahead and have dinner together here? Twasla can do the most of the work. While you and Dave go right on to the yacht? Really, dear, we won't mind. We've a great deal to talk about. Won't you go?" [186]

“You’re so nice to offer. Would it be all right for us to go?”

“Of course, Clementine.”

“Well, Mr. Morgan has taken it for granted that we will come. He says that he expects us on the *Gypsy* by six o’clock.”

“And you shall go. We’ll consider that a settled matter. Run over now and tell Dave.”

“I’ll do that,” said Clementine, “and I’ll have everything fixed up with Twasla, though perhaps you had better make the salad the last thing yourself.”

Clem ran lightly down the steps. “I’m not sure that Dave will go. He is looking forward to that freezer of strawberry ice cream that Mr. Fowler said he would bring.”

“There will be some waiting for him when you get back from the yacht,” reassured Miss Campbell. “And I’m sure that we can look after the powder warehouse while you are away.”

And so it was that at five minutes to six the *Gypsy* slid up to its old place alongside the yacht’s white side, and Clem and Dave mounted to the deck of the *Memory*. Mr. Morgan, resplendent in white yachting costume, was there to greet them. Quite a different picture he made from the last time they had seen him, just after his rescue from the bay. [187]

“I’m glad,” said Mr. Morgan, with a grave smile, “that you felt you could leave the powder house long enough to dine with me. After I had sent the note, I feared that this young man’s suspicious nature might make him hesitate. Evidently he

decided that I was not luring him away in order to seize possession.”

Dave laughed. “Lucky for us, friends are at the house this afternoon and evening. Otherwise, I’m afraid I wouldn’t be here.”

“From what rumor says,” remarked Mr. Morgan, as he led the way to the rear of the yacht where the dinner table was spread beneath an awning, “your watching days at the powder dock will soon be over, young man.”

“I suppose it’s no secret,” replied Dave, with a touch of gloom, “that the place is to be abandoned. Well, there is one thing I would like to do before I leave the powder.”

“And what is that?” inquired Mr. Morgan.

Dave waited until the three of them were seated and the manservant had disappeared toward the galley. “I’d like to solve the secret of that rock up there—Vanishing Rock, you might call it.” As he spoke, Dave pointed upward in the direction of the island top where the mysterious rocky ledge was clearly discernible beneath a fringe of rugged trees. [188]

Mr. Morgan glanced at Dave in surprise. “You don’t mean to say that *you* have ever seen anything vanish from that rock!” he exclaimed.

“One moment I saw a man on that rock. The next second he was gone,” replied Dave.

“Hm-m,” mused Mr. Morgan, tapping on the table edge with

finger tips. “You bring to mind something that I saw more than forty years ago. I asked you and your sister here to talk over another matter, but business can wait, and you may find interesting an account of an experience I had in the early days. The story is perhaps of additional interest when you know that the strange events took place on ground you are familiar with—the island point—and that my companion in the adventure was no other than your old fisherman friend Bunte.”

Both Dave and Clem exclaimed over the prospects of such a story.

“I wonder,” thought Clem, “if this story will explain Twasla’s remark that Mr. Morgan knows how she got the scars on her elbows.”

As the dinner progressed from a thin soup, through a [189] roast of tender beef served with a Spanish sauce, on to a frozen pudding and generous slices of layer cake, Thomas Morgan transported brother and sister back through the years.

“I was just entering manhood, nineteen perhaps. Puget Sound was little settled. My folks had taken a house in the village of Everan and—er—Bunte and I spent a deal of our time fishing and trading in a small way with the Sound Indians.

“One morning in August we decided to sail across from Everan to what is now called Canuse Island. The trip was partly because we had never explored the island and partly because a trapper, visiting my father the night before, had been firm in his assertions that a quantity of Indian ivory was cached on the north point of the island.

“We aimed to take advantage of the tide run, so our pushing off was later than it should have been. We were well in the center of the three-mile space between mainland and the island, when we found a dense fog settling upon us. Our sail flapped useless.

“Of course, like youngsters, we spent several minutes arguing as to whose fault it all was and as to who should take the oars.”

Mr. Morgan paused. He had a certain dramatic ability in [190] his telling of the adventure—a highly interesting quality in his voice and a smooth selection of words that had already caused Clem and Dave to forget the pleasing features of the dinner that was being served.

“As we wrangled back and forth,” went on their host, “Bunte suddenly raised his hand in a gesture of silence.

“‘Listen,’ he whispered; ‘hear that? What is it?’

“‘Dip-dip-dip-dip,’ came a steady sound.

“‘Seems like paddles, and a lot of them,’ said I, in a subdued voice, as we fixed our gaze on that portion of the fog curtain from which the strokes came.

“Slowly the sound traveled from left to right, louder until it was unmistakably the rhythmic dip of many paddles and then perhaps fifty yards away and somewhat past our boat a strange sight took form in the mist. A long war canoe, lined with many dark figures in the uniform motion of wielding paddles, was vaguely visible for a moment. Then with the receding ‘Dip-dip-dip-dip’ the vision vanished.

“Bunte and I turned and stared at each other in astonishment.

““Say, did you see what I saw?’ I exclaimed, thoughts of an Indian uprising flashing through my mind.

““Didn’t look like any Indians I ever saw in these parts,’ [191] replied Bunte; ‘must have been fifty in that war canoe. Tom, I’d hate to have those fellows on my trail. Sh-s-s! Here comes——’

“Sitting there in dread of discovery, we listened to the approach of another craft. Nearer and nearer it came to us as we drifted in that uncanny bank of fog. Apparently they were headed straight for us. In went the oars. Once, twice Bunte strained his utmost. It seemed for a moment that we had passed out of the path of the second war canoe. Then another form loomed before us. The Indians saw us the same moment that we glimpsed them. There was an ejaculation and a command in a jargon I did not fully understand. The big canoe swung toward us and the paddlers lifted their dripping paddles from the water.

“I had crouched forward from the back seat and was lending my strength to the oars. Useless as it was to try to escape from a powerfully manned war canoe, we kept up our struggle in a blind sort of way. I don’t know that I was ever so desperately scared as I was in those moments. I could fairly feel the shoot of the scalping knife around my skull and the tugging at my scalp lock.

“Without even an attempt at pursuit, a big Indian sitting [192] in the stern swung up a rifle from the canoe and fired.

The bullet smashed one of our oars into splinters. So rowing was at an end, and there could be no question as to whether the Indians meant business or not. In silence we waited while the war craft came alongside. I'm sure I was actually scared stiff or else I would have plunged overboard and invited another crack from the rifle.

“There we sat while thirty broad-shouldered, flat-nosed Indians eyed us with dark expectant glances. Their stream of jargon was interrupted by the chief's commands. Two Indians stepped into our boat—the *Clam Shell*—and promptly pinioned our arms behind our backs with bits of rawhide. I breathed more normally for I knew that we were to be taken as prisoners. Even in the confusion I began to hope for an opportunity of escape.

“The tow line was fastened to the end of the war canoe and off we went into the fog. Neither Bunte nor I had offered any resistance. We both had felt it better not to provoke any violence. That would come soon enough if the black looks and growling words were to be depended upon. The unexpectedness of the capture, its absolute impossibility, had dazed us.

“We were at a loss to place these men who had taken us. [193] They were a sturdier type than the Sound Indians. There could be but one possibility as I saw it, and that possibility made me shudder anew. Of the fierce British Columbia Indians, we had heard many a gory tale. These tribes in still earlier days had been equally willing to attack the Coast Indians, the Canoe Indians, or the white settlers of the Sound district. Always they carried back to their northern lodges the

trophies that had gained them the name of ‘Head Hunters.’

“But that had all been twenty years before. Could it be that the wild folly of some Indian chief had brought a war party from the north after these years of inactivity? Had the hand of destiny thrust Bunte and myself into the power of such a party?”

The changing of the dinner course interrupted Mr. Morgan’s tale. Clem eased herself back in her chair with a new conception of this white-haired yacht owner. That he had experienced such a thrilling contact with the Indians, placed him in an entirely new light. Clem recalled that Bunte had said something of the Head Hunters when he had told the story of Blackie and his partner.

“Of this much we were sure,” went on Thomas Morgan, “our arms were securely fastened, our boat was slipping smoothly through the water in the wake of a war canoe whose destination was apparently settled, another canoe was somewhere ahead, and the heavy fog gave no indication of lifting. Shrouded as we were, there could be no hope of rescue from the few boats that plied the Sound in those days.

“Well, I leaned over and whispered to Bunte as to what he thought the Indians would do with us. ‘Tom,’ he replied, ‘I don’t know. If it were the bucks that I’ve seen on the plains I’d expect them to make short work of us or else hold us for ransom, but with these Head Hunters I don’t know.’” [194]

“We kept up occasional remarks speculating on where we were going until, after perhaps two hours had elapsed, the canoe swerved to the right and floated quietly in to a sandy

beach beside the other war canoe. Only one Indian, evidently a guard, was in sight. I know now that our landing spot was right over there in front of where the powder dock stands now. The Indians had swerved south in the fog and had run down here to the head of Whidby Island. Keeping direction in a fog is a thing that Indians manage by instinct when most whites would go wrong even with a compass.

“Bunte whispered to me to watch our chance and make a break for it. He figured that we had better take a running chance than to wait and be butchered like a couple of hogs. I had an idea that I might stall them off by talking so I told Bunte that I was going to try talk—which goes to show how green I was in those days.

“As we disembarked the chief waved for two of his men [195] to take charge of Bunte and me.

“‘Why take us?’ I demanded, putting on a brave front. ‘Why bring us here?’

“‘No talk!’ growled the leader, motioning to the guards who slipped their fingers around our throats. ‘You talk—A-a-aaa!’ and he imitated the gurgle of a strangling person. ‘You run! woshee-e!’ He tapped the well-kept rifle he carried.

“The Indians piled various bundles out of the long canoe and then four of them splashed out alongside the craft, two on each side. Bending down together they raised from within a light framework upon which lay the body of a white-haired, deeply wrinkled Indian clad in the full tribal regalia of a great chief. With the corpse carried thus upon their shoulders the four

warriors led the way up the faint path that crossed the driftwood and ran up the gulch just the way you folks get to the top of the island. Bunte and I brought up the rear except for a rifle-bearing guard who prodded us along whenever he had half an excuse.

“Well, five minutes of stiff climbing brought us to the top of what I began to suspicion must be Whidby Island. [196]
As we trudged deeper inland along that ridge that runs toward the head of the island, our hopes forsook us entirely. We knew Whidby to be wild and uninhabited here at the Point, virtually cut off from all civilization. All in all, it was a place where anything might happen with little likelihood of interruption or revelation.”

Mr. Morgan hesitated, glancing at his eager-faced audience.
“Now that dinner is over, we may be more comfortable in the lounge chairs next the rail.”

He led the way from the table to the side of the yacht where the deck chairs had been placed in readiness.

[197]

CHAPTER XIV

THE HEAD HUNTERS

As they settled themselves in the chairs, Clem looked out at the island lying so close in the twilight. She could almost see the long war canoes beached as Mr. Morgan had described them. It was easy to imagine that the trail up the alder-grown draw was peopled once more with the line of savages bearing aloft the body of the dead chieftain and to Clem, once more the two young men—Bunte and Thomas Morgan—were being urged up the trail to an unknown fate. She squeezed Dave's hand in a little ecstasy of excitement and waited for Mr. Morgan to resume.

“Finally our way led into a level clearing about one hundred feet wide, broken by a solitary evergreen tree near the center,” said their elderly host, blowing a wreath of smoke aloft from his cigar. “Unless I am mistaken, an old cabin stands in the clearing now.”

Clem and Dave exchanged glances.

“A short distance from the tree a big fire served to dispel the clammy touches of the fog which hung so close to earth as to make it impossible to see upward beyond the second branches of the tree. Around the fire the warriors of the first canoe were making such camp preparations as were entirely necessary. It looked as though squaw work was not to their liking. [198]

“Attention was turned upon Bunte and me as we were prodded up to the fire. Only the stern words of the chief kept the crowd from seizing us at once. Taunts and gestures with knives and rifles came thick and fast as we were backed up against the lone tree. Bunte’s face was chalk-white and I suppose mine was also, but we both set our teeth. We wanted to meet whatever was coming without a whimper. We knew that Indians do have some respect for physical courage.

“A rope passed twice around us and the tree held us effectively as captives. While one heavy-shouldered warrior was placing the rope in position, another filled his hand with mud from the banks of a small spring that oozed close by. Without warning he flung the slime in Bunte’s face. Naturally, Bunte went off into a burst of words, but his remarks were cut short by a handful that took him squarely in the mouth. The gang of Indians roared with laughter.

“Within the next three minutes, half the Indians had entered into this new game and Bunte and I were plastered an inch thick with the black mud. The savage fellows seemed to enjoy the mud throwing as much as children to-day might, but you may rest assured that it was far from funny for us. [199]

“All of a sudden a tomahawk whizzed through the air and trembled in the bark between us, not more than two inches from my ear. With a wild whoop, the fellow who had thrown the ax tore his leather shirt off, baring himself to the waist. Then, with the crouched position and quick knee action of the war dance—you’ve seen it in the movies—he approached the spot where the few bundles of baggage lay. Behind him were a string of

imitators. As they passed the tree, tomahawk after tomahawk bit into the bark close to our bodies. One struck another already embedded and gave my face a glancing blow. I thought my time had come when I felt a trickle of blood run down over my muddy chin.

“I could see that the Indians were pulling out cans of their home-made war paint and their feathered headdresses. The whole adventure is vivid in my memory. I notice that details keep coming back as I tell the story. Their distorted faces became even more hideous with the streaks of mourning black.

“Bunte unsealed his lips from the mud and asked me [200] whether I was hurt much. I told him that I guessed it was nothing more than a crack on the nose. Then he told me in a whisper that one of the tomahawks had struck so low that he could pull the rope that was holding us to the tree up against part of the ax bit. He had started to cut through.

““What’ll we do if we do get loose?’ I asked hopelessly. ‘These Indians would catch us in no time. They can run like deer and trail like bloodhounds.’

““Well, I’m going to work along on the rope just the same,’ says Bunte. ‘I’m going to have it so that we can break loose with one heave.’

“We talked over our slim chances for several minutes while the Indians were getting on their paint. It was hard to believe that we were where we were. We knew that a searching party would start out after us in a day or so. We knew that the Indians would be hunted down by the United States and Canadian

governments if our fate ever became known. But the idea that the Indians might be punished eventually didn't seem to comfort us at all.

“As we whispered to each other, the preparations continued before our eyes. Seventy Indians stripped of their upper garments and splotted with the mourning paint, adorned with various feather headdresses and necklaces of claws, shells, or bones! Clem, you might have imagined yourself at a movie or a wild-west show if you'd been there.”

“Say,” gasped Clem, “I'm glad I wasn't there! Go on, Mr. Morgan. Don't stop in such exciting places.” [201]

Mr. Morgan smiled as he resumed his story.

“I had noticed that three of the Indians had not joined the others in the painting. Their short-cut hair in contrast with the braids of the warriors told us that they were slaves. One of them was a young woman, and perhaps you'll be still more interested if you know that that woman lives to-day—you know her—her name is Twasla!”

Both Dave and Clem cried out in surprise.

“Near the central fire,” went on Mr. Morgan, “these slaves were slowly erecting a mound of small logs and dead branches. As each of the warriors completed his ceremonial preparation he took his place to form a sitting circle which finally surrounded the fire and the tree against which Bunte and I were lashed. Then the body of the dead chieftain was borne by the slaves to a position beside the heap of fuel.

“‘Cremation,’ I ejaculated softly. ‘They have come here to burn the old chief’s body!’

“‘Remember how that old scout last night told how the Head Hunters always burn someone with their chief?’ [202] whispered Bunte in my ear and the same thought was in our minds. These Indians had brought us to that place in order to bind us on the funeral pyre of their chief!

“‘We haven’t a ghost of a chance,’ groaned Bunte. ‘We’re done for!’

“Dave, it’s hard to believe, as I sit here this evening, that all this took place up there back of that rocky ledge. Let me tell you it was a strange scene as the leader rose in that circle. Nearly six feet tall with his full war bonnet of eagle feathers increasing that height. By rights he belonged to an earlier generation. On either side of him sat lesser chiefs whose faces reflected back the firelight. The tall, shrouded evergreen trees, as I remember them, formed an impressive background in the dusk. I was in despair and yet I was intensely interested in the sight.

“Slowly the chief began to speak, using at first the meager Indian jargon but gradually introducing snatches of Canadian French and even some English phrases as his thoughts demanded wider expression. I caught the meaning fairly well and his grand style—eloquent to the last degree—sticks in my mind to this day. His remarks went something like this:

“‘Warriors of a fading nation, two suns have sunk since the hand of Darkness settled on the heart of He-Who- [203]

Trails-the-Elk, my father and your tyee. You were near when he made me swear to give him ancient burial on the very ground where first his ax drank the blood of an enemy. Many times have our paddles stabbed the water since we last saw our lodges. No food has passed our lips. We have traced the lines of mourning on our skin. The wood lies ready for the torch.

““The Great Father has sent the curtains of clouds to hide our war canoes as we came downward from the north and he has placed within the reach of our tomahawks these sons of the lying pale face. Before the smoke curls around our tyee, let us counsel!”

“As he sank back to the ground, a young chieftain sprang to his feet.

““Oh, Plintuga, Namer-of-Names, the wailing of squaws in our lodges makes known the passing of your father. Slaves we have brought with us from whom to select a servant to aid him on his journey to the Happy Hunting Grounds, but would his entrance not be more like a great chieftain’s if fresh scalps dangled at his belt?”

“A chorus of grunts and exclamations of approval from the circle followed this suggestion. Again Bunte and I looked at each other in despair. Apparently our scalps were to serve as a funeral ornament. In the back of my mind I began to wonder whether a scalped person ever lived or whether it was a fatal process. Sounds kind of silly now, but I got to thinking that maybe we could strike a bargain with our captors whereby they would only scalp us—and do that gently. Perhaps I was a

bit out of my head from fright. I'll never forget those moments. My heart would do double quick for a minute and then skip a beat. I felt cold and hot by turns, but most of the time perspiration was trying to get through the mud on my face.

“Then, with apparent effort, a shrunken old brave gained his feet, saluted Plintuga, and spoke: ‘I, Ka-mi-a-kin, have seen the salmon come and go more times than can be numbered. This knife let the blood from the first elk your father’s arrows dropped. I have seen the pale face gather like snowflakes of the frozen moon. The warriors of the White Father are everywhere. They have placed our people in their lodges, they will find us there. Oh, Namer-of-Names, he who lies yonder waiting for the warmth of the fire-god would wish no new war to smoke from his ashes. Bind to him a servant as is his right as tyee. Let the shells of chance speak—which of these slaves shall go. I have spoken.’

“The old Indian had spoken against our execution, but [205] the dark glances from the circle quenched the hope that surged up in our breasts. With pounding hearts we watched Plintuga arrange three clam shells, with hollows down, upon the ground before him. Then, at a sign, the miserable slaves—Twasla and the two men—shambled forward. Well they knew the part that one of them must play. The one who drew the shell with the blackened interior would be bound face to face with the dead chief and laid upon the funeral mound to await the torch. It must have been a terrible moment for Twasla.

“With hands that shook, each seized a shell and at a word exposed its inner side. For a moment everything was silent; expressions of joy spread over the faces of Twasla and the

smaller of the men. The third slave swayed as though dazed and then with a wild yell leaped straight over the head of the seated Plintuga and bounded for the protection of the fog-wreathed forest. The suddenness of the act threw the entire group into confusion. Several of the young braves started up in pursuit, but a shout from Plintuga held them back. As though turned into a painting, the scene around the leaping fire lost all motion for a moment.

“The chief calmly waited until the fleeing slave had almost gained the first tree, then with a quick throwing motion he shot. Caught in a leap, the victim doubled into a ball, rolled a few yards, and came to an abrupt halt between two trees. At a sign from Plintuga, the two remaining slaves ran out to bring back the body. As they approached their fallen comrade they hesitated, then went forward again and seemed to strike at something between the trees.

“Shouts of surprise came from the slaves; they pulled at the brush, and what appeared as a part of the underbrush fell away revealing what seemed to be a rough board shack. The watching warriors around the fire leaped into action. Within a minute the door of the place had been crashed in and yells of huge delight issued from those who could crowd their way in. As the crowd eddied indistinctly to and fro around the door it became apparent to Bunte and me that a liquor cache had been discovered. I presume that early traders had established the cache because of its central location. Some of those fellows carried on a big business, with liquor as their best payment. [206]

“Well, one by one the redmen straggled back to the circle, each

with at least one flask. Fully a half hour passed before the council again took up its deliberations, and by then the state of mind had undergone a decided brightening. Whiskey on stomachs kept free from food because of the mourning custom acted with startling rapidity. Excited oratory, in which all the gamut of Indian emotion held sway, was exhibited. What to do with us, the sons of the pale face? A dozen suggestions were made in answer—suggestions that, as far as we could make out, were concerned with the method of doing away with us. Yet no decision was reached! Our fate balanced first one way and then another until at last Plintuga struggled to his feet.

“‘The torch must be thrust beneath the tyee. While the
ashes gather we will let the shells decide over these [207]
white ones. They shall choose their own fate. Bind chief and
fallen slave, pile on the boughs, let the greasy smoke seek the
sky.’

“While these instructions were being carried out, the circle of Indians arose, commenced the funeral chant, and swung into the movements of a tribal dance.

“Horror struck through my very soul as the weird scene developed around us. The double fires, piled high, held back the night that had engulfed the world outside the little clearing. Grotesque shadows from the leaping dancers swayed and faded on the leafy background. Round and round they went like caldron devils, crouching, springing, swaying, shouting the chant of the death fire. I can tell you it was a hellish sight that night up there on the cap of the island.

“As the minutes passed, the liquor took its toll in [208]

staggering warriors who stumbled down outside the circle into drunken slumber. When perhaps an hour had reeled by, only three of the older chiefs, including Plintuga, maintained their consciousness. These had seated themselves across the blaze from us and were making an end to several bottles that superior rank had held for them. The two slaves were busy tending the funeral fire. They, of all the Indians, were sober.

“‘Bunte,’ I whispered, ‘our chance must come before long. If we are going to make a try, it must be while these drunks are down.’”

“‘Well,’ said Bunte, ‘I’ve a hunch—but I ain’t sure we can make it. What time do you suppose it is?’

“I guessed that it must be midnight at least and we figured that the fog would hang on until after sunup. So if we actually succeeded in getting away from camp we would have several hours of thick darkness to help us in eluding the Head Hunters.

“Bunte told me that he had cut through the rope on the bit [209] of the tomahawk until it would drop with a little pull.

We waited for a moment when the male slave was away from the fire in search of firewood and the woman had her back to us. A bit of a jerk and the rope slid to our feet. Then with but a slight change of position Bunte began sawing his wrist thongs on the same tomahawk, but suddenly he groaned. The tomahawk was coming loose from the tree. I edged my way over and managed to grasp the ax although my hands were still tied behind my back. We held that position for several minutes before I noticed that Plintuga had come to and was stumbling toward us.

“We trembling lads held our places as the Indian chief advanced aimlessly toward us. His rifle he had left behind but in his hand gleamed the blade of a knife. In desperation, Bunte strained on his weakened thongs and they gave. In a second he had grasped the tomahawk from my bound hands. It was difficult to keep from breaking into a run, but we managed to hold our places.

“A minute later, the intoxicated chief stood wavering before us, knife in readiness. Perhaps he had determined to put an end to the argument concerning the method of our taking off. A heavy scowl distorted his already terrifying features. His glance traveled gradually downward. A flare of light from the fire disclosed the rope across our feet. Plintuga gave a ponderous start and bent forward in drunken thoughtlessness as though to pick up the hemp. Instinct flashed through his stupor even as he bent, but too belated to save him the skull blow from the flat of the tomahawk directed by Bunte. Without a sound the Indian collapsed. Bunte jerked back into his place against the tree.

“The slave at the fire, some thirty feet away, was using her pole to stir the blaze. When she turned and glanced in our direction I could feel the mud loosen on my forehead from the perspiration of that second. Apparently Twasla decided that Plintuga had been overcome as had the other braves. A new armful of fuel arrived and attention was diverted to the task of flinging it on the fire. [210]

“Instantly Bunte sank to the ground in the comparative darkness, snatched up Plintuga’s knife, and freed me. ‘Stay right where you are, Tom,’ he commanded, ‘you will have to act as dummy for a minute or so while I arrange our getaway.’

“With that Bunte seized the rope and slid into the shadow of the tree. A dozen feet above his head the stump of a branch afforded a firm holding place for a loop after several fruitless throws. Drawing the noose tight, Bunte eased himself back beside me. I could see his plan and I knew that it was a daring one. Instead of rushing away through the woods in the pitch darkness, we would stay within the very circle of the funeral ceremony, high above the heads of those who presently would be searching for us.

“Not a soul was moving in the camp except the two [211] slaves and they were crouching together half turned from our tree. At what moment a warrior might return from his drunken dreams could not be told, nor could we know when the stunned Plintuga might stir at our feet, but certainly this was the moment for the supreme effort.

“Bunte pulled me around the tree and thrust the rope into my trembling hands. I grasped as high as I could reach and squirmed upward faster than I ever traveled on a rope before or since.

“Deeds are accomplished under great stress that might defy the performer ordinarily. So it was that presently Bunte and I found ourselves lodged in the fir tree so far above the camp that a veil of fog intervened and suggested an additional chance of concealment in that time of search to come. Bunte had loosened and retained the rope after reaching the first branch. The crackle of the big fire had served as adequate covering of the noises necessary in ascending to our place of concealment above the drunken warriors. Our posture was far from homelike and in daylight a sharp eye would undoubtedly detect

us despite the fog. Our chief hope lay in the unusualness of our hiding place.

“We tied ourselves securely to the main trunk of the fir. [212] Then for a time we kept up a cautious conversation while the camp below us continued to sleep. Now and then, as the smoke eddied around, it was a struggle for us to keep from coughing, but we welcomed the heat which came with the smoke.

“As the time passed, something like a stupor developed from the cold, the exhaustion of our previous experiences, the strain of our present positions. It seemed as though hours passed before there came a wild alarm whoop, a confusion of sounds from the befuddled warriors, a hurried rush as the search reached out into the gradually lightening timber. They were after us, but if my understanding of the jargon was accurate, we were not alone the object of that search. Twasla and her remaining companion had taken to the woods in flight. I have no doubt but that their actions had much to do with our escape from discovery.

“While some searched, others were busy about the embers of the funeral pyre which had burned to the ground. Thanks to the fog, their movements were almost impossible to make out definitely, but we knew when they brought Twasla back. There was no hesitation in what they were to do with her. A torch flared. They gagged her. The poor creature’s arms were bound with thongs about her elbows, behind her back. A dozen Indians laboring together bent a strong young tree in a half-circle. Twasla was fastened by the elbows to the top branches. The tree was released and the woman dangled in that agonizing

position ten feet from the ground. There she would hang, in that lonely spot, until starvation claimed her.

“Increasing light caused the Indians to redouble their speed in preparing to leave—much to our trembling delight. I judged from their actions that their return trip should have been started hours earlier. Probably they had hoped to be well on their way toward the Straits before white settlers left their cabins. [213]

“At last Plintuga uttered words that put the men in single file. They were but dim forms to us in the tree-top for their torch had been extinguished. Then with the words, ‘Our canoes are restless for us,’ the chief headed the file and they moved.

“But here, Dave, comes the unbelievable part of my story. Those Indians did not move toward the ridge down which they had come. Instead, they advanced without hesitation to the edge of the rock and—well, in the fog it looked as though that line of warriors simply melted off the edge of the island. If they had had wings, they couldn’t have done it any nicer.”

[214]

CHAPTER XV

JIM NOVAK APPEARS

Mr. Morgan brought his feet down from the rail with a bang and tossed the stub of his cigar into the moon-flecked bay. Clem and Dave moved as though awakening from another world.

“And Twasla?” queried Clem.

“Oh, we cut her down and let her go her own way. She preferred to stay on the island. Must have been some years later that she first attached herself to the fishing colony that started here.”

“And the Head Hunters?” ventured Dave.

“Well, Dave, a stranger wouldn’t have known from the signs left that there had been a cremation and a whiskey party staged in that clearing. Every ash from the fire had been swept up and taken. There wasn’t a whiskey bottle to be seen,” declared Mr. Morgan. “And as far as I know that was the last time that the Head Hunters visited Puget Sound.”

“How did those warriors get down to their canoes, Mr. Morgan?”

“I don’t know. I satisfied myself that there was no trail down. At high water, I suppose a person might jump it and come out alive, but still I doubt that. Naturally, Bunte and I didn’t stay around long. We hit up the ridge through the woods

until we came out at a steamboat landing halfway up the island. We were mighty glad to get home that afternoon. The folks never did fully accept our story.”

“Ever go back to try to solve the mystery of the rock?”

“Never did, Dave. A week or so later I went East to school. Bunte decided he’d stay with the fishing and trading. Times of late years I’ve thought I’d like to look around up there, but it’s a bit of a climb and I guess I’m too fond of sitting here fishing off the end of this boat.”

“Mr. Morgan,” said Clem, “you’ve heard of Jim Novak, haven’t you?”

“Yes, to my sorrow!” replied Mr. Morgan. “For several years he and Twasla lived together as man and wife—until he got into trouble with your powder company. Then one Saturday night when I was here, my yacht tender—rowboat, you know—disappeared. And the next morning Jim Novak was gone. I’d be willing to wager that he stole my boat.

“Ha! Ha!” went on Mr. Morgan, “I have to laugh at the way Twasla used to handle that big fellow. She was the only person on the island that wasn’t more or less afraid of him. I saw her trip him up one day when he had been abusing her. She dropped him rolling in a mess of fish nets and tangled him until he couldn’t move an inch. Then she pulled him down on the mudflats and let him wait for the tide to get him. When the water began slopping over his face, Jim began making promises. Twasla let him lie until he’d swallowed a quart or so of water—he didn’t have any luck trying to keep afloat—

[216]

and then she untied him. He never tried to bully her again.”

Reluctantly, Clem glanced at her wrist watch. “I just hate to leave, Mr. Morgan, but it is later than I thought for, and our friends at the house will be expecting us.”

“Well, Miss, I presume you are right,” said Mr. Morgan. “I wanted to get better acquainted with Dave, here, and with you, too, of course, but about all I’ve done has been to dig up a story from the Dark Ages.”

“We’ve more than enjoyed hearing you talk—you’re the best story teller *I* ever listened to,” exclaimed Dave enthusiastically. “If we stay here to fish after the dock closes down, we’ll have you over to our camp fire some night.”

They moved across the deck to the outer side where the *Gypsy* had been tied. “Did your men change the launch?” inquired Dave, who was slightly in advance.

“What do you mean——”

[217]

Mr. Morgan’s reply was cut short by Clem’s exclamation: “Why, the *Gypsy* is gone!”

Dave, Clem, and their host stood gripping the rail of the yacht, staring blankly alongside where the dainty *Gypsy* had floated two hours earlier.

Mr. Morgan was the first to recover. “Hedges,” he shouted toward the companionway.

The man who had served dinner leaped up the steps.

“Hedges, what do you know of the *Gypsy*?”

“Sir? The launch? Isn’t she——”

“Gone!” cried Mr. Morgan. “Start the engine. She isn’t in sight, but the tide runs toward the head of the island. There’s a faint chance that she broke mooring and drifted away.”

“Mr. Morgan, I tied the rope myself,” said Dave. “It didn’t come undone by itself.”

Hedges hurried away.

“This is a companion to the odd things that have been going on since I came to the powder dock,” cried Clem. “The *Gypsy*’s gone and something tells me that we aren’t going to find it!”

Nor was it found, although the yacht cruised about for an hour, and brilliant moonlight aided the search. At length Mr. Morgan put Clem and Dave off at the dock, promising in farewell that he would stir the county and state officials far and wide in an effort to regain the *Gypsy* and apprehend the thief.

“I’m frank in saying that this looks to me like the return of Jim Novak,” declared Mr. Morgan. “He may have towed the launch with a canoe, started the engine when he got out a ways, and hit across for the mainland. My yarn and the place we were sitting in made us easy prey.” [218]

Miss Campbell and Mr. Fowler were seated before the blazing fireplace when Clem and Dave tramped in with the ill news. Discussion became animated. Not an unusual thing had occurred during the absence of the two. Twasla had served

supper. The reunited lovers had settled themselves before the fire. No laughs had disturbed them. The Devil's Swing had not creaked under a rider. The hound had slept peacefully on the floor beneath the window.

Dan Fowler promptly accepted Mr. Morgan's theory regarding Jim Novak. Clem wondered whether or not the acceptance was sincere. Now, according to the postmaster, Jim Novak had always been a lawless fellow. On several occasions small things had been missing from the post-office counter after Jim had loafed away an hour or so. True, his Indian wife had told Clem that she thought Jim had "gone dead in water," but Mr. Morgan's man had reported having seen Novak recently on the Seattle wharves. Was it not possible that the fellow had taken up a passing residence on top the island in order to vent his vengeance against the powder dock?

Would the *Gypsy* be recovered? Both men thought so. If [219] not, prospects were dark for Clem and Dave. Dave's job was almost at an end. Mr. Hammer, head man in the Seattle office, was due within two days to take things over. Without the launch, all plans for fishing were at an end.

Miss Campbell and the postmaster were quick with their reassurances of financial aid to tide them over to another job, but brother and sister knew that such help could be accepted only as a loan.

So distracted were they by the situation, it was past midnight when Dave looked at the clock and suddenly exclaimed, "Mr. Fowler, did you eat up all of that strawberry ice-cream?"

True to his promise, the postmaster had brought the freezerful. Clem heaped the plates with the frozen cream and another half hour sped by in eating. Dave sauntered back to the freezer so many times that Clem began to wonder where the nearest doctor was to be procured. But at last even he was satisfied. Mr. Fowler bade them all good-night, and within a few minutes the little white cottage, nestling near the powder warehouse, was sunk in slumber despite the new calamity.

As Clem's last waking thought was of the *Gypsy*, so the [220] queer gripping sensation about her throat returned when the sun brought her from restless sleep. She raised herself on one elbow and glanced out to where the trim boat had ridden at anchor on the previous morning. No miracle had occurred; the launch had not been returned. Clem dropped back upon the pillow with a sound close to a sob. After such a wonderful gift from Mr. Morgan! After such glorious plans for a profitable summer! And now all their hopes were faded. Dave would have to take up day labor somewhere on the island. She herself might try her hand as a maid of all work to one of the summer homes above the post office. The prospects were not alluring.

Clem wished that she felt more like entertaining Miss Campbell. Then her conscience tumbled her out of bed, hustled her into her clothes, and made her hasten out into the kitchen. No matter how badly she felt herself, she must try to make things pleasant for her new friend.

Twasla was already building a fire in the stove [221] preparatory for breakfast. Clem stopped short when she saw the old Indian woman. Last night's story of her slavery to the Head Hunters, the terrible death she had seemed doomed

to, and her escape, had endowed Twasla with a new fascination. She was no longer a waddling old Indian, cast-off wife of Jim Novak, but the heroine of a remarkable adventure. Scars on her arms testified to the cruel thongs that had jerked her aloft when the tree had been released.

“Good-morning, Twasla,” said Clem. “Mr. Morgan told us last night the story of your scars. An awful experience you went through. We heard, too, last night, that Jim Novak is still alive.”

Twasla turned about with a stick of wood swinging in her hand. “Ump,” she snorted, with a threatening gesture. “No good him come here.”

“I’m afraid he has come and gone again,” replied Clem sadly. “The *Gypsy* was stolen while we were on the yacht and we have found no trace.”

Twasla shook her head. “Him cultus siwash. Him left hand steal from his right hand. No good! No come here—me——” The Indian woman ended her vigorous remarks with a clatter of the stove lids as though to indicate something of what would happen in case Jim Novak put in an appearance.

Clem smiled in spite of herself while she went about the setting of the table. Any woman who could get the better of a husky man by entangling him in a net and leaving him for the tide to subjugate was an object of admiration. Also it was interesting to speculate on just what Twasla might do if she again encountered Jim Novak.

At breakfast the talk was chiefly on the loss of the *Gypsy* [222]

although Dave took occasion to vow again that as soon as he was relieved of the powder dock he was going to try once more to solve the mystery of the rocky ledge on the island head.

“When you go, I’m going along,” declared Clem, “but in the meanwhile I’m going to spread the news about the *Gypsy* among the fishermen. They may see the boat sometime and recognize it even if it is repainted.”

“You’ve had such good luck advertising,” smiled Miss Campbell, “perhaps you ought to try the papers again.”

“I shall, but I’m afraid it won’t bring another such nice person as you!” exclaimed Clem.

Dave seconded Clem’s remark with a movement of his head. His mouth was too full of hot cakes for words. Miss Campbell’s energy and kindness had won her a place in the hearts of both brother and sister.

“I noticed,” said Miss Campbell, “that a large fishing boat just came into the bay when we sat down to breakfast. Wouldn’t it be a good thing to find out whether they have seen anything of the *Gypsy*?”

“Good idea,” mumbled Dave. “I’ve got to send some things up to Wilton. I’ll send an advertisement in to the papers also.”

“Miss Campbell,” said Clem, “you and I will row out to the new boat right away. We’ll have the fun of seeing them pull their seine, anyway. That’s always lots of sport.” [223]

“I’ll be glad to go, Clementine,” replied Miss Campbell, rising with decision; “I don’t believe I’ve ever actually seen them do that. If you can lend me a pair of your khaki trousers and leggings I’ll put them on for comfort’s sake.”

Presently the rowboat, with Clem at the oars and Miss Campbell in the stern seat, was making its way toward the light-colored fishing smack circling gently off shore. Several dark-skinned fishermen could be seen on the deck of the boat getting in readiness for the big purse net soon to come over the wide roller that occupied one side of the net platform. One of the men shouted words of greeting and waved at the pair in the rowboat.

“We’ll tie up at the side and go aboard,” said Clem. “We’ll ask them about the *Gypsy* and we’ll watch the net haul from a good position.”

“Clem, we can pull ourselves up there by the porthole,” counseled Miss Campbell.

As the rowboat drifted alongside, Clem’s head came just [224] below the open port. Hoarse voices from within the cabin caused her to push her comrade’s leg with her toe and raise her fingers to her lips. As they held their rowboat to the side of the slowly moving fishing boat, their expressions underwent a dramatic change. Words were audible from within.

“Understand, the boat’s mine! Look out or you’ll find your throat cut when you wake up some morning!” The speaker’s voice shook with an emotion that caused Clem and Miss

Campbell to gaze at each other in blank amazement. Could it be that the man was speaking of the *Gypsy* when he said that the boat was his?

“Blast you, Jim, I’ll flatten that nose of yours all over your ugly mug if you start anything that queers to-night’s haul.” The second voice was low but clear and strong.

“Bah! I got the money in the boat. You can’t run me, Woodruff. No! I’ve got my own reasons for coming back to this here place. Wait ’till I strike a match over there——”

“Oh, can that talk. If I don’t run you, you’re done for. You own the boat all right, but your brains wouldn’t make trout bait. Your revenge will put you to dangling at the end of a stout rope if you don’t wreck yourself first monkeyin’ with that powder dock.” The speaker was talking rapidly, emphasizing his words with fist on wood. “Who showed you how to make ten times what you was? Who wised you up to pickin’ yer crew and gettin’ ready for the game? Who helped you make yer getaway when you croaked that revenue——”

The voice was drowned to the listeners by a shout from one of the deck men. “Hey, you needa help?” [225]

As Clem gave the rowboat a push that cleared it from beneath the porthole, she attempted to answer in a casual manner: “No; we were just resting. Guess we’ll come on and watch you haul.” She was not sure whether she wanted to climb on or not. Judging from the cabin voices, trouble was brewing aboard this innocent-looking fishing boat. Going ahead might place them in some danger, and yet it might be possible to get

important information concerning this man who threatened the warehouse—concerning the *Gypsy* also. Perhaps it was their duty to go ahead, find out whatever they might in the course of the hauling of the nets, and then hurry back to Dave with the news.

“We want to watch you haul,” helped out Miss Campbell, “and we want to talk to the owner for a minute about a launch that went adrift.”

“Sure ting. Come oop. We fix you oop.”

The man turned to the cabin way and shouted a sentence [226] in Italian down the stairs. A moment later the boat stopped its progress and the sound of the winding drum began. The two visitors tied the rowboat with some misgivings and scrambled up the side of the fishing smack. The voices in the cabin were silent.

“Clem, what do you make of what those fellows said?” Miss Campbell whispered.

“I don’t know what to think,” answered Clem. “One of them made a very definite threat against the powder dock and I am more than anxious to see what he looks like. I want to be able to identify him. It may be, of course, that there are several people who have a grudge against the warehouse, but I don’t know why this person should not be either one of the two that I know have vowed vengeance—either Ward, the man that Bunte told me about, or else Jim Novak.”

“Goodness,” muttered the little lady, seating herself cross-legged on top of the cabin where the seine hauling could be

seen to an advantage, “these fishing boats look pretty sliding along through the water when we see them from shore, but you can’t tell what devilment is going on inside them. Perhaps we had better ask about the *Gypsy* and then leave at once.”

“Miss Campbell, what do you suppose he meant by ‘to-night’s haul’?”

Before Miss Campbell had time to answer, a yell [227] sounded from the cabinway followed immediately by the flying appearance of a tall, powerful young man who dodged back across the deck to the protection of the hoist mast. The men on the net platform farther to the stern paused in their work with expectant smiles. Evidently this was not the first time they had been so entertained.

Clem nudged Miss Campbell: “Must be Woodruff, the fellow that said he was the brains of the boat.”

On the stairway almost beside the two visitors appeared a wild-eyed Norwegian whose mustache twitched as he crept up the steps, knife in hand. A prickly sensation developed along the spines of the two watchers who shifted their position to one on hands and knees. If knives were drawn, pistols might follow, and bullets could make the cabin top a place worth leaving rapidly. The girl and the woman crouched as low as possible and waited, desperately regretting the whim and sense of duty that had caused them to persist in coming aboard.

Apparently the crew did not consider the fight in a serious light, yet there was their boss advancing upon one of their number with all the outward indications of tragedy. As the

Norwegian's face came into the sunlight Miss Campbell seized Clem's arm with a muffled exclamation. She put her lips close to Clem's ear and whispered: "I've seen him before. He's the man that used to have Twasla as a fishing partner—Jim Novak, sure enough."

Woodruff's face appeared around the mast and the [228]
Norwegian's arm snapped back for a throw. A chorus of indignant protests sounded from the men in line with the mast and the infuriated owner of the knife. They had no desire to serve as a back stop in case the heavy knife missed its mark.

Probably the protest in itself had little effect upon the maddened Novak, but the arm lowered. With a rush, the Norwegian plunged forward, intent upon the man behind the mast. Three quarters of the distance was covered when Novak's foot slipped on a clot of fish slime and he stumbled. Instantly, clinging to the mast as a pivot, Woodruff swung one foot swiftly, catching Jim Novak's wrist a numbing blow. The knife spun backward through the air within a foot of Clem's head and splashed down into the cool green water. One leap placed Woodruff beside the writhing man. With the ease of a cat lifting her kitten, the young giant lifted the owner aloft and tossed him clear of the rail into the water surrounded by the rapidly incoming net.

One of the crew had for some minutes been thrusting a [229]
can-tipped pole into the water, sending down with each motion a stream of bubbles that frightened fish from possible escape under the boat during the time that the engine was closing the bottom of the immense purse net. Woodruff seized this pole and as soon as Jim Novak came to the surface, forced

him under again.

“I’ll soak it into your fool head that I’m running this boat—owner or not. I’ll ram ya clean——”

“Look out behind!” Clem exploded the words automatically.

Woodruff whirled in time to receive squarely in the face a small salmon thrown by one of the net men. The blow placed Woodruff at a disadvantage in the rush that followed.

Confusion was evident, momentarily, in the manner in which his arms sawed the air, but back of each move was a strength that brought a feeling of awe to the onlookers and a personal discomfort to the attacking fishermen. For the first time in their lives the girl and the woman saw a man struck a blow that lifted him into the air and caused him to light shoulders first. The boxer gave his opponents no opportunity to close in on him and overwhelm him by force of numbers. With swinging smashes and short hammer punches he met the men as rapidly as they came. None returned for a second encounter. One by one they dragged themselves away nursing whatever part of their bodies had come in contact with Woodruff’s fists or boots.

The grim grin had not left Woodruff’s face. He fought quietly but, as the last man hit the deck, he burst into profane comment upon his past and future dealings with these sons of Italy and Norway. [230]

“I got enough on you wops to stick ya in the bull pen for life. Do I turn you in and collect the reward money that’s on most of ya? No, sir. I gives you a chance to make an easy livin’ and

what do you do in return? Glad of a chance to try to clean up on me. The next time I have to crack ya on the deck, I'm goin' ta lay ya out, chuck ya in the fish hole, and run in ta Seattle with ya, you——” A string of oaths completed the speaker's estimation of the men who had slouched back to their work and were hustling to catch up with the net pull.

Up over the gunwale came the pursed bottom of the big net. The rope winding on the drum had finally drawn together the lower edge of the big seine, the upper edge of which was held up by pieces of cork in a wide circle on the surface of the Sound.

Woodruff jumped to the control lever and stopped the drum. Then, remembering Jim Novak, he rushed back to the gunwale with a shout. A dozen yards off the prow was the Norwegian in Clem's boat, rowing for shore with all his might.

CHAPTER XVI

THE FISH PIRATES

In the excitement of the fight, Novak had escaped unobserved even by the two women who now set up shouts of alarm. So far they had been only spectators, but the loss of their rowboat entangled them very definitely in the events.

“Let him go,” laughed Woodruff, “now we can get somethin’ done.”

“But he’s got our boat,” protested Clem.

Woodruff turned and eyed the two for a long minute. Perhaps he was seeing them for the first time to recognize them as individuals. “What’s your names?” he demanded.

“I’m Clementine Fargar,” answered Clem.

“I’m sure I don’t see that it is any of your business,” retorted Miss Campbell, provoked by his tone.

Woodruff flung back his head with a hearty laugh. [232]

“Well, well! How was you invited and us not even knowin’ your name? Still, I ain’t sorry you come, seein’ as how I’m rid of Novak in your boat. Your boat’s gone. We can’t put you ashore just this minute. Amuse yourselves watching the boys pull the net. Sorry to have such a rough time just when you takes into your heads to drop in on us.” Again he laughed.

“We’ll thank you to land us at the powder dock as soon as your

nets are in,” said Miss Campbell.

“Do you belong there?” asked Woodruff, suddenly stepping toward them.

“Yes,” declared Clem, “my brother is in charge of the powder warehouse.”

“Well,” said Woodruff significantly, “he ain’t got a healthy job—nope, not with Jim Novak around!”

“What do you mean?” cried Clem.

“Jim Novak’s got no use for the Pondeux Powder Company.”

“Can’t you stop him?” demanded Miss Campbell. “If he should do anything, you would be responsible.”

Woodruff laughed. “You seen already how much influence I have with old Jim. What he does ain’t my worry.”

“We came to ask if you’d seen anything of the *Gypsy*, a launch that went adrift or was stolen last night. When you have told us, we will thank you to put us ashore.” Miss Campbell spoke with high dignity.

“A launch?” said Woodruff with interest. “Haven’t seen [233] anything of it myself. Novak didn’t bunk on this boat last night. He may know something of it. It’d be just like the old fox to pick up a good launch and then hold out on me.”

“Very well, then, you will please take us ashore!” Miss Campbell moved toward the rail as though expecting

immediate service landward.

Once more Woodruff broke into loud laughter. "Want us to chuck our nets overboard an' hustle in to land, eh? Likely! Just you make yourselves as much to home as you can an' stick around 'til we get good and ready. Then maybe we'll land you." With these remarks, Woodruff went back to overseeing the work on the net.

Clem and Miss Campbell said very little to each other during the succeeding half hour. Their minds were busy with agitated thoughts as to when they would be put ashore and as to the need for warning Dave of Jim Novak's intentions. All possible pleasure in watching the fish haul had vanished, although the task went on to completion before their eyes.

The fishermen had apparently taken the result of the fight [234] as a part of the events of the day and were quite willing to go on under Woodruff's orders. As the net was withdrawn from the water, the fish were brought in closer and closer until the small pocket remaining was literally alive with the struggling victims. Then the large rowboat that had been used to put out the pilot net was warped to position. The final heaving on the net raised it entirely from the Sound, emptying hundreds of flopping trout and salmon into the big rowboat. As soon as the salmon were safely in the rowboat and it was tied astern, Woodruff dispatched one of the crew to the engine room and within a minute the *Santa Anna* was under way.

"Hey, you visitors, get down in the bunk cabin and keep quiet. You've seen enough," called Woodruff, lighting a cigarette. Something in his tone of voice prompted the girl and the

woman to quit their position without a word—screaming would be futile at this distance from shore. Clem’s inclination to dive overboard and swim for shore was abandoned at once since the older woman could scarcely follow. So they went down into the hot, dirty cabin, lined with unkempt bunks, with the feeling that they must do everything possible to avoid unpleasantness.

Once inside they crowded to the open porthole on the land side. Already Jim Novak was lost to sight in the confusion of driftwood on the beach some distance up the island. Clem hoped that they would be able to find the rowboat before the tide had wrecked it. The *Santa Anna* was headed to pass the fishing colony in the opposite direction.

“He doesn’t intend to put us ashore, Miss Campbell,” [235]
breathed Clem, as they heard the click of the door key.

“What will he do with us? He can’t run away with us!”

“Can’t he? What’s to hinder? Judging by what he did to the man who owns this boat, I guess he’ll do just about as he pleases and our saying that he mustn’t won’t stop him by a long shot.”

“Do you suppose the man knows that he is laying himself open to a term in the penitentiary for kidnapping?”

“I wish that there were some way in which we could let Dave know our direction. If he keeps busy in the warehouse, he might not notice that the fishing boat was leaving.” Clem surveyed the cabin thoughtfully. A shelf next the stairway attracted her attention.

“Miss Campbell, keep an eye on that door.”

Tearing a piece of paper from the newspaper that covered the shelf, Clem extracted a stubby pencil from her pocket and wrote hurriedly:

Off Powder Dock. Kidnapped aboard fish motor boat
Santa Anna.

Running toward Skagit Head.

MISS ANNIE CAMPBELL and CLEM FARGAR.

Next she took from the shelf a small medicine bottle and [236]
emptied the contents behind one of the beds. Then she
thrust the message into the flask and corked it well.

“The bottle’s too small,” discouraged Miss Campbell. “It will
never be seen.”

“I don’t want it seen for a while yet; it has to drift by those men
on deck. If I fixed it up so that it could be easily spotted, then it
would not have a chance of getting by. Of course this may not
do us the slightest good, but it seems to me worth trying.”

From the open porthole she dropped the bottle as close to the
side of the *Santa Anna* as possible. Would it escape the
watchful eye of Woodruff even if it were not sucked into the
blades of the propeller? The two listened intently. No new
sound was audible above the heavy hum of the engine.

“I can’t understand his object,” declared Miss Campbell.

“I think I can,” whispered Clem. “He has some big plans and he is afraid we will give the alarm if he lets us go.”

“But he doesn’t dare delay—I’ll—he will—why!” Miss Campbell sank down on the edge of the bunk.

“Don’t you think we had better keep him good-natured [237] by doing what he says?” asked Clem. “Seems to me that he is more apt to treat us decently, and I really think he will put us ashore the minute he is through with whatever he has planned.”

“But, Clem, every minute may mean that Jim Novak will set fire to the powder warehouse.”

“I don’t believe that he would attempt to fire it in the daytime.”

“He is wild enough to do anything, Clem.”

“Do you think that he will risk going up with the warehouse? If he had had this boat to get away in, he might have lit a long fuse and raced for the open water on the other side of the island.”

“But, Clem, for all you know he may have the *Gypsy* waiting to escape in.”

Clementine flinched at the truth of this suggestion. Even now, the life of Dave and of scores of others might lie in the balance. What ought she to do?

“Really, Miss Campbell,” she murmured, “I think he will be more interested in getting even with this man Woodruff than with settling an old score.”

Just now there appeared to be nothing that could be done save wait, ready to take any reasonable opportunity to escape. Conversation was interrupted by the opening of the engine-room door and a rough command from the engineer instructing them to enter.

“Open a cans; stir ’em oop,” he growled, pointing to a number of pails of paint in one corner. [238]

There seemed to be no choice in the matter, so the two set to work, prying off covers and working the sticky contents.

“Brown paint,” speculated Miss Campbell, under her breath. “I’ll bet you that fellow Woodruff has been figuring on getting rid of Jim Novak for some time past and now he isn’t going to run any chances of being recognized.”

“This painting is probably a part of their plan, and I think Novak knows about it. At any rate, painting won’t change the shape of the *Santa Anna*. It’s got something to do with the night job he spoke of. Unless I miss my guess, we have stumbled on to the gang that could explain the signaling from the tree on top of the island. These fellows have been up to shady work before.”

Across the room, the engineer and a member of the crew addressed as Guinny conversed in low tones and melodramatic gestures. Clem and Miss Campbell fell silent as an occasional word above the sound of the engine suggested the nature of the

conversation.

“Wait,” the engineer was speaking, “when we’re done t’night we—a . . . *Santa Anna* . . . ours . . . Canada . . . Good-by, Mester Woodaruff!”

His eyes gleamed beneath their heavy brows and he caressed the handle of a cleaning knife at his belt as he spoke. The smell of turpentine mingled with the rat-oil lubricant helped to emphasize to Miss Campbell and Clementine the sickening possibilities of that knife. [239]

Guinny gave a low laugh that carried little mirth. “Novak—he get him. He know where we go. He get him.” And he gave a rapid pantomime of the time when Novak would settle the final score with Woodruff.

So the talk ran while can after can of the brown paint were mixed to readiness. Later, when the girl and the woman followed the pails on deck, the *Santa Anna* had passed the island head and was fighting the choppy waves of Useless Bay. Presently she rounded a point and lay at anchor in a little cove protected from idle gaze on three sides.

The seven men began painting at once on the shore side, some standing in the big rowboat alongside, others working from the deck. Clem and Miss Campbell were permitted the freedom of the boat, because, as Woodruff put it, “Yelling won’t do no good here, and if you took it into yer heads to flop overboard, we could easy get ya in the rowboat.”

An hour and three quarters saw the side done. The craft was swung around with its new brown face toward the [240]

channel and under Woodruff's urging the remaining half began its transformation. The leader produced two strips of canvas upon which was lettered *Walrus*; these he tacked over the original name.

"Now, boys," encouraged Woodruff, "slap 'er on lively. Can't say as I ever seen slicker painters. A brand-new boat we've got, an' 'fore morning she'll be carrying full cargo."

While the painters were finishing up, a Seattle-bound steamer passed by and far out in the channel a speedy little cruiser hurried northward in a V of spray. On the island side nothing occurred to break the monotony of a summer afternoon.

"A word with you, mates," spoke up Woodruff, as the men deposited their pails on deck, "understand we're doin' just as we'd planned when Jim Novak was here, but if there's a man aboard who wants to say something, now's his time. What we're aimin' at will bring in a neat pile o' coin to be split fair and square. We won't have to work long—we'd sure be caught—but we'll work fast and clean slick before the news gets around. Then we'll give the boat another coat an' no one will be the wiser. I figger as soon as Novak cools off he'll be comin' back with his lesson learned. He knows where to reach us in Seattle. What have ya ta say?"

A chorus of approval came from the crew.

[241]

"Fine!" ejaculated Woodruff. "Take it easy while we run on up the island. Go slow on that Dago wine, there'll be real work from ten o'clock on. Now you two women—I want ta talk with you in the cabin."

He followed the couple into the fore cabin and, seating himself in the one chair, cocked his feet against the wall. When a cigarette was smouldering comfortably between two long fingers, Woodruff began.

“More excitement than you figgered on, I guess. Well, no need to worry. I ain’t fool enough to get you hurt, but—well, I ain’t sure how much you are wise to. You was a landin’ pretty close ta that there port when I was talkin’ ta that hot-headed Novak. So I’m just goin’ ta hang on ta ya till the night’s work is over. You look like you had sense enough to not do anything as ’ud make me lay hands on ya. To-morrow this time you’ll be home with a whole skin an’ a whole net full of experiences. You’ll never see me in these parts again, so you won’t have a chance to have me took up.”

“Couldn’t you let our folks know that we aren’t dead?” queried Clem.

With difficulty, Miss Campbell restrained herself as she [242] watched their captor. She longed to give him a piece of her mind, but she feared unpleasant consequences. She, too, had decided that it was best to smile and wait with as good grace as possible.

A smoke ring traveled lazily toward the discolored ceiling. “Let’s see, we’ll touch in Seattle before sunup to-morrow morning. You can telephone from there, and until then I guess the relatives will have to draw their own conclusions. See? In the meanwhile, do what yer told—if you want to keep things peaceful.”

With this, Woodruff sauntered out. A moment later they heard him tuning in on an afternoon concert being broadcast by a music house in Everan. The sound of the latest dance hit mingling with the throb of the engine and the strange voices of the crew seemed oddly out of place—added a touch of the unreal to an adventurous afternoon.

“What do you suppose Dave has been doing?” suggested Miss Campbell.

“He won’t become alarmed until evening,” replied Clem. “He knows we are together. He will think we have a clue about the *Gypsy* and have gone with the *Santa Anna* to see about it. Around supper time he will begin to wonder, especially if he is real hungry. Mr. Fowler will be coming to see you and when he hears Dave’s story, the search will start. By that time we will be up to our ears in whatever scheme it is that Woodruff is working.”

“Doesn’t look as though we could look for outside help, [243] does it, Clem?”

“No chance!”

“Then we have got to keep our eyes open!” exclaimed Miss Campbell. “I’d like to turn tables on that Woodruff. I’d like to show him that there is a law against kidnapping.”

“Miss Campbell, from the things Woodruff has said, I believe he has been running a gang around here for some time. Probably it was one of his men that I saw the other morning in the tree on top the island. They may have their land headquarters back up the ridge somewhere in the woods.”

“I should have thought the revenue captain would have gone back and searched the end of the island by daylight,” said Miss Campbell.

“Probably he would have done so if Dave weren’t so sure that the man in the fish mask was drowned that night in the cove below the cliffs.”

“You didn’t get to tell me yesterday, Clem, what it is that Dave thinks about the man in the fish mask. Don’t you remember, the invitation to the yacht came just as you were going to tell me.”

Clem did remember, only too well. Now with several [244] hours of waiting ahead of them in the cabin of the fishing smack, she could scarcely avoid the question nor find a better time for answering it. She came to the point abruptly.

“Miss Campbell, Dave has believed all the time that the postmaster knows the secret of the man in the fish mask.”

Clem hesitated, watching the expression on the face of her newly found friend. She hated to hurt her in any way.

“For a time Dave thought that Mr. Fowler himself might be that mysterious man, but of course since he saw the fish mask go down in the waters of the cove he has given up that idea. Dave still thinks, however, that the postmaster has been behind an effort to scare him away from the powder dock.”

“But, Clem, why should Dan Fowler want to scare——”

“Because,” interrupted Clem, “he is chairman of the committee organized to get rid of the powder dock.”

“Well, Clem, it won’t take long for me to find out when I get back. Dan Fowler will clear up his share in the mystery—if he knows anything—or else he will find that I have not lost all of my individuality.”

Time dragged rather heavily until darkness found the *Walrus* creeping along the west side of Whidby Island some miles to the north of the Point. Close to shore she ran in the rising tide, with no lights showing. Patches of indigo sky dotted with rhinestones gently silhouetted the tree-fringed island cliffs. There was no unnecessary movement aboard the smack; each man was in his assigned place, instructed by the capable Woodruff as to the exact part he was to enact in the coming events. Clem and Miss Campbell, tense with excitement, peered up the companionway or looked from open portholes. Their orders had been simple: “Keep below deck an’ keep yer traps shut unless you want trouble an’ plenty of it!” [245]

As the two prisoners waited for the unfolding of the “night haul” that Woodruff had spoken of, they occasionally breathed remarks to each other.

“Booze?”

“Sounds like it, but it seems they would have to go nearer to Canada to get it.”

“Woodruff must know where there is a lot of it hid.”

“Certainly dangerous for us, if that’s his game. A revenue cutter would run this boat down or shoot it up in no time. Miss Campbell, we surely want to keep our wits ready [246]

for a chance to make a quick getaway. They will be landing at some dock, no doubt; perhaps our opportunity will come then.”

A warning hiss silenced them. From the companionway, Clem could make out, not far ahead, a dock projecting some distance from shore with a small warehouse crouching on the outer piers. The *ex-Santa Anna* idled alongside at a speed that reduced the engine noise to a minimum.

As the boat paused beside the dock in the darkness, Woodruff tossed the tie rope over the head of one of the pilings and took a hitch around the iron at his feet. When the *Walrus* grated against the wharf, every man except the new captain scrambled quietly up on to the dock. Woodruff made no move to follow the crew. Either he did not choose to put himself in jeopardy, or else he would not trust a member of the crew to control the *Walrus*.

Clem decided that the man was none too sure of his hold upon the fishermen, and, judging from the remarks she had overheard while mixing paint in the engine room, he might well be cautious. Unfortunately, such cautiousness made escape impossible. Once more Clem wished that Miss Campbell were able to spring overboard with her. In the darkness they might reach shore or attract the attention of the beach village.

Suppose she were to commence screaming. Would such tactics arouse help? No, screaming would only mean that the crew would drop back to the deck and the *Walrus* would slide away from the dock. Then a reckoning between her and an angered Woodruff would follow swiftly. [247]

Clem caught the muffled sound of a lock giving way, and almost at once shallow boxes about three feet long began to float down to the deck from the dock. Clem could see Woodruff hard at work slipping off the ropes and sliding the heavy boxes out of the way.

“It’s fresh fish that they are stealing,” gasped Clem in Miss Campbell’s ear. “Look!”

Fourteen boxes came down before the thieves dropped panting to the *Walrus* and the boat edged offshore in silence save for the faint throb of the engine, leaving a trail of phosphorus in the disturbed water.

The men were elated over the ease with which the first venture had succeeded. Not a soul had been disturbed in the little shacks that sprinkled the beach nor in the numerous launches anchored inshore. Before morning the *Walrus* would be tied up at a friendly wharf in Seattle with a neat cargo of easy money. Disposing of the fish would be a simple matter and then would come a division of spoils and days of high living.

The members of the crew lounged about on the deck, [248] their outlines merging into the darkness, their faces faintly lit up by the glow from their cigarettes. Woodruff was at the outer steering wheel from which he could look out across the low cabin top and steer a course toward the next stop.

Woodruff’s voice broke in on the leisurely comment of the men: “Is that boat off toward the mainland bearing in this way?”

The possibility of rescue caused Clem to step softly up two of

the steps and gaze eagerly toward the distant mainland. Judging from the plainly visible lights, the boat was small and swift, but at the present angle it was impossible to determine her absolute direction.

“‘Bout size a revenoo boat,” suggested one of the men, “mebbe we betta——”

“Better! Huh!” growled Woodruff. “There’s our next dock; they won’t spot us against the black of the island. Get ready to jump fast. We’ll load an’ then drift ’til those lights round the Head. Shut up, the whole of you, an’ follow commands. There’s more waves here, so watch the heave of the boat when ye’re lettin’ the boxes down.”

Once more the *Walrus* turned inshore and eased up to a dock very similar to the one previously visited. Three minutes later the boat was free of all save the captain and the two prisoners. The men on the dock were meeting with trouble in forcing the warehouse lock. Their sounds floated back to Clem and Miss Campbell on the cabin steps. Woodruff, at the tie rope, peered out toward the lights of the new boat, then with a curse of impatience, he leaped up the slip to the dock. From her position on the cabin stairs Clem saw his departure. For the moment she and Miss Campbell had the boat to themselves. With a stealthy hiss to attract the woman’s attention, Clem grabbed a long cleaning knife from the rack on the outer wall of the cabin and started for the spot just vacated by Woodruff. [249]

At that same moment she saw a match flare from a crouched figure on the northern corner of the dock. The flame was thrust down against the big timber that edged the small platform

surrounding the three sides of the warehouse. In the yellow light Clem saw the swarthy face of Jim Novak distorted with passion. When the match touched the wood, a flare as of powder flashed along the timber leaving in its wake a slower spreading flame that raised at once a wall of flame from the gasoline-soaked wood. In far less time than it takes to relate the action, the fish pirates had been cut off from their boat by a wall of living flame.

The darkness of the great cliffs was splotted by this sudden burst of light. Huge shadows chased frantically over Sound and beach. They were but the monstrous counterparts of the affrighted crew that rushed madly along the wooden walk that led over the water to shore and the aroused fishing village. [250]

Over the instant shouts of confusion rose, in wild tones, the voice of Novak: "I've tricked you this time, Woodruff." With the glitter of a new knife from an extended arm, the avenging Novak leaped for the one man who had stood his ground.

In this second of startling action, Clem had been paralyzed. Now she came to life. With quick slashes of the heavy knife she severed the tie rope. In the heavy wave current, the prow of the *Walrus* dropped out from the flame-swept dock at once. Clem stumbled back toward the steps to the dark engine room with the cry: "Take the wheel, Miss Campbell; steer out."

Clem, thankful that she had learned something about running an engine and that she had kept her eyes on the engineer of the *Walrus*, pulled at a lever, and the smack shot forward at full speed. Miss Campbell, now at the wheel, swung the boat

outward and headed for the channel. As Clem leaped on deck again for a glimpse of the drama behind, she saw Woodruff land a blow that staggered Novak. Before the Norwegian could recover, Woodruff seized him in his steel-like arms and, bearing his enemy as a shield, plunged through the wall of fire that now cut them off from land.

In the light from the dock, a grin appeared on Clem's face, expressive of immense relief. "Ahoy, captain," she shouted to where Miss Campbell stood at the wheel, "all set for a cruise. Newly painted smack with thousands of pounds of fresh salmon for provisions! What are your orders, sir?" [251]

"Well, now," cried Miss Campbell, "switch on the mast lights so that boat won't run us down, and start the loud-speaker on that radio. I feel the need of a bit of music. Then lend a hand with this wheel."

"Awk—squawk—ar-r-r," and then came shrill words from the loud-speaker: "Foul play—or kidnapping suspected—boatmen—are asked to lend every effort to discover—girl and woman missing from Pondeux powder dock——"

"Ah, ha!" interrupted Miss Campbell, "mate, look the boat over and see if we have any stowaways!"

"Guess I'd better look later and help you now with that wheel. Keep her head around more," answered Clem. Away from the lee of the island, the channel waves were running high with a stiff wind. As Clem spoke, a wave capped the gunwale and slushed across the rear deck wetting Clem to her knees.

"Don't take those waves head on, Miss Campbell," [252]

exclaimed the girl, seizing the spokes of the steering wheel. "Quarter off against the wave or we'll wish we hadn't cut loose from the dock."

"It will take a great deal to make me wish that, Clem!"

Yet, had the woman and the girl known all that was to befall them in the coming hour, they might well have turned about and headed for the flaming dock.

CHAPTER XVII

THUNDERING CLIFFS

Frothing waves, ruddy from the dock-fire glow, spread out before the eyes of the girl and the woman at the wheel of the *Walrus*. A mist curtain had cut off the dim outline of the distant mainland. Occasional gusts of rain gave promise of a real downpour to come. To the north, the island faded quickly into blackness beyond the reach of the light from the doomed dock. Near at hand, on the south, the lights of the unknown boat were moving past toward the flaming picture. Every minute Clem expected a whistle from the stranger. In remembrance of her previous experience with Captain Main, she would not have been surprised to hear the crack of a gun and the whine of a bullet across the *Walrus*.

It was not until they were well past that Clem realized [254] that the *Walrus* had not been seen. Her glance shot upward to the masthead. The signal lamps were still dark. In the rapidity of events, she had failed to push in the switch and the approach of the other boat had been at such an angle that the *Walrus* had merged into the shadows of the cliff instead of standing out against the red of the flames.

“I must get the lights on. Hold her hard.”

Working her way back to the engine room, Clem fumbled at the switchboard she had noted earlier behind the door. One after another of the lever switches she shoved in without result. The lighting system was broken or disconnected in some manner

unknown to Clem. She turned and stumbled back with the news to Miss Campbell at the wheel. That lady took the announcement as calmly as any spray-drenched sailor could have. So much that was unusual had come into her life within forty-eight hours, lights on a tossing mast mattered not at all.

“It’s getting rougher the farther we get into the channel, Clementine,” she cried. “What are we going to do?”

In the tense excitement of the past hour, neither girl nor [255] woman had really noted the increased sweep of the wind and the swift clouding of the sky from seaward. Intent upon one thing—escape from the fish thieves—they had given no consideration to their fortune after slashing loose from the burning dock. Even had they fully realized the difficulty of managing the fishing smack in foul weather, it is doubtful whether they would have altered their actions. Certainly there was no hesitation in their minds as they held the prow of the *Walrus* against the sides of the waves and ran to the north of the fleet boat whose attention seemed riveted upon the fishing dock. No definite plan was in Clem’s mind. She was glad they were rid of Woodruff and his gang. She felt some pride in the thought of restoring the stolen fish to the owners. But whether they could successfully maneuver the *Walrus* back to the powder dock had not occurred to her.

“Let’s swing to the south, Miss Campbell, and beat our way around the Head. We must hurry. Novak may head for the powder dock as soon as he gets away from Woodruff!”

So they put the wheel hard over. The *Walrus* twisted, found itself in the trough of a wave, and rolled treacherously. The

next wave leaped over the gunwale, scudded across the sloping deck, to froth back into the heaving Sound once more.

“Farther yet!” cried Clem, and they tugged again on the spokes.

The *Walrus*, nosing into the run of the waves, shot forward toward the island head. Now, on their left, the dock was blazing fiercely. Flaring high into the black night, the flames brightly illuminated the unknown boat.

One glance was enough for Clem. “It’s my boat!” she screamed. “It’s the *Gypsy*! Oh, what can we do?” [256]

The situation was a difficult one. Clem’s natural impulse was to turn the *Walrus* in pursuit of her treasured launch. Yet such a move might place them again at the mercy of the outlaws. Second thought suggested the impossibility of capturing the *Gypsy* even if the *Walrus* could come abreast that fleet craft.

“Oh, Miss Campbell, who can it be at the wheel of the *Gypsy*? Why is my boat being raced to that dock fire? Can it be that some friend of Novak has been waiting to help him escape? They may plan to fire the powder dock and trust to the speed of my boat to help them get away.”

“My dear,” cried Miss Campbell, “you’ll have to wait for the answer to those questions. Right now we have enough to keep us busy. If we are going to prevent such danger falling on Dave and Dan Fowler, we’ve got to keep the upper hand of this crazy fishing boat.”

As though to add weight to the woman’s assertion, the engine in the *Walrus* coughed and stopped dead. At once the boat lost

headway, wallowed in defiance of the rudder, and then pitched across a heavy wave with a motion that sickened the two mariners.

“Do what you can to keep the boat headed right,” cried Clem. “I’ll see if I can start the engine again.” [257]

Down in the dark engine room, the girl fussed and fumbled over the strange machinery in desperate hopes that something would happen. She had no means of knowing where the trouble lay, but she groped about for several minutes hanging fast with one hand to avoid being flung from wall to engine by the pitching motion.

There in that black room, tossed by the increased violence of the waves, Clem felt the chill hand of despair upon her. What could she do? What could her companion do? They were caught by an angry channel whose fierce rip tides felt the encouragement of the lashing gale. At least two hours must pass before dawn; even then they might not encounter a rescuer—and in the meanwhile the *Walrus* was at the mercy of the storm. Its present course would carry it toward the powder dock but, intervening, lay the bleak island head with its clustered wave-swept rocks and its forbidding cliffs.

Clem shuddered, sick at heart with the thought of their position, nauseated with the lurch of the fishing boat and the odor of the dogfish oil. She sank to her hands and knees and crawled to the steps that led to the rear deck. Once through the door, the wind revived her. She grasped the sides of the companionway and stood with the gale tearing at her hair and middy collar, her body sheltered by the walls.

Well to the northward, the dock fire had sunk to a crimson glow. Nothing else was visible save the indistinct outlines of the boat itself and the vague forms of racing waves. Clem twisted her head to see her companion still wrestling with the wheel. [258]

“Miss Campbell,” she shouted wearily, “no use! Leave it alone and come here where you’ll be sheltered.”

“No luck with the engine?” gasped Miss Campbell, as she half fell down the steps to Clem’s side.

“It’s useless,” cried Clem. “I don’t know enough about such an engine. We’ll have to drift.”

“I think, if anything, the boat rides easier without my fighting the wheel,” said Miss Campbell. “Where will we drift to, Clem?”

“I’m afraid that a half hour will put us on the rocks at the Head.”

“Couldn’t we light a distress signal?”

“I thought of that, Miss Campbell, but I couldn’t find any matches. Did you see what became of the *Gypsy*?”

“I lost sight of it entirely, soon after you went down into the engine room, Clem.”

“We’re pretty much up against it, Miss Campbell! And if it hadn’t been for me you would probably be sound asleep in your Seattle bed with chances of a comfortable old [259]

age. Now—well, the best I can see is the thousandth chance of swimming for it when the *Walrus* strikes.”

“Don’t worry about having got me into trouble, dear. That’s sheer nonsense. We’re here. We’ll do what we can when the time comes. In the meanwhile, there is something worth while we can do.”

“What do you mean, Miss Campbell?” cried Clem above the noise of the wind and the rain.

“We can pray,” replied the little woman huddled in the companionway. In her voice was the calm assurance of her belief in the power of prayer. Clem reached for her friend’s hand; the two edged closer together, and a silence held between them. In those few minutes of silent appeal, Clem’s early training at her mother’s knee flooded back with a rush. The simple prayer of those days mingled with the hopes and fears of her present surroundings.

The *Walrus* was riding the storm easily enough now that she had her own way, but the lifting, falling, wallowing continued with unabated strength. Vaguely, Clem could make out the island outline across the top step at her head. Presently she shifted her position higher so that she could watch the blind progress of the *Walrus*. Wind and the racing tide currents were carrying them rapidly toward that part of the black outline known to Clem as the cliffs of the island point. [260]

“We’d better get ready,” she cried with a squeeze on Miss Campbell’s hand. “I’m going to get two of the life preservers that are strapped near the wheel.”

She pulled herself cautiously up the steps and along the side of the cabin to where the life belts were tied beneath a seat. Jerking two of them loose, Clem took advantage of a slanting of the deck to slide back to where Miss Campbell waited.

“Get into it like a vest. Tie it tight. Take off your shoes. Hurry!” shrilled Clem. “Then we had better stand up here on deck. We can hang to the cabin rail and be more in the open when we strike.”

“How close are we, Clem?”

“You can hear the waves breaking. See, you can make out the cliffs. There are a half-dozen big rocks that are out of the water even at high tide. We’ll be on them in five minutes. Oh, I wish that I could help you, Miss Campbell. Try for the beach below the Head.”

“Clem,” Miss Campbell’s voice hesitated, “Clem, if you should get through and I do not, tell Dan Fowler that I believe in him—and that I am wearing his ring!” [261]

“If we aren’t knocked unconscious, we may get through. Don’t give——”

Clem’s words stopped short. She spun about on the twisting deck to face the channel. The unmistakable staccato of a gas engine had come to her ears in the roar of the gale. Bearing from the north came the dancing mast lights of a small launch. With a scream of hope, Clem scrambled to the top of the low cabin, balanced herself barefooted on the uneasy spot, and waved her arms frantically.

“Help me shout, Miss Campbell!” she called back to her companion. And together they sent scream after scream into the teeth of the gale.

It may be that the launch had already sighted the drifting *Walrus*; it may be that the desperate cries of the girl and the woman carried through the night.

“They’re coming, Miss Campbell; they’re coming!” Clem cried, with a sob in her voice. “They can’t get close enough to take us off. I’ll have to throw them a rope so that they can tow us away from the rocks.”

On her hands and knees the girl crept across the cabin top and loosened what was left of the tie rope.

“Not long enough,” thought Clem. “I must get——” [262]

But Miss Campbell, anticipating the need, was already pushing a coil of light rope over the edge of the cabin. Clem wormed her way along the heaving top until she could grasp the rope end. Back at the tying iron she knotted one end fast and braced herself for the throw.

The rescuing boat had swerved at full speed and was now racing alongside.

“Catch the rope,” screamed Clem to the shadowy form visible on the other boat. She swung the coil of rope above her head and flung it with all her strength. The figure moved. The sound of the engine slackened. The figure lunged as though trying to catch the rope, but from the feel of the strand in her hand Clem knew that she had missed. She had miscalculated the moment to

throw.

With one backward glance through the darkness toward the looming shape of the thundering cliffs, Clem began recoiling the wet rope. Was there time for another trial? Cries of encouragement came faintly from Miss Campbell above the booming of the waves on the rocks. The other boat had circled and was working alongside a second time when Clem was ready with the rope. Again the girl braced herself on the swaying cabin top with rope coil above her head. For a second she watched the progress of the launch. Then she hurled the rope high as though to clear the prow of the other boat.

The movement of the figure showed that the hemp had [263] fallen partly upon the top of the enclosed cabin. A scramble, dimly visible, a leap back to the rear of the small launch, a stooping as though to tie, and then Clem felt the rope at her feet tighten. The speed of the launch changed. The lumbering *Walrus* responded to the pull and made headway slowly away from the huge rock that reared its foam-wreathed bulk within a boat's length.

So strong was the reaction of relief, Clem felt herself growing faint. She sprawled at full length on the spray-swept cabin top and gripped the iron rail that edged the cabin. For several minutes she lay thus, unheedful of anything except that the *Walrus* continued its outward course.

Their prayers had been answered. They had been snatched from the very froth of disaster. Who could it be that had so miraculously come to their rescue? In the tension of the previous minutes, Clem had given no attention to such a

question. Now thoughts flashed. She raised her head and scrutinized the dim outline of the boat ahead. Yes! It could be no other! The rescuing boat must be the *Gypsy*! She had seen her boat not more than an hour before. There was small likelihood that another such craft would be in the same vicinity at this time of the night.

Oh, if she could only in some way discover the identity [264] of the shadowy figure at the wheel of her beloved launch. Would the opportunity come before the stranger turned them loose again?

Clem got to her hands and knees, crawled back to the rear, and let herself down into the arms of her companion.

“You’ve saved us, Clem!” cried Miss Campbell, pulling her close with one arm.

“We’re off the rocks, all right, but do you know that’s the *Gypsy* ahead? I suppose I shouldn’t begrudge my boat to the person who has saved our lives, but I wish I knew who it is.”

“Do you think that he knows the *Walrus*?”

“If it’s Jim Novak, then he knows the *Santa Anna* and he is more interested in saving his boat from being wrecked than he is to keep us off the rocks.”

“Could it be Novak?”

“Why not? He may have planned for someone to lie offshore with the *Gypsy* while he had his revenge on Woodruff. I’ve no doubt but that he expected to regain his own boat. Having the

Gypsy close may have been for just such an emergency as came about. He followed us after his fight with Woodruff.”

“Then the sooner he can get rid of us, the better pleased he will be, Clem.” [265]

“Yes,” cried Clem, “and the more pleased we will be!”

As Clem and Miss Campbell talked, the two boats rounded the Head and came within sight of the twinkling lights of the powder dock. Steadily they plowed their way through the waves with not a word or signal from the rescuer.

“Someone is still up at the dock,” said Clem.

“I presume that some sort of search has been going on, judging by that message we heard over the radio.”

“Well, at this rate we’ll be able to put an end to their worries in no time. Looks to me as though our rescuer is going to take us right up to our door. Perhaps we can get a chance to thank him for saving our lives, and we might inquire as to why he has the *Gypsy*.”

“Whoever it is that has rescued us is no fool, Clem, as I think you’ll find before many minutes. I wish that I might have the opportunity to thank him, but I fear that he won’t stay near in that stolen launch.”

“Look, Miss Campbell, the searchlight is on at the powder dock. I’ll bet that Dave has either seen the *Gypsy*’s lights or heard its engine.”

The beam from the searchlight hurried along the white- [266]
capped waves, now and then catching a fishing boat
tossing at anchor. Northward it traveled until the *Gypsy* and the
Walrus lay within its path. There it held.

Gazing ahead, Clem saw the figure on the launch leave the
steering wheel for the rear of the boat. There were several
swift downward motions. The *Walrus* hesitated, lost headway,
and turned to wallow once more in the wave trough. They had
been cut loose.

At the same moment the figure on the *Gypsy* turned full into the
beam from the searchlight. Clem gasped, seized her
companion's shoulder, and pointed toward the strange sight.
The face of their rescuer carried no semblance of a human
being. It was completely covered with a scale-like mask.

"He is not dead, Miss Campbell!" screamed Clem, as the
Gypsy circled and moved away. "Look, we have been saved
by the man we thought was dead, by the man in the fish mask!"

CHAPTER XVIII

HOT CLUES

Dave and Dan Fowler were both in the boat that took the *Walrus* in tow a few minutes after the man in the fish mask had disappeared into the night with the *Gypsy*. Fishermen at the powder dock took charge of the anchoring of the *Walrus* while Clem and Miss Campbell were escorted with many exclamations of relief to a roaring blaze in the cottage fireplace. The story of their adventure was told in full, from the minute their skiff had scraped the sides of the *Santa Anna* down to that second of discovery when the searchlight had illumined the grotesque face of their rescuer.

What had taken place at the powder dock in their absence was more briefly told. As the girl and woman had imagined, Dave had felt no particular anxiety until they had failed to appear for the evening meal. Then he had hurried to the post office for a conference with Dan Fowler. With the coming of darkness and the rising gale, they had become genuinely alarmed. Telephone inquiries to various island towns had brought no news of the *Santa Anna*. A search party had discovered the abandoned rowboat down bay with a man's footprints leading from it. A fishing boat had followed the island south nearly to Wilton and had tried unsuccessfully to buck the storm, north, past the Head. A call to the Seattle radio station had resulted in the broadcasting of a general appeal. From the Calley fishing village had come news of the burning of that dock and the escape along the beach of a crew of fighting strangers thought to be rum-runners. [268]

Dave's faith in his sister's ability to take care of herself had finally caused him to switch on the big searchlight as a signal in case they were trying to beat their way in from the storm.

"I had a hunch you were on the water, Sis," declared Dave, leaning against the mantel, "but I expected to see you turn up in the *Gypsy*."

"Yes," said the postmaster, pausing in his task of warming Miss Campbell's hands between his own. "Dave kept saying to me, 'They're after the *Gypsy*; maybe they are having a tough time getting it, but I know Sis. She won't give up until that launch is back.'"

"And I won't," asserted Clem stoutly. "At least I know who has it now. If Jim Novak is the man behind that mask, we've got more than one reason for hoping that the sheriff will lay hands on him."

"Well, if that wild Norwegian shows up around the warehouse to-night, he will sure get punctured," said Dave. "There must be fifteen of the summer colony people who have been guarding that warehouse ever since the news came of the fire up at the Calley dock. Their fear of an explosion has pretty much relieved me of my responsibility." [269]

"I guess that you can go to sleep in safety, Annie," remarked the postmaster. "You'll have to sleep all day to-morrow—to-day, I should say—in order to make up for this affair."

"Dan, I'll sleep the better if you'll tell us whether you really know who is the man behind that scaly mask," replied Miss Campbell.

The postmaster, taken back by the directness of the remark, moved uneasily in his chair and looked at his watch. "Say, now, do you know how early in the morning it is? I must get along."

Miss Campbell laid her hand on his arm. "Are you trying to avoid my question, Dan?"

"Why—well, er—you mean do I know the fellow who wears that mask? How should I know any more than anyone else?"

"That's not answering my question, Dan!"

The postmaster looked from one to another of the faces [270] around the fire as though seeking aid or escape. When he turned back to his newly regained sweetheart something close to resignation was written on his countenance.

"Annie, I'm sorry that you have asked that question because I cannot answer it as I would like to. All I can say is this: I am not certain enough to even tell you my suspicions any more than I have. I have felt for weeks that the removal of the powder warehouse would result in a happy solution to these troubles. Much as I hate to see Dave's job go, I have felt that I should work for the abandonment of the warehouse. I can't tell you how glad I am that they're goin' to start takin' the powder out to-morrow."

"Yes, Clem," said Dave, "Hammer himself is coming this afternoon to take charge and to make plans for the disposal of the company's buildings."

"Dan, you ought not to have any secrets from me," said Miss

Campbell.

“I hope that it won’t be for long, Annie!” replied the postmaster soberly. He took his hat and moved to the door.

“Well,” exclaimed Clem, “so far as I’m concerned, the most important thing to be done is to discover who the man in the fish mask is. He has my boat. As soon as I’ve had a good sleep I’m going to go back up to that old cabin on the island and hunt for clues. I think there’s more to be learned about that ledge of rock.

“Years ago, Mr. Morgan and Bunte saw a strange disappearance there and Dave has had the same experience. Perhaps when we solve the mystery of the rock, we’ll find we know more about the man who has the *Gypsy*.” [271]

“I’m with you, Sis!” cried Dave. “If Hammer comes, you and I will have a picnic of our own up at the old cabin.”

“Sleep is the important thing right now,” smiled the postmaster. “So, good-night.”

Sleep it was for Clem and Miss Campbell, until the sun was well started on its downhill journey. Clem was the first of the two to make her appearance. In her bathing suit, she ran down for a swim that wiped away yawns and sent the blood tingling through her veins.

“It would have to be a regular Rip Van Winkle of a log to sleep as I have since I struck the pillow,” she cried to Dave, as she ran dripping up the path beneath the Devil’s Swing. “Did Mr. Hammer come?”

“Yes, he’s down at the post office talking with Mr. Fowler and the committee of summer campers.”

“How long is he going to stay?”

“Longer than we are, I guess,” replied Dave.

“To-day is our last day, isn’t it, Dave?”

“Yep.”

“When I’m dressed, we’ll do some planning. Shall we?”

“Well, go on and get into your duds.”

[272]

But apparently the day was not intended for planning. Dave found himself presently called upon by Mr. Hammer to make a final checking of the warehouse stock, and Clem made the most of the opportunity to play the hostess to Miss Campbell.

That lady was frankly tired. The strain of adventure had sapped her of her usual vivacity and left a languor that promised to linger for more than one day. She lay in the porch hammock, tucked in with a bright-colored Indian robe, and lived over with Clem the events of yesterday.

From where she sat, Clem could see the island head rearing its irregular outline, grim despite its mantle of green and the warmth of the summer sun. How singularly that huge mass of rock had fitted into the background of these few days! Into the background of countless days! That rocky ledge, high above the cove, had looked out upon the sails of the first voyageur to try the breezes of this land-guarded sea. Across its moss-grown

edge a company of Indians had vanished into foggy space. In later years, two men, sworn comrades, had wrestled with fearful outcome upon its slippery surface. A weird character, with motives unknown, had stood face masked upon that rock—stood and faded in the twinkling of an eye to reappear days later in the rush and roar of last night's storm.

Yes, Dave had been wrong in thinking that the wearer of [273] the fish mask had met his death in the deep cove beneath the cliff. He was not only alive but he was in possession of her beloved launch. Where he had managed to keep the *Gypsy* to escape the eyes of the searchers, Clem could not imagine. She wished that she could be doing more toward its recovery yet she felt that she had done everything within her power. Now she must play a waiting game. Sooner or later, news must come that the launch had been seen again. The spot where it was sighted would give direction to additional search.

Sooner or later would come the moment when that strange mask would be torn aside to reveal the identity of the man of mystery. Clem hoped that she might be present when that revelation came; present with Captain Main and Dave and a score of others!

So thoughts and conversation passed the brief hours until [274] Twasla's blows on the steel triangle announced supper. After that came an evening around a fire built by Dave on the beach. Mr. Hammer sat with his back against a log and smoked his fragrant after-dinner cigar. The postmaster was there to watch over Annie Campbell with an awkward solicitude. Dave nearly scorched his face and smoked out his eyes building a fire that ruddied the waves for a hundred feet from shore,

picked out the figures on the dock of watchmen from the summer colony, and painted the shadows of warehouse and cottage against the gloomy cliffs. Clem stretched herself at a comfortable distance from the blaze and listened eagerly to Mr. Hammer's amusing accounts of evenings he had spent around camp fires.

But toward nine o'clock the late hours of the previous night prompted the saying of good-nights.

Clem awoke next morning with the feeling of complete recovery. She sang softly as she dressed, scraps of a dozen melodies, and then she came to one of her favorite pastimes—making up ditties of her own. The tune was often an old one, but the words were new enough for anyone.

A fisherman girl was caught in a whirl
Of salmon so silvery and plump;
She ran out of gas and cried out, "Alas,
Right here's where I get a good bump."

As she sang, she noticed from her window that Morgan's yacht still rode at anchor near the island head. The sight brought remembrances of her own *Gypsy*.

Once I had a boat so nice,
Thought I was in Paradise;
But my boat has gone away—
Gone somewhere across the bay.

"Oh, but we're going to find my boat," muttered Clem. [275]
"We must. Dave's job is done for. We must find the
Gypsy, then we can make a real try at fishing. I have a feeling

that we may accomplish something in this trip to the old cabin. I hope that nothing interferes to prevent Dave's going this morning."

Just before leaving her room, Clem picked up her small electric search light and thrust it into the hip pocket of her khaki trousers. It was a trivial move, based entirely upon impulse, but a move that Clem was to remember with thankfulness before many hours.

"Why do you suppose Morgan has stayed, Dave?" questioned Clem, as she sat down at the breakfast table and drew back the frayed curtain from the window beside her that overlooked the bay. They were eating without Miss Campbell, who had voiced her intention the night before of sleeping as long as she could.

"Nothing unusual about his staying, Sis; you see, he's been comin' here regularly in good weather, as long as I know of. He usually anchors in deep water near the Point, and fishes from the rear deck. I've seen him sittin' there in an easy chair by the hour, either deep-fishing for sole an' rock cod or using a casting rod for trout and salmon."

"Doesn't he come ashore?"

"Never did until the other day. Sometimes he'd hire Bunte to run him out to the banks in a small boat, but more often than not he wouldn't have a small boat along with him at all. I never paid much attention to him until the other day when I recognized who he is. I wouldn't be surprised to hear that he had something to do with getting this place abandoned. He's a sly old codger."

“Well, Davie dear, he may be sly, but he is generous, and he’s been mighty nice to us. From what he said the other evening I think there’s a chance that you might get a job through him. Well, now, when do we start for the old cabin?”

While Clem was speaking, Twasla waddled in with another plate full of pancakes. She must have caught the last of Clem’s remarks for she set the plate down with more suddenness than necessary and spoke in her toothless articulation: “Me say you no go to lookout place. Much better here.”

“But, why not, Twasla?” answered Dave, in surprise.

“No good place; much better here. You hear story Morgan man tell. You no take girl.” With this, the old woman shuffled out of the room leaving brother and sister to stare at each other in some perplexity.

“She can’t forget what she went through up there. And I don’t know that I blame her. Think you want to go after that, Sis? Hard to say what we may run into.” [277]

“Of course I’m going, and the sooner we get started, the better pleased I will be. I’m convinced that we may run across a clue that will enable us to get a line on the *Gypsy*, and I certainly feel that we need that launch as we never needed anything before.”

“Well, you know it takes more nerve not to do a thing sometimes than it takes to do it. You don’t need to hang on to your plan just to keep me from making fun of you. I can keep busy helping here with Mr. Hammer as well as not if you’d like to postpone the trip.”

“Nothing doing, Dave!” exclaimed Clem, rising. “Pack the rifle if you want to, but I don’t want to spend another day without doing something about the *Gypsy*. We’ve simply got to find the man in the fish mask and trail him to his home, then we can get some men and go after him in earnest.”

“All right, Sis; we’ll go,” said Dave, rather admiring the stand that his sister had taken. “We’ll take the dog and the rifle, and maybe we’ll see something worth while. Your general plan is a good one. I’d like to run across Ol’ Fish-mask again. I’d like to march him down the trail with the rifle pokin’ between his shoulders and turn him over to Captain Main. It would be a good one on Main if we were to bring him in after the big search they pulled off.” [278]

“Well, we shall probably be back before Miss Campbell gets up,” said Clem, as she made a package of several sandwiches. “So my conscience won’t hurt me for running away for a while.”

Five minutes later, Twasla watched the boy, the girl, and the dog wend their way from sight among the alders that hid the trail up the ravine to the top of the island. The frown on the old Indian’s face deepened. She pulled a dilapidated sunbonnet from its hook behind the kitchen door and waddled down the beach toward the place where the recovered skiff lay above high tide. Evidently her mind was made up, she would take an active hand in affairs if these young people failed to heed her admonition.

Clem, Dave, and the hound found themselves, within three quarters of an hour, looking down on the small clearing where

the cabin stood. The scene was quite the same as when Clem had first viewed it with Mr. Hawkins, the carpenter: a one-roomed house, roofed with long cedar shakes, and surrounded by a bramble of berry bushes, ferns, and small evergreens; a nearly obliterated trail leading from the hut to the outjutting rock visible from the water far below; the distant stretch of Sound, and mainland, and snow-capped mountains.

As before, Big Boy leaped ahead and raced for the cabin. [279]

“Now, watch him, Clem; maybe we can tell from the way he acts whether there’s been anyone around here recently.”

“He acts as though he wasn’t sure what kind of a reception he may get; but you see he isn’t especially interested in the house.”

“There’s nobody there. Come on.” With only a trace of hesitancy they advanced to where the hound was busy with his nose to earth following various trails. Dave pushed open the cabin door and they stepped into the small room that, according to remaining testimony, had done duty as a kitchen, parlor, and bedroom.

“Just think, Ward and Blackie lived here for years; funny that they’d build up here so far from the beach.”

“No better place than this for a lookout, Sis; and for years the smuggling business has made a good lookout necessary. I’ll bet that the two birds that lived here didn’t depend on their fishing. Captain Main told me that the place had been under suspicion for a long time.”

“And it must be that the Head Hunters had their funeral fire just about where the cabin now stands.”

“Looks that way, Clem. Say, can’t you just imagine those [280] Indians filing over that rock out there?”

“What’s this, Dave?” The girl pointed to something in one corner of the dilapidated bunk.

“Say! Clem, that’s a stick of dynamite.”

“Then that’s what the Fish-mask was using the other evening, trying to get rid of the revenue boat. He probably heard the shot that stopped me and was all ready when we came into the cove beneath the rock out there. He stood right out there on that rock and deliberately lit that dynamite and tossed it down on us in hopes that it would kill us.”

“Sounds like he’s a hard-hearted villain or else that he’s so off his head he doesn’t know what he is doing.” Dave strode to the door of the cabin in answer to a whine from the big dog. “Look at what the pup has found. You’re not the only one that has unearthed clues.” He widened the opening to admit the hound. Big Boy came in dragging a black oilcloth slicker.

For a moment, Clem and Dave stood looking down at the animal and his find, then the girl broke into sudden realization: “Dave, Old Fish-mask had that on, or one just like it, when he rode the Devil’s Swing and when I saw him in the *Gypsy*!”

“You’re right, Clem. He had one on when I chased him [281] and he went under in the cove beneath the rock.”

Dave lifted the coat and swung it about for inspection. He thrust his hand into one of the pockets. A second of fumbling and then a look came over Dave's countenance that Clem will never forget to her dying day.

“What is it, Dave? What is it?”

In reply, the young man's hand appeared. In it was clutched a corncob pipe. “It's still hot, Clem; it's still hot!”

CHAPTER XIX

THE ROCK OF MYSTERY

Dave held the pipe before him for a moment, then with one accord brother and sister stepped out of the cabin door into the open. Something had changed the very aspect of the day. The sun shone fully as gloriously as when they had entered the cabin. The breeze, caressing ferns and trees, still gathered fragrance and whispered gently on its way. But in the minds of the two explorers each clump of bushes, each tree trunk, was hiding place for the man of mystery. Every second they expected to hear his hideous laugh ring along the ridge, to see his form slink along the trail. Dave held the rifle in the hollow of his arm. Clem picked up a stick from near her feet.

“There could be more than one coat like that,” murmured Clem, biting nervously on her lower lip.

“Wish I could think this wasn’t his,” ejaculated Dave, [283]
“and yet this certainly is a hot clue and that’s what we have been looking for. I should say that he was in this clearing not more than fifteen minutes ago although I don’t really know how long the heat will stay in a pipe.”

The hound, impatient of praise for his discovery, trotted across the little clearing and mounted the big flat rock that hung over the edge. Clem watched him as he gazed out over the Sound. She recalled how he had looked to her when she had seen him from the rowboat, in just such a pose. The hound sniffed along the side of the rock, whined softly, and glanced back to the

couple standing before the cabin.

“Say, I never noticed whether there’s an attic to the cabin; did you, Clem? If there is he might be hiding there.”

“Peek in again, Dave.”

Dave pushed at the door with the muzzle of his rifle and peered upward. “Just rafters——”

Clem’s fingers gripped his sleeve. He turned sharply and followed the direction of her pointing arm. The rock, where a moment before the dog had stood, was vacant. Dave rubbed his eyes and looked the second time.

“Hey, pup; here, Big Boy,” shouted Dave.

No answer.

“Gone, Dave, the same way you said Ol’ Fish-mask went—just gone! Just the way those Head Hunters went. There’s something funny about that rock, something pretty close to spooky.”

“You don’t think the dog jumped off, do you, Sis?”

[284]

“Let’s look.”

A minute later they were on their hands and knees gazing over the edge of the flat rock. On the front face, the drop was almost perpendicular to the blue-green water. With a spring, a man could clear the shelving ledge below and strike the deep-water cove after close to a five-hundred-foot flight. If he ever came

up again, he would be within fifty yards of where Morgan's yacht now lay riding the slow swells.

Dave moved to the left-hand edge and scrutinized the underbrush that clung to the narrow ledges. "This first shelf is plenty wide enough for a man or a dog to land on, Sis. See, it's about five feet wide right below here where you see that mess of ferns."

"Do you suppose that there is another ledge beneath that one; one that we can't see from here?"

["I'm going to drop down there](#), Sis, and have a look. You aren't afraid if you have the rifle, are you?"

"Of course not, Dave, but can you get back up?"

"It isn't more than eight feet. You drag that old pole over [285] from there by the cabin and when I'm ready to come up, we'll slant it from the ledge up to here, and I can shinny up in no time. I'll drop down while you get the pole. There's no danger in getting down there."

"All right, Dave, but do be careful."

Dave laid the rifle on the moss-covered surface away from the edge and buckled his belt tighter. Jumping down to the trail, Clem hurried for the pole. She had half a mind to propose that they give up the search, but the thought of Dave's joking sided with her intense curiosity regarding the strange disappearance, and she said nothing.

As she tugged away on the pole, she saw Dave lower himself

over the side of the rock. His hands, gripping a place on the edge, were in view for a moment and then slipped from sight. The illusion that he had vanished over a sheer precipice was so perfect that Clem gasped involuntarily and felt her heart skip a beat. Was that a muffled cry she heard? With trembling limbs she clambered back to the rock and threw herself full length. A cautious crawl, and she was looking down from the spot where Dave's hands had last been visible. With a moan Clem realized that the ledge was empty!

A chipmunk raced across a bare stretch of the ledge, [286] flirted daintily, and whisked behind a bunch of grass—not another sign of life. The spot where Dave should have landed was empty except for the clump of ferns behind which no dog or man could hide.

The girl was close to black unconsciousness for a moment. Then she found voice and screamed her brother's name in hysterical frenzy, until her throat was parched, until a cold sweat broke out on her forehead. Dave was gone. Dave was gone. She wanted to run; anywhere to leave this terrible spot, to get away, to hide, to——

Suddenly she gripped her finger nails into the palms of her hands and gained control over herself. "I mustn't lose my head," she muttered. "It's at least two miles to the powder dock; too far to get help; Dave may have slipped and hit his head. He may be lying on another ledge, or he may have rolled back where I cannot see him. He cannot have gone over the edge to the water or else I would see some commotion where he struck. Oh, I don't know what—I don't know whether it is an accident—or if Ol' Fish-mask has—I—I——"

In a blind recklessness, Clem leaped to her feet, tossed the rifle to the branches of a bush below, jammed the pole over as a return caution, and swung down as Dave had done. The rock bit into her hands and wrists with cruel insistence before she dropped for the clump of ferns and bushes that had found root in a crack directly below.

When Clem loosened her hold upon the rocky ledge, she [287] had no conception of what lay before her, yet for Dave's sake she was determined to search that ledge. She felt her feet come in contact with the foliage. She expected a jar from level rock beneath the clump of ferns. Instead, her feet struck a hard slanting surface, the bushes snapped upward along her body and closed above her head as she half fell, half slipped downward into the chill darkness of a crevice, perhaps four feet in diameter, that curved inward beneath the great rock.

Gasping from the force of the fall, Clem strove to cry aloud, to dig her heels into the rock, to stop the progress by grasping at the smooth walls. The descent was not rapid, for after the first few feet the rock passage down which she was sliding lost much of its slant. Still there was enough grade to render useless the wild efforts which she made to stop her movements.

Her mind was a jumble of frantic thought. Was this the [288] same way in which the hound and Dave had disappeared? Had they already met their death in some fearful fall to come, or would she encounter them in this subterranean tunnel and with them await a slow death by starvation? Could this passage lead to the crazed man's secret home? Grotesque thoughts of horror, torture, everlasting entombment, crowded Clem's mind in the seconds that the smooth rock slid upward

under her. The odd fancy caught her that she alone in all this universe of darkness was motionless and that the walls were sweeping by with a slow whirling motion.

Seconds flitted by—hours, so it seemed to Clem. Then with a suddenness that took her breath the girl shot out into midair and dropped in the blackness. “The end,” thought Clem, but the next moment she was sprawling on an uneven surface. The drop had not been more than three feet.

She lay quite still for a minute, collecting her senses. Absolute darkness, a dank, mouldering odor, a general feeling of spaciousness. Her right hand felt out the surface beneath its palm. Smooth—round. The fingers advanced. Other similar objects in proximity. The fingers moved into the tiny valley between these strange objects. A round hole in the smooth surface. Another. Farther down on the surface a row of——

Clem came to a standing position in the darkness before she well knew that she had moved. Her whole frame was shaking. Her fingers had been feeling out the contour of a human skull. From the uneven footing she judged that other skulls lay under her feet. She backed first one way and then another without escaping from the gruesome message.

What trap of death had she fallen into? How terrible was this blackness and the knowledge of what lay beneath her feet. If she could only see! [289]

Then it was that she remembered the pocket flashlight that chance had caused her to pick up that morning before she quitted her room. She wormed it from her pocket, fingered the

lens, fearful that her fall had broken it, and punched home the button. The shaft of light fell upon the uneven surface where she had lain. Skulls and bones! A carpet of dark, mouldering bones—once the support of human beings.

Dave! Where could he be? Was it possible that he had not preceded her into this chamber? Was she then alone, or was there some other outlet to this rock room already discovered by Dave?

Clem slowly swept the light beam around the vaulted chamber into which she had slid. There was the opening through which she had come. Even before she made her way to it and observed its slanting walls, she was sure that, without a rope from above, escape was impossible in that direction. Tears welled from her eyes while she continued the investigation of her prison. The high dark walls frowned down upon the unwilling intruder from every direction that the light flashed.

The girl lowered the beam to follow the base of the walls. Here was a difference, for, leaning against the walls, and in piles of various sizes, were Indian relics of every description. Bows, arrows, spears, baskets. Clem's thoughts leaped to the story of the Head Hunters. Perhaps this was an explanation of the disappearance of the warriors. Might they not have fallen into this cave and perished here—perished as she would probably do! [290]

As the light struck the folds of a blanket white with mold, hanging in one corner, Clem saw the lower corner drop noiselessly. Someone or something was behind the blanket although apparently it hung flat against the wall. Clem's

hesitation was momentary. Dave, Big Boy, or the man in the fish mask? Nothing would be gained by postponing the evil moment. She held the beam of light on the blanket and spoke in a voice that shook:

“Who are you?”

At the sound of her voice, the blanket was jerked outward and Dave’s anxious face appeared in what seemed to be the entrance to another tunnel. The cry of gladness which burst from the girl’s lips was echoed by her brother.

“Clem! Is it you?” Dave rushed to her side and put an arm around her.

“What’s left of me,” replied Clem, covering her real emotion with a light remark. “Oh, Dave, at least I’m not alone in this awful place!”

“I saw the light,” exclaimed Dave, in a subdued voice; [291]
“thought it might be Ol’ Fish-mask, so I laid low.”

“Have you followed the tunnel?”

“No, Sis; I looked around in here with the aid of some matches, and had just crawled behind the blanket when I heard the noise of your landing. I suppose that you dropped from the rock aiming to hit the same bunch of ferns that I did——”

“Exactly; and now we’re going to have our hands full getting out. One thing sure, we’ll never be found in here.”

“Ol’ Fish-mask may find us.”

“Ugh! We must hurry and find the way out. I’ll bet there’s a passage down to water level, or else far enough down to make it possible to jump into the cove. That’s how the old fellow managed to get away so neatly each time. When you saw him disappear he merely dropped down into this slanting passage. He has taught the dog the same trick and that’s how the dog disappeared. When Ol’ Fisk-mask left his slicker and his pipe he may have thought he was cornered by us coming down the ridge.”

“He may be in here now, somewhere in this underground home of his, waiting for us!”

“That’s about as cheerful an idea, Dave, as being here in this graveyard. How do suppose these bones got here? [292]
Are they the remains of the Head Hunters band?”

“I doubt that, Sis, but I do think that the Head Hunters knew the secret of the cliff and used this route as a quick passage back to their canoes on the beach. No, my guess about the bones is that Sound Indians used this as a burial vault. Used it for many years. Like as not Twasla knew about it. That’s one reason why she didn’t want us to come back up here.”

“You mean you think they just slid the bodies down?”

“Sure. An easy method, but of course you can see that all these trinkets and weapons have been brought in by someone. The place has been fitted up as a regular burial vault.”

“There’s a dagger, Dave. Looks like it had been made from a deer’s antler. I’m going to carry that along. It will be better than nothing in case we meet Ol’ Fish-mask.”

“This old spear ought to help some,” said Dave, picking up a short spear that leaned against the wall. “The head seems solid enough. Say, Sis, if we ever get out of here, we’ll come back with ropes and get this stuff. I’ll tell you, we can sell this junk.”

“Maybe so—but right now I can’t think of that. Oh, [293] Dave, I had an awful time; I sure thought you were a goner when I came back to the rock and couldn’t see a thing of you.”

“Say, Sis, maybe you think I haven’t been sweating blood since I dropped from that rock. I didn’t know what you might do when you saw that I was gone. When I saw what I had landed on in here I pretty near threw a fit. It’s not half so bad now with that flashlight to help out.”

“Let’s get started. If it is as you think, if the Head Hunters knew a way down to the beach, then we should be able to find our way out. You haven’t seen anything of the dog?”

“Nope, not a thing. Give me the light and I’ll crawl in first. I’ll spot the passage for a ways and then douse the light. No telling how long the battery will last.”

Glad to leave the gruesome carpeting, Clem and Dave made their way into the crevice. After revealing the sameness of the narrow, low corridor for some distance, Dave shut off the light and they crept along in inky blackness.

“Hope we don’t have an earthquake now,” remarked Dave. “If these rocks twisted a foot closer together, no one would be able to get through here again.”

“Aren’t you afraid that we’re walking straight into the old fellow’s den, Dave?”

“I’d just as soon run chances with him as to spend the rest of my life here, or back with the bones, Sis. Look out for the steps.” [294]

What Dave had spoken of as steps were more a series of long slants broken by occasional drops of three or four feet. Here and there the crevice widened, but not enough to produce a chamber until some minutes of rapid descent had carried the couple deep into the point of the island. Then a flash of the light revealed a change in the formation; glittering rock reflected the gleam as in a million minute mirrors.

Suddenly the narrow passage gave way into a spacious chamber and the hoarse bark of the hound greeted them. The flashlight picked him up halfway across the rock-strewn floor, and the next moment he was beside them, whining and wiggling in evident gladness. The dog’s presence did much to cheer the brother and sister, although they feared that his excitement indicated their nearness to his wild master.

Back and forth they stalked, now where Clem could lay hands on him, now off toward the farther side of the cavern. Dave circled the light around the room. It was several times larger than the cavern of bones, and far more spectacular in its grand beauty. In places the color of the rainbow glittered back from the high ceiling and jagged walls. Ancient drippings from the dome had hung pendent formations in disarray so astounding that Clem broke into muttered exclamation.

“Some palace of jewels! Dave, isn’t it just gorgeous!” [295]

“Gosh, I wish we had a torch. That would light things up and maybe we could see why the pup keeps beating it over to that far wall.”

“Let me have the flash a minute, Dave.” Clem reached for the little metal cylinder that meant so much to them. Her hand touched Dave’s, fumbled, and the next second the light had fallen with a tiny crash followed by blackness.

“Now, see what you’ve done!” cried Dave. He groped for the flash, found it, and pushed the button frantically. “It’s broken!”

“You’ve got matches, haven’t you?”

“Only two left; you’ve got us in a pretty mess, Sis!”

“Are we any worse off than we would have been if I hadn’t brought the flashlight at all?” replied Clem. “Well, then, don’t cry over spilled milk, Davie dear. Suppose we just sit down and think things over a bit.”

Dave subsided, still grumbling, and, when they were settled close together on a slab of rock, Clem continued: [296]

“The hardest thing for us, Dave, is to keep our nerve. If I were to let go and do what I feel like doing, I’d start running and screaming, and I suppose I would keep it up until I was too tired to go on. That’s what I wanted to do when I was outside on the rock. I feel more like bawling right now than trying to keep my nerve and yours, too. We’ve got to keep our heads, Dave. We must plan carefully and save our strength as much as we can. Now think.”

For several minutes the only sounds were the dog's whining and the sound of distant dripping. Then Dave spoke up: "There may be another way out of this place just like there was up above. If we went to the wall and you took one direction and I the other, we could feel our way around. That way we would be sure to strike the opening, if there is one, even though we didn't see an opening when we had the light on."

"Dave, do you know where we came in?"

"Why, yes, I think I do; I'm about facing that place right now."

"Well, Dave, you go over there and stay so that we won't lose track. I'm going to take hold of Big Boy's collar and see if I can get him to take me to the way out."

"Say, now, that's a good idea, although it seems to me that we would have seen the place if there is one."

"I'm going to try the scheme, at any rate, Dave." So [297] while Dave made his way to the wall and presently announced his having found the entrance, Clem took firm hold of the hound's neck and stood up.

"Now, doggy, go home!" she exclaimed sharply. Big Boy barked and tugged ahead.

"He's going, Dave."

"Coming, you mean," replied Dave. "You're coming straight to me. He thinks you want to go back up to the bone-yard. Hey, you pup, get for home. Get!"

The dog paused under Clem's hand and then turning to the right, stepped as rapidly as Clem could follow among the big rocks. His movements were so certain that Clem had high hopes that her plan was working. Slowly they made their way across the floor of the cavern, with Dave encouraging them at every step. Several times the girl bit back murmurs of pain when her legs came in contact with the rough edges of the boulders. Once she stumbled and was saved from a bad fall only by her hold upon the dog's collar. Then Clem's groping hand came against the damp wall.

"He's brought me to the wall, Dave," she called. "I don't find any hole, though."

Carefully Clem felt over the wall she faced. From the floor slowly her hands traveled up as high as she could reach. Then to the sides she repeated the performance while Dave was making his way to where she stood. Together they felt out the surface for some distance on each side of the spot where Big Boy had come to a stand, yet they could find no indication of an opening. It was hard for them to give up hope but, finally, Clem sank down in the darkness with a sob in her throat. Hours would elapse before anything would be done at the powder dock because of their absence. By nightfall Miss Campbell and Mr. Hammer would probably grow uneasy and organize a searching party. They would comb the locality of the old cabin but might never hit upon the unusual entrance to the tunnel. Clem wondered how long Dave and she could live in that dizzy darkness before death from starvation came. Then she noticed that Dave was talking to the dog.

[298]

"Home, pup; where's home? Say, Sis, you know every time I

“speak to him that way he rears up against the rock. I’ll bet he knows the hole is up above where we are—up so high that we can’t reach it. I’m going to tear the sleeve off my shirt and use it as a torch. Here, take this match and strike it when I say ready. Remember that match is the next to the last one we have. Then, when the sleeve lights up, you look to the right for the hole and I’ll take the left side and see if I can locate anything.”

“All right, Dave,” said Clem, wiping her eyes with the back of her hand. [299] “I guess the dog’s got a lot more sense than we have. He’s got more real brains than the two of us put together. Haven’t you, Big Boy?”

The hound’s answering bark echoed and re-echoed in the black chamber.

“Ready, Clem? Now see to it that you shield the blaze and hold it steady.”

The flare of the match lit up the strained faces of the girl and the boy, reflected back the green depths of the big hound’s eyes, and created strange shadows that swayed and hovered on glittering walls and ceiling.

Even as the flame was to be applied to the twisted shirt sleeve, a long-drawn call, faint, yet clear, stiffened Dave and Clem into rigid postures and set the dog into a frenzy of baying. Just where the call had come from was impossible to tell because of the echo.

“Shall we answer?” whispered Clem.

“Big Boy has done that for us already. We’d better lie low and

see who it is. There is a chance that we may discover the way out without having anything to do with the man in the fish mask. If he comes nearer we may be able to tell just where he is. What I'm afraid of is that he is coming down the same tunnel that we just came in by and that this chamber is after all the end of the cavern."

The match fell from Clem's trembling fingers, sent up a final quaver of shadows, and went out. The dog howled again. Clem drew close to Dave and laid her hand on his arm. [300]

"Look!" hissed Dave suddenly.

Clem's glance took in the darkness above their heads. Near nine feet above them appeared a rectangular glow perhaps six feet long and five feet high. From the nature of the shadows, it appeared that the actual opening was fronted by a ledge several feet wide. The glow grew in strength.

"Leave the dog, Sis. We'll get back here on the side. Give me your hand; I know where we will be out of sight. Hurry!"

Seizing Clem's arm, Dave half dragged her across the dimly lighted chamber. At one spot near the farther wall a loose pile of jagged rock afforded a place of partial concealment. Here they crouched and waited with thumping hearts.

CHAPTER XX

THE PLUNGE

“Now, if the hound doesn’t give us away,” muttered Dave, “we may get by without having a stick of dynamite tossed at us!”

“The man would never do anything like that in here, Dave! The explosion would bring down the walls on him, too.”

“How’re you going to tell what a crazy man’ll do? Huh?”

“Have you still got the spear, Dave?”

“Sure! Say, do you think I’d leave that behind?”

“I wish there was some way to keep him from coming down in this chamber. Now that we know where the opening is, we could manage somehow to get up to that ledge and follow the new tunnel. I feel sure that it leads to a hole that we can get out of. If the hound goes with him and doesn’t give us away maybe the man will go on out in the open at the foot of the cliff.”

“Sh-s-sh!” cautioned Dave.

The increasing light, pushing back the inky shadows, was slowly revealing more fully the strange beauty of the glittering chamber. Clem and Dave ceased to whisper as the million mirrors gathered brightness. [302]

The big dog, backing way from the wall from which came the light, waited restlessly, whining occasionally in the direction

of the watchers. Twice his deep voice awakened the echoes of the rocky cavern. Then, abruptly the hound crouched in silence and a voice raised in song became audible.

The words of the simple tune, sung in the hoarse voice, filled the cave with an uncanny tone so magnified by the sounding walls that Clem unconsciously attempted to shrink still farther into the covering gloom of the corner.

“When a man goes to sea,
With his topsails set,
And the wind’s in the lee——”

The words ceased as suddenly as they had begun, and a lantern was thrust from the mouth of the crevice. For an instant, the light and the bare arm were all the breathless watchers could distinguish. Then appeared upon the ledge the wildest figure that Clem had ever dreamed of.

Over the face of the weird creature was stretched a fish [303]
skin which covered the features completely. The fish head at the top and the tail beneath the chin gave tying places for the rags that held the ugly mask in place. Eyeholes and a mouth slit completed the face disguise. Nondescript clothes hanging from the narrow shoulders served to emphasize the smallness of the man’s stature, and the skinny hand that lifted the lantern gave evidence of a shrunken body.

Clem, crouched beside Dave in the corner, gazed in mingled repulsion and curiosity. It was much the same sight that she had seen twice before except that this time no slicker covered the clothing of the man of mystery. Clem’s mind flashed back to all

that she had learned of this outcast: his life with his partner, Blackie—long since dead; his island trading; his plans against the invading powder warehouse; his bravado in the Devil’s Swing; his rescue of the *Walrus* from rocks of the Head. Who could this person be? Where had he hidden the *Gypsy*?

The man’s attention was centered on the hound.

“Back are ya—ya hell hound!” came the rasping voice. “Back ya come, but I’ll learn ya ta turn traitor—ta leave me an’ live with them as lives down there.” And then came that hideous laugh that had brought the chills racing along Clem’s spine before.

The dog cowered while the gnome-like man set his lantern on the edge of the ledge and, seizing a fragment of jagged rock, hurled it fiercely. Back and forth the beast dodged in his efforts to escape the shower of missiles. [304]

“Did ya see Blackie? Did ya?” The voice rose to the scream of a maniac. “Ain’t I told ya—Blackie’s gone to the dogfish! The pogies’s been swimming ’tween his ribs fer many a year. Ha—a—a—a! An’ ya left Ol’ Bill. Ya—owee—ee—ee! Ya didn’t need to go down there ta see Blackie, he’s hiding in the shadows everywhere. He won’t stay outside where he belongs.”

Dave’s shoulder against the wall dislodged a fragment that fell and rolled noisily.

The maniac stopped shouting and cupped his ear to listen. Then in a lower voice as though to himself: “Thought I heard the walls rattle. Ha—a—a, maybe ’twas Blackie slippin’ off the

rock again.”

A new spasm of shrieking curses and heaving of rocks swept the crazed man. Still the great dog held his ground, something pathetic in the posture he maintained, as he dodged and whined.

Suddenly, as the dog freed his fangs in a snarl, above the shouts of Ol’ Bill came screaming words from a new source: “I’ve come for ya, Ol’ Bill; I’ve come for your black heart!”

Midway in the act of throwing, the maniac was [305]
paralyzed for a moment, and then with a convulsive turn he flung himself into the mouth of the passage and fled screaming as though pursued by a devil.

While the wailing screams died away, the hound gave a run and a prodigious bound. As he landed on the ledge, his foreleg sent the lantern flying back against the wall. A crash of glass, a momentary struggle of dim light, and heavy darkness claimed the chamber of mirrors once more. A patter of the hound’s paws in the tunnel and he was gone in pursuit of his master.

“It worked, Dave! He’ll never come back here until he’s had a chance to forget those screams I let out then,” ejaculated Clem.

“Glory, Sis, I’m glad you gripped my shoulder just before you let out that awful yell. Guess I’d ’a’ beat the old fellow down the tunnel if I hadn’t had a hunch you might do something. You sure struck the right ticket that time.”

“Ever see anybody as scared as he was, Dave?”

“Nope.”

“My, I wish we had saved that lantern.”

“The pup finished that, but I think we can pile up stones in the dark. We can pile up enough to let us get up to that ledge. Come on, Sis.”

“Dave, do we dare follow him?”

“I can’t see that we have any choice, Sis. We’d be fools [306] not to try to get out, and I think that I can manage the fellow if I have to fight it out with him. I’m not sure that we will have the pup on our side when it comes to a real fight.”

While they were speaking, they commenced their blundering work. Placing the rough stones to form the steps up to the exit was no easy task in the intense darkness, but finally Dave succeeded in pulling himself up, and with his helping hand Clem reached his side upon the ledge.

“Shall we try to do anything with what is left of the lantern?”

“If we have to, Sis, we’ll come back to it, but from the way Ol’ Fish-mask ran, the tunnel must be pretty easy to get along from here on. I’ll use this spear to feel ahead and I think we can get along all right. Put your hand on my shoulder; now, follow close and careful.”

In the next few minutes not many words were spoken. Both boy and girl were busy thinking of what was to come. How would they evade the crazed man if he still remained in his underground home? Could they trick him, or must they fight for

their liberty? Some slight assurance came to Clem as she fingered the bone knife she carried and thought of the spear that tapped the downward slanting floor ahead of them. The spear at least was a worth-while weapon.

After some distance, the passage had turned at right angles and then dropped more rapidly in a series of irregular steps that twisted the narrow tunnel around in a confusion of directions. At last Dave stopped and whispered in Clem's ear: [307]

"Hear that mumbling noise? He's talking to himself, and, see, there's a bit of light ahead. Now look here, Sis, you keep out of the fracas unless I yell to you. I'm going to try to speak to him naturally. Maybe he has calmed down and I can reason with him. You watch your chance and make for the opening—if there is one."

"We've come so far down, Dave, we must be clear down to sea level."

"Yes, Sis, there's probably a crack in the face of the cliff near the base and covered with bushes on the outside just like that entrance was. You get out while I'm holding him and leg it for help as fast as you can. Morgan's yacht ought to be close enough for you to get his attention."

"Listen, Dave; that's Big Boy whining."

"Sh—s—sh."

Clem could feel her brother's shoulder muscles grow tense as he moved forward once more. She herself could hardly breathe

as they edged their way around the dimly visible corner. A ruddy glow threw the next turn into sharp relief. Down on their hands and knees, by inches Dave and Clem crawled the last few feet. Words came distinctly now, although the voice seemed unnatural in its hoarseness. Old Fish-mask was talking to the hound.

“Twas a mistake lettin’ you in on the secret of this place. [308]
Yer the only one that knows ’cept me. Ya ain’t no good
fer watchin’ the stuff. Ya ain’t no good for nothin’ ’cept for
spirits ta ride on!”

From the light, it was apparent that Clem and Dave were near a ledge situated like the previous one, above a chamber. Dave had lain down flat and was wriggling forward with great caution. Clem followed his example. She came abreast of Dave on a narrow ledge. Several yards below, an astounding scene spread out before them.

The man in the fish mask was leaning over a metal barrel at the far end of the sandy floored cavern. At least half of the sloping floor was covered with water. They had come indeed to the last cavern on the level of the Sound. The outer wall of the cave arched down like an inverted cup to the water’s surface. From the greenness of the tide, it was evident that the world of sunshine was not far away, and even without the glare of the torch, the room would be in a faint twilight from the sun rays that filtered through the quiet water. Apparently at low tide a person could swim or wade out with small difficulty, no more than a ducking for a second to get beneath the rim of the cavern. At present there was no open exit unless a person were equipped with a diving suit.

The remainder of the floor curved away from beneath the narrow shelf where Clem and Dave lay. At the farthest point of the crescent formed by the exposed sand, behind the man, were piled a number of boxes and irregular shaped gunny sacks. [309]

“Liquor,” thought Clem; “and there’s the marked box where he has his dynamite; probably bottles in the sacks.”

The hound lay near the foot of the rough steps that led down from the ledge. His watchful eye was on the man who was his master.

“Twenty years I’ve fooled ’em. An’ ya can’t fool me. No dog can fool me. Ain’t I tricked my own brother? Ha—a—a. An’ even the rum-runners don’t know this perty hole, no, they don’t. All they knows is that when I takes a cargo into my ol’ rowboat an’ puts a few fish on top nobody sees nothin’ of it ’til they say they’s ready for it. Ol’ Bill’s too wise fer ’em all. Ha—a—a! Wait till I sets off the ol’ powder house as Blackie wants me ta. I was feared afore, but now as I have the *Gypsy* I can do it an’ easy get away. Ain’t none goin’ to get by Ol’ Bill. Nurther be you, dog, a goin’ ta keep on bein’ a traitor runnin’ with thet gal instead a stayin’ with me.”

The crazed man loosened the cap on the metal barrel, pulled a length of rubber hose from a box and started to siphon some of the liquid into a tomato can. A familiar odor was wafted upward to the waiting pair. [310]

“Gasoline,” breathed Dave.

“I’m goin’ ta send ya where ya won’t bother no more, ya

hound,” snarled the man. “A fair drenchin’ o’ gas, an’ a fling of the torch’ll make ya sizzle. Ya can tell Blackie ta stay put, fer me. He won’t have ta ride ’round with ya—not he. Ha—a—a. Ol’ Bill’ll fool ’em. Ghosts ain’t goin’ ta get in with you no more.”

Clem nudged her brother, put her lips close to his ear, and whispered rapidly: “Dave, things are going to happen in a hurry. One way we may have to go. See, from this ledge it’s nearly fifteen feet straight down to the water. That’ll give us a good start for a shallow dive. We’ll hit the water within a yard of the outer wall and if that wall isn’t too thick we’ve got a chance to come up on the outside.”

“Look, Sis!”

Seizing the can of gasoline from beneath the flowing tube, the wild man lunged in cursing fury toward the big dog. A sweep of the tin drenched the unhappy animal. Then, as the hound started a snarling retreat toward the rocky steps, the man in the fish mask leaped backward, grasped the torch, and poised for the throw that would envelop Big Boy in a mass of flames. [311]

In a desperate attempt to save her dog friend from a horrible death, Clem burst forth in a wailing tone: “Death if you throw—death to a squawman coward!”

The hands of the frenzied man twitched convulsively at this new evidence of Blackie’s return. The torch fell from his uncertain grasp and he clawed at his mask as though he were suffocating.

“The fire! The fire!” screamed Dave, leaping to his feet.

The licking flame had touched the sand, gas-soaked by the still-flowing siphon. The dainty blue flame hesitated a moment, then crept rapidly toward the barrel. Within seconds there would be an explosion that would wreck the chamber and mangle all within it.

“Jump for it, Sis! Dive! Come, Big Boy. Come, Pup.”

As though dazed, the crazed man turned. His mask [312]
slipped and dropped clear of his distorted features.

Clem and Dave, ready for the dive, saw the face distinctly, and, even, as they plunged from the ledge, their minds were horrified with the recognition of those features. At the very moment when death for all seemed inevitable, the mystery of the man behind the fish mask had been revealed.

A terrifying lifetime it seemed to Clem and Dave from the moment they left the ledge until the water closed above them. Would the tiny blue flame reach the gasoline barrel while they were still within the confines of the cavern? Was it possible, in any event, to dive deeply enough and swim far enough to reach the outside world?

With vigorous strokes, Clem went down through the cool green water. Down and outward she struggled beneath the edge of the cliff on and on with lungs bursting. She sensed the threatening walls above her. The green above her brightened. There came a heavy boom. The shadow seemed settling upon her. Dave was just ahead and to the right. Upward they shot while the shadow slid down behind them like the black curtain of

tragedy.

And then came air, and luxuriant breathing, and sunshine; the shrill cry of sea gulls on wing; shouts from a rowboat; Dave swimming strongly beside her.

Poor Old Bill, the man in the fish mask—blown to Kingdom Come—and the big hound——

Up from the depths beneath the cliff rushed a body that broke the water in a fury of lashing and wheezing. The impossible had happened—Big Boy had escaped.

The commotion had brought the man in the rowboat to his feet. Then with a shout of assurance he veered his craft toward them. A moment later and he was beside them. [313]

“Hang on,” cried the fisherman, “an’ I’ll have you over to the yacht in no time.”

So Clem and Dave trailed in the wake of the boat, encouraging the hound in the short swim to Morgan’s yacht.

“What has happened?” demanded Mr. Morgan tensely, as he helped them from the fisherman’s boat over the side of the yacht. “What was that explosion? See, it has jarred loose clay patches and rock clear up the face of the cliff.”

The girl and her brother slumped back in the deck chairs and stared in wonder at the man’s excited actions. The hound shook himself and stretched out on deck at their feet.

“Tell me,” Thomas Morgan repeated, before either had the

breath to reply, “how did you come in the water? How?”

“A barrel of gas—we dove—from—inside the island,” was Dave’s incoherent answer.

“Was it a cave? Who—was anyone hurt?” questioned Mr. Morgan rapidly.

“Dave,” said Clem, pushing back her dripping hair, “you saw his face when the fish mask fell, didn’t you?”

“It doesn’t seem possible, Sis, that it could have been him!” [314]

“Who?” cried Mr. Morgan. “Speak out, young man.”

“Mr. Morgan,” said Clem quietly, “we’ve been through a strange adventure. Behind that cliff wall we saw a man’s face just before he was blown to his death. That fellow was the one we have called the man in the fish mask, the man whose hideous laugh has worried us at the powder dock, the man who saved Miss Campbell and myself from the rocks, the man who knew where the *Gypsy* is hidden. He was a man we all know. Beneath that horrible mask was the face of Bunte!”

At her words, the yacht owner wheeled abruptly and leaned heavily against the railing.

“Poor old Bunte—he must have suffered from streaks of insanity,” said Dave. “He seemed all right whenever I saw him about the beach, except that he had some queer ideas. It’s hard to understand.”

Clem nodded. She was having difficulty in realizing that the man in the fish mask, bitter enemy of the warehouse, bomb thrower, friend, and fisherman, were all the same person. "Why, he told me his own story then, when he told me of Ward and Blackie. He was Ward!" she exclaimed.

"I can add something to the story, perhaps," said Mr. Morgan in a new tone. "I—knew Bunte, as you call him. I knew him well. He was—well, I often had him with me on the boat and I had sensed for several times past that his mind was wavering. I knew vaguely of a cave in the island; but he never revealed his secret to me. I felt sure that he had some questionable dealings with smugglers, but for the memory of his long-dead parents I let him lead his own life. I gave him the dog the last time I was here. I—— Do you think that there is the slightest chance of his being still alive?" [315]

"No," replied Dave. "Bein' under the water at the time of the explosion was all that saved us. I doubt if the chamber can be reached again, either from above or below, but I'll show the way. We'll get some men, a rope, and lanterns and try the entrance that Clem and I fell into."

"Good," exclaimed Morgan. "We'll make for the powder dock at once. I cannot rest until I am sure because—you might as well know it—Bunte was my brother. Now while we are going, tell me all that has happened."

CHAPTER XXI

THE END OF THE POWDER DOCK

Still another surprise came to Clem and Dave when the yacht set them down presently at the powder dock. Securely tied to the upper side of the wharf lay the *Gypsy*. Shouts of astonishment broke from the girl and the boy.

Mr. Hammer, Dan Fowler, and Miss Campbell hurried out from the cottage porch to greet the water-soaked pair and Mr. Morgan.

“There’s your boat, Clem,” cried Miss Campbell, waving a hand in excitement, “and you’ll never guess how it came back!”

“Do you know what that explosion was?” shouted Dan Fowler.

“We do,” declared Dave emphatically. “It was inside the head of the island and we were near to being left there ourselves. We’ve seen the last of the man in the fish mask—poor old Bunte—Mr. Morgan’s brother!”

Cries of wonder burst from the trio. A babble of excitement reigned for several minutes until Clem exclaimed: “Now we must help Mr. Morgan to get a search party.”

“Let me use your telephone,” said Mr. Morgan. “I’ll have a diver over from the mainland in a special boat, and I’ll get the help of some of the young fellows at the summer colony. It won’t take very long to try both entrances.”

“Clem, dear, you’re sopping wet,” discovered Miss Campbell, as Dave led Mr. Morgan away toward the cottage telephone.

“Yes, I’m wet,” said Clem slowly, “but I’m alive—and there’s been more than once in the past half day when I thought my minutes were numbered. But I’m wild to know about the *Gypsy*. It seems too good to be true—to see it back again.”

“I can scarcely wait to hear your story, Clem, but I want you to know how your launch came back. I was sitting over on the porch not more than two hours ago when here came Captain Main in the revenue cutter up the bay and alongside was the *Gypsy* running on her own power. Well, I was out here on the dock with Dan when they came in and would you believe it, your old Indian woman was running the *Gypsy*. Yes, sir, there was Twasla at the wheel and tied to the back gunwale was our old friend Jim Novak. How Twasla ever knew where to look, and just how she got the upper hand of Novak, I couldn’t get her to say. But she had him and she turned him over to Captain Main herself! Imagine that! All she said was: ‘Him better long way off. You work him.’

“Yes, Captain Main says that he spotted the *Gypsy* [318] running along about a mile up bay, but when he came up with the *Gypsy*, Twasla wouldn’t hear to his taking Novak until she had landed here at the powder dock. The Captain accused the fellow of being the man in the fish mask, but he denied it straight. Said that he had come to an old hiding place and found the launch there. I suppose that it was some place that he and Bunte had used together.”

“Yes,” said Clem, “that fits in with what we know. Bunte was

the real man behind the mask and now he's done for in the cave beneath the Point."

"I'm thankful that you and Dave are back safe and sound," said the little lady. "I was apprehensive when I awoke near noon and found you gone. I'm thankful, too, that the mystery has been cleared up although it was a terrible outcome. I wonder if Dan Fowler knew about Bunte."

Miss Campbell whisked about and called to the postmaster who was approaching from the cottage, "Dan, I want you."

"If that's the truth, Annie, why don't you name the day for our weddin'?"

"Never mind that just this minute, Dan. I want you to tell [319] us what you knew concerning the man in the fish mask."

"Well, Annie, my suspicion pointed right. I intended to have a face-to-face talk with Bunte as soon as I could locate him but things worked out another way."

"Poor old Bunte," mused Clem.

"Maybe 'twas best as 'twas, Clem. I guess that things are run accordin' to some plan or other," replied the postmaster. "But I had no idea he was Morgan's brother. That's a new one on me."

"Come, Clem," exclaimed Miss Campbell. "While you change I'll get a trayful of food for you and Dave and we can then all listen to your story."

It was really more than two hours later when the entire story had been told, for Dave, Mr. Morgan, and Mr. Hammer did not get back from the search until then. Their report was brief. From the upper opening to the island cave they penetrated to the narrow passage beyond the cavern of mirrors. There they had found the rock walls shifted enough to shut off forever entrance to the tide-water cavern. From the base of the cliff, the diver had discovered the opening filled with tons of fallen rock. There could be no doubt as to the fate of the unfortunate man who had worn the fish mask.

“Our last night here,” said Dave, in a low voice when [320] they found themselves alone for a few minutes before the open fire in the living room. “They’re out on the porch now settling the final dope.”

“Who all are they?”

“Hammer, Morgan, Dan Fowler, Miss Campbell, and Clemens, that fellow from the summer colony. They gave me to understand that I wasn’t wanted. They needn’t have been so exclusive. I know I’m fired. Hammer told me that himself, said we’d have to vacate the house right away. It’ll be a wonder if Morgan don’t decide to take back the *Gypsy* and leave us to dig clams for a living.”

“Mr. Morgan acts as though a great responsibility had been taken off his shoulders, Dave.”

“I don’t wonder, Sis. Think of comin’ here year after year an’ anchorin’ off the Point just to be where he could keep track of his brother and to know that his brother was gradually losing

his mind. That's why Morgan wanted to buy the powder dock property. He expected to use it as a kind of reservation for his crazy brother to live on. Wow, this is sure a funny world. All of the old man's money couldn't relieve him of the responsibility of his brother."

"I've had enough surprises, Dave, to last a lifetime. You [321] could have knocked me down with a butterfly when Mr. Morgan told us that poor old Bunte was his brother."

"I can see how the old fellow disappeared the other night. He knew just where to dive or walk under the cliff in order to get into his cave."

"Yes, and of course that's how Big Boy got down from the rock so quickly. He didn't jump, but he got wet coming out below. There was probably a place when the tide was out where he didn't have to dive at all."

"Losing Bunte ought to be a blow to the smugglers that depended upon him to hide their stuff. I've an idea that we have seen the last of Woodruff and his gang especially since the government will take care of Novak for having nearly killed that revenue officer. You and Miss Campbell will probably have to give your evidence in connection with what you overheard Woodruff say about Novak when you were getting on board the *Santa Anna*."

"Well, to-morrow, Davie dear, Dave Fargar, nursemaid to a powder dock, will vanish, and in his place will be Davino Fargarillo, catcher of fish!"

"Hump! I hope the title you've given me will be a good one."

We'll need to work the *Gypsy* early and late on the fish banks, and live like a couple of beachcombers."

"Never mind, Dave; we're lucky to be out where we can [322] enjoy life. I'll never complain after what we went through inside the island. We can appreciate the sun and the flowers all the more since we went through that black experience."

The murmur of voices on the porch ceased and Mr. Hammer spoke from the doorway: "We would like to have you two join us on the porch if you will."

Clem and Dave moved forward and stepped out upon the porch. Somewhat surprised at the formal expectancy with which the group greeted them, Clem took a seat beside Miss Campbell in the porch swing, while Dave perched on the railing with his elbows on his knees. Mr. Hammer stood near the door puffing on a nearly extinguished cigar. Mr. Clemens, from the summer colony, was seated on the top step with his back against one of the posts. White-haired Mr. Morgan, looking rather weary from the experience of the afternoon, leaned back in the big veranda chair, his thumbs caught in the arm-holes of his vest.

"Well," cried Clem, "why are you all so quiet? What's up?"

Dan Fowler, standing with his hands clasped behind his back, ceased to teeter his weight from toe to heel and back again to toe. "All set, Hammer," he grinned. "Go ahead and start the fireworks."

The head of the Pondeux Powder Company thus

[323]

addressed, cleared his throat and began to speak. “I’ve watched Dave’s work here for a number of months and I’m certainly sorry that his job has come to an end. Then, too, I’ve heard a good deal about the girl of the powder dock, a young lady named Clem. Tom Trent has done very little but sing her praises since he came back to Seattle. The postmaster tells me of Clem’s honesty and straightforwardness; Miss Campbell commends her for her good ideas and pleasantness; my friendly rival, Mr. Morgan, speaks of her courage and decision. Well—so much for that.

“Now,” continued Mr. Hammer, “it’s been a small problem to decide what to do with the Pondeux buildings—the warehouse, the cottage, and the dock. Something like \$15,000 we have invested in buildings. Finally, however, a plan came to my mind. I proposed it to the others an hour ago and it has met with strong approval.

“Three of us—Mr. Morgan, Mr. Clemens, and myself—are going to form a company. I am furnishing this location and the present buildings, valued at \$15,000. Mr. Morgan is to put in an equal sum in reconstruction and additions. The summer colony, through Mr. Clemens, will put up another \$15,000 for equipment, advertising, and running expenses, and will also exert certain influences for the successful patronage of a summer resort to be called the Island Inn.

“You, Clem and Dave, are going to open up this place by the middle of July with Miss Campbell—soon to be Mrs. Fowler, I understand—as a general adviser. After a season or so you’ll be able to run things by yourselves. Construction work will begin Tuesday. You are to start on

salary to-morrow in planning to make this place the finest rest and pleasure resort on the beaches of Puget Sound. And with the backing you are going to get, you can succeed in doing just that. You can do it!”

Mr. Hammer’s enthusiasm found an answer in the spontaneous cheer that went up from the group and echoed and reëchoed from the island cliffs.

Dave Fargar, standing beside his sister, patted her hand and laughed a rather jerky laugh. “School for you, Sis, when the time comes,” he whispered. “We’ll make a go of this place because we’ll work harder than we ever did before. You’ve got the brains to plan, and I’ve the muscle to work!”

“O—o—oh!” exclaimed Clem, sitting very straight on the edge of the hammock. “I can hardly believe it!”

“It’s all true, Clem,” cried Miss Campbell, putting an arm around the girl’s waist. “We’re going to work together.”

“O—o—oh,” continued Clem, in rising exultation, “think [325] what it means! Such a summer, such a chance to do something! Oh, we’ll make it a place where people will just love to come and just hate to leave. Why, with those mountains yonder, and our wonderful Sound, and the fishing, and—and—and—— Oh, Mr. Hammer, Dave and I thought we had a lot of problems, but they’re solved in a jiffy provided we’ll work. Oh, can’t you see that dear old powder warehouse transformed into the dearest old-fashioned inn! Can’t you, Davie dear? Oh, when can we start? Tell me, Mr. Hammer, when did you say the remodeling would begin?”

THE END

Transcriber's Notes

- Preserved the copyright notice from the printed edition, although this text is in the public domain in the country of publication.
- Omitted the frontispiece illustration from the HTML edition, which may still be under copyright.
- Silently corrected a number of typos (but leaving nonstandard spelling and dialect as is).

[The end of *The Powder Dock Mystery* by Reed Fulton]