

**DON STURDY
ON THE
OCEAN BOTTOM**

VICTOR APPLETON

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VICTOR APPLETON



**DON BROUGHT THE BAR DOWN ON THE ROPE-
LIKE TENTACLE.—[Page 155](#)**

DON STURDY ON THE OCEAN BOTTOM

OR

The Strange Cruise of the Phantom

BY

VICTOR APPLETON

AUTHOR OF THE DON STURDY BOOKS,
THE TOM SWIFT BOOKS, ETC.

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DON STURDY ON THE OCEAN BOTTOM

CHAPTER I RECKLESS DRIVING

“Say, Uncle Frank, did Uncle Amos tell you of the letter he received last week from California?” asked Don Sturdy of Captain Frank Sturdy, as the two, together with Don’s sister Ruth, sat in the family automobile at the Hillville station. They had driven there to meet an expected visitor.

“You mean the one that invited him to take part in an expedition to explore the bottom of the sea off the California coast and to gather specimens for the new marine museum of that State?” returned the captain. “Yes, Amos spoke of the matter to me, but we haven’t had time yet to discuss the matter thoroughly.”

“You don’t know then whether he intends to accept or not?” went on Don.

“No,” replied his uncle, “though I think he’s rather favorably inclined toward the proposition. It’s a big thing and needs to be looked at from every angle before one decides either for or against.”

“The bottom of the sea!” exclaimed Ruth with a little shudder. “Sounds awfully creepy and crawly to me. Water snakes and sharks and those things with waving tentacles—ugh! They’re enough to give one the horrors. I do hope that Uncle Amos won’t go.”

“There’s the girl of it,” remarked Don. “Getting cold feet at the first hint of danger! Wanting to wrap the men of the family in cotton wool so that they shan’t be hurt! Where would science and discovery be today, if the men had listened to their women and stayed snug and safe at home?”

Ruth made a face at him.

“They might do a great deal worse than listen to their women,” she declared with spirit, “and when you talk of science and discovery, you make me laugh. What you’re really after is change and thrill and danger and excitement.”

“Now, now, Sis,” protested her brother.

“It’s so, just the same,” persisted Ruth. “A lot you cared about science and discovery when you risked your life among the gorillas and the head-hunters! You were just aching for adventure.”

Don looked a little disconcerted, and his discomfiture was increased by the quizzical glance that his uncle shot at him.

“Did she hit the bullseye, Don?” the latter asked teasingly.

“I wouldn’t go as far as that, though I’ll admit she grazed the target,” returned Don. “Of course, I’m fond of adventure——”

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“Of course,” mocked Ruth.

“But all the same,” Don went on, “I—ah, there’s the train at last!” as a long whistle came from up the track.

“It’ll be too bad, if Teddy isn’t on it after all this waiting,” remarked Ruth.

“Oh, he’s on it, all right,” asserted Don. “Gee, maybe I won’t be glad to see the old rascal!”

He jumped out of the car and ran through the waiting room of the station and out on the platform, where the train from New York was coming to a stop with a great grinding of brakes.

It was a long train and Don hurried along the platform, his eyes running hastily over the passengers that came from each car, in the hope of discovering the one he sought.

He had begun to fear that his friend, Teddy Allison, had missed the train, when he caught sight of a youth with flaming red hair coming down the steps of a car carrying a couple of valises, while a porter behind him bore as many more.

Teddy caught sight of Don at the same moment that Don perceived him, and threw up his hand to wave to him.

As he had forgotten for the instant that that hand held a heavy bag, Teddy's gesture was an unfortunate one, especially as he was just in the act of taking the last step from car to platform.

He staggered, sought to save himself by dropping a bag and clutching the rail, stumbled over the dropped bag and did a bit of ground and lofty tumbling that would have done credit to an acrobat, sprawling finally at full length on the platform. 4

Don rushed forward to pick him up.

“Hurt anywhere, Brick?” he asked, using the nickname applied to Teddy because of his red mop of hair.

“Only in my dignity,” replied Teddy with a sort of shamefaced grin, as he looked around to see if many had witnessed his mishap.

“Oh well, if that's all, it doesn't matter,” laughed Don. “You never had enough of that to count, anyway.”

Teddy made a pass at him which Don adroitly ducked.

“Give me one of those bags,” said Don, grabbing the one that Teddy had dropped. “For the love of Pete!” he exclaimed, as he noticed the porter's load. “How much baggage have you, anyway? What are you going to do with it all? Open a general store? Or set up housekeeping?”

“I oughtn't to satisfy such vulgar curiosity,” replied Teddy, “but I'm too big-hearted to let anyone suffer, no matter how low or ignorant he may be. So let me whisper into your shell-

like ear that I'm bringing this stuff along so as to be ready for any emergency. If any of you globe trotters should start off in the middle of the night, Teddy Allison is going to be Johnny-on-the-spot, all ready to the last shoestring and belt buckle."

"From all of which I gather," said Don, "that the trip you were thinking of taking to Mongolia with your father has petered out."

5

"The trip hasn't, but I have," returned Teddy regretfully. "I certainly talked plenty to be permitted to go along and bring you with me. If Dad had had the say, I'd have carried my point, too. But, you see, he himself made connection with the expedition only at the last moment because one of the party fell sick, so he didn't feel free to press the matter of taking us along."

"It's too bad," observed Don. "I'd have liked nothing better than to have gone to the land of Chinese. Chopsticks, you know, and tom-toms and coolies and rickshaws and sampans and all sorts of queer things."

"Maybe bandits and pirates," put in Teddy wistfully. "There'd sure be no lack of thrills on that trip."

"Never mind, old scout," Don comforted him. "There's something else in the wind right now that may develop into a bang-up proposition. But here we are," he said, as he paused before the door of the automobile. "Look what I found on the station platform, Ruth," he grinned, indicating Teddy. "I wish you could have seen him getting off the train."

"I don't care how he got off as long as he's here," smiled

Ruth, her eyes sparkling and her cheeks dimpling as she extended her hand to Teddy. “Awfully glad to see you, Teddy. Seems an age since you were here last. Step right in.”

Captain Frank’s greeting was quite as cordial, for Teddy was a prime favorite of his, as he was of every member of the Sturdy household.

“Welcome to our city,” smiled the captain, as he opened the door of the car. “Just throw your bag in here, jump in yourself and we’ll get going.”

“Bag!” exclaimed Don. “That’s a good one. There are four bags at least in sight, and I don’t know but what he has a trunk or two in the baggage room.”

“Nary a trunk,” denied Teddy, “but it is an imposition to ask you to take all these bags in the car. I’ll arrange for an expressman to bring the lot of them up to the house.”

“Nothing of the kind,” declared the captain. “We can make room for one or two of them in the tonneau and strap the others on the running board. Lend a hand there, Dan,” he directed Dan Roscoe, the chauffeur and man of all work about the Sturdy place.

Dan complied, and in a few minutes the baggage was neatly stowed and secured.

Don mounted beside the driver, while Teddy ensconced himself between Ruth and her uncle in the tonneau.

To Captain Sturdy he related, as he had to Don, the reasons

for his failure to connect with the Mongolian Expedition.

The captain listened intently.

“Just as well, perhaps,” he remarked, when Teddy had finished his tale of woe. “Things out that way are in bad condition just now. With civil war and famine threatening, Mongolia is a good place to keep away from. Once get in and it might not be so easy to get out.”

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“There wouldn’t be any fun, if it were too easy,” observed Teddy with conviction.

Captain Sturdy laughed.

“A hopeless case!” he chuckled. “I wonder if you and Don will ever get your fill of adventure.”

“You needn’t talk, Uncle Frank,” pouted Ruth. “You’re just as keen for it as they are. You know you are.”

It was the boys’ turn to laugh, and the captain did not deny the impeachment.

“I guess it’s in the Sturdy blood, my dear,” he said, patting her hand. “We certainly feel the lure of the unknown and answer the call of the wild. The same is true of Teddy, too. His father is a daring explorer, always on the go, and Teddy is just a chip off the old block.”

“Don was telling me that there was something in the wind up here, something that might be a bang-up proposition,” said Teddy, looking at the captain hopefully.

“Something in the water rather than in the wind,” smiled the captain. “Yes, there is something more or less definite. Professor Bruce has received an offer to head a marine expedition—perhaps it would be more correct to say a submarine expedition—to secure specimens from the ocean’s bed for a California museum.”

“Gee, that would be swell!” exclaimed Teddy, his imagination catching fire at the prospect. “Davy Jones’s locker! The graveyard of ships! Sunken treasure! Sponges! Coral rocks! Mermaids——”

8

There was a general laugh.

“Don’t let your imagination run away with you,” remarked the captain. “All the mermaids you’ll see will probably be armed with terrible rows of teeth. You’ll make tracks when you see them coming.”

“Likely enough,” admitted Teddy. “But what about this offer? Has the professor accepted it?”

“Not yet,” replied the captain, “but he’ll probably reach a decision in a day or two.”

“And if he takes it up, will there be room for Don and me in the expedition?” queried Teddy.

“That’s more than I can say,” replied the captain. His eyes twinkled. “I don’t know exactly what your scientific acquirements are,” he drawled. “For instance, are you an ichthyologist?”

“No,” replied Teddy, “I’m an Episcopalian.”

He joined himself in the roar that followed.

“But really,” he went on, “there ought to be some place where Don and I would fit in. We won’t charge a cent for our services, which ought to count for something.”

“You’ll have to put it up to the professor,” said Captain Sturdy. “I imagine he’ll have a pretty free hand in choosing those who are to go with him. Perhaps he can squeeze you in somewhere, though for the life of me I don’t see how he can use anyone but a trained scientist. Still—hello, there! Look out! Sheer off!”

9

His shout was evoked by a car that was passing them at a reckless rate of speed and pressing so close that it threatened to drive them into a ditch at the side of the road.

The captain’s protests passed unheeded.

The oncoming auto scraped the side of the Sturdy car, crumpled a mudguard as though it had been so much paper, tore Teddy’s bags from the running board and scattered their contents in the road!

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CHAPTER II

HOT WORDS

There was a scream from Ruth and angry shouts from the others as the force of the impact almost made the Sturdy car turn turtle.

“Are you hurt, Ruth?” asked Don anxiously.

“No,” replied Ruth tremulously, “but dreadfully scared. I thought we were all going to be killed.”

“No credit to that driver that we weren’t,” stormed Captain Sturdy, bristling with indignation. “I’d like to have hold of him for just one minute.”

“Swell chance of that!” exclaimed Don. “He hasn’t even looked around. He’s streaking it for all he’s worth.”

“One of those hit and run skunks,” growled Teddy. “See what he’s done to my bags. Scattered my things all over the road.”

“I’ll help you gather them up,” said Don. “By the way, did any of you folks see the number of that car?”

None had, it developed, except Dan, the chauffeur.

“I didn’t see the whole of it,” he explained. “But it had ‘83’ as the last figures.”

“Was it a New York license plate?” the captain asked.

“No,” replied Dan, “it commenced with a ‘C.’ Looked to me like ‘Cal.’ or maybe ‘Col.’ I can’t be certain.”

“Well, it doesn’t matter much,” observed the captain. “We’ll probably never see the driver again, as he’s putting on speed to get as far away from us as possible. If I had him, I’d do my best to have his license taken away from him. Fellows like him are a menace to all decent people.”

“Has he hurt the car much?” asked Ruth, who was still trembling from the shock of the experience.

“Crumpled up the mudguard and scraped the paint,” reported Dan, who had been sizing up the damage, “but as far as I can see, he hasn’t hurt the running qualities of the car. Can’t tell for sure, however, till I look it over carefully after we get home.”

In the meantime, Don and Teddy had been gathering up the contents of the broken bags and stowing them in the tonneau.

“The valises themselves are done for,” stormed Teddy, whose temper was as fiery as his hair. “Here’s a pair of field glasses that has been knocked flooey and a part of my best collapsible fishing rod broken. Gee, I’d like to take it out of that fellow’s hide!”

“Hard luck, old man,” sympathized Don. “Still, it might have been worse. One of us or all of us might be on our way to the hospital by this time.”

“Or to the undertaker’s,” added Captain Sturdy. “But climb in now, if you boys have gathered up everything, and we’ll get going.”

Don and Teddy resumed their seats, Dan threw in the clutch, and the party proceeded on its way.

In a little while they had reached the Sturdy home. They passed through the gate and were halfway up the drive, when, as they turned a curve, Ruth gave vent to an exclamation.

“We have visitors, I guess,” she remarked, as she pointed to a car standing in front of the main door. “I wonder who it can be. I don’t think Mother was expecting anybody.”

Teddy leaned out with sudden interest.

“Geewhillikens!” he exclaimed. “I’ll bet a dollar to a plugged nickel that it’s the same car that ran into us a few minutes ago. Yes, it is,” he went on, his excitement growing. “See, there are the figures ‘83’ at the end of the plate and there’s ‘Cal.’”

They were near enough now to the rear of the car to see that Teddy was correct. The legend on the plate was “Cal. 24,683.”

The occupants of the car stared at each other in surprise.

“What in the mischief is the fellow doing here?” asked Don blankly.

“We’ll soon find out,” declared Captain Sturdy, as he jumped out of the car with an agility surprising in so

large a man. “Come right along with me.”

They followed him into the house and proceeded in the direction of the library, from which came the sound of voices.

One of them they knew for that of Professor Bruce, quiet, cultured, restrained.

The other was unfamiliar to them, and there was something about it that aroused instinctively dislike and distrust. It was loud, arrogant and full of self-complacency and conceit.

“As I was sayin’, purfessor,” the voice boomed, “they ain’t any question of money in this. We’re willin’ to shell out all the coin that may be necessary. We know that you’re the real cheese when it comes to this science stuff an’ we want to get our hooks into you before you come to a showdown with the other guys. We want to knock them fellers for a goal.”

There was a moment’s pause before the professor replied.

“I do not care to be drawn into any controversy,” Professor Bruce observed. “Strife of that kind is distasteful to me. Until your visit today I had no idea there was any thought of a rival expedition.”

“Well, you know it now, since I’ve given you the lowdown,” interrupted the visitor.

“I had been inclined to accept the first proposition,”
went on the professor. “In the first place, it came from
the Governor of the State. That gave it an official touch that is
always of value in an expedition of that kind. Then, too, it

gave me a free hand in the selection of my assistants. In the third place, it provided ample funds for the carrying out of the project.”

“Ample funds!” snorted the visitor. “Where is the money to come from? From the treasury of the State. It’s always easy to be generous with other people’s money.”

“I understood that the legislature had put the money at the Governor’s disposition,” interposed Professor Bruce mildly.

“Yeah?” sneered the man. “He’s got them birds eatin’ out of his hand. They’re just rubber stamps. Whatever he wants they say ‘yes’ to.”

“I take it that you’re no friend to the Governor,” observed the professor. “I suppose you belong to the opposite political party.”

“You’re just shoutin’ I do,” bellowed the visitor. “Why, I wouldn’t be found dead with the bunch that bozo trains with. But that ain’t neither here nor there. This ain’t politics. It’s business. We’ve got the kale an’ money talks. I’m makin’ you a straight up an’ down proposition.”

With a premonitory cough to announce his coming, Captain Sturdy entered the room, followed by Don and Teddy.

Professor Bruce looked up and greeted the captain with an expression of relief.

“Not intruding, I hope,” remarked the captain, looking from the professor to the visitor.

In the latter he saw a burly, thick-jowled man, loudly dressed, wearing much jewelry. He had shaggy brows, jutting jaw and a domineering manner. He glowered at the newcomers as though he did not greatly relish the interruption.

“Not at all,” declared the professor in answer to the captain’s question. “I was wishing that you were here. This is Mr.—Mr.—” he looked at the visitor inquiringly.

“My moniker is Rufus Gold,” the latter said curtly. “I told you that when I first came in.”

“True,” murmured Professor Bruce. “I had forgotten. Pardon me. Frank, this is Mr. Gold. Mr. Gold, this is Captain Sturdy, a relative of mine by marriage.”

There was no warmth on either side in the acknowledgment of the introduction. The captain ached to bring up the matter of the automobile collision, but refrained for the moment out of courtesy to the professor.

“Take a seat, Frank, and you too, boys,” invited Professor Bruce. “I think you will be interested in the matter that Mr. Gold and I were discussing.”

“I didn’t know that this was to be a mass meetin’,” remarked Gold ungraciously.

The professor flushed, but retained his temper.

“Hardly that,” he said. “I have no secrets from Captain Sturdy. We seldom embark on any enterprise without talking it over with each other.”

He then turned to the captain.

“Mr. Gold has called with an unusual proposition, Frank,” he said. “Perhaps he will be willing to re-state it for your benefit.”

The visitor scowled and hesitated.

“I ain’t keen about sellin’ my cabbages twice,” he said surlily, “but here’s the long an’ short of it. I’m here to make an offer to the purfessor to do some scoutin’ on the ocean bed—collectin’ specimens and things like that for a museum. We got to have a highbrow with a big reputation, an’ that’s why we hit on the purfessor.”

“Very interesting,” remarked the captain. “It’s rather a singular coincidence that the offer should come so closely on the heels of the other—the one that came from the Governor of California.”

“My offer’s a mighty sight better than that guy’s,” declared Gold, “an’ if it ain’t, I’ll make it so. Whatever the Governor’s offer is, I’ll top it. The sky’s the limit.”

“I don’t think the professor would care to put himself up at auction,” observed the captain icily. “There are other things than money that would determine his course of action. You speak of this as ‘my offer.’ Is it your own personal proposition, or are you acting for another?”

“I’m actin’ for Mr. Erasmus Rust,” Gold said impressively. “Mr. *E-ras-mus Rust!*”

He spoke the name almost with awe, and looked about him to see the effect produced upon others by the mention of it.

No one, however, was apparently impressed.

“Yes?” said the captain politely, “and who is Mr. Erasmus Rust?”

Gold looked not only pained but shocked.

“Ain’t that the limit?” he mourned. “‘Who is Mr. Erasmus Rust?’ Why, man alive, Erasmus Rust is the biggest wheeze in the State of California. Got more money than he can count. Dollars ain’t no more to him than pennies is to most folks.”

“I see,” said the captain. “A very rich man. What else is he?”

Gold looked nonplussed for a moment. Evidently to be a rich man was, in his judgment, enough for anybody.

“He’s—he’s a public benefactor, that’s what he is,” averred the visitor. “He’s always willin’ to spend his money for the good of the people——” Here his tone became positively unctuous. “You wouldn’t believe what he’s willin’ to do for the people of California. He’s figgerin’ now on buildin’ the finest marine museum there is in the United States, fillin’ it with specimens of all kinds of sea plants an’ fish an’ corals an’ the like an’ turnin’ it over to the people of his State without its costin’ them a single cent. Not one single red cent! That’s the kind of man Erasmus Rust is, an’ don’t let no one tell you diff’runt.”

He glared about as though challenging contradiction.

“One of Nature’s noblemen,” murmured Teddy to Don.

Don nudged his friend in the ribs.

“No wise cracks,” he advised him.

“That is certainly very generous of Mr. Rust,” remarked the professor thoughtfully, “but isn’t it rather superfluous, when the State itself has undertaken to do the same thing? Would it not be better for Mr. Rust to spend his money for some other purpose equally beneficial to the people?”

“An’ let the Governor hog all the credit for establishing the big marine museum?” cried Gold. “Not on your life! That big stiff would point to it as one of the great achievements of his administration. He ain’t a-goin’ to get the chance, not if Erasmus Rust can beat him to it. That’s what I’m here for, purfessor, to get you to turn down this State offer an’ take up with ours. Your name and reputation would make the Rust Museum lay all over any other. We’d knock the Governor into a cooked hat, make him look ridic’lous.”

He spat the last words out with venom.

The captain and the professor looked at each other. It was clear that both were disgusted with the coarseness of the man. Erasmus Rust, whoever he might be, had been unfortunate in the choice of an emissary.

It was the captain who spoke.

“It seems to me,” he said coldly, “that there is more of politics in this than there is of science and philanthropy. The main purpose seems to be not so much to establish a great museum for the benefit of the people as it is to hurt the prestige of the Governor of California, to ‘knock him into a cocked hat,’ to use your own phrase.”

“And on the other hand to bring Mr. Rust into the limelight as a public benefactor,” added the professor.

“No such thing,” snapped Gold. “If he gets hurt in the mix-up, that’s his hard luck. Nobody’s aimin’ to do him dirt. Not but what he ought to be fired from his job. He’s a four-flusher, if there ever was one, and the sooner his term is over, the better it will be for the people of California.”

“I had an impression that the Governor was a man of character and of marked ability,” observed Captain Sturdy.

“You don’t know that bird as I do,” Gold blurted. “But all this rag chewin’ ain’t gettin’ us anywheres. I’ve made you a bang-up offer, purfessor. How about it?”

The professor reflected.

“I will discuss the matter with my brother-in-law and Captain Sturdy and let you know,” he said, not wishing to hurt by a blunt refusal.

“Got to ask permission, eh?” sneered Gold. “Ain’t big enough to act on your own——”

At the gross insult Captain Sturdy leaped from his chair.

As he flings himself across the room to collar the offender, it may be well, for the benefit of those who have not read the preceding volumes of this series, to tell who Don Sturdy was and what had been his adventures up to the time this story opens.

Don Sturdy, now in his seventeenth year, was born and reared in Hillville, near New York City. He was a muscular, lithe, clean-cut youth, with brown hair and eyes and a fair complexion, much bronzed, however, by life in the open.

He was the son of Richard Sturdy, noted explorer, and Alice Sturdy. His sister Ruth was two years his junior. Two bachelor uncles, Captain Frank Sturdy, big game hunter, and Professor Amos Regor Bruce, scientist, often visited them. When Don was thirteen, they took him on a trip to the Sahara Desert. The first volume of this series, "Don Sturdy on the Desert of Mystery," tells about their rescue of Teddy Allison's father, captured by Arabs. Later on they went to Brazil to search for Don's parents and sister, who had been shipwrecked near that coast, and the volume, "Don Sturdy with the Big Snake Hunters" depicts their encounters with wild animals of the Amazonian Jungle. In Brazil Don found his sister, and they left for Egypt, where their parents had gone, Mr. Sturdy having sustained a head injury in the shipwreck. They found, however, upon arrival, that their father, half-demented, had disappeared. They traced him to the Valley of the Kings. Here the party was captured by bandits and trapped in the "Tombs of Gold," and the third volume of the series tells how they escaped; of the finding of Mr. Sturdy, his recovery, and the journey home.

The spirit of adventure persisted in Don, however, and he took a hazardous trip by airship to the North Pole. In “Don Sturdy in the Land of Volcanoes,” his thrilling adventures among the volcanoes of Alaska are related. “Don Sturdy in the Port of Lost Ships” depicts his fearful experiences in the Sargasso Sea.

In the volume, “Don Sturdy in Lion Land,” are related Don’s travels into darkest Africa, into Gorilla Land, and his encounters with savage beasts in the lion-infested regions of the Dark Continent.

Greater risks even than these were incurred on a trip to Patagonia, perhaps the least known of the countries of the world. What terrifying animals he faced in that wild region—what ordeals he was compelled to undergo—the captivity he endured at the hands of savages—the daring and ingenuity that finally accomplished his escape are told in the preceding volume of this series, entitled: “Don Sturdy In the Land of Giants.”

And now to return to the turmoil that arose in the library of the Sturdy home as the captain hurled himself at the man whose coarse insult to the professor had roused him to furious anger.

Don, too, had been equally quick, and before the astonished Gold fairly realized what was happening, an arm on either side was grasped by powerful hands and he was being propelled rapidly to the door.

He struggled to free himself, but they held fast and in a

moment he was at the threshold.

“Out you go!” roared the captain. “Nobody can talk that way in this house and get away with it. If you ever show your face here again——”

“Frank! Don!” pleaded the professor, hurrying to the door. “No violence! Please. No doubt Mr. Gold spoke thoughtlessly and is willing to apologize——”

“He’d better be,” growled the captain. “It’s either that or a mighty quick trip to the out-of-doors.”

“I—I’ll apologize,” stammered Gold, as he shrank before the blaze in the captain’s eyes. “I spoke before I thought——”

“That’s all right,” said the professor generously, eager to bring a distressing scene to an end. “We’ll just forget that anything unpleasant has been said or done.”

Don and the captain relinquished their hold of Gold’s arms. The latter stood for a moment uncertainly and then picked up his hat.

“Well, you’ve got my offer, anyway,” he muttered. “Here’s my card,” as he handed it to the professor. “Let me hear from you by letter or telephone. If you know a good thing when you see it, you’ll take it up. Now I’ll be going.”

“Not just yet,” said the captain, barring the way. “I have a matter to settle with you on my own account.”

Gold stared at him in astonishment.

A tense hush fell on the room.

CHAPTER III

AN UGLY CUSTOMER

“Butting in some more?” snarled Gold, seeking to pass.
“Seems to me you’ve done enough of that for one day.”

“That may be true from your point of view, but it isn’t from mine,” replied the captain. “I’m curious to know why you drove into my car to-day, crumpled up the mudguard and inflicted other damage to the extent of perhaps a hundred dollars or more.”

It seemed as though Gold were about to deny all knowledge of the collision, but there was a tone of certainty in the captain’s charge that made him think better of it.

“So that was your car that was hogging the road, was it?” he blustered. “Why didn’t you move over and give me room to pass?”

“You had plenty of room,” replied the captain. “You simply bore down on us, side-swiped my car and nearly made it turn turtle. It was reckless driving of the worst kind. One or more of the people in the car might easily have been killed.”

“Well, you’re all alive an’ kickin’, ain’t you?” sneered Gold.

“No thanks to you that we are,” returned the captain,

keeping control of his temper with difficulty. “You didn’t even stop to see what damage had been done. The hit-and-run idea isn’t very popular with people in this part of the country.”

“There wasn’t any question of hit-an’-run,” growled Gold. “I hardly knew I touched you. But what do you figger that the damage is? I can’t stand here all day.”

The captain named a very moderate figure, and Gold scribbled a check for it, threw it down angrily on the table and stamped out, slamming the door behind him.

“Good riddance!” remarked Don, as from the window he saw the man clamber into his car and drive off.

“The most unpleasant individual I’ve encountered in a long while,” commented Captain Sturdy. “What do you think of his proposition, Amos?”

“I’m not going to accept it,” replied Professor Bruce. “I don’t care to be drawn into what seems to be a sordid political quarrel. Gold, of course, doesn’t care a rap for science. Possibly the man he’s acting for doesn’t, either. The main idea seems to be to down the Governor, to give the opposing political party a handle for an attack on him.”

“Dollars to doughnuts that’s the gist of the whole thing,” acquiesced the captain.

“Who is this Emanuel Rust, anyway?” asked Don. “Ever heard of him before, Uncle Amos?”

“I know that he’s a multi-millionaire,” returned the professor, “and that he’s a publicity seeker. Inordinately vain and likes to be in the limelight. I’ve heard that he has a private press agent. It’s quite likely that he cherishes political ambitions. I understand that he’s a large owner of stock in a factory for making submarines and diving apparatus.”

“H—m!” remarked the captain. “That fact, too, may have something to do with his eagerness to have your services. In that event you would use his submarine and it would add prestige to his reputation as its maker. But as I understood you to say, when we were talking over this matter yesterday, the submarine the Governor plans to have you use is of a different type and has certain qualities covered by patents that no other undersea boat possesses.”

“Yes,” the professor assented. “One feature among many is that it has large windows of quartz capable of standing immense pressure, and so welded in, that the largest possible opportunity is afforded for studying the life of the sea under the surface.”

“For studying it, yes,” interposed Don. “For photographing it too, perhaps, but not for coming in contact with it. You can’t very well step out of a submarine and onto the ocean floor.”

“No,” admitted Professor Bruce, “for that we still have to use the diving bell. That, of course, we can use only where the water is comparatively shallow, for to go down too deep with no protection but the diver’s outfit would be fatal.”

“In what way?” asked Teddy.

“One would be crushed—crushed like an eggshell,” replied the professor. “At about the greatest depth known, say thirty thousand feet, the pressure on any object would be about six tons to the square inch.”

“Gee!” exclaimed Teddy. “One would be flattened out as though a steam roller had gone over him.”

“Exactly,” was the reply.

“How do the fishes stand the pressure?” asked Don.

“Most of them are not subjected to it,” explained his uncle. “There is very little life below a half mile from the surface. Certain specimens of fixed existences, such as sponges and mollusks, have been found at a depth of several miles, but they are the rarest of exceptions. In such cases they have special apparatus to counteract the excessive pressure.”

“I suppose we’ll see no end of queer specimens,” remarked Teddy.

“Where do you get that ‘we’ stuff?” asked Captain Sturdy.

“Chiefly because I want to see the expedition a success, and I don’t see how it’s going to be unless I go along,” replied Teddy with a grin.

“It hasn’t appeared to me in that light,” smiled the professor. “For that matter, I haven’t even decided definitely to go at all.”

“Oh, do go, Uncle Amos,” urged Don. “I’d hate to see you

pass this thing up. It's so different from anything else that we've ever undertaken. We've been on the ground and up in the air, but we've never yet gone under the sea."

"There again comes in that 'we'," said the professor quizzically. "The cool assumption of this younger generation is simply amazing. But seriously," he went on, "I don't see just where you boys would come in on an expedition of this kind. On land explorations you've been of service with your rifles in emergencies. There won't be any shooting under water."

"Ought to be plenty of fishing, though," urged Teddy.

"What fishing there is will be done chiefly with nets," observed the professor, "and they'll be pulled in by some of the huskies of the crew. No, I can't figure where you boys would come in at all, except as excess baggage."

Captain Sturdy laughed.

"Now," the professor said thoughtfully, "if either of you youngsters knew how to paint——"

"Paint?" exclaimed Teddy, ready to grasp at any straw that presented itself. "Now you're shouting. Paint is my middle name. You've come to the right shop. If you'd ever seen any of my work——"

"Amos isn't referring to fence painting," observed Captain Sturdy.

Teddy assumed an air of wounded dignity.

“Neither am I,” he asserted. “I’m talking about art—art with a big A. Raphael, Michelangelo stuff,” he added modestly.

There was a general laugh at the comparison.

“All nonsense aside, Teddy has a real gift for painting,” put in Don. “I’ve seen some of his sketches and they’re dandy. Same with some of his water colors. But just where does painting come in on this kind of an expedition?”

“It’s a very important part,” replied the professor. “The color of marine creatures is very helpful in determining their classification. Many of them, when they’re hauled up in nets, are glowing with all the colors of the rainbow. That often fades rapidly, and a painter is needed to put the colors in permanent form on paper or in sketch-books. If Teddy could really do this, it might solve the problem of taking him along. I’ll have to look at some of his work.”

“But where do I come in?” asked Don. “I’m not so gifted, artistically, as this red-headed genius——”

“Why couldn’t Don serve as your private secretary, Amos?” inquired Captain Sturdy. “You’ll be making an enormous number of notes and it will be much easier to dictate them than to write them out yourself. I think you told me that the Governor’s offer included provision for a private secretary.”

“It does,” agreed the professor. “All the provisions have been very liberal. Upon my word, I don’t know but what that will be the solution of the problem, Frank!”

“That would be dandy,” exclaimed Don. “Of course, I don’t

know much about shorthand——”

“You wouldn’t need to,” interrupted the professor. “In writing anything pertaining to science, one has to go very slowly and carefully in order to be sure of the facts.”

“Besides,” added Captain Sturdy, “it’s essential that your secretary should be one in whom you can have the fullest confidence. You don’t want anyone to know what have been the results of your expedition until your writings have been fully protected by copyright.”

“Then everything’s for the best in the best of possible worlds,” chortled Don.

“Hurrah for the Bruce expedition!” cried Teddy.

“Steady, there, steady!” cautioned the professor with a smile. “The ‘Bruce expedition,’ as you call it, is still up in the air _____”

“But it will soon be under the sea,” murmured the irrepressible Teddy.

“Even if it were definitely determined on, I don’t know whether the parents of you youngsters would be willing to have you go,” continued Professor Bruce, ignoring the interruption. “You’re both taking a good deal for granted.”

“Not I,” denied Teddy. “I’ve permission from my Dad in advance. When he saw how broken up I was because I couldn’t go with him on the Mongolian trip, he told me that if you and the captain were planning an expedition I could go

along, providing you were willing to have me. He knows that whenever I've gone anywhere with you folks, I've always come back right side up."

"I think Dad will feel the same way," chimed in Don. "Of course, Mother and Ruth"—he hesitated a moment—"well, you know they're always reluctant to have me go. But I'm sure they'll come around. They always do."

"Well, clear out now," said the professor. "I want to talk the matter over with Frank. But remember that I haven't promised anything."

The boys left the room, highly elated. They were just in time to catch sight of the lanky figure of Jenny Jenks, the Sturdy's maid of all work, vanishing down the stairs.

CHAPTER IV

JENNY JENKS JABBERS

The boys gazed after the flying figure of Jenny for a moment, then looked at each other and laughed.

“Jenny seems to be in an all-fired hurry,” observed Teddy.

“Probably been listening and was afraid we’d catch her at it,” replied Don with a grin.

The subject of their comments kept on with unabated speed until she reached the kitchen, into which she burst like a whirlwind and threw herself into a rocking chair.

Mrs. Roscoe, the plump, matronly housekeeper, was so startled by the sudden irruption that she nearly dropped the cake she was in the act of taking from the oven.

“Lands sake, Jenny!” she expostulated. “You gave me such a start. What’s got into you?”

“It ain’t what’s got into me, but what’s got into other folks that ain’t so fur away from here,” returned Jenny, fanning herself vigorously with her apron, “not that I’m namin’ no names, but when people is plannin’ deliberate like ter git drowned like Pharaoh’s army wuz in the Red Sea, an’ at that you can’t blame the ’gyptians much, coz with them it

wuz jist hard luck an' they wouldn't hev drowned if they cud hev helped it, an'——”

“Come now, Jenny, talk sense,” commanded the housekeeper. “What are you getting at?”

“I'm a woman of few words,” went on Jenny, “coz the tongue is an unruly member an' the least said the soonest mended, an' far be it from me to crystallize them that is over me an' is relations to them that pays me my wages, but my blood biled when I heerd the cap'n an' the purfessor in the liberry talkin' about——”

“Were you listening, Jenny?” asked Mrs. Roscoe.

“Not what you cud say listenin’,” replied Jenny, “but I wuz a dustin' in the hall an' I cudn't help hearin', coz, thank goodness, they ain't nuthin' the matter with my ears, an' they wuzn't talkin' soft or nuthin', an' what I heerd made the hair stand up on my head an' fairly friz the blood in my veins, coz it's bad enough to be on top of the ocean an' bein' seasick, though they say that ain't necessary if you eat plenty of lemons, but when it comes ter goin' under the water of your own accord, that's the limit, an' if I say it wunst I say it twice, that's the limit, an' it ought ter be put a stop to by law an'——”

Here Jenny's emotions so overcame her that she swallowed her gum, or rather partly swallowed it, and almost choked before it was dislodged by Mrs. Roscoe's vigorous thumps upon the back.

“Which goes ter show,” Jenny said, as soon as she could

speak, “how tender-hearted I am, for I git so upset over the troubles of others that some day, if I ain’t careful, I’ll be swallerin’ my tonsils, which the doctor said I ought ter hev out anyway, but which you can’t never tell, coz all the doctors think about nowadays is op’rations, an’ as I wuz sayin’ it’s a sin an’ a shame that them pore boys shud be led down inter the valley of the shadder by them that shud be their nat’ral purtectors, an’ it’s flyin’ in the face of Providence ter take sech chances, an’ some day they’ll be come up with, you mark my words, coz the pitchers that goes ter the well too offen gets broke at last an’ it’s only hevin’s mercy that they ain’t bin broke before this——”

“Jenny Jenks,” said Mrs. Roscoe severely, “will you give me the least idea of what you’re driving at? Who is doing what? I’m all at sea.”

“At sea!” repeated Jenny. “That’s jest it, an’ that’s where Master Don and Teddy’ll be if sumthin’ isn’t done about it, only they’ll be at the bottom of the sea, on the ocean bed, as the purfessor called it, though why anyone shud want ter sleep on that kind of bed when there’s plenty of good soft mattresses at home beats me, but there’s no accountin’ for tastes as the old lady said when she kissed the cow, an’ how is they goin ter breathe, I’d like ter know, when nobuddy kin stay under water fur more than a few minnits at a time without gittin’ esfixiated, an’ that wud be a nice thing, wudn’t it, fur them ter be cut orf in the flower of their days an’——”

“The boys have gone with the captain and the professor many a time and they’ve always come back safe,” observed the housekeeper.

“That ain’t sayin’ they always will,” returned Jenny. “There’s got ter be an end ter good luck sometimes, an’ anyways they hez allers bin on terra cotta up ter now, ’cept that time they went by air ter the North Pole, which wuz a silly thing when there’s plenty o’ poles in the back yard or down ter the lumber mill. Et wuz bad enuf when they went ter Egypt, which I saw one time when Hank Bixby tuk me ter the movies an’ I seed that horrid Pharaoh who wudn’t let my people go an’ hed all the plagues come down on him an’ served him right, an’ when they rode on the cambles an’ got chucked inter the tombs of gold, an’ it wuz wuss yet when they tuk that trip ter the Ambazon an’ fit with the big snakes an’ nearly got et up by cannonballs, but after all they wuz above ground an’ maybe their bones cud hev bin brought back, anyway, but down under the sea they may be swallered like Jonah by a whale an’ not hev Jonah’s luck in gittin’ back agen ter the light o’ day an’——”

“Yes, Jenny, I know, that would be awful,” interrupted Mrs. Roscoe with a glance at the clock, “but it’s getting on toward dinner time, and you’d better get busy at setting the table. We’ll talk about this sea trip some other time, or at least I’m certain that you will.”

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Checked in mid-career, Jenny adjusted stray wisps of her scanty, straw-colored hair and obeyed.

In the meantime Richard Sturdy, Don’s father, had joined the professor and the captain in the library, and an earnest conversation was going on between the three men.

“So you really think that you’ll take up this offer of the

Governor of California, do you, Amos?” Mr. Sturdy was saying.

“Yes,” replied Professor Bruce thoughtfully. “Up to today I was undecided. But the visit of that ruffian has just about clinched things.”

“Roused your fighting blood, did it, Amos?” asked Captain Frank with a laugh.

“You might put it that way,” smiled the professor. “I’m rather slow to anger as a general thing, but I must admit that he rubbed me the wrong way. I’m not accustomed to dealing with men of his speech and manners.”

“He’s a good deal of a roughneck, although he seems to have plenty of money and there’s no doubt he’s very close to that multi-millionaire, Emanuel Rust,” observed the captain. “He certainly was very eager to obtain your services.”

“If he had really been moved by scientific earnestness, I might have given him more consideration,” remarked the professor, “but I feel sure he doesn’t care a copper about science. He just wanted to use me as a pawn in a sordid political game, to do something that would hurt the prestige of the Governor and bring Emanuel Rust into the limelight. I decline to be used in any such way.”

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“Well,” put in Captain Sturdy, “you needn’t fear competition. They won’t get anyone to head their party that will have your prestige and reputation.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t say that,” replied the professor, with whom

modesty walked hand in hand with knowledge. “They’ll likely get some scientists of standing to handle their proposition. Ordinarily I wouldn’t mind that in the least. But I’d hate to see what ought to be a matter of pure science get entangled in a scramble for political advantage. And that’s what will probably happen, on their part at least. Rust will spare neither money nor effort to diminish the position of the Governor in the public eye and exalt his own.”

“Well, we can’t help that,” remarked Mr. Sturdy, “and there’s no use in borrowing trouble. The main thing is that you’ve decided to undertake it. When do you expect to start for California?”

“In about a week or ten days, I imagine,” was the reply.

“How long do you expect to be gone?”

“That’s hard to tell,” declared the professor. “About three months, I should say at a guess.”

“Are you going with Amos, Frank?” asked Mr. Sturdy.

“I don’t think so,” was the reply. “Amos wants me to, but my work lies along other lines. I can’t do any shooting under water,” the big game hunter added with a smile.

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“But the Sturdy family will be represented by another beside myself,” said the professor, “that is, if you consent, Richard. Don is eager to go along. How about it?”

Mr. Sturdy hesitated.

“I don’t know,” he said. “Don——”

He was interrupted by the ringing of the telephone.

“I’ll see who it is,” volunteered Captain Sturdy, who was nearest.

He listened a moment and then turned to the professor.

“It is Rufus Gold,” he announced, “and he wants to talk with you.”

CHAPTER V

VOICING A THREAT

With an expression of surprise, Professor Bruce rose from his seat and took the receiver from the captain's hand.

"What can the fellow want?" he murmured to himself. "I thought I'd seen and heard the last of him."

"Sounds as if he were in a temper," observed the captain in a whisper. "Don't take any nonsense from him. If he tries to pull any rough stuff, hang up."

"Bruce speaking," said the professor into the phone. "Oh yes, Mr. Gold. What can I do for you?"

"Plenty," came the voice from the other end of the line.

"That's a bit indefinite," replied the professor, pleasantly enough. "Won't you be more specific?"

That Gold was complying with this request was evident from the close attention the professor was paying. The burden of the long speech was disclosed by the professor's reply.

"I shall have to say 'no', Mr. Gold," he said. "I have gone over the matter very thoroughly since you were here, both in my own mind and in conversation with those

whose judgment I value. I have decided to accept the Governor's proposition.—What's that you say? I'd better fall in with your offer, if I know what's good for me? How dare you talk to me that way? What do you mean by it?"

Don's father and the captain exchanged startled glances.

"What's the fellow doing, threatening you?" cried the captain, jumping to his feet. "By the great horn spoon! I'll——"

The professor motioned with his hand for silence, and the captain sank back again in his chair.

What was being said at the other end of the line the captain and Richard Sturdy could only conjecture. That it was something that stirred the professor mightily was evident. Surprise, indignation, disgust, uneasiness were expressed in turn by his features. At last he could not contain himself.

"You're a contemptible blackmailer!" he cried into the phone. "If I had you here, I'd know how to deal with you. But rest assured that your threats are as powerless as your persuasions. Go ahead and do your worst. That's my final word."

He slammed the receiver on the hook with a bang.

"What was it, Amos?" cried Captain Sturdy. "What did that rat have to say that's upset you so? By Jove! I wish I hadn't let him off so easily this afternoon."

41

The professor essayed a faint smile.

"The rascal threatened me," he said. "Actually had the

impudence to say he'd expose me to public scorn unless I promised to head Rust's expedition."

"Expose you?" exclaimed Don's father. "You, who are the soul of honor? You, whose life is an open book? What on earth did the scoundrel mean?"

"He referred to that Marvin matter of some years ago," replied the professor. "You know, that charge against me of plagiarism in that book I wrote on Polynesia."

"Oh, that," snorted the captain. "Why, Marvin didn't have a leg to stand on. The scientific societies investigated the charge and found that you were entirely blameless in that matter."

"What was the idea?" asked Don's father. "That must have happened while I was away on that expedition that met with shipwreck, that time I received the injury to my head. I've never heard either of you refer to it."

"It was an unpleasant affair, and we've tried to forget it," explained the captain. "You see, Amos and Marvin were connected with different parties that were making explorations in Polynesia. After their return, each of them wrote books on the subject. Naturally, as they dealt with the same subjects, there was a certain similarity of thought and at times almost of expression in the discussion of various topics."

42

"I should think that might be inevitable," remarked Mr. Sturdy.

"Amos finished his book first and put it in the hands of his

publishers,” went on the captain, “and a little later Marvin did the same with a different firm. Yet, though it was written later, Marvin’s book appeared first, because there was a strike on in the plant of Amos’s publishers which delayed the appearance of his book.”

“I begin to see,” murmured Don’s father. “Sheer luck brought the book that was written last into the public eye before the book that was written first.”

“Exactly,” assented the captain. “Even at that, probably nothing would have happened, if it hadn’t been that the book Amos wrote sold like hot cakes while Marvin’s book was a frost. That made Marvin sore and he tried to get back at Amos by charging him with plagiarism. This had a certain plausibility because Marvin’s book had actually been printed first.”

“Unfortunate,” commented Mr. Sturdy.

“Of course,” went on the captain, “no one who really knew Amos believed Marvin’s charge. But you know how excessively sensitive this old boy is”—he put his hand affectionately on the professor’s knee—“and he was fearfully upset by it. He could hardly do any work for months because of the annoyance the charge caused him. He’s a highly organized machine, Amos is, and it doesn’t take much to throw him out of gear.”

“I know,” said Don’s father. “Still, as you say, the charge was refuted——”

“It was,” interrupted the captain, “not only by the

investigation of the scientific societies but by the evidence of the publishers, who testified that every word of Amos's book had been in their hands before Marvin's book appeared."

"That should have settled it, then," remarked Mr. Sturdy.

"It did with thinking people," put in the professor, "but no doubt there were hosts of others who saw only the charge but never heard of the refutation. You know the tendency of human nature to draw the worst conclusion. They shake their heads and say that where there was smoke there must have been fire. A lie will go round the world while truth is getting its boots on. The mere fact that a charge is made, no matter how senseless or false it is, is as good as proof to many people."

"That's unfortunately true," agreed Mr. Sturdy. "How did Marvin himself take it? If he had a drop of sporting blood in his body, it was up to him to accept the decision of reputable men and offer an apology to Amos for having made the charge."

"You would think so," chimed in the captain, "but Marvin doesn't seem to have a drop of that sporting blood you spoke about. He's very pig-headed and prejudiced. Once let an idea get into his head and it's there to stay. Perhaps he thought the scientific men showed partiality to Amos. Perhaps he thought the publishers lied. Whatever it is, he's always moped and grouched about it. He probably believes still that something was put over on him and that he's a much-abused man."

“Yes,” agreed the professor, “likely enough he thinks he had right on his side. He’s simply so made that he can’t back down when he’s once taken a position, no matter how unjustified that position may be shown to have been.”

“How do you suppose that this rascal, Gold, ever got hold of it?” asked Mr. Sturdy.

“Oh, it was a matter of considerable comment at the time,” replied the captain. “Gold’s probably wanted a club to hold over Amos in case he couldn’t get his assent to go on the Rust expedition and he thinks he’s found it in this Marvin matter.”

“Why, it’s blackmail, pure and simple!” exclaimed Mr. Sturdy indignantly.

“Of course it is,” agreed the captain. “But you see how infernally cunning this Gold fellow is. He doesn’t put it in writing. He doesn’t say it in words before witnesses. No, the coward uses the telephone that leaves no evidence behind it. If he were ever charged with having made this threat, he’d simply lie out of it and Amos would have no way to pin it on him.”

“Well, his shot has proved to be a dud,” observed Mr. Sturdy. “It hasn’t worked. It’s only killed the last chance he ever had that you might accept his proposition. It’s been a boomerang.”

“Yes,” assented the professor with a worried look, “but he still has it in his power to get revenge by spreading a false story that I hoped had been buried forever.”

“Ten to one he’ll never use it,” predicted Mr. Sturdy.

“Just my advice, too,” added the captain. “But if that fellow ever comes within my reach——”

He did not finish the sentence, but his powerful hands clenched significantly.

“Well, we’ll thrust it into the background for the time being, anyway,” declared the professor. “And now to get back, Richard, to what we were talking about before the telephone bell rang.”

“What was that?” asked Mr. Sturdy. “Oh, that matter of Don?”

“Yes,” replied the professor. “How about it? May he go?”

CHAPTER VI

A MOMENTOUS DECISION

MR. STURDY'S face grew grave as he pondered the question asked by the professor.

"There would seem to be no reason why he shouldn't," he answered at length. "You know I've never been in favor of wrapping boys up in cotton wool. They must learn to stand on their own feet and face life as it comes to them. They can't do that successfully, if they're coddled overmuch. So if I were the only one to make the decision, I wouldn't hesitate, much as I miss the lad when he's away from home. But there are others besides myself to be consulted."

The professor nodded.

"Yes, I know," he said. "Alice. Of course, as his mother, she ought to be consulted. But we know in advance what her reaction will be. She'll say 'No' with a big 'N.'"

"Probably," agreed Mr. Sturdy. "Don is the apple of her eye, and she can't bear to have him out of her sight. Whenever it's a question of him going on a trip where any danger is involved, a whole flock of terrors assail her. I suppose most mothers are the same way. I shall have hard work to bring her to your and my way of thinking, but I'll do my best to persuade her."

“I hope you’ll be successful,” returned the professor. “Don has always been a big asset on our expeditions. He’s a dead shot and doesn’t know what fear is. There’s no one I’d rather have at my back in case of trouble. He’s proved on a score of occasions that his brain works like lightning and that his nerves are steel.”

“I’d match him against any man I ever met, bar none,” declared the captain.

While this conversation had been going on, Don, unaware of the eulogies that were being showered on him, had gotten his repeating rifle and gone with Teddy to the open space back of the house that served for a shooting range.

“I’m feeling the need of a little practice,” Don volunteered. “I don’t want to get rusty, especially if we have a chance to go with Uncle Amos on that expedition.”

“You get rusty!” jeered Teddy. “Why, you could hit the bullseye in your sleep.”

“I’d hate to do any shooting of that kind,” laughed Don. “Let’s try first what I can do while I’m awake.”

“Well, there’s a target,” said Teddy, pointing to one that had recently been set up and as yet bore no mark. “Plug away at it.”

Don flung his rifle to his shoulder and fired so quickly that Teddy was startled.

“That went off accidentally, didn’t it?” he queried. “You

didn't have time to take aim.”

“Go and look,” said Don.

Teddy did so.

“Gee!” he cried. “Pinked it right in the centre of the bullseye! Some shooting!”

“Clear the track,” directed Don. “Here comes another.”

Teddy scurried out of range and again Don fired.

“Not so good,” commented Teddy, as he again examined the target. “That shot went wild. You didn't hit the target at all.”

“Look again,” advised Don.

“Don't you think I have eyes?” retorted Teddy. “I tell you there's only the mark of the first shot.”

“Look again,” repeated Don.

Wonderingly, Teddy gave the target a closer inspection, and an expression almost of awe crept into his eyes.

“Wriggling snakes!” he exclaimed. “You planted the second bullet right on top of the first one and drove it deeper into the wood. Here they are, both of them. In the same hole.”

“I thought the first was lonely, so I gave it company,” grinned Don.

“You were the fellow that was getting rusty,” gibed Teddy. “If you do this kind of thing when you’re out of practice, what would you do if you were in practice?”

“Quit asking conundrums,” laughed Don. “Get out of the way now and I’ll write your initial on the target.”

49

Teddy complied, and there was a rapid rain of shots, at the end of which a perfect letter T stood out on the board.

Teddy threw up his hands.

“That isn’t shooting,” he declared. “It’s magic!”

“You flatter me,” smiled Don. “It isn’t so much fun, though, shooting at a stationary target. Let’s get something that’s moving.”

“I might borrow a lion somewhere and send him charging down on you,” suggested Teddy.

“I don’t insist upon the lion,” laughed Don. “I had enough of them to last me a while on that trip we took to Africa. There’s something not quite so dangerous,” and he pointed to an empty tomato can a hundred feet away. “Throw that up in the air and let me see if I can plug it before it gets down.”

Teddy flung the can up and saw it shiver twice, once on its ascent and again on its downward flight, as Don’s bullets penetrated it.

“Throw it up once more,” directed Don, “and this time I’ll shoot from the thigh.”

Teddy complied, and without raising his rifle higher than his waist, Don again punctured the can with ease.

“The can’s too big a mark,” observed Don. “Got a half dollar, Brick?”

“Yes,” replied Teddy, as he took the coin from his pocket, “one of the few that represent the bulk of my worldly wealth. What do you want with it?”

50

“Toss it up in the air as high as you can and see if I can plunk it.”

Teddy kissed the half dollar.

“Goodbye, old pal,” he said. “You’re going for a ride.”

He tossed it up. There was a sharp ringing sound as coin and bullet met, and the half dollar went spinning up against the trunk of a tree in the adjoining lot.

With an exclamation of wonder, Teddy ran to retrieve it. He picked it up and regarded it ruefully.

“A fool and his money are soon parted,” he murmured. “That coin will never be the same again. But it’s worth it to see such shooting.”

“I’ll give you another in place of it,” laughed Don.

“No,” said Teddy, pocketing the battered piece. “I’ll save it to show my grandchildren what marksmanship was when I was a kid.”

“We’ll try something less expensive this time,” remarked Don. “Get a hammer and some nails, will you, Brick? You’ll find some in the garage.”

“What’s the idea?” asked Teddy, as he came back with the desired articles. “Going to do some carpenter work?”

“You might call it that,” replied Don. “Suppose you take about six of those nails and drive them into that board about a couple of inches apart. But drive them in only a little way. Just enough to make them stick. Get me?”

51

“I’m on,” said Teddy, and in a minute or two had complied with Don’s directions.

“Now,” said Don, “the idea is to drive every one of those nails right into the head with a bullet. But perhaps even your feeble intellect has already grasped the design.”

“My feeble intellect says that you can’t do it,” replied Teddy. “Why, you can scarcely see those tiny nails from where you stand. You might hit one or two of them, but six in a row! No, it isn’t sense.”

“Maybe not, but for every one I miss I’ll give you a dollar,” promised his friend.

“Go ahead,” challenged Teddy. “Here’s where I become one of the idle rich.”

“Don’t start counting the money yet,” warned Don.

He raised the rifle to his shoulder and six barks followed in

quick succession.

Teddy ran to the board and his eyes bulged.

“Every one of them driven right into the head!” he cried.

“Goodbye, my dream of wealth! I’ll have to work for a living, after all.”

Don was about to reply, when Jenny appeared, coming around the corner of the house.

“Ah, here’s Jenny,” cried Don. “Come on, Jenny, you’re just in time. I want to shoot an apple off your head. You’ll find it lots of fun.”

Jenny regarded him severely.

52

“Which some folks idea of fun is diffrunt from what others has,” she remarked, “an’ I ain’t got but one head on my shoulders an’ heads wuz made for sumthin’ else than ter put apples on an’ let ’em be shot at, though, goodness knows, you boys didn’t think much of yourn when you went ter the country of the head-hunters an’ me expectin’ any day ter see you comin’ back with yer heads missin’, like I seen once in a pictur’ in the movies of a headless horseman, an’ it give me the creeps, an’ it’s only heveng’s mercy that you came back with yourn on, an’ it oughta bin a lesson ter you not ter take no more sich chances, but did it, no it did not, fer after that you went ter the country of the lions, an’ it wuz bad enough for pore Daniel when he wuz chucked inter the lions’ den, but he’d a had more sense than ter hev gone in there on his own two feet, delib’rate like, the way you did, but even that didn’t teach you nuthin’, fur yer hed ter hunt up them gumbillas thet

might hev tore yer lim' from lim' an' even that wuzn't enuf an' yer risked yer lives among them Patsygonians——”

“Patagonians, Jenny,” grinned Teddy, who was enjoying himself hugely.

“Jenny!” came a call from the housekeeper, and with a last mournful shake of her head as though she were looking upon the doomed youths for the last time, Jenny hastened in the direction of the voice and disappeared.

Don and Teddy looked at each other and burst out laughing.

53

“Isn't she a scream?” chuckled Don.

“Scream?” replied Teddy, wiping his eyes. “I should say she was. She'd make a hit in vaudeville, knock them off their seats. Just wind her up and set her going. She'd do the rest.”

“I take it that you're speaking of Jenny,” said a voice behind them, and they looked up to see Mr. Sturdy, who had emerged from the house.

“No one else but,” grinned Don. “She's just been staging a lecture for our special benefit.”

“Predicting disaster if you go with Amos on this trip, I suppose,” smiled Mr. Sturdy.

“Yes,” replied Don. “She's certain that this is the finish. But how about it, Dad,” he continued eagerly. “May I go with Uncle Amos?”

“Yes,” he said. “I’ve just been talking to your mother about it. She didn’t like the idea at all, was dead set against it when I mentioned it, but she’s finally agreed.”

“Glory hallelujah!” cried Teddy, grasping Don and doing with him an impromptu war dance.

“Great!” exclaimed Don, his eyes shining. “Thanks ever so much, Dad. I’ll promise mother to be very careful all through the expedition.”

“Do,” urged his father. “She thinks the sun rises and sets on you, Don. And so do I,” he added affectionately, as he threw his arm over the boy’s shoulder.

As the three walked toward the house, Mr. Sturdy told the boys about the blackmailing telephone call of Rufus Gold.

54

“The lowdown rascal!” exclaimed Don hotly. “Why didn’t I hand him one when he was here this afternoon?”

“You may get a chance yet,” put in Teddy.

Which proved that Teddy was something of a prophet.

55

CHAPTER VII

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING

“ARE you boys all ready for the trip?” Professor Bruce gave Don and Teddy a quizzical glance as he accepted a second cup of coffee and a roll. “All your apparatus secured? Just waiting for the word to go?”

Don and Teddy exchanged glances. It was the latter who answered with a grin,

“I’ve four suitcases packed with supplies, Professor, but I doubt if they’ll be much good for an undersea expedition.”

“Let’s go and look,” said Don as he pushed back his chair. “No time like the present.”

“Right,” agreed Teddy. “I’d about finished breakfast anyway.”

“You haven’t eaten anything to speak of, either of you,” Ruth protested. “If the thought of mingling with sea serpents and octopi is going to take away your appetite, you’d better stay at home.”

To this sentiment Jenny Jenks, entering the dining room at that moment, subscribed with voluble vehemence.

“Which you never said a truer word, Miss Ruth, though of course it ain’t no business of mine to say whether you’re right or wrong, but I can’t help overhearin’ things about snakes an’ octopi, though whoever’d want to eat that kind of a pie I don’t know nor want to know, what’s more, an’ I’d take it kindly if you wouldn’t ask me——”

With a grin and a wink at Ruth, Don sidled out of the room, closely followed by Teddy.

Arrived in the sanctuary of Brick’s room, Teddy dragged forth his suitcases and he and Don went over the contents.

There were nets and fish hooks, aviator’s togs and warm clothing for zero and below zero temperatures, heavy boots and shorts and a kit of tools for every conceivable use, the most complete assortment of instruments that Don had ever seen.

“Looks as if you meant to hack your way around the globe,” laughed Don. “The only thing that’s missing, so far as I can see, is a scalping knife.”

“They don’t sell them in the sporting goods department of the stores,” explained Teddy. “Next time we go to Borneo, I’ll pick up a couple to add to my collection.”

There was a rap on the door and both Don and Teddy regarded it apprehensively, fearing a visitation by Jenny Jenks. They were reassured, however, by Ruth’s voice, impatiently demanding admittance.

Teddy sprang up, opening the door with a flourish.

“As long as it’s only you!”

“Who did you think it was?” Ruth demanded.

57

“He thought it might be Jenny Jenks,” Don murmured, “come to finish telling us what she thought about the undersea exhibition.”

“She finished it,” said Ruth with a grimace. “I wasn’t permitted to miss a single word. When Jenny gets started, you might as well try to stop Niagara. My, what a lot of things!” Ruth’s attention was diverted by the sight of Teddy’s belongings scattered about the room. “What a stack of clothes! Do you wear them all at once, Brick, or one at a time?”

Teddy grinned ruefully.

“I don’t suppose there’s a thing in the whole collection that I’ll be able to use on this expedition,” he said.

“Brick’s prepared for almost any kind of adventure on the face of the globe or in the air above it,” Don added. “The only thing he never thought of was an undersea trip like the one ahead of us.”

“What you need is a diver’s suit and a long knife or two for spearing sharks,” chuckled Ruth. “I can see I’ll have to help you select your supplies.”

“Let’s go into town and load up with what we need,” Don suggested with a look at his watch. “We still have time to catch the early train. Ruth can go with us,” he added,

magnanimously.

“Good!” Ruth jumped up from the bed and skillfully threaded her way between piles of Teddy’s junk.

58

Reaching the door, she turned to smile at them. “We can have lunch in town and perhaps go to a matinee later. Lots of fun!” Ruth vanished, flinging after her the remark that she would “get her hat and be back in a minute.”

Don and Teddy exchanged glances.

“If that isn’t just like a girl!” remarked Ruth’s brother. “You invite her to help select equipment for an undersea expedition and right away she adds lunch and the theatre to the program.”

“Oh well, why not?” Teddy countered unexpectedly. “We might as well make a day of it. Ruth’s a fine girl anyway, a regular good sport. It will be fun having her along.”

Don gave his friend an odd look. On the point of making a joking rejoinder, he looked up and saw his sister in the doorway, hatted and cloaked ready for the trip.

“Hurry, or we’ll miss the early train and there isn’t another for almost an hour.”

As they were leaving the house a few minutes later the trio was intercepted by Professor Bruce. The latter handed Don a slip on which he had jotted down a few necessary items of equipment which he was eager that they should not overlook.

“There are one or two things I’d like you to get for me since

you are going into town,” said the professor. “As you see, I have made a separate list of them. Don’t forget,” he added as Don turned away, pocketing the slip of paper, “to lay in a stock of paints and brushes and drawing tools for Ted. He will need them.”

The three young people turned their steps toward the station. They arrived there almost simultaneously with the early train to the city.

59

On the way into town Don and Brick jotted down such items as they thought they would need on the expedition. Inspecting the list, Ruth said, demurely:

“I don’t see any mention of drawing materials for Brick.”

“Oh, I’ll get them all right,” Teddy assured her. “Although I’m afraid I won’t be a great deal of good to the expedition.”

“Teddy, you really draw very well. I’ve seen some of your things and I think they’re clever.”

“Oh, I can sketch some,” Teddy conceded modestly. “But making pictures of undersea flora and fauna seems just a trifle out of my line.”

“Cheer up,” Don consoled him. “You will probably do plenty well enough for the salary you’ll get.”

“Salary,” Teddy echoed blankly. “I never thought of it!”

“Don’t think of it now!” Don grinned. “You won’t get any.”

“As a public servant,” Brick declared, pompously, “I demand just and due remuneration for my services.”

“Try to get it,” laughed Don.

“I don’t see where you are any better off yourself, Don Sturdy,” Ruth reminded him. “You don’t expect to be paid, do you?”

“At least I have a better chance than Brick,” Don retorted. “I’m working for my uncle and there’s a chance that my hard and unremitting labor——”

60

“Ha-ha!” from Teddy.

“May touch his hard heart and cause him to loosen up to the tune of a few bucks,” Don finished, imperturbably.

“Uncle Amos hasn’t a hard heart,” said Ruth with spirit. “And I must say I hope he isn’t so foolish as to pay you for having a good time. That’s the limit.”

Don yawned and turned up his coat collar.

“Any time you want to learn the truth about me, Brick,” he remarked, “just go ask my sister!”

Arrived in town, Don dug down in his pocket and drew forth a slip of paper on which was written the name of a dealer expert in outfitting expeditions.

“This fellow, Benjamin Rife, has a small shop on a side street,” Uncle Amos had told him. “The place looks like a

junk shop, but it is anything but that. Rife knows his business and he specializes in deep sea paraphernalia of all kinds. Just tell him the type of expedition on which you are bound and he will see to it that you are outfitted completely.”

Toward the shop of Benjamin Rife the young people turned their steps.

Behind a counter heaped with strange-looking objects they found a wrinkled old man with a perfectly bald head and a nose like the beak of an eagle. He regarded the young people curiously from behind a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles and listened attentively while Don explained the object of their visit.

61

He made no verbal reply but set to work at once to satisfy their needs. From a hopeless jumble of objects he produced, as though by magic, two diving helmets and their accompanying suits of heavy leather, an assortment of oddly-shaped knives and two powerful flashlights which Don and Teddy examined with absorbed attention.

There followed various odds and ends of equipment, about the uses of which the boys were naturally vague.

When Teddy, prompted by Ruth, broached the subject of artist's supplies, old Rife shook his head.

“I have about everything else, but not that. However, I shall give you the name of a man not far from here who will supply you with everything you need in that line.”

The young people accepted gratefully, and a few moments

later found themselves outside the shop of Benjamin Rife, laden with interesting bundles.

The art shop was not hard to find, and there Teddy bought a generous assortment of the tools of his craft, including special canvas and scientifically prepared oil paints.

“Now if I’m a flop as an artist, it won’t be the fault of my equipment, anyway,” grinned Teddy. “All I need now to be able to draw real well, is a little talent.”

62

“I should say all you need is a little training,” said Ruth, generously. “You have the talent, Teddy Allison, as you very well know.”

When all the shopping was done, including those items which Professor Bruce had asked them to get for him, the young people decided that it was still too early to go for lunch.

“What’s the matter with a trip to the aquarium?” Don suggested. “Since we are going to live on such intimate terms with the fish before long, we might as well get better acquainted with them now.”

“Oh let’s!” cried Ruth. “Some of those great big fish with the beautiful colors are gorgeous. I love to look at them.”

They took a bus to the aquarium and for more than an hour wandered about among the glass tanks, fascinated by the curious specimens contained therein.

“I’d like to paint some of those beauties,” said Teddy enthusiastically. “Believe it or not, I’m beginning to look

forward to this new job of mine aboard the *Phantom*. I'm going to do my best to make it a real one."

"Brick's all worked up over his new set of paints," chaffed Don. "He can't wait to try out those new oil colors on canvas. A kid with a new toy!"

"You leave Teddy alone," Ruth told him. "I shouldn't wonder if he'd come back with the best pictures of all. Oh look," she cried, darting over to one of the glass tanks, "what kind of fish is this?"

63

"A rainbow, I think," Don answered. "If Uncle Frank or Uncle Amos were here, either one of them could probably give us the complete history of the fish from its birth and habitat to the length of time it takes to reach maturity."

"Well, anyway, it's pretty," Ruth maintained. "I never saw a prettier fish. I'd like to take one home with me."

"It won't fit in our aquarium," laughed Don. "Come along, Sis. Looking at all these fish has given me an appetite."

"Poor fish!" murmured Teddy, and dodged a right uppercut expertly.

At the hotel where they had decided to eat, Don checked their packages, and the party of three went on into the main dining room. They secured a pleasant table near a window and Ruth resorted to the menu card with healthy eagerness.

"I'll have roast duck, spinach and applesauce with some fried potatoes on the side," she announced. "Oh yes, and I think I'd

like a little broiled bluefish first.”

“We can’t get away from fish,” groaned Don.

Ruth started to say something else; then paused. She touched Don’s arm and said, “Who is that over there, Don?”

CHAPTER VIII

RUFUS GOLD TURNS UP

Don followed the direction of Ruth's glance and sat up somewhat straighter in his chair. His mouth set and the stern expression of his face made him look much older than he really was.

"You mean the big man with his back half turned to us?"

Ruth nodded.

"Isn't it that awful Rufus Gold that side-swiped our car?" she asked tremulously.

"And afterward insulted Uncle Amos," Don agreed. "I might forgive him the damage to the car—he paid for that—but the insult to Uncle Amos is a different matter."

The object of the young Sturdys' dislike sat at a table next to the one occupied by the three young people. With him was a middle-aged man of rather unobtrusive appearance. This person had iron-grey hair, a thin, colorless face and a mouth partially concealed by a drooping mustache. He wore a grey suit and his shoulders stooped, giving an impression of perpetual weariness. A man who would never attract a second glance in a crowd, the young people noticed him particularly now only because he occupied the table with Rufus Gold.

“Who do you suppose that is?” Ruth whispered.

“I don’t know,” Don returned. “To my knowledge, I’ve never seen him before.”

“Whoever he is, he seems to be hand-in-glove with your friend Gold,” remarked Teddy. “From the way they have their heads together, you’d think they were boon companions.”

“Probably are,” said Don, turning away disgustedly. “Any one who associates with such a person can’t be worth much. Let’s forget them, or I’ll lose my appetite for lunch.”

Ruth found it extremely difficult to forget Rufus Gold and his companion. Teddy, too, often found his gaze straying toward that table, curious to know what type of conversation could mutually absorb two men as diametrically opposite in type as Gold and his companion.

Rufus Gold sat with his huge shoulders hunched over the table, his face close to that of the thin grey man, one big, ham-like fist pounding emphasis to his speech.

His companion listened attentively, nodding now and then as though in complete accord with whatever Gold was saying. Occasionally he asked a question, to which Gold responded in a lowered tone.

“He hasn’t seen us yet,” remarked Ruth. “I hope he won’t,” she added, nervously. “I’m afraid of that man. He might make a scene.”

As she spoke, Rufus Gold straightened in his chair, his glance

drifting casually over the room. It rested for a moment upon the two young Sturdys and Teddy Allison, but it was evident that Gold did not recognize the young people. He turned toward his companion again and Ruth breathed a hearty sigh of relief.

“He didn’t recognize us at all,” she said.

“He saw us only once and then he was mad,” said Don. “I doubt if the fellow has any notion of what we look like.”

At that point the bluefish appeared, to be closely followed by roast duck. For a time the young people attended strictly to the meal, which was excellently served and plentiful.

Their attention was recalled to Rufus Gold suddenly and in a rather startling manner.

Don, in the act of raising a spoonful of applesauce to his mouth, heard Gold say in a louder voice than he had so far used:

“That’s the name of it, eh? ‘Treatise on Polynesian Fauna and Flora.’ A queer sort of a name, ain’t it?”

Don glanced at Ruth and thought his sister looked pale.

“‘Polynesian Fauna and Flora,’” she repeated under her breath. “Why, Don, that’s the name of one of Uncle Amos’s books, isn’t it?”

Don nodded, frowning.

“Yes,” he agreed, “that’s the name of one of Uncle Amos’s works, all right. Such a title sounds queer on the lips of such an ignoramus as Rufus Gold.”

“Do you know what I think?” Ruth leaned toward him, and as though in imitation of Gold, pounded her small fist on the table. “I think that fellow is hatching some sort of plot against Uncle Amos!”

“I don’t know what he could do,” protested Don, looking worried, nevertheless.

“There’s that silly old plagiarism charge,” Ruth reminded him.

“There was no plagiarism,” Don contended. “They can’t prove something against Uncle Amos that never existed.”

“Oh, I know that as well as you do,” rejoined his sister impatiently. “But you know how Uncle Amos dreads the reopening of that old trouble, no matter how absurd the charge against him may be. Such notoriety never does a man in his position any good.”

Don nodded, anxiously watching Rufus Gold. Suppose, he thought, this fellow were successful in his attempt to revive the old charge of plagiarism against his uncle. The charge had been disproved once and could, Don felt sure, be disproved again. However, notoriety of any sort was distasteful to the quiet and scholarly Professor Bruce. The old scandal, revived, would be particularly unfortunate at this juncture when the expedition sponsored by the Governor and to which he had committed himself, had thrust Professor

Bruce forward to a prominent place in the public eye.

Following his uncomfortable thoughts a little further, Don could see that any embarrassment of the professor at this time would reflect embarrassment also upon the Governor and his administration.

“Probably just what this fellow Gold would like,” he thought. “The whole thing is politics, and dirty politics, at that. I guess maybe Uncle Frank and I will have to beat up that fellow yet!”

Don was recalled to a sense of the present by Teddy’s question. “What are we going to have for dessert?”

“I don’t think we are going to have any dessert, Brick,” Don returned. “I think we are going to follow that fellow, Rufus Gold, and find out, if possible, what’s the next trick up his sleeve.”

“All right with me,” agreed Teddy. “I’m just asking for excitement, myself.”

“Good!” cried Ruth briskly. “I was hoping you’d suggest that, Don. I didn’t quite dare.”

Don glanced at the next table and saw that Gold and his companion were lingering over coffee and cigars. They would be ready to leave in a few moments, and Don meant, when that time came, to be free to follow them.

He beckoned to the hovering waiter and demanded the check. He was on tenter-hooks while the man was away

for fear Rufus Gold and his companion would choose that interval to leave the dining room. Gold had already paid his check, so that there was nothing to delay his exit.

He remained seated, however, conversing in low tones with the man in grey. Now and then the young people were able to catch a phrase or two of the conversation, but these were disjointed and unenlightening.

“I’d like to march right up to him and ask what he’s talking about,” cried Ruth.

“Of course he’d tell you,” teased Teddy.

“It’s the most exasperating thing, sitting here and not being able to hear a word! I wish they’d get up to go!”

“Not yet!” said Don. “We haven’t paid our check. Ah! Here’s the waiter now.”

Don paid the bill, tipping more lavishly than he would have done had his mind been on the business. He had barely finished this, pocketing the change from a ten dollar bill, when Gold and his companion rose and headed for the exit.

Don, Ruth and Teddy also rose, as unostentatiously as possible, and followed the pair.

In the lobby Gold paused to light another cigar. He offered one to his companion. The latter refused with a slightly impatient air and half-turned toward the exit.

By this time Don and Ruth, closely followed by Teddy,

had edged up toward the pair until they stood within a few feet of them, hidden from Gold's sight by a group of three tall, potted plants which, with others of the same type, adorned the lobby of the hotel. Feeling like conspirators, the young people pressed close to the plants, hoping to learn from Gold's conversation with the stranger whether their suspicions in regard to him had been correct.

It was Gold's companion who spoke first.

"Now that everything is settled," said this individual. "I must go. I have an appointment at two."

"Just as you say. Just as you say," boomed Rufus Gold heartily. "We've got along great, brother, and I don't mind tellin' you, it's a relief to me to have this business settled. I've got your promise, ain't I, that you won't back out when the time comes?"

"You have my word," said the man in grey, testily. "If that isn't enough——"

"Oh, sure, sure," Gold interrupted. "It's more than enough, brother. I just wanted to make sure there wouldn't be no slip when the time come. But you and me, we're goin' to get along great. I could tell that a mile off. Goin', brother?" said he, as his companion moved a step or two toward the exit.

"Yes, yes," muttered the man in grey. "I must go now. I'll be late if I don't. Goodbye!"

Gold raised his hand in a gesture of farewell and turned toward the lift while his companion hurried toward the

exit.

Not one of the young sleuths had been prepared for this. They could not very well trail both men at once. Which one, then, were they to follow?

CHAPTER IX

TROUBLE AHEAD

The indecision of the young people, hiding behind the group of plants in the hotel lobby, lasted not longer than a minute.

Rufus Gold was the one to follow, of course! Why had they been so foolish as to hesitate?

They darted from behind the group of plants in pursuit of the big man with the blatant voice. They were just a few seconds too late, however, for as they reached the lift which had opened to receive Gold, the door closed and the elevator shot upward.

“Bother!” cried Ruth, exasperated. “What will we do now?”

“Follow him!” cried Teddy, excitedly. “There’s another elevator!”

It was Don who held back.

“No use chasing Gold now,” he said. “Chances are we can’t catch up to him, and if we should, what good would it do?”

“We could find out what room he has and whether he has been staying here long,” Brick suggested.

“We can find that out from the hotel register.”

“But we must do something,” cried Ruth. “We can’t let the man go like that, when we’re practically sure he is plotting something against Uncle Amos!”

Again Don shook his head.

“If we could have overheard the conversation between him and that grey-haired man in the dining room, we might possibly have learned something that we need to know. As it was, we learned just enough to make us curious and no more. That was our bad luck.”

Leaving the elevators, the young people hurried to the street, hoping to catch a glimpse of the grey-haired man and, by following him, gain some clue as to his identity.

They were just in time to see the individual in question enter a taxicab and whiz off into the traffic!

“Oh, what’s the use!” cried Ruth. “Even if we got another taxi, we’d never catch him in that traffic jam. Come on, boys! Let’s go to the matinee!”

They made the best of the matter and proceeded to a theatre. The comedy was a good one, but even the catchy musical numbers and the excellent work of the chorus could not blot out the vision of Mr. Rufus Gold hunched over a hotel table talking earnestly to a grey-haired man who nodded acquiescence.

Every one liked and respected Professor Bruce. Don and Ruth Sturdy loved him and Teddy Allison was not far behind these two in his affection for the genial, scholarly man.

The thought that such a fellow as Rufus Gold might be scheming to the professor's harm was intolerable. The suspicion spoiled the matinee for the young people, and they were glad when it was over and they were free to hurry back to Hillville.

Arrived there, they burst in upon Captain Sturdy and Professor Bruce who were lazing over a late-afternoon cigar in the study of the Sturdy house.

“Hello! You come in like a typhoon,” Captain Frank greeted them. “Stop and rest for a moment and get your breath. What's all the hurry about?”

“Did you have a good time?” asked Professor Bruce.

“Oh, Uncle Amos,” cried Ruth, “we would have had. We did have a good time, really, except for one thing!”

“Well,” smiled Professor Bruce, “aren't you going to tell me what the one thing was?”

“I can't,” faltered Ruth. “I think probably Don had better tell.”

“Passing the buck!” said her brother grimly. “All right, I'll tell you what happened.”

While Professor Bruce and Captain Frank Sturdy listened attentively, Don recounted the scene in the dining room, the chance phrase overheard by them in which the title of one of the professor's own works, “Treatise on Polynesian Fauna and Flora,” had been mentioned.

At this point Professor Bruce put his cigar down in the ash tray. Don noticed that the light had gone out.

“The title of that book,” he said, “must have sounded odd on the lips of such a man as Rufus Gold.”

“It did,” Don assured him. “I remember thinking so at the time.”

Professor Bruce took up the dead cigar absently, turned it about and put it down again.

“About Gold’s companion,” he said slowly. “Could you describe him accurately?”

“That’s one thing I can do,” Don said, positively. “You see, I sat facing him all the time we were at luncheon.”

“What did he look like?” prodded Professor Bruce. There was an odd eagerness in his voice.

“He was very thin and quite tall,” said Don, watching his uncle closely as he gave the description. “He had grey hair and a drooping grey mustache——”

“And stooped when he walked?”

“Yes, he did, Uncle Amos, quite a good deal. I remember thinking that he stooped because of his height.”

Professor Bruce nodded two or three times. He toyed with the dead cigar and his face looked suddenly tired. Ruth Sturdy went over to him and put her hand on his shoulder.

“Uncle Amos,” she said, anxiously, “you are worried, aren’t you? We were afraid,” she added hesitantly. “Don and I were afraid—and Teddy, too—that this fellow, Gold, might be cooking up some trouble on that old plagiarism charge. We were terribly afraid of it, Uncle Amos and,” more daringly, “I think you are, too.”

Professor Bruce reached up and patted the hand on his shoulder.

“Well, perhaps I am, my dear, a little—perhaps I am.”

“Uncle Amos,” Don said, hesitantly, “from my description, could you recognize the man with Rufus Gold? Do you know who he is?”

In much the same manner that he had answered Ruth, Professor Bruce replied:

“I am afraid I do, Don. I am almost sure I do.”

Captain Sturdy bent forward in his chair and placed his hand affectionately on the professor’s knee.

“It was Martin Marvin, wasn’t it?” he asked.

Professor Bruce nodded slowly.

“Probably—almost certainly. Martin Marvin,” he explained to the group of young people, who watched him anxiously, “is the man who brought that old charge of plagiarism against me. Marvin was never satisfied with the ruling. In all probability he would welcome the opportunity to re-open the

case against me.”

“He must be crazy not to know he must lose a case like that,” cried Don. “You are bound to win out, Uncle Amos.”

Professor Bruce shrugged wearily.

“Even if I win,” he said, “I lose!”

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Not one of the young people needed to be told what he meant by that cryptic phrase. They knew only too well.

Although the professor turned the conversation into other channels and refused resolutely to discuss Martin Marvin further, it was evident that he was greatly worried.

Nothing could be done in the matter, however. It was impossible to accuse Marvin—or Gold, either, for that matter—of a conspiracy which, so far, was only suspected. Until some overt act of the enemy should bring him out into the open, Professor Bruce was powerless to move in his own behalf.

Meanwhile, preparations for the expedition were going forward swiftly. Every day brought telegrams to Professor Bruce, reporting progress. The deep sea apparatus was all in readiness, the *Phantom* was equipped with all the necessary devices for maintaining comfort. Small boats, to be used for short, independent cruises, had been furnished with glass bottoms.

“What kind are they?” Don asked.

“Mostly rowboats,” Professor Bruce replied. “There will be one motorboat, however, with a glass bottom, which will, of course, be used for longer cruises.”

“It all sounds marvelous,” Ruth Sturdy said, with a sigh. “Uncle Amos, couldn’t you find some place for me aboard the *Phantom*? I wouldn’t be in the way, truly. You never can tell, I might even make myself useful.”

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“What could you do?” scoffed Don.

“I don’t know,” Ruth admitted, and added mischievously, “I might hold Teddy’s paints.”

“You’d be sure to drop them overboard,” Don teased. “Girls aren’t any good on an expedition like this.”

“Well, anyway, if I stay at home, I’ll have good company,” said Ruth, slipping her arm through Captain Sturdy’s. “You aren’t going, are you, Uncle Frank?”

Captain Sturdy’s hesitation in replying to the question made Don look at him hopefully.

“Oh, come along, Uncle Frank,” he urged. “You know you are going to be sorry if you lose this chance to clamber over coral reefs and examine fantastic sponges.”

“Why not, Frank?” Professor Bruce added his persuasion to Don’s. “There is nothing in the world to stop you, especially as the Governor has given you a special invitation to accompany the expedition.”

Still Captain Frank hesitated.

“A big game hunter scarcely seems at home among tropical fish,” he protested.

“We have big ones, though,” Teddy suggested with a grin. “I’d just about as soon meet a tiger as a shark. And it is said the tarpon are natural born fighters.”

Captain Sturdy laughed heartily.

“So you think my gun might come in handy, do you? Well, well, I hadn’t considered it from that angle. As you say, there may be good sport after all.”

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“He’s weakening,” mourned Ruth. “Now I won’t have anyone to stay at home with me outside of Mother and Dad.”

Ruth was right. Captain Sturdy weakened to the extent of declaring on the following day that he would accompany the expedition, after all.

“Hip, hip, hooray!” cried Teddy.

“That’s great news, Uncle Frank,” said Don enthusiastically. “I was hoping you’d say that.”

Two days later they started for the coast, where they were to meet the Governor’s party.

A considerable crowd gathered at the Hillville station to see the party off. Professor Bruce and Captain Sturdy were heartily cheered, the boys, as usual, coming in for their share

of the popular enthusiasm.

“Goodbye, Dad,” cried Don. “I wish you were coming too. Goodbye, Mother darling. Sure, I’ll take care of myself.”

There were tears in Mrs. Sturdy’s eyes as she hugged her big, bronzed son to her heart. He was well able to take care of himself, she knew, and yet her heart always misgave her when he started on one of these expeditions into the unknown. The love of adventure was in his blood; the craving for new sights, new experiences drew him as a magnet does a needle. He could not help it, his mother knew, but neither could she help wishing that he had been born a stay-at-home, content with simple, ordinary things.

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Don wiped her tears away and kissed her again.

“You’re not to worry, hear me? I’ve always come back, haven’t I? Well, I always will. A bad penny is hard to lose, you know.”

Ruth hugged her brother and was heartily hugged in turn.

“Take care of Mother, Sis. Wish you were going, too. Gee, if I could only take the whole family!”

“Look out for the sharks,” begged Ruth between laughter and tears, “and don’t let a jellyfish bite you.”

“Which if a jellyfish bites, it’s the fust time I heerd of it an’ I hopes it’s the last,” put in Jenny, “though I must say you cud hev wuss things a-bitin’ of you sich as sharks an’ them tarpaulins Master Teddy was speakin’ about—”

“Tarpon, Jenny,” corrected Teddy with a grin.

“It duzn’t matter wot names the horrid things is called by,” rejoined Jenny, “coz the names won’t change their natures, which is bad clear through, an’ I dreamed las’ night that some of them was a chasin’ you an’ I hope an’ pray that none of them will ketch up with you——”

At this juncture Jenny broke down and blubbered, and it was all that Mrs. Sturdy and Ruth could do to pacify her. The boys were touched and did their clumsy best to soothe her.

They shook hands with Dan and Mrs. Roscoe and swung themselves up on the platform of the train. They waved till they were out of sight.

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Don for a time was unusually quiet, for he dearly loved his people and parting was always painful.

Mingled with his regret at leaving the home folks was, however, the keen exhilaration he always felt when facing the unknown.

He would come home again, but not before he had seen strange sights, heard strange sounds, faced strange perils.

His blood ran hotly through his veins. He heard the call of the wild. Adventure beckoned.

To Don Sturdy adventure never beckoned in vain!

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CHAPTER X

SPANNING THE CONTINENT

The trip across the continent was uneventful except for its ending. Day after day went by and mile after mile of shining rail swept under the thundering train as the party neared the Pacific Coast and the real start of the expedition.

The time seemed long to Don and Teddy, who were eager for action.

Sensing their restlessness, Professor Bruce gave them books to read describing various tropical and deep-sea fish, specimens of which they were apt to encounter on the expedition.

Over these the two boys pored for long hours on a stretch, admiring the fairy-like, living vegetation on the ocean floor, exclaiming over fish with luminous eyes and others with fins like hands.

“Must be like visiting a different world to walk along the ocean floor,” remarked Teddy. “A sort of Alice-in-Wonderland adventure.”

“And all only forty or fifty feet beneath the surface of the water,” nodded Don. “Our glass diving helmets should come in handy for that sort of work.”

“All the comforts of home,” grinned Teddy. “Glass windows for unobstructed vision and plenty of nice fresh air to breathe.”

“I don’t know about the ‘plenty of nice fresh air’,” Don objected. “According to Uncle Amos, that’s one of the drawbacks to undersea exploration. The air in the helmets remains pure for only a short time, so that investigations have to be cut short again and again, just when they become interesting.”

“That’s something that science has still to perfect,” Teddy agreed, “a helmet that will manufacture oxygen as you go along so that the explorer may spend hours undersea if he so desires. Look here, Don! Did you ever see a horse-back fish?”

Teddy passed the book and Don studied the illustration, a queer-looking fish with its dorsal fin standing straight up from his back.

“The fin is supposed to represent the rider,” Brick explained. “You would need a pretty good imagination to see any resemblance, but I suppose it’s all right. Funny looking thing, isn’t it?”

“Not so funny as the ones we’re going to see,” Don prophesied. “Gee, Brick, I’m just counting the days till we reach the coast!”

The lads had noticed a change in the manner of Professor Bruce as the journey progressed. He had become absent-minded and curiously aloof. Often it was necessary to repeat a question two or three times before he

roused from his inner absorption sufficiently to answer it. He was very quiet and frowned often, as though at some secret, unpleasant thought.

“He is worried about that plagiarism charge,” Don surmised. “Uncle Amos never says much. It isn’t his way. I suppose he feels more keenly than most people on that account.”

Teddy, to whom the memory of Rufus Gold had grown steadily more vague as the miles swept by, was inclined to make light of Don’s fears.

“That fellow Gold is a big bag of wind,” declared Brick. “He was probably just trying to bully the professor into heading the expedition for Erasmus Rust. Now that Professor Bruce has definitely committed himself with the Governor, I don’t think we’ll hear from Gold again.”

Don was not so sure. He was afraid, not so much of Gold who, after all, was only a pawn in the game, as he was of Erasmus Rust. Rust was many times a millionaire, arrogant, confident of the power of his immense wealth to accomplish anything upon which he set his heart.

Teddy, who had been thinking along lines of his own, asked suddenly:

“Do you think Erasmus Rust really means to organize a rival expedition?”

“I certainly do! In fact, if you were able to read all the papers, you would know that the millionaire has already set the wheels in motion. I am willing to bet you just about anything

you may name, that we shall find the rival expedition completely organized when we reach the coast.”

Teddy was very thoughtful.

“In that case,” he said. “I’m afraid your Uncle Amos may be in for an unpleasant time.”

However, the actual arrival at San Francisco banished all other matters to the background.

The cheerful hustle and roar of the coast city were contagious. The spirits of the boys rose and they sniffed the fresh air eagerly, as though they already imagined themselves out upon the ocean.

From the train they went straight to the hotel. Their luggage disposed of, Professor Bruce declared his intention of arranging an interview with the Governor at once.

“I have been informed that the Governor and his party are in San Francisco. There are several last minute matters that I must talk over with him.”

“How long will you be, Uncle Amos?” Don asked.

“An hour or two, not longer.” At the door the professor hesitated and glanced back at the boys and Captain Sturdy.

“Why not take the boys to the dock, Frank? I doubt if they will be able to board the *Phantom* to-day, but the other shipping at the wharves will interest them.”

“I’ll say it will,” said Don and Brick together. “When do we start?”

At the wharves they found the *Phantom*, a sturdy, beautifully-built ship whose decks teemed with activity. Although the boys longed to board her, they were courteously informed that the ship was not yet ready for visitors.

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“Since you are members of the expedition, you may come aboard if you wish,” said Captain Brody of the *Phantom*, “but everyone is so busy, I’m afraid you would have hard work finding your way about.”

“We’ll wait till to-morrow, Captain,” said Captain Sturdy. “There is no hurry, except the impatience of these lads to see all that is to be seen. I think I can persuade them to wait another twenty-four hours.”

For an hour or so they wandered about the wharves, enchanted with the sights and sounds, the hustle and activity.

“Makes you wish you could start on a dozen cruises at once,” said Don, longingly. “Each one of these ships is bound for a different port and to each one will come all sorts and varieties of adventure. Think what we’re missing!”

Captain Sturdy laughed indulgently.

“You’re a glutton, Don. I dare say you would like to divide yourself up in half a dozen pieces and send each fragment on a different mission. Even then, I doubt if you would be content. You would still feel that you were missing something!”

“Well, Brick’s just as bad,” Don defended. “Aren’t you, Brick?”

“Sure. That’s why we get along so well. We’re two of the same kind.”

On the way back they discussed the new diving sphere, that wonderful invention about which the entire scientific world was talking.

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“Uncle Amos says you can go down in it for almost a quarter of a mile beneath the water,” said Don. “At that depth it must have to withstand a terrific pressure.”

“So it does,” agreed Captain Sturdy. “An incredible pressure—many thousands of pounds to each square inch.”

“Thousands of pounds!” repeated Teddy. “Why, it isn’t possible!”

“True, nevertheless,” smiled Captain Sturdy. “If the heavy door of the sphere were opened for a minute, or for the fraction of a minute, the men within the sphere would be crushed paper-flat. Oh yes, a man takes a chance in entering one of those new contraptions, but it’s a chance with a tremendous thrill in it. Ah, here we are at the hotel.”

As they opened the door to the suite that had been engaged for Professor Bruce, the professor himself turned toward them. He held out a yellow paper that shook in his hand.

“Read that!” he commanded.

CHAPTER XI

BAD NEWS

Don saw at once that the yellow paper was a telegram. He sensed also that it contained bad news for Professor Bruce.

Captain Sturdy accepted the slip of paper, while Don and Teddy, taking advantage of the professor's permission, read the message over the captain's shoulder. It said:

“Have received word Martin Marvin will institute suit on old plagiarism charge stop Have engaged lawyer stop Marvin no chance of success stop Don't worry

“Richard Sturdy.”

“H'm!” said Captain Sturdy. “Well, you expected this, Amos, I suppose.”

Professor Bruce shook his head.

“I feared it, of course. At the same time I had hoped that this fellow Gold was only bluffing, that when he saw I was determined to head the Governor's expedition, he would drop the matter.”

“You forget that Gold represents Erasmus Rust, a

powerful and unscrupulous man accustomed to getting his own way,” returned Captain Sturdy. “This millionaire, Rust, undoubtedly believes that his money can buy anything.”

“It can’t buy me,” said the professor, tapping impatiently with his fingertips upon the table. “That is one fact Mr. Rust appears to have overlooked.”

“I doubt if Rust has ever come up against your sort, Amos,” returned the captain. “He evidently thinks his sledge hammer methods will prove as effective against you as against others.”

“If Dad has taken charge of things, you don’t have to worry, Uncle Amos,” said Don. “A good lawyer will probably quash that fake plagiarism case before it gets to the papers.”

Professor Bruce shook his head doubtfully.

“I wish I could be sure of it. The papers are always avid for sensational news. The journals, particularly those opposed to the policies of the present administration, would seize upon a story of this sort and play it up eagerly in an attempt to discredit the Governor’s expedition. It won’t be so easy, Don, I’m afraid, to quash the plagiarism charge.”

“Do you think this man Martin Marvin thinks he has a case against you, Professor Bruce?” Teddy asked.

The professor hesitated and when he answered spoke slowly, as though measuring the words.

“It is my belief that Martin Marvin actually thinks he has a grievance against me. It is absurd, of course, but even

honest men fall victim to obsessions occasionally.”

“Then you think Marvin is acting honestly in this matter?” Don asked.

“I believe Marvin has seized upon the opportunity to even an old score with me,” Professor Bruce replied. “Marvin is a learned man, but in many ways a narrow and bigoted one. He is the sort who will nurse a grudge for years, never doubting that the moment will come when he will be able to avenge himself upon the person he fancies has wronged him.”

“Nice disposition,” observed Teddy.

“An unfortunate disposition for the one who possesses it,” returned the professor. “Yes, I believe Marvin thinks he has a case. I also do him the justice to believe that if he knew of the purpose to which Rust and his henchman, Rufus Gold, intend to put his desire for revenge, Marvin would repudiate them both.”

“Well then, there’s the answer, Uncle Amos,” Don exclaimed.

Professor Bruce looked up, his tired eyes questioning.

“The answer to what, Don?”

“Why, to the whole thing! Why not wire Dad to have his lawyer get in touch with Marvin, tell him the truth about Gold and Erasmus Rust and convince him that this plagiarism charge of his is being used as a club over your head in an effort to force you to do a dishonorable thing? If Marvin is an honorable man, that story should have weight with him.”

“It would, undoubtedly,” said the professor, slowly, “if he could be brought to believe it.”

“I think the idea is worth trying just the same, Amos,” observed Captain Sturdy. “If you say so, I will send a wire to Richard at once.”

Professor Bruce agreed that an attempt to convince Martin Marvin that he was being used as a pawn in the game played by Erasmus Rust could do no harm and might, possibly, do some good.

When Captain Sturdy had departed to send the telegram, Don asked another question of his uncle.

“Martin Marvin may believe he has a case against you, Uncle Amos, but surely no reputable lawyer could agree with him. You believe that, don’t you?”

“Certainly I believe that,” returned Professor Bruce. “But there are lawyers and *lawyers*, my boy, and a considerable number of them, if you are to believe what you hear, are none too scrupulous. One of the latter class could easily convince Marvin that he has a winning case and then bleed him to his last cent without a qualm.”

“I bet Erasmus Rust’s money is paying for the lawyer,” observed Don.

“And I’ll add a bet that Rust picked out the sort of man he wanted for the job,” Teddy added.

Professor Bruce did not reply, but was silent so long,

tapping with his fingers on the table, that Don finally grew anxious.

“What about the expedition, Uncle Amos?” he asked. “Are you going on with it?”

Professor Bruce looked surprised.

“Going on with it? Why, of course! I am committed to it. Everything is in readiness. I could not back out now, even if I so wished.”

“I thought,” Don explained, “that with this suit in progress, you would feel you must stay and battle it yourself.”

“For Pete’s sake!” cried Teddy. “Don’t go putting ideas into the professor’s head, Don! What’s the matter with you?”

Professor Bruce smiled ruefully.

“I am no business man, Don. Your father will do much better for me, I have no doubt, than I could do for myself. No, I am content to leave the suit in his hands. If anything can be done to keep the matter from the ears of the general public, I am confident he will do it.”

Don’s relief knew no bounds.

“Gee, that’s great!” he cried. “I had begun to see my hopes of deep sea fishing go glimmering.”

The following day Don and Teddy went down to the docks again, this time with Professor Bruce, the Governor and

several members of the expedition.

They went aboard the *Phantom* where they were heartily welcomed by Captain Brody and given three rousing cheers by other members of the crew.

“All ready, Captain?”

“All ready, sir. Just a few details to attend to. We can set out as early as you like in the morning.”

There followed an hour and a half aboard the *Phantom* that Don and Teddy would never forget. Never had they seen such a beautiful yacht, so perfectly appointed both for comfort and utility.

Everything needed for the success of the expedition was there. A large, perfectly-appointed laboratory held the boys spellbound for over an hour. They wandered about, handling test tubes and new type magnifying glasses and telescopes, through which portions of deep sea fish and minute larvae could be seen magnified an incredible number of times.

“Here’s where all sorts of interesting experiments will be carried on,” observed Don. “I only wish I were scientist enough to understand them all.”

From the laboratory they went to inspect the tank where the rare specimens Professor Bruce hoped to collect would be lodged.

“Here’s where I’ll spend most of my time,” grinned Teddy, “painting, or trying to paint, fish with bug eyes and baby eels

that are nothing but eyes.”

“That should be easy,” laughed Don. “I could even do that myself. Just paint a couple of circles on the canvas and label it ‘eelet.’ Simple!”

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“Very!” returned Teddy. “Something tells me you’d better stick to your job as secretary to Professor Bruce.”

From the aquarium the boys visited the quarters that were to be theirs during the voyage and found them commodious and comfortable. They examined with interest the dynamo that was to provide the ship with light and refrigeration.

“All the comforts of home,” observed Don.

“These new-fangled contrivances sure take all the grief out of expeditions,” agreed Teddy. “We’ll be as comfortable aboard the *Phantom* as we would be at home in a rocking chair.”

“And with a great deal more to look at,” observed Don.

On deck Captain Brody took them in hand and showed them the bow pulpit, from which considerable of the casting and netting work of the expedition would be carried forward.

The little wire-enclosed platform close to the surface of the water looked a long way down as Don and Teddy stared at it from the deck of the *Phantom*.

“How do you reach it?” asked Teddy.

“There’s a ladder that can be let down to it,” the captain

explained. “You lads will have a lot of fun on that platform, netting surface specimens and the like.”

“We might even do some harpooning on the side,” laughed Don, glancing at the captain. His gaze became suddenly fixed, resting on a headline in the paper Captain Brody carried.

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“Erasmus Rust Sponsors Expedition,” Don read. “Altruism of Millionaire Prompts Erection of Elaborate New Museum of Natural History to Which He Hopes to Contribute Valuable Specimens.”

Captain Brody noticed the direction of Don’s glance and handed him the paper.

“That Erasmus Rust is a blow-hard,” said Captain Brody disgustedly. “He hasn’t a single worth-while scientist on his list. How he expects to make a good record for his expedition is a mystery to me.”

“He may not make a good record for his expedition,” thought Don. “But he is going to make trouble for Uncle Amos, if he can. Something tells me we shall have to watch that fellow!”

96

CHAPTER XII

THE ENEMY GETS BUSY

Don said nothing to Professor Bruce about the reference he had seen to the Rust expedition. He hoped that his uncle, intent upon last-minute details of the expedition, had not noticed it. He found out afterward that this precaution had been unnecessary. The glaring headlines announcing the Rust expedition had already caught the professor's eye.

One of the greatest thrills the boys were to have was when they visited the submarine that was to accompany the *Phantom*. They were taken to the observation compartment with its windows of quartz, that strange substance as strong as iron and clearer than the clearest crystal. Here they could loaf along, two hundred feet beneath the surface of the sea and, at their leisure, study the various forms of deep sea life as they floated past, a privilege not given to many and one to which the boys looked forward eagerly.

“Chance for you to do some more painting, Brick,” laughed Don.

“Gee, I’ll be too busy looking,” rejoined the enthralled Teddy. “I’ll forget to paint!”

The chief function of the submarine, as Professor Bruce explained to them, would be to serve as a scout, to go on

ahead of the *Phantom* and report the most likely places for sub-sea work.

“Once arrived at our location, the submarine will be very useful, too, in attracting and identifying specimens,” the professor added. “The powerful lights of the submarine will attract large quantities of fish which will be scooped up by our nets and examined at leisure aboard the *Phantom*.”

“I say, Uncle Amos,” said Don as they were leaving the boat, “is there any chance of us fellows getting a ride in the new deep-diving sphere? You know, the one that goes down for a quarter of a mile beneath the surface of the water?”

Professor Bruce regarded his nephew with a quizzical smile.

“Two hundred feet is too shallow for you, is it?”

“It seems shallow when you compare it to fourteen hundred,” laughed Don.

“Honest, Professor Bruce,” Teddy added, “if we could take a ride in that sphere, we’d get a thrill that we’d never forget as long as we lived.”

“Well, well, we’ll see what can be done,” said the professor, indulgently. “I think it can be managed.”

Don and Teddy noticed how the professor’s face darkened when he stepped upon land again. It was as though he took up the burden of Erasmus Rust’s enmity where it had been temporarily forgotten in the enthusiasm and delight his chosen life work always brought him.

It seemed as though newspapers besieged them wherever they went. A dozen newsboys solicited their patronage before they regained the hotel. Don bought a paper from one of them and he and Teddy went over it when they reached their own room.

There was the usual clamor about Rust and his plans, including an editorial on what an endowed museum would mean to the community. There was also a cut of the submarine to be used by the Rust party, showing a portion of the interior.

“They don’t seem to have any supply ship,” Teddy remarked. “If they have, nothing has been said about it in the paper. I wonder if they don’t intend to use one.”

“Probably haven’t had time to equip a supply ship properly,” Don returned. “As a matter of fact, I believe the submarine will be used more to harass and hinder our party than to collect scientific data. All this bally-hoo doesn’t mean a thing, except as it is calculated to hinder and embarrass the Governor and shift the spotlight from him to the rival expedition. I don’t imagine that Erasmus Rust’s contribution to the cause of science will amount to much.”

They slept little that night and were up even before the captain and Professor Bruce were astir. They went down to breakfast and walked around outside the hotel until their elders appeared.

99

Most of the luggage had already been sent to the *Phantom*. The party had only handbags to pack and this was accomplished in short order.

Professor Bruce had picked up a paper and was glancing at it worriedly. Now he said, in an agitated voice:

“The Rust expedition starts today. Evidently the man intends to hinder and annoy us to the full extent of his power.”

“Erasmus Rust may find himself hindered and annoyed,” Captain Sturdy returned grimly. “He is an upstart and needs to be taught his place!”

Arrived at the dock, they found that the other members of the expedition had preceded them and had already boarded the *Phantom*. A crowd had gathered to see the famous men embark and Professor Bruce, who hated the fuss attendant upon his fame, was forced to stand for several photographs demanded by various representatives of the press. The boys, too, came in for their share of photographing, although they were embarrassed, as they afterward confessed, at being included in such distinguished company.

“I hope I looked more dignified than I felt,” said Teddy as they boarded the *Phantom*. “What I really wanted to do was dance a jig.”

“Nothing to stop you now,” laughed Don. “Go ahead and earn your keep as an entertainer.”

“I am an earnest student of art,” Brick reminded him, gravely. “From now on, jigging is not in my line!”

100

They went below and stowed their luggage, to return almost immediately to the deck.

It was an inspiring sight. The crowd waved and cheered. From somewhere came the strains of the Star-Spangled Banner. There was the rasp of rope and the heavy drag of timber as the gangplank was drawn up. The steam yacht, *Phantom*, gave a deep triumphant whistle, people waved frantically, more cameras clicked, and a tiny rift appeared between the *Phantom* and the dock.

Wider and wider grew that aperture while Don Sturdy and Teddy Allison watched the boat draw slowly away.

“Want to leave?” Don asked. “It’s not too late yet. I’ll ask the captain to set you ashore, if you say so.”

Teddy pretended to consider this, but, after a period of intense concentration, announced that he would stay with the expedition after all.

“I’m afraid it couldn’t get along without me. That’s the only reason I put up with you. What would the expedition do without my soul-stirring sketches of *cypselurus furcatus*, *halobates*, etc., etc.? I ask again, what would this formidable array of scientists do without me?”

“It’s hard to say,” Don retorted dryly. “I think probably their most pressing problem right now is what to do with you.”

“Ouch, that hurts!” cried Brick, with a grin.

“What say we call off the feud and be friends?”

“You’re the one that started it,” Don said. “Say, Brick, isn’t it great to be standing here with the wind blowing great guns

and not have a care in the world? Boy, this is the life!”

“You’re right! The finest feeling in the world, starting out on a new adventure. You never lose the kick and the thrill. I guess we are born earth-wanderers, Don.”

Don nodded, soberly.

“From my angle, it’s a great thing to live. To go to places and see strange things—things, perhaps, that no man has seen before. That’s the life. Gee, I wonder what we are going to find this time?”

CHAPTER XIII

“MAN OVERBOARD!”

The start of the *Phantom*'s strange voyage was propitious. Being a steam yacht, she was not dependent upon wind or weather but made steady progress toward tropic seas.

During that initial phase of the trip, the two boys from Hillville spent their time becoming better acquainted with the marvelous ship upon which they were pampered guests.

The cook, though an autocrat when ruling his province of the galley, was a good fellow when approached in ordinary converse. He had served under Captain Brody for years and had nothing but praise for the stalwart captain, both as man and as seaman.

“There's a sailor what knows his trade,” the cook was wont to declare. “When he takes command of a wessel, he knows her from the smallest screw in her hold to the highest pulley on the mainmast riggin'. He loves a ship, the captain does, like most men love a woman. Why, I could tell you stories——” Upon which he would trail off into some anecdote of the sea, to which the boys were always sympathetic and interested listeners.

They struck up a friendship with the salty cook, who rejoiced in the name of Alanthus Highboy, and, as a

consequence of this friendship, were receiving extra juicy slabs of steak and seconds on desserts before the voyage was fairly under way.

Between the boys and Captain Brody there sprang up, also, a warm, mutual regard. Many a yarn of adventure on the high seas the captain spun for the delectation of his attentive audience. In return, the boys recounted some of their adventures on land and sea which won for them added respect on the part of the much-traveled captain.

“You lads are young to have seen and done so much,” he said on more than one occasion. “But when the desire for adventure’s in your blood you can no more resist it than a man can help shaking when he has the chills and fever. Well, well, I hope you lads see action enough on this trip to satisfy you.”

So far neither the surface nor the vertical nets had been let down, for the scientists anticipated finding little of exceptional interest until reaching more southern waters. The trawls lay idle and the deep-sea dredge which would be used to drag the ocean bed lay curled up on the forward deck.

Despite the fact that there were, as yet, no specimens to catalogue, photograph or dissect, the laboratory was already the scene of much activity on the part of the scientists.

Here they made ready catalogue sheets and jars of various shapes and sizes containing interesting chemicals. Here telescopes and microscopes were tenderly adjusted and typewriters made ready with heaps of manuscript

close by in anticipation of that moment when something new could be recorded on a clean white page.

Regarding the innumerable small bits of apparatus to be used in the laboratory, Don was moved to remark on the chaos likely to result from a storm at sea.

“What would happen to all these disks and tubes and jars,” he queried, “in the event of a real, husky storm? I should think they would go scooting all over the place.”

“In that case,” said Professor Bruce with a smile, “it is the business of each scientist to save his own apparatus. If he can’t, that’s his own misfortune.”

“Why can’t all this stuff be fastened down?” Teddy demanded.

Professor Bruce shrugged.

“A scientist is like a surgeon, in that he requires an infinite variety of tools for his work. A scientist cannot, any more than a surgeon, use his tools while they are fastened down.”

“A surgeon doesn’t have to perform an operation aboard a rolling ship,” Don pointed out.

“Which, perhaps,” smiled Professor Bruce, “is fortunate for humanity!”

The boys were keenly interested in all the manifold machinery of that wonder-ship, the *Phantom*. During the first few days of the voyage, it seemed to them that they

were constantly discovering new objects.

For instance, there was the projection room, where moving pictures would be taken of the living prizes of the expedition. By means of this magic silver sheet, treatises were transformed into vivid life.

“I don’t see what I’m here for,” said Teddy to the operator of the moving picture machine. “What good are pictures painted on a canvas when you can get photographs of the real thing?”

The operator smiled and shook his head.

“The trouble is that only a small proportion of the specimen fish and insects are captured alive,” he said. “Many of them are dead when caught, or die a short time later. Even among those that survive, many are ‘camera-shy’ and refuse to act for the movies. Oh, no, there will be work enough for your brush. No need to worry about that.”

“If you get so few good pictures, it seems hardly worth while to put in all this elaborate apparatus,” Don suggested.

Again the operator smiled and shook his head.

“Scientists are a queer lot,” he said. “If we should take only one good picture of some rare deep-sea fish, they would think almost any expenditure of time and trouble and money justifiable. I’ve taken plenty of pictures for them and I know what I’m talking about!”

“Your job must be fun,” observed Teddy. “I wouldn’t mind having it, myself.”

The operator laughed.

About the third day out they ran into the first bad weather of the voyage.

Early that morning Don was awakened by a pitching and rolling that fairly catapulted him out of his berth.

He rubbed his eyes and looked about him in time to see Teddy stagger and skid across the slanted cabin floor, bringing up with a sound thud against the opposite wall.

“Old man Ocean cutting up a bit,” remarked Don, swinging his legs over the edge of the berth.

“Me too,” grinned Teddy, nursing an injured elbow. “Did you get an eyeful of that fancy step I did?”

“Kind of early in the morning for acrobatic dancing, isn’t it?” returned Don, running a hand through his ruffled hair.

“Wonder what time it is, anyway?”

“About five-thirty, I guess. Early as it is,” he added, “I judge by sundry sounds and scurryings that other folks are awake.” As though to add point to this observation, a cabin door across the way slammed shut with a resounding noise.

“Who could sleep with all this excitement?” grumbled Don. “Might as well get dressed, I suppose, and join the others.”

Breakfast was a sketchy affair, where spreading one’s bread was an exploit and the swallowing of a cup of coffee a virtual impossibility.

“This is what you might call breakfasting on faith,” remarked Brick. “I believe I have had a good breakfast, therefore I have had one.”

“I’d hate to tell you what you are,” grinned Don. “If this keeps up,” he added, “we’re apt to starve to death.”

As the boys got up from the table Professor Bruce regarded them anxiously.

“You are going on deck?” he asked.

“We intended to,” Don nodded. “The best place on earth to enjoy a storm and get a real kick out of it is on deck, Uncle Amos.”

“Undoubtedly, as long as the deck remains firm under foot,” his uncle rejoined. “This one, however, is more like a bucking horse and is apt, I am afraid, to toss you into the ocean.”

“Not us,” denied Teddy, confidently. “We can take care of ourselves, Professor, don’t worry.”

Professor Bruce looked toward Captain Sturdy and the latter nodded indulgently.

“Let them go, Amos. The lads can take care of themselves. They have demonstrated that often enough in the past.”

So, slipping and stumbling, gripping the railing, Don and Teddy ascended the steep stairs to the deck. They found this easy in comparison to the perils encountered in traversing the brief stretch from the deck house to the rail of the ship.

From scaling great heights one was instantly thrown forward toward a sloping valley whose floor was the rolling green swell of the ocean itself. This disappeared and again they were ascending a steep incline, reaching for the rail.

They gripped it at the same instant and clung to it like grim death.

They were glad after a moment that they had taken the precaution to cover their clothes with slickers and put on high rubber boots. The spray from the heavy combers would have soaked them through. As it was, their slickers glistened with wetness and every now and then the *Phantom*, stooping her deck to the trough of a wave, clipped off a portion of the crest, sending a thin stream of bluish-green water washing over the deck.

Clinging to the rail, the deck like a plunging horse beneath their feet, the wind tearing the breath from their lungs, the boys realized that the professor's warning had been justified. Their position was perilous in the extreme. Anyone, not certain of his balance, might easily be washed over the dipping rail.

However, the view from this vantage point was stupendous. The great sweep of the ocean, placid for so long, was like an angry giant suddenly awakened. It beat with thunderous waves against the frail bulk of the ship and shot spirals of spray toward a lowering sky.

Through the uproar there sounded a stentorian shout, the

lookout booming through his megaphone those two dread words of the sea:

“Man overboard!”

CHAPTER XIV

A SWIM FOR LIFE

At the moment of the lookout's shout, Don, gazing aft, saw a bobbing dot on the water.

Without stopping to think, Don tore off his slicker. Clinging to the rail, he shed his heavy boots, not noticing that they went slithering over the slippery deck.

Teddy tried to argue with him, raising his voice above the storm.

“Don't be a fool, Don. They'll lower a boat for him. If you dive, there will be two, instead of one, to save!”

If Don heard him and understood what he was trying to say, he made no sign. He said afterward that he had no remembrance of Teddy's having spoken to him.

The discarding of his slicker and boots had taken no more than a few seconds. Now, with difficulty, Don mounted a rail that felt like glass beneath his feet and stood balanced there for a brief moment.

Teddy tried to restrain him, but Don shook off his hand impatiently, raised his hands above his head, and flung himself forward.

He saw the mountainous waves reach up for him. A moment more and he felt the cool sting of them against his flesh as he clipped the water cleanly and dived downward into a fathomless sea.

Since the dive had been a high one, it took him for a proportionately long distance beneath the surface of the water. It seemed an age of time before his descent was checked and he felt the buoyancy of the water begin to force him toward the surface.

He helped himself with all his strength and soon had brought his head above the water.

He gulped in the fresh air gratefully, and set off with a powerful crawl stroke toward the point where he had seen the struggling blot on the water.

He had no notion of the unfortunate man's identity. Whether it was a member of the scientific staff or one of the crew who had lost his balance on the slippery deck and pitched into the water, he could not tell.

"Probably one of the scientists," he thought. "A seaman would have better sealegs. He would know enough not to fall overboard in a sea like this."

The thought put fresh energy into Don's stroke. A majority of the scientific men were good swimmers, he knew. On the other hand, a number of them could not swim at all. If it had been one of this latter group that Don had seen struggling in the water, then the need of his services was very great indeed.

Nevertheless, and in spite of his best efforts, Don realized that his progress was very slow. The forces opposed to him were appalling.

Great walls of green water swept toward him in ceaseless succession like the ranks of an advancing army. He survived one, only to be overwhelmed by another.

Realizing the impossibility of scaling those green walls, the swimmer drove straight through them. One after another broke over his head until he found himself gasping and half-drowned.

It was impossible to see for any distance before him. He was not even sure that he was headed toward the man whose life he was trying to save.

“Like hunting for a needle in a haystack,” he thought desperately. “And what a haystack!”

Just when he was beginning to despair, sheer luck, or Fate—call it what you will—thrust Don upon a sodden bulk in the water that resolved itself into the body of a man.

The wretched, drowning fellow made a feeble grab for his would-be rescuer, and Don recognized Mason Dunn, the chief chemist of the expedition.

Don had only time to verify the identification when a huge wall of water bore down upon them, engulfing them both.

Don grabbed for the chemist and caught hold of his slicker. The coat was slippery as an eel and Don had the

nightmare sensation of impotence so frequently encountered in bad dreams. He had hold of the slicker. A man's life depended upon his ability to retain his hold on it. Yet his fingers were slipping, slipping——

He came up, gasping, on the other side of the green mountain of water. He renewed his grip on Dunn, this time grabbing the collar of his slicker.

“Now!” he gasped. “If you can take hold of my shoulder—keep hold of it, see, whatever happens!——we may make it.”

He realized that Dunn could not hear him. The thunder of the waves and the wind drowned out his words almost before they were uttered. Besides, Dunn was all in, nearing unconsciousness, his eyes glazing.

“It's all up to me now,” thought Don, desperately. “I must swim with one hand, keep my own head and Dunn's out of the water. In this sea, the question is, how long can I manage it?”

How far away was the ship?

Lost in the mountainous hills and valleys of that terrible sea, Don asked himself the question as his one hope of salvation.

He knew the alarm had been given aboard the *Phantom*. The ship would be stopped as soon as possible and a small boat lowered. If a little craft could live in the mountainous sea, then rescue must be near.

“It will have to be,” thought Don grimly. “Otherwise two

more skeletons will go to join the others in Davy Jones's locker."

The struggle with the heavy sea was wearing him down. The effort to breathe was a heavy weight on his chest. Again and again great seas washed over them and he emerged, gasping and choking, to drag the chemist's head above the water.

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He felt his strength failing him. He knew that within a very short time his exhausted muscles would refuse to function, and he and his helpless burden would be dragged beneath the surface of the sea.

"Fine specimens for the *Phantom's* dragging nets," he thought grimly.

He tried floating on his back, but the dead weight of the chemist and the pounding of the waves dragged him under and he had to abandon the attempt.

A wave higher than any that had yet threatened him, bore down upon the struggling lad and his helpless burden. Don watched it coming with a desperate feeling of complete helplessness.

Battered as he was, at the limit of his endurance, he knew that nothing short of a miracle could save him and Mason Dunn. He could not survive an onslaught such as this promised to be.

The wave grew in size until it seemed to reach almost to the lowering sky. To Don's tormented fancy it was a sea monster, a creature with slavering jaws reaching to devour him.

The green wall was directly above him. Don drew a long breath into his laboring lungs and tensed his muscles.

The great wave broke over him with a smothering roar. He felt himself caught up by it, rushed along.

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His fingers, gripping the collar of Mason Dunn, began to weaken. The irresistible power of the current tugged at the body of the unconscious man seeking to tear him from his rescuer.

Don fought to regain the surface of the water, fought to retain his grip upon the man whose life had become as dear to him now as his own. He would either save Mason Dunn, or die with him!

Don came to the surface, managed with the last of his failing strength to drag Dunn up with him.

He found that, though his arms and legs made familiar motions in the water, he made no progress. His strength was gone. It was all he could do to keep up.

“Another wave like that last one,” he thought desperately, “and we’re both goners!”

The rescue boat must be very near now. Don thought that if he could see it, he might gain courage to carry on.

Don’s heart leaped as he saw something bobbing on the water ahead of him.

It was not the boat. What was it? A piece of wreckage, a bit of

driftwood?

The object came nearer, and Don saw with joy that it was a floating hatch, mute evidence of an untold tragedy of the sea.

With the last of his failing strength, Don forged through the water until his hand touched the hatch. He drew himself up on it, and with infinite effort dragged the unconscious chemist after him.

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There he lay, face downward, gasping, his hand gripping the edge of the hatch, an arm about Mason Dunn to prevent the inert form from slipping off into the water.

Don knew well enough that the hatch offered only temporary succor. Tossed about on the turbulent water, it was completely at the mercy of the waves. Its helpless human freight, if not soon rescued, would be battered into lifelessness.

However, the hatch did promise a brief reprieve from the fate that lurked in the dark depths of the ocean. If the small boat of the *Phantom* came soon, all well and good. If the boat did not come soon, then the reprieve would serve only to prolong Don's agony.

A mountainous wave bore down upon them. The hatch tilted perilously, but managed magically to ascend the steep wall of water, clipping off only a portion of the crest.

The plunge downward into the trough of the wave was a frightening experience. Don's exhausted muscles protested against the strain that was necessary to keep the human freight

aboard its frail craft.

Don clung to the hatch and wondered how long it would be possible to retain his hold on it.

The face of Mason Dunn was turned toward him. The eyes were closed and the skin was putty-colored. There was no sign of respiration.

The unpleasant thought came to Don,

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“Suppose he is already dead and I am trying to rescue a dead man! A nice idea!”

However, Don did not believe the chemist dead. He had not been under water long enough.

“A little first aid would probably save him. I’m in a fine position to administer first aid. It’s all I can do to keep us afloat.”

Don was finding it increasingly hard to cling to the bobbing hatch. The ceaseless rise and fall of it, the climbing of continuous watery mountains and the steep descent on the farther side, were an increasingly burdensome tax upon his strength.

The time came when he gritted his teeth and decided to endure until the last possible moment, when he would slip from the troublesome hatch and drown as quickly and painlessly as possible.

The pain in his hands as he gripped the edges of the hatch

grew worse. It felt to him as though the palms were rubbed raw.

He could not stand it much longer. The muscles in his forearms had lost all feeling. In a few moments his fingers would begin to slip.

His thoughts became confused and incoherent. He felt an odd, tortured pounding in his head. Something was turning the world dark about him. Was it night? No, of course not!

His senses swam together. He felt his fingers slipping but, strangely, did not care.

It was over, all over. No use to struggle——

CHAPTER XV

SAVED FROM THE SEA

Don recovered consciousness to find himself in the cabin of the *Phantom*, stretched out on one of the divans. Anxious faces peered at him and he heard a voice say in a professional tone of authority, “He will do now. It’s hard to kill these husky youngsters but he had a close call, just the same.”

Don felt detached, curiously uninterested in what took place about him. He was very tired and there were tingling sensations in his arms and legs.

Memory came back to him slowly. He remembered the feel of his fingers as they lost their grip on the edge of the hatch. He realized that he must have been very nearly drowned.

This thought brought another. He sat up suddenly and put a hand to his head as the familiar cabin swam before his eyes. The action brought a professional protest from Doctor Swain, ship’s surgeon, but Don disregarded it.

“What happened to the chemist?” he cried. “Did he drown?”

Professor Bruce appeared through the mist that swam before Don’s eyes.

“It’s all right, son,” he said, soothingly. “They got Mason

Dunn, too.”

“How is he?” Don insisted, being almost afraid to ask the question for fear of the answer.

“Doing nicely,” responded the professional voice of the ship’s doctor. “We were able to revive him and he is now resting in his cabin. He will require a few days to recover from shock, but I think after that he will be none the worse for his terrible experience.”

“Well then,” said Don, heartily, if weakly, “that’s all right!”

Although Doctor Swain ordered rest for him, Don refused to be pampered.

“I’m all right,” he insisted. “If you shut me up in a cabin by myself, doctor, I’m apt to run a fever. I’ll feel fit as a fiddle in a little time, I promise you.”

After a second careful examination the doctor agreed to give the patient his way, provided the latter promised to remain reasonably quiet for the remainder of the day.

Don agreed to this under compulsion and was carried off to his cabin for a change into dry clothing.

Back in the main cabin of the ship he was fed hot chicken broth while his strength slowly returned and he began, once more, to take a keen interest in life.

“What happened, Brick?” he asked. “I can’t remember past the point where I felt my fingers slipping and was

sure poor Mason Dunn and I were goners.”

“That must have been a swell sensation,” remarked Teddy.

“It wasn’t so bad,” said Don with a reminiscent smile. “I think I was rather more relieved than anything else to feel that the worst had come and I could do nothing more about it!”

“You were almost unconscious, probably,” said Teddy, pouring more broth into his chum’s bowl. “You were quite unconscious when they hauled you out—and very wet.”

“I wish you’d tell me what happened,” said Don, scowling. “First, I am about to die and more than half glad of it; then I wake up here aboard the *Phantom* safe and sound, though a trifle weary, and am soon eating chicken soup as though nothing had happened.”

“You’re a lucky guy to be eating anything at all right now. Instead, you might easily be feeding the tunny fish and tarpon, to say nothing of the astronesthes and myctophids——”

“Oh, go on,” grinned Don, “Try out your learning on someone else. I’ve been almost drowned and I’m not strong yet. Have a heart!”

“Shall I begin at the beginning?”

“Where else?”

“Well then, with the cry of ‘Man Overboard!’ the order was given to heave-to the *Phantom*. A ship can’t be stopped in its own length, though, as you know, so that when

you made your high dive from the rail, the yacht was still making headway.

“Orders were given to lower the lifeboat, and a nice job *that* was. We no sooner had her sitting on the water than a wave would come along and swamp her.

“I was hopping all over the place and yelling like a madman, ‘For Pete’s sake get her started!’ Then the boat would roll and I’d find myself clinging to the rail half over into the sea myself. It was a show, I tell you! Before they got the boat launched, I’d just about given you up for dead.”

“About that time,” Don interjected, “I’d just about given myself up for dead!”

“Well, anyway, they finally coaxed the boat to stay right side up long enough for some men to get down in her and we started.”

“We?” questioned Don.

“I was with them,” nodded Teddy. “They didn’t want me to go at first, but I raised such a rumpus, threatening to jump overboard myself that they had to take me.”

“Gee, Brick, that was wonderful of you!”

“Cut it,” begged Teddy, embarrassed. “You’d have done the same for me, only more so. Did you suppose I was going to stay safe on deck with you out there getting yourself thoroughly drowned? Nothing doing!”

“Anyway, I’m here to tell you that the sailors that manned that lifeboat were heroes, every one of them. The way they faced those towering green walls of water, never turning a hair when the little boat shipped the crest of a wave, almost swamping us, was a lesson to the chicken-hearted!

“Along with a couple of the others, I was set to bailing out the boat and that one task kept us busy, let me tell you!”

Teddy’s account was so vivid that Don could fairly see the little boat manned by an intrepid crew wallowing in the heavy sea, threatened each moment with disaster and kept afloat only by the indomitable courage of those aboard her. It was an inspiring picture and Don’s eyes glowed as he regarded it.

“You were a long time coming, or so it seemed to me,” he said. “I never caught a glimpse of you, though you may be sure I strained my eyes trying.”

Teddy nodded.

“We tried to keep you in sight. The second mate was in command and he used heavy glasses. He picked you up in them soon after we started, but lost you again and again in the heavy sea.

“We saw you reach Mason Dunn, grab him and try to swim with him.”

“It was hard going,” Don explained. “I had been battered pretty badly by the waves and the poor chemist couldn’t do a thing to help himself. He was half-drowned, I guess.”

Teddy nodded.

“When we saw you had Mr. Dunn,” he continued, “we worked harder than ever to reach you. We knew you could not last long in that sea, hampered by the weight of a half-drowned man. Of course,” Brick added with a half-sheepish grin, “the others were as much interested in Mr. Dunn as they were in you. But I, well you know how it is yourself, Don. I was a lot more worried about you. We’ve been pals a long time and it wasn’t much fun to see you drowning before my eyes, and not be able to reach you. It was fierce!”

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Teddy contemplated this fierceness for some time; then continued:

“Well, all the time I was bailing out that confounded boat and every time we got the water down a few inches, we’d ship another wave. It was like trying to hold back Niagara by holding a tin cup under it. It seemed as if every wave must swamp us.

“Somehow we managed to keep afloat, but for some time we lost sight of you completely. We had begun to think you had gone down and that all our hard fight had been for nothing, when we topped the crest of a wave and swept down almost on top of you!

“That was one of life’s great moments, Don, let me tell you. I’ve never had a thrill like that before or since!

“I let out a howl, and made a grab for you that almost capsized the boat.

“I didn’t touch you but two of the sailors, armed with a sort of curved spear that is used for harpooning certain types of fish, reached out and hooked on to your clothing and Mason Dunn’s.

“At that the boat almost capsized, for another great wave rushed down on us just as we got you hooked. The men did their best to hang on to you and to keep the boat right side up at the same time!”

Teddy had been talking with a headlong excitement while Don listened, his spoon poised motionless above the bowl of chicken broth. Now Brick glanced at Don and they smiled understandingly.

“I’m all steamed up,” Teddy admitted. “It was a great experience, the thrill of a lifetime, and now that it’s over, with nobody hurt, I’m just beginning to realize how good it was.

“The sailors in that boat, including the second mate, were supermen. They managed not only to keep the boat afloat but to get you and Mr. Dunn into it.

“Fortunately for us, we found that the *Phantom* had turned and was steaming toward us, so that we were not long in reaching her.

“If we had had far to go, the men, exhausted as they were with the effort to make headway against the giant waves and with the added load of two half-drowned men in the boat, never could have made it.”

“I bet you were glad when you saw the good old *Phantom*

steaming to the rescue,” Don observed.

“It was another of life’s great moments,” Brick agreed, grinning. “When we climbed to the deck at last, we were a sorry-looking crew, but we didn’t care. We were thankful just to be alive!”

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“How about Mr. Dunn? Is he seriously ill?”

“Only suffering from shock and the quantity of sea water he swallowed before you came up with him,” Teddy said. “We were able to revive him sometime before you came ’round,” he added, “even though he is in worse shape now than you are.”

Glancing about the cabin, Don noticed for the first time that the rolling of the ship had subsided considerably. The *Phantom* appeared to be riding in quieter waters.

He spoke of this to Teddy and the latter nodded.

“We’ve left the Big Wind behind, though the captain seems to think that this is only an intermission and that we’ll run into a harder blow farther on.”

“I hope the captain’s mistaken,” Don said, and added with a wry smile. “I’ve had enough rough weather to last me awhile!”

“Same here,” grinned Brick. “I’m all for a hot, dry spell!”

As it happened, the captain’s prophecy of foul weather failed to materialize, while Teddy’s prediction came true. The

following day the *Phantom* sailed into bright, placid waters off the coast of Southern California.

At that time the real work of the expedition began.

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Surface and vertical nets were laid down, trawls were set to work and the members of the party eagerly awaited the moment when the deep sea dredge could be put into action and the secrets of the ocean depths be brought to light.

Don and Teddy were wild with desire to try out the diver's helmet and get down on the ocean bottom, which, at the point where the *Phantom* was anchored, was from forty to fifty feet below the surface, and which, when the sunlight struck straight down, could be dimly seen from the vessel's deck.

Captain Frank and Professor Bruce looked a bit dubious, but finally consented.

"We could haul them up in a jiffy if any danger threatened," said the captain.

"I suppose so," agreed the professor reluctantly, "but until the lads get more used to it, the trips will have to be short ones."

The boys made no objection to this. They would have agreed to anything in order to achieve their hearts' desire.

Then arose the question as to which one should go first.

"Let's toss a coin for it," suggested Teddy.

"All right," assented Don. "I'll toss and you call."

He spun a coin into the air.

“Heads!” called Teddy.

The coin struck the deck and they examined it eagerly.

“Tails!” laughed Don. “You lose, Brick.”

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“No use fighting against the Sturdy luck,” mourned Teddy.

The diver’s suit and helmet were carefully adjusted and Don was lowered over the side.

Down, down he went into the cool water, his pulses thrilling with excitement, down until his feet struck something solid and he knew that he had reached the ocean floor.

His heart and mind were in tumult. The bottom of the ocean! The goal he had in mind, the thing of which he had dreamed ever since this journey had been broached. He, Don Sturdy, was having an experience vouchsafed only to a very few of the whole human race.

Millions had sailed over the ocean’s surface. Other millions had struggled in its tossing waves. Only a small number of individuals had ever trodden the ocean floor. He, Don Sturdy, was one of the favored few!

He took a grip on himself. There would be plenty of time to analyze his emotions later. Now time was pressing. Fifteen minutes had been put as the limit of his stay and he must utilize every precious moment.

Fish of all sorts swam about him, most of them sheering off as they came near this strange voyager to the ocean floor. Many of the species Don had already seen drawn up in nets. Others were utterly strange to him.

He took a step forward. His first impression was that of lightness. He seemed almost to float rather than to walk. The pressure of the water was urging him up toward the surface and only the heavy weights on his feet and the top of his helmet kept him down. He felt as though he could walk on eggs without breaking the shells.

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It seemed to Don that the ocean floor was moving, a feeling produced by the waving seaweed, the bending sponges and the masses of light shells swayed by the currents.

This impression of motion was accentuated by the myriad of fish that swept by him, some swiftly, some lazily. Shrimps floated past like ghosts. There were crustaceans as transparent as glass, sargasso fish colored like the mottled and spotted weeds among which they lived, bat-fish with fins like hands and a tentacle in the centre of the forehead; a host of others, either beautiful or grotesque, that astounded him by their number and varieties.

Others there were of a larger and in some cases a more dangerous type. Great tarpons from time to time sent hordes of smaller fish flying as they dashed into a school of them and selected their prey. There were sinuous water snakes darting through the water like illuminated whiplashes, poisonous, most of them, as Don had already learned from the professor. Then there were the barracuda with their terrible teeth as

sharp as lancets.

Their evil eyes surveyed Don curiously and sometimes they approached him as though to carry their investigations further, but as he made no hostile move, they did not attempt to attack him. There was plenty of easier prey in sight.

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Engrossed as he was with the wonderland into which he had been plunged, Don took no notice of the flight of time until a tug on the line told him that but two minutes remained to him.

Just then, as he went to take a step forward, he found that his foot had been caught in something.

He tried impatiently to shake it loose, but found that he could not budge it.

Annoyed more than alarmed, he renewed his efforts, but his foot was held as in a vise.

A cold sweat broke out on him as he realized that he was trapped!

The air in his helmet was almost exhausted. A few minutes more and it would become unbreathable.

With anyone less cool and courageous than Don Sturdy, panic would have ensued. There would have been wild plunging that would probably only have wedged the foot more tightly in its prison.

Don went to work calmly and carefully, turning his foot

gently from side to side, backward and forward, until at last, after a minute that seemed an hour, he found the spot of least resistance and drew his foot free.

With a relief far too great to be put into words he gave the signal and was swiftly drawn to the surface, hauled on board and divested of his suit and helmet.

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He was enthusiastic in response to their questions as to how he had enjoyed his first visit to the ocean bottom. It was only to Teddy in private later on that Don revealed the terrible danger that had threatened him.

“Not a word to my uncles,” he adjured his friend. “It would only worry them and perhaps put a stop to other trips.”

“I’m dumb as a clam,” replied Teddy. “Probably dumber,” he added with a grin.

The next day Don and Teddy, operating one of the surface nets, were startled by shouts from the bow of the vessel.

The voice was that of Professor Bruce and it sounded as though he were calling for help.

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CHAPTER XVI

IN THE DEPTHS

Don and Teddy dashed toward the bow of the *Phantom*. They leaned over and peered in the direction of the frantic cries.

There they observed Professor Bruce standing on the bow pulpit. The small grated platform, surrounded by a railing of wire netting, had been let down close to the water, so close, in fact, that as the bow of the *Phantom* plunged into the trough of a wave, two or three inches of water slipped over the pulpit's floor, gurgling about the professor's water-proof boots.

Professor Bruce continued his loud shouting until, looking up, he observed the boys watching him. Then he stopped his cries and beckoned to them, by which they assumed that the professor was inviting them to descend to the pulpit level.

This they did with alacrity, wondering what ailed the usually quiet and orderly man of science that he should shout so loudly and compellingly for no reason apparent to them.

It was not an easy matter to descend the swaying ladder to the pulpit many feet below. The boys accomplished it, however, and soon stood upon the pulpit close to the professor's side.

Then they saw what it was that had so excited him. A

school of dolphins, attracted by the ship, had begun the frolic in which this sportive fish loves to indulge.

Around and around the ship the dolphins played, sometimes leaping entirely clear of the water, maintaining a uniform distance from the *Phantom* with no apparent effort.

“What are they doing?” asked Teddy, puzzled.

“Only playing,” responded Professor Bruce. “The dolphin is a friendly fish and will sometimes continue the game for hours, circling around and around a ship, keeping pace with it with no effort. Look at that beauty, now!”

As he spoke, a dolphin leaped clear of the water, so close to the floor of the pulpit that it seemed Professor Bruce could touch it by reaching out his hand. He tried, but the dolphin dipped under the water, to reappear only a few seconds later before the bow of the ship.

“They go like the wind,” said Don, puzzled, “and yet you can’t see how they do it. They shoot through the water like torpedoes and don’t move a muscle!”

“If you will look closely,” the professor instructed, “you will see that the powerful tail flanges are responsible for the dolphin’s speed. They shoot him through the water with piston-like force. The motion is a beautiful one to watch, so swift and apparently effortless.”

“Was this what you were shouting about, Uncle Amos?” Don asked. “We thought you were hurt or in danger.”

The professor smiled a bit sheepishly.

“I’m sorry I startled you,” he said. “The school of dolphins was too much for my self-restraint. I wanted others to share my pleasure, yet was too selfish to go in search of them. So I shouted to attract attention.”

“I’m glad you told us,” laughed Don. “Otherwise Brick and I would probably die of heart failure before the voyage were half over.”

For awhile they stood on the pulpit, watching the antics of the dolphins with interest; then climbed the swaying pilot ladder to make room for those of the professor’s associates who were eager to watch the torpedo-like fish at play.

“It’s too bad only two or three people can squeeze into the pulpit,” grumbled Teddy. “It seems to me whenever we want to spend a peaceful hour or two there, we always have a hive of scientists buzzing about our ears.”

“I never saw anything like them for hard work,” observed Don, meaning the scientists. “When their enthusiasms are roused, they never seem to tire. Uncle Amos was in the laboratory until almost three o’clock this morning, inspecting and tabulating yesterday’s net catch. Yet he was up at five o’clock to watch some odd-looking bird fly past the ship. I don’t see how he stands it.”

“We all work hard for our enthusiasms,” said a voice close to them, and they saw that Captain Frank Sturdy had come from the cabin unobserved. “I, myself, have worked harder trying to trap a lion than a day laborer digging a ditch.

There's everything in doing what you like to do."

"I suppose so," Don agreed. "Just now I'm going to do what I like to do and pull up this net. Give us a lift, will you, Uncle Frank?"

The net was more than usually heavy, but when it lay sprawled on the deck, the boys prepared, with all their customary eagerness, to examine the contents.

Several of the sailors lounged closer and those of the scientists who were not busy in the laboratory, projection room or aquarium came to see what the boys had caught.

A large tank, filled with water, was always kept in readiness. Into this the boys emptied their catch.

There was the usual collection of jellyfish, snails and baby crabs and besides these there were two or three more unusual varieties.

"Look at that dark fish with spots on his back," cried Teddy. "He flaps along under the surface like a bird."

Mason Dunn pushed forward with an exclamation of delight.

"I believe it's an eagle ray," he cried. "A very rare fish and an excellent specimen. Professor Bruce will be glad to see that."

"A good subject for the projection room, too," laughed Don, "judging from the way it flaps about. Maybe you can paint it, Brick. You've been rather low on subjects lately."

“What’s that funny thing?” Teddy asked, pointing to an object like a bunch of small balls glued together. “Looks like golf balls with whiskers.”

“That’s the bubble globigerina,” said Professor Bruce. He had abandoned the pulpit and was bending over the bucket with eager interest.

Don and Teddy exchanged glances.

“I’m afraid we know just about as much now as we did before, Uncle Amos,” smiled Don. “Would you mind explaining just what a ‘bubble globi-what-ever-you-call-it’ is?”

“A bubble globigerina,” the professor obliged, “is a single-celled animal living fairly close to the surface of the water. When it dies, it sinks to the floor of the ocean, its shell forming an infinitesimal portion of the Globigerina ooze which carpets thousands of miles at the bottom of the sea.”

“Thanks,” said Don. “Gee, all this is interesting! I suppose there’s a story to each one of these little fellows. For instance, what kind of a fish is this?”

Don reached out a hand to touch one of the fish that darted about in the water, but withdrew quickly at a warning exclamation from Professor Bruce.

“Don’t touch that fish,” cried the professor. “It is of a species rare in these waters, and if touched, exudes a poison that is painful, even dangerous.”

“What a beauty it is!” exclaimed Teddy. “With that blue body and orange-colored tail, it would be wonderful on canvas. I’d like to paint it.”

“Do so, by all means,” advised the professor, “but if you are wise, you will keep your distance from it.”

By this time Don and Teddy had come to realize that their official jobs aboard the *Phantom* were more than mere names. They meant hours of strenuous work, but work that was so fascinating that it seemed more like play.

Teddy, for instance, had found that his painting, from the crude efforts of a beginner, was developing into something really good. The chief artist criticized his work in a kindly way, pointing out his errors and praising his good points and leading him surely along the paths of real pictures.

Teddy’s last two canvases had won the praise not only of his immediate chief but of other members of the expedition as well. Encouraged by this commendation, Teddy had declared to Don that he was going to take up art work in earnest when he returned home.

“Some day,” grinned Teddy, “you are going to say of me, ‘Teddy Allison? Why sure. I knew him when——’”

“Go to it,” Don encouraged him. “If I could paint, I wouldn’t have to pound a typewriter for hours a day.”

“You like it, you know you do,” Teddy retorted. “Why, the other day when Professor Bruce wanted to stop dictating to take a squint from the pulpit, you asked him not to

stop until he had finished his description of a certain kind of fish.”

“The sting ray,” laughed Don. “It lies on the bottom of the sea with all its spines extended so that no other fish can come near it without getting stuck. A pretty good defense, if you ask me.”

“You see! You’re as much of a nut as your Uncle Amos over all this scientific stuff.”

“I admit it’s fascinating,” Don returned. “Taking dictation from Uncle Amos is like reading a story of adventure, only I’m helping to write it, instead.”

Two days later Professor Bruce, having reached a place where the water was very deep, announced that they were about to try out the new diving sphere. Naturally, the boys clamored to be permitted to make the descent, and after considerable hesitation the professor at last consented.

“There will be danger,” he warned them. “The sphere is as nearly perfect as science can make it, but at a thousand feet, or thereabouts, beneath the surface of the sea, almost anything may happen. If a screw should slip, or the airline become entangled, dire tragedy might result.”

“Taking risks is all there is to adventure, Uncle Amos,” Don reminded him. “You aren’t afraid. Why should we be?”

Professor Bruce let it go at that.

Don and Teddy spent the remainder of that day

examining the elaborate mechanism that was to lower them for many hundreds of feet beneath the surface of the sea.

The submarine, in its rôle of scout, had come back to report conditions ideal for the use of the sphere. The barometer also predicted fine weather for the following day. Everything, in fact, was propitious for the attempt of what was regarded by the professor and his fellow scientists as one of the most important accomplishments of the expedition.

The submarine, however, brought other news not so pleasant. The commander had sighted a similar boat which he took to be the one used by the Rust party.

“The submarine is tagging us pretty close, sir,” the commander reported to Professor Bruce. “Several times it has cut across our bow a bit too close for comfort. It is my opinion that her commander is attempting to find out where you will do the mass of your research work and then anchor in the most likely place. What shall we do about it, sir?”

Professor Bruce was silent for a few minutes, frowning thoughtfully.

“I can’t see what we can do about it,” he said at last, “except to give the submarine a wide berth and then ignore her as much as possible. We must get ahead with our own work, no matter what Mr. Rust may decide to do.”

The commander saluted and went off, leaving Professor Bruce in a very troubled frame of mind. During those first delightful days of the expedition’s work, the scientist had been able to forget, or nearly to forget, the threat of Rust’s

enmity.

Now that the fact had been forced upon his attention again, it was sufficient to cast a cloud over his delight in the progress already made by the expedition, and to fill him with anxiety as to the success of his future plans.

He would not talk about Rust, but all aboard the *Phantom* sensed the change in his manner. He was no longer the genial, humorous philosopher. He became distant, thoughtful, given to long periods of abstraction.

“Plague take that fellow Rust!” exploded Don. “He is ruining all Uncle Amos’s fun.”

“He will be lucky if Rust doesn’t ruin the expedition as well,” said Teddy gloomily. “I’d like to send Mr. Erasmus Rust down in the bathysphere and then open the door and let in three thousand odd tons of sea water.”

In spite of his gloom Don laughed.

“A fitting revenge,” he agreed. “But not quite practical, I’m afraid. We shall have to get even with Mr. Rust some other way.”

The morning dawned fair and warm. There was no wind to speak of and the sea was almost as placid as a lake.

The weather could not have been more perfect for the epoch-making attempt of Professor Bruce to descend for more than a quarter of a mile beneath the surface of the sea and there observe living organisms at home in their particular environment.

The boys were so greatly excited over the prospect of the deep-sea dive that they were able to do scant justice to the really excellent breakfast provided by Highboy, the cook.

They rushed up to the deck to watch the last minute preparations for the lowering of the sphere.

The deck was teeming with activity, and the greatest interest was being shown in the professor's experiment. For once the clatter of typewriters was stilled, the scientific men had put aside test tubes and microscopes to be on hand to see the bathysphere swing out over the deck and cut the surface of the sea.

"We are going to send it down for a trial dive first," the chief mechanic informed Don and Teddy. "If everything is all right, then you can climb aboard."

The boys watched, fascinated, while the crane-like apparatus swung the bathysphere out over the sea. There it hung for a moment, then was gently lowered toward the water. With a slight splash it cut the surface and slowly sank from sight.

Don and Teddy watched the steel cable as it was let out, foot by foot, and tried to picture the big sphere on its strange journey toward ocean depths.

It reappeared at last, was hoisted to the deck and the great steel door taken off. Only a small quantity of water was found within the sphere, not more than would comfortably fill a quart bottle. So far the sphere had proven itself trustworthy, capable of carrying human freight.

This decided, all the necessary appliances were speedily adjusted; especially the telephone, by means of which communication with those aboard the *Phantom* could be carried on with perfect comfort.

The sphere was also equipped with electric light, an airline which amply supplied those within with oxygen, and a fan to keep the air circulating and remove all sensation of stuffiness.

“All ready?” asked Professor Bruce.

The boys climbed into the sphere and, after them, Professor Bruce. The heavy door clanged into position and was securely fastened by bolts.

When all was in readiness within the sphere, the machinery on deck was put into operation. The sphere lifted gently, cleared the rail and, for a few moments, hung above the surface of the sea.

For that few seconds the boys experienced an odd and thrilling sensation of being hung between sky and sea in some queer and rarefied atmosphere. There was plenty of oxygen within the sphere, the fan kept it circulating freely and yet for those few seconds the boys found it difficult to breathe.

There was a creaking of the machinery on deck and the bathysphere dipped slowly toward the water. It reached the surface, clipped it gently and began to sink.

In a few seconds the boys found themselves staring through the windows of quartz at the keel of the *Phantom*.

“Gee, this is great!” cried Don. “How far will we have to sink, Uncle Amos, before things will get dark, I mean, before the surface light disappears?”

“That is one of the things I want to find out,” returned the professor. “No one has been able to answer it yet. We will, I hope, soon!”

The professor wore the headphones that kept him in touch with those aboard the *Phantom*. He also operated the electric light and at his hand were notebook and pencil for jotting down interesting facts.

Don and Teddy carried powerful torch lights with which they, at regular intervals, illuminated the hose-inlet and the great steel door to make sure that everything was functioning properly.

Two hundred feet below the surface, three hundred feet. There was less variety now in the sea life outside the small quartz window. The light was different, too. It seemed to take on a more brilliant hue.

Three hundred and fifty—four hundred feet——

Suddenly the voice of the professor broke through the silence within the sphere, cutting it as sharply as a knife.

“Turn the light on the door!” he cried.

CHAPTER XVII

DEADLY DANGER

Don directed the powerful circle of light directly on the ponderous steel door. What he saw there froze him into temporary immobility. It seemed to him his heart stopped beating.

A trickle of water was slowly making its way beneath the door!

Teddy also fastened his eyes on that portent of evil. What did it mean? Was the pressure without the sphere too great to be borne? Was the massive steel door about to yield beneath that terrific weight?

Nothing within the boys' experience enabled them to answer that question. They turned to Professor Bruce.

"What do you make of it, Uncle Amos? Will we have to go back?"

"I don't know," confessed the professor anxiously. "We are in no danger unless that trickle of water should become a stream. I see no reason why the trickle should grow larger."

"Let's go on," urged Teddy, eagerly. "It would be too bad to have to call off the trip now."

After a little more consideration and weighing of chances, Professor Bruce finally gave the order to continue the descent.

Thereafter, however, the flashlight was turned often on the door. The trickle did not increase and gradually reassurance took the place of that first heart-tugging fear.

Realizing that fifty feet was the ultimate depth to which one might safely go when encased in a diving helmet, the boys were more and more impressed with the marvelous properties of the bathysphere. Sheltered in this wonderful steel shell, one might descend to heretofore unheard-of depths without suffering any discomfort whatsoever.

Professor Bruce was in the seventh heaven of a scientist's delight. He stared through the quartz window and made notes on his pad or telephoned his impressions up through the electrified wire to those aboard the *Phantom* waiting eagerly to receive them.

Now he turned to the boys and asked suddenly:

“Do you notice anything odd about the light?”

“I've been trying to decide whether it is very dull, or very brilliant,” Don responded. “For the life of me, I can't tell which it is!”

“It seems dark and yet at the same time it seems almost painfully bright,” Teddy added. “I know it sounds crazy, but that's certainly my impression.”

“You are both perfectly right,” the professor cried excitedly. “I was beginning to think there was something wrong with my eyes, but if you think as I do, my curious impression is justified. I am going to turn off the light within the sphere and see what difference that may make to the world outside our quartz window.”

The light having been switched off, that strange, contradictory impression of brilliance combined with deep twilight persisted, became, if anything, more acute.

Through this odd illumination floated, occasionally, some queer denizen of the undersea. Hesitating briefly before the quartz window, it would turn and dart off, to be almost instantly swallowed in the strangely-brilliant darkness.

At thirty feet below sea level the landscape had been much more varied. Here were beautiful sponges, fashioned by Nature into patterns of most exquisite lace work. An undersea reef had appeared, decorated with floating streamers of weed and large groups of pearl shells.

The fish at this level also were more varied and the professor exclaimed again and again as some species familiar to him swam into view.

Although at the lower level undersea life was less abundant, such specimens as did appear were infinitely more interesting from a scientific standpoint.

The sphere continued to descend and at a little over six hundred feet the professor gave the order to stop.

They remained at that level for several minutes, while the professor telephoned his impressions to those above and the two boys constantly called each other's attention to fresh wonders.

“Look at that fellow,” cried Don, pointing to a long, thin object, faintly luminous. “What are those two lights standing out at right angles to its head, Uncle Amos?”

“Those are its eyes, stereoscopic eyes,” the professor responded. “The creatures at this depth are forced to carry their own lighting systems. See those two little silver spots before the window?”

“Yes,” Don and Brick replied with eagerness.

“Well, they are swimming snails and there is another variety of snail quite close to them. This is marvelous! Hundreds of facts that have been dark to me before are becoming clear as crystal to me now. What a wonderful new field this magic sphere reveals to science!

“From now on, guess work will become certainty, questions will resolve themselves into facts. By means of this narrow steel shell, scientists may observe, classify, even photograph forms of life heretofore unknown to man!”

The thrill felt by the professor was shared by his young companions. They realized to the full the privilege that had been granted them, to see for the first time phenomena never before witnessed by man.

Professor Bruce gave the signal and the descent began

again. Seven hundred, eight hundred feet! An incredible distance beneath the surface of the sea!

Teddy turned the flashlight on the door.

“Is the leak worse?” asked the professor.

“There seems to be about the same amount of water,” Brick responded. “I don’t think it has increased, professor.”

“Good! Then I think we can go on.”

“To the full fourteen hundred feet?” Don asked.

“I see no reason to hesitate. The leak is no worse. We still have an ample supply of oxygen. Do you feel any discomfort?”

“Not the least,” responded Don. “As a matter-of-fact, impossible as it may seem, I am as comfortable in this narrow space as I would be in the cabin of the *Phantom*.”

“Except that we can’t stretch out our feet,” amended Teddy.

“Well, that would be a comfort. But we can’t expect everything!”

The sphere continued to sink. It reached the thousand mark and still the descent continued.

Professor Bruce turned on the small searchlight with which the sphere was equipped. The light did not penetrate far into the brilliant velvety blackness, but it sufficed to attract a

number of small, luminous fish. These hesitated briefly within the circle of radiance and then swam off, appearing like silver-green dots against the odd light.

Eleven hundred feet and they continued to sink; twelve hundred, thirteen, at last fourteen hundred feet beneath the surface of the sea!

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The boys had a swift vision of the *Phantom*, gently riding the waves on the surface of the sea. They saw a strong cable, extending down through many fathoms of water, dangling at its end a tiny sphere from which three humans looked out on wonders never before seen by man.

“What would happen, Uncle Amos,” Don asked suddenly, “if we should open the door?”

“We would be crushed as thin as these crustaceans that dwell at the bottom of the sea,” the professor responded. “I think we will not experiment with the door of the bathysphere!”

At a signal from Professor Bruce the sphere began its long journey upward toward the surface of the sea.

Often during the ascent the electric torch was turned upon the water beneath the door, but always the amount of moisture remained the same.

When they had reached a depth of a little over two hundred feet they were startled by a long, dark shadow that cut across their window of quartz. The shadow resolved itself into the bulk of a submarine!

“It will cut our airline!” cried Don. “And we can’t do a thing!”

CHAPTER XVIII

WRITHING TENTACLES

“It will cut our airline!”

The desperate cry was echoed by Teddy and Professor Bruce. The mere possibility of such a catastrophe filled them with horror.

If the airline were severed, so also might be the cable that connected them with the hauling apparatus aboard the *Phantom*. If the cable broke, they, entrapped in the bathysphere, would go hurtling to the bottom of the sea. A certain and horrible death stared them in the face.

Professor Bruce gave the signal for a more rapid ascent. He could do no more than this and was forced to sit still while with every second he anticipated the jarring jolt that would mean the severing of the lifeline or cable, perhaps both.

When seconds passed and nothing happened to delay their swift ascent, they began to breathe more easily.

They were not more than a hundred feet from the surface when the slinking grey shadow again cut across their line of vision. It passed dangerously close to the bathysphere, and once more the undersea adventurers underwent the horror of anticipation.

There was no contact with the submarine, however, and in a few moments more the bathysphere dangled safely above the surface of the water.

It was swung to the deck of the *Phantom*, the massive door was unbolted, and the three adventurers stood blinking in the almost painful radiance of the sunlight.

Members of the expedition, the captain and mate of the *Phantom*, gathered about them eager to learn their experiences, what they had seen, how they had felt.

Don thought Professor Bruce looked shaken and white. He answered the queries of his associates in the most enthusiastic terms. When he mentioned the appearance of the submarine, however, his eyes blazed and his hands gripped the arms of his chair.

“It was the most brazen and brutal bit of impertinence that has ever been my privilege to witness,” he said. “There is little doubt in my mind that the submarine carried members of the Rust expedition and that it was Erasmus Rust or his tool, Rufus Gold, who played us that infernally ingenious trick.”

“Might it have been accidental, Amos?” Captain Sturdy asked.

“The first time, possibly. However, the second time was no accident. The thing was deliberately done!”

No one had ever seen Professor Bruce so angry. His face was white with passion and his hands opened and closed as though he longed to vent his fury upon the person

responsible for it.

“Do you think, professor,” asked Mason Dunn, “that an actual attempt was made upon your life and the lives of those with you in the bathysphere?”

“I suppose not,” returned Professor Bruce in a quieter tone. “I presume even Erasmus Rust would not go to the length of murder. The idea, without doubt, was to harass and annoy us, an aim which was certainly accomplished,” he added, grimly.

Thereafter, the bathysphere was lowered several times over the side of the *Phantom* but on each occasion the slim grey shape of the submarine appeared, harassing and worrying the scientists so that the results of their research were much less gratifying than they should have been. It was a silent threat.

Professor Bruce finally determined to move on to another location and shallower water, where it would be possible to descend in diving helmets to study the characteristics of a more familiar landscape some forty or fifty feet beneath the surface of the sea.

This plan met with the full approbation of Don and Teddy, who were eager to use their diving helmets to explore a portion of the globe as strange to them as it was familiar to Professor Bruce.

“The bathysphere has more than served its purpose,” Professor Bruce observed. “We have learned that the observation of deep sea life for a quarter of a mile and more beneath the surface of the water is not only practical but reasonably safe. I venture to predict that within a short time

scientists will be able to descend for a half mile below sea level to observe what takes place there. It is an inspiring and fascinating thought and opens up new realms of which science, so far, has only dreamed.”

“I’d like to go down again, Uncle Amos,” Don said. “That once was only enough to whet our appetites.”

Professor Bruce shook his head, while a grim look played over his face.

“Perhaps you might have, had not Erasmus Rust willed otherwise. Captain Brody has orders to draw anchor tomorrow and make for shallower water. There,” he added, with a smile, “you will probably meet with enough adventure to satisfy even you!”

At that moment there came a sharp hail from the deck which meant that the deep-sea dredge was about to be hauled to the surface. This was a thrilling event on any day and never failed to lure the men of science from whatever business they happened to have on hand.

Now as Professor Bruce and the boys went out on deck, they were met by others hurrying from the laboratory and projection room. Eager-eyed, these men of learning came to find what new wonders had been hauled up from the ocean bed.

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The dredge lay on the deck and the boys noticed that the deck hands stood away from it fearfully, as though it contained something dangerous.

As the members of the expedition crowded about the dredge, Professor Bruce warned them back.

“We have caught an octopus,” he announced. “A particularly vicious specimen from the look of him. To free him would mean rare sport on deck.”

“Probably we would all make for the rigging,” laughed one of the party.

By means of long sticks, the octopus was held back while the remaining catch was scooped into tubs of water standing near.

Captain Brody poked at the octopus and one of the long tentacles reached out viciously.

“Begging your pardon, Professor Bruce,” said he, “what’s wrong with throwing this fellow back where he came from? No use, says I, of keeping such a vicious creature about the place. If it got loose, it could squeeze the life out of a man.”

Professor Bruce was horrified at the suggestion of releasing so valuable a specimen.

“When we remove it from the dredge, we will put it in a tank from which it cannot possibly escape, Captain Brody,” he assured the anxious captain. “It will be used for observation not only in the laboratory, but in the projection room as well, where it will contribute to the few moving pictures we have made.”

Captain Brody did not protest further, but it was noted that he looked with marked disfavor upon the writhing

tentacles of the octopus.

Meanwhile, everyone bent above the tubs wherein those other creatures, captured from the depths of the sea, writhed and darted.

There were worms and snails and one sinister-looking sea snake with a clump of barnacles clinging to its scales.

“Repulsive looking creature,” Teddy observed. “You’d think the barnacles could find a pleasanter place to stick.”

“Almost all sea snakes are covered with that parasitic growth,” said Professor Bruce. “This one is fortunate to have only one clump of barnacles sticking to it.”

Suddenly Professor Bruce gave an exclamation and reached for a hand net. Into the tub he dipped it and brought up a small black fish, globular in shape, which he dropped into a glass bowl filled with clear water.

“What is it, Uncle Amos?” Don asked.

“It is an Oneirodes, a luminous deep sea fish,” the professor replied. “We shall take it to the dark room and see if it will turn on its tiny light for us.”

With one accord they all rushed to the dark room, Professor Bruce carrying the glass bowl containing the Oneirodes. There, while everybody bumped into everybody else, because confused by the darkness, Professor Bruce transferred the little deep sea creature to a larger aquarium.

There was a breathless hush, followed by exclamations of sheer delight.

From the top of the head of the little Oneirodes extended a hair-like, luminous thread. This thread bent downward, almost at right angles to the base and at its end dangled a tiny ball of silvery light.

“A fish that carries its own electric lighting plant,” exclaimed Teddy. “Gee, that’s the queerest thing I ever saw!”

While the scientists remained in the dark room, exclaiming over their find and exchanging reminiscences, Don and Teddy went up on deck again, drawn by their interest in the sinister lone occupant of the deep sea dredge, the octopus.

“I’d like to paint that fellow,” Teddy confessed. “I’ve a desire to get its vicious body and snake-like tentacles on canvas.”

“Its tentacles on canvas would be harmless enough,” began Don and stopped.

He was staring toward the dredge, and Teddy, following his glance, cried out in consternation.

The octopus, in some way, had writhed itself free.

It lay with its pulpy body pressed to the deck. Its tentacles writhed in the air like snakes. Its eyes were fastened wickedly upon the boys.

Even as the latter shrank back with exclamations of surprise and consternation, the creature acted.

Like lightning one of its great tentacles shot out and clutched
Teddy's arm!

CHAPTER XIX

IN THE GRIP OF THE DEVILFISH

Never had Don Sturdy felt such an overwhelming sensation of horror as when he saw his friend struggling in the grip of that fiendish monster of the sea.

For an instant he stood rooted to the spot with anguish. Then he grasped an iron bar that happened to be the only weapon at hand and sprang to Teddy's help.

Teddy himself, despite his terrible plight, had not succumbed to terror, and was fighting desperately to free himself from the monster's clutch.

He was battling against odds with which no one without weapons could cope. The suckers with which the tentacles were studded held his arm as in an iron vise.

Steadily and surely he was being drawn toward that hideous mouth, armed with a horny beak that would tear him to pieces as soon as he should come within reach.

Don lifted high the heavy bar and brought it down with all the might of his powerful arms on the dreadful, rope-like tentacle.

It bent beneath the stroke, but its leathery substance did not break, nor did it release its hold on Teddy.

Again the bar rose and fell, but again without apparent effect. By this time the monster had turned upon its assailant and its waving feelers swung to and fro in horrid festoons, trying to claim another victim.

“Help! Help!” yelled Don desperately as he worked.

By this time the shouts of Don and the sound of the struggle had brought a number of the crew and members of the expedition to the scene.

Cries of horror arose as they saw the tragedy that threatened to enact itself before their eyes. The shouts were multiplied when another one of the waving tentacles caught Don and held him fast!

The bulging eyes of the monster, big as saucers, glowed with frightful malignity as it gloated over the two victims now in its deadly coils.

Men rushed about seeking for bars, hatchets, anything that might kill or maim the brute. In the confusion they got in each other’s way. Now the struggling lads were close to that awful beak and slavering mouth.

Up the companionway came bounding the herculean figure of Captain Frank Sturdy, rifle in hand.

“Steady, lads!” he cried. “I’ll get him!”

He flung his rifle to his shoulder.

The waving tentacles seemed ever to get in the way of a

vital spot. There was the danger, too, of those leathery feelers deflecting the bullet in the direction of the boys.

Bang!

The rifle cracked and a bullet sped right through the centre of one of the bulging eyes.

Bang!

Again the weapon spoke and the messenger of death buried itself in the other eye.

Neither bullet stopped until it reached the monster's brain.

The tentacles that were holding the boys dropped limp.

Instantly, eager hands plucked the lads out of the maze of writhing feelers that swung about like flails as the brute thrashed and beat the deck in its death flurry.

There was no need of another bullet. Captain Frank dropped his rifle and flung himself down beside the boys, who, utterly spent by their frantic struggles, had been laid tenderly on the deck.

On the other side of them was Professor Bruce, who had come on deck just in time to see the final act of the ghastly drama.

“Don! Teddy! Dear lads! Are you badly hurt?” cried the professor, his voice breaking.

Captain Frank, who, though shaken to the depths, kept a

stricter rein on his emotions, answered for the boys:

“I don’t think they are, Amos.” His hands, trained in first aid, ran deftly over their limbs. “No bones are broken, though they well might have been in that terrible grip.”

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Don tried to summon a smile, though it was not a pronounced success.

“I’m—all—right—I guess,” he gasped, “but—my arm—feels—as though—it’s—on fire.”

“Same here,” panted Teddy.

Under the doctor’s directions the sleeves of the boys’ shirts were rolled up, each arm that had been grasped by the devilfish showing a mass of angry blisters.

“No wonder your arms feel like fire,” ejaculated the captain. “The rows of suckers on those tentacles were like so many cups, each drawing the flesh up into itself. That’s what gives the creature such tremendous holding power.”

The doctor treated the wounded arms with soothing lotions and antiseptics and bandaged them.

“You won’t be able to use them much for a day or two,” he told them, “but after that they’ll grow better rapidly. You lads are lucky. Until your last moment comes, you’ll probably never be nearer death than you’ve been today.”

“And such a death!” muttered Teddy, repressing with

difficulty a shudder as he cast a glance at the sprawling figure of the repulsive sea terror.

“That was some wonderful shooting, Uncle Frank,” observed Don gratefully, as he rose to his feet after the doctor’s ministrations were at an end.

“Pshaw!” The captain shrugged the tribute aside. “How could I have missed a mark like that?”

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“Oh, the target was big enough,” Don agreed, “but with us in the way and those tentacles lashing about between you and the eyes—that was something else again.”

“Not one man in many thousands could have done it,” put in Captain Brody, “especially with the knowledge that the slightest failure in striking a vital spot meant death for you lads. Most men would have been utterly unnerved—shaking like a leaf. Captain Sturdy’s arm was like a bar of iron.”

“Oh well,” said the captain, eager to change the conversation, for, like Don, he was modest, “the main thing is that the devilfish is dead and the boys are alive.”

“Slightly disfigured but still in the ring,” grinned Teddy.

“Perhaps you’re not surprised now that I didn’t want the brute on board the ship,” observed Captain Brody. “They’re bad medicine. What folks used to say about their enemies is true of the devilfish—only more so—the only good devilfish is a dead one.”

“Well, this one seems to be completely dead,” remarked Don.

“I’m afraid it won’t be much good as a specimen, Uncle Amos.”

“I couldn’t bear to touch it after what has happened,” Professor Bruce said. “I should have constantly before me the memory of you and Teddy struggling in its hold.”

“It’s all right then, if we throw it overboard?” asked Captain Brody quickly.

160

“The sooner the better,” replied the professor.

Captain Brody gave the order and the huge body of the octopus was thrown over the side. It struck with a great splash, floated about for a few moments and then gradually sank beneath the surface until it was lost to sight.

“Well, we’ve seen the last of that,” murmured Don.

“Not by a jugful!” replied Teddy. “I’ll see the brute a hundred times—in my dreams.”

“As long as you don’t see it anywhere else, you’ll be able to stand it,” was Don’s rejoinder.

It was a terrible mental and nervous shock to which the boys had been subjected, but the resiliency of youth stood them in good stead, and on the following day, after a long night’s sleep, they were in excellent shape, with the exception of their injured arms.

Those were still very sore and sensitive, and it was a full week before they had thoroughly mended.

Ordinarily the boys would have fretted and fumed at this curb on their activities. They were so unspeakably grateful for their deliverance from a horrible death that their prevailing feeling was one of exhilaration.

“No kick coming!” crowed Teddy. “Not at all.”

In this sentiment Don heartily concurred.

Not more than two miles from where the *Phantom* was lying was a small island, only a few acres in extent. The boys had promised themselves that they would row over and look about the island, which bore no trace of human habitation.

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Their injured arms had put rowing out of the question, however, and they had had to defer their trip.

Great was their surprise one morning, on coming to the deck, to see that a tent was standing on the island. It seemed to have sprung up like Jonah’s gourd over night.

“Frozen hoptoads!” exclaimed Teddy. “Somebody has the jump on us. Wonder who it can be?”

“The Rust expedition, likely enough,” replied Don, calling his field glasses into play. “You know they haven’t any mother ship like the *Phantom*, so they’d naturally make their headquarters on one of the islands around here. Yes, that’s what it is,” he went on with increasing animation, “for I can just see the nose of their submarine sticking out from behind the further end of the island.”

“Why in the mischief do they keep dogging us so closely?” exclaimed Teddy. “Isn’t the ocean big enough for two expeditions—or two hundred, for that matter?”

“Sure it is,” replied Don. “They’re just trying to get our goat, harass us, just as they did with the submarine, divert our minds from our work, get Uncle Amos so disgusted that he might be tempted to throw up the whole thing.”

“Something familiar about that fellow standing at the entrance to the tent,” observed Teddy.

162

Don focussed his glasses on the figure in question.

“Rufus Gold, as sure as you live!” he exclaimed. “I shouldn’t wonder if he were heading that expedition. Ten to one Emanuel Rust hasn’t come along at all.”

“I never thought he would,” replied Teddy. “Why should he when he has a rough, unprincipled man like Gold at hand? Rust will provide the money and trust Gold to do the work—lots of it dirty work, no doubt, that Rust himself wouldn’t care to be personally mixed up with. Besides, Rust would want to stay in San Francisco where he can watch the political moves and try to checkmate the Governor. No, it’s dollars to doughnuts that Gold is handling this expedition.”

“If that’s the case, I don’t think you and I will get a very cordial reception when we go to look the island over, as we’ve been planning to do,” remarked Don.

“No, we’ll be as popular as poison ivy,” agreed Teddy, “but, after all, he doesn’t own the island and we have as much right

there as he has, as long as we mind our own business.”

The next few days were busy ones for both Don and Teddy, especially the former, whom the professor kept busy for hours on a stretch recording his notes and observations.

The manuscript grew under Don’s fingers until there was a bulky pile of sheets that, in the professor’s eyes, were more precious than gold. For they contained a vast number of facts concerning the denizens of the sea that had been wholly unknown before and that Professor Bruce knew would cause a sensation in the scientific world.

163

One night Don was making a last turn of the deck before going below when he noted one of the watch leaning far over the rail with ears intent and eyes searching the darkness.

“What’s up, Donovan? Listening to the songs of the mermaids?” Don asked jokingly, as he joined him at the rail.

“Nuthin’ like that, sir,” the man replied, “but I was sure I heard the sound of oars. It’s gettin’ fainter now, but mebbe if you listen you can hear it too.”

Don strained his ears. Sure enough, receding rapidly, was what seemed to be a rhythmic beat that could well be attributed to the movement of oars in rowlocks.

He dismissed the thought as incredible.

“Sounds like a man rowing,” he admitted, “but it must be something else. Who’d be rowing on the ocean at midnight? Unless,” he laughed, “it’s a sea burglar looking for loot.”

“Guess I must have been mistook,” said Donovan. “Well, goodnight and pleasant sleep to yer, sir,” as Don turned away.

CHAPTER XX

FACING HEAVY ODDS

Pleasant sleep was a stranger to Don Sturdy's eyes that night. Usually he fell into slumber almost as soon as his head touched the pillow.

Following his talk with Donovan he found himself strangely wakeful. He did not know why this should be, for he had had a tiring day and the prospect of bed had been grateful to him. Yet, after he had slipped between the sheets, he tossed about restlessly, unable to close his eyes.

Deep down in his consciousness some thought was trying to struggle to the surface. What was it?

His talk with Donovan came back to him. He had joked about the mermaids singing. No, it wasn't that which was bothering him now. What else had been said?

The "sea burglar looking for loot." Ah, there it was! That was the phrase that had been trying to force itself upon his attention. Spoken originally in jest, it had now assumed a graver meaning.

Don sat upright in bed with a jerk.

Had some prowler really been in the vicinity of the *Phantom*

with thievish designs?

The night had been dark, and Don knew that it would be comparatively easy for an adroit thief to pull himself on board by means of some dangling rope without much likelihood of detection.

165

A thought struck Don that almost made him lose his breath. He jumped out of bed and pulled open the doors of the wardrobe, on one of the shelves of which he kept the manuscript that had piled up from his uncle's dictation.

The shelf was empty! The papers were gone!

Stunned by the discovery Don sat down on the edge of his bed and buried his face in his hands.

Terrible as the blow was to him he knew it would be doubly so to his uncle. Those papers were precious beyond price. Don dreaded to see the misery in his uncle's eyes when he should learn of his loss.

Who had committed this dastardly crime? Who would profit by it?

The answer was not far to seek: Rufus Gold!

Gold had the motive. Gold had the opportunity, camped as he was not more than two miles away. Perhaps in person, perhaps through an accomplice, Rufus Gold had stolen those papers!

They were gone! Don vowed to recover them.

All through the remaining hours of that night Don studied his problem, with the result that the next morning after breakfast, having refrained from mentioning his loss, Don dropped into one of the glass-bottomed rowboats, ostensibly for a little exercise, and rowed in the direction of the island.

A light mist enabled his approach to be unnoticed and he shelved his boat on the sands without apparently attracting any attention.

166

Stealthily as an Indian, Don stole up the beach. At every instant he feared that some figure might emerge from the tent. It was only from that quarter that he thought discovery likely, for the closest scrutiny failed to reveal any other sign of life on the little island. It seemed probable that most of the party were away on work connected with the expedition.

Indeed, it might be true that the tent itself would be deserted.

Yet Don had detected occasional swellings and bulgings of the canvas, as though someone, passing to and fro in the interior, had pressed against the canvas walls.

This impression was reinforced by a slight murmur, which, as he drew nearer, resolved itself into voices.

His hunch then had not deceived him!

There were at least two persons in the tent, possibly more. The odds against him, if violence should come into play, would probably be heavy.

This consideration did not deter Don Sturdy for an instant.

Availing himself as far as possible of every tree trunk and every clump of bushes that offered a promise of shelter, Don edged his way by a circuitous route to the rear of the tent.

There he drew a long breath of relief. His approach to the island, his progress up from the beach had not been detected. Luck so far was with him.

167

He lay flat on the ground behind the tent, yet so near that he could touch it.

Very slowly and with the utmost precaution he raised the flap of the canvas an inch or two from the ground and peered into the interior.

What he saw were two pairs of legs, one pair upright, showing that their owner was standing, the other pair crossed, indicating a sitting position.

From the situation in which he found himself, Don could not see higher than the knees. It was impossible, therefore, for him to identify the possessors of the legs.

At the moment there was silence in the tent, broken only by the rustling of paper that was evidently being turned leaf by leaf, and an occasional grunt of satisfaction as the sheets were scanned.

Then a voice spoke:

“Good work, Bill! They seem to be all here. Not a break in them anywhere.”

Don's heart beat faster.

He knew that voice. It was the voice of Rufus Gold!

"I told yer I'd get 'em for you, didn't I?" came a hoarse voice in reply. "An' I got the carbon copy, too!"

"You sure did and you kept your promise," declared Gold exultantly.

Don could hear the man smack his lips as though over a precious morsel.

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"Baby!" Gold resumed after a moment. "Won't that old bozo be sore when he tumbles to the fact they're missing? I'd give a year of my life to see how he acts and hear what he says. I'll bet the air will be blue."

"It sure would be a circus," agreed the man called Bill. "The old geezer'll be foamin' at the mouth."

"That cub nephew of his will be raving, too," chuckled Gold. "I've wanted to soak that kid good and plenty ever since I first saw him. Had the gall to try to throw me out of his house, jest because I let slip a word that he didn't like. Ain't that the limit? The purfessor chose him as his secretary so that his precious papers would be safe. Safe! Can you beat that?"

There was a burst of raucous laughter from the fellow's throat, in which his companion joined.

Don's fists clenched.

“Well, now you’ve got ’em, don’t furgit that five hunderd you promised me,” Bill reminded his employer.

“Don’t worry about that,” replied Gold. “You’re going ter get it right here and now. And take it from me, I never paid out five hundred bucks with more pleasure.”

There was a minute or two of silence.

“There, count it and see that’s it all there,” said Gold.

“All kerrect,” pronounced Bill after a moment. “Much obleeged, boss.”

169

“I shouldn’t wonder if Emanuel Rust would double that when you get back to San Francisco,” declared Gold. “He’ll be tickled pink when he finds out what monkeys we’ve made of that bunch. He’ll realize that he didn’t make any mistake when he left this business in the hands of Rufus Gold. The man that gets the best of this baby has got ter get up mighty early in the morning.”

Don could hear Gold slap himself complacently on the chest.

Cautiously Don raised himself to his feet. He had learned all that he needed to know.

His blood boiled as he realized to what depths that rascal, Gold, could sink to satisfy his political grudges and meet the desires of Emanuel Rust.

He felt perfectly sure that the papers to which the pair had alluded in their conversation and the rustle of which he had

heard were the sheets of Professor Bruce's forthcoming report of the results achieved by the expedition. They had not said so in words, but they had said enough to dispel all his doubts on the subject.

Priceless information was contained in those sheets, hundreds of facts and observations made at the moment on the examination of specimens that had served their purpose and been discarded, and could not be replaced without an enormous expenditure of time and effort.

If those papers could not be recovered, the expedition, instead of being a brilliant scientific success, would resolve itself into a commonplace trip that would fill the Governor with chagrin, diminish the prestige of his administration, and fill his political opponents with glee.

170

Don knew, too, the depths of gloom into which such a result would plunge his uncle, always sensitive regarding his scientific reputation.

The lad's muscles flexed. He had waited long enough. Now was the time for action.

He moved silently around toward the opening of the tent. In the soft sand his footsteps made no sound.

"Now that you've got the papers, where are you goin' ter keep 'em?" asked Bill. "'Tain't very safe ter keep 'em on this island where people may come nosin' around."

Gold pondered for a moment.

“That’ll bear thinking of,” he replied.

“For the present I’ll take care of them,” said a voice at the entrance of the tent.

Bill started convulsively and Gold jumped to his feet as Don Sturdy confronted them!

For a moment the plotters stood as though riveted to the spot with surprise and consternation.

The blood crept up Gold’s mottled face until it was a dull brick red. Then he rallied and took a grip on himself.

“What are you doing here, you whelp?” he cried.

“Shall I throw him out, boss?” asked Bill, moving toward Don menacingly.

CHAPTER XXI

IN SWIFT ATTACK

Don Sturdy braced himself for the battle that seemed imminent.

He did not yield an inch of ground and the look he gave Bill made that ruffian, big and burly as he was, lose his enthusiasm for “throwing him out.”

So piercing and steely, indeed, was that look that Bill hesitated and glanced inquiringly at Gold.

That arch-plotter himself was greatly disturbed. His usual self-confidence was gone. The sudden appearance of Don on the scene threatened to disrupt all his plans.

In those plans actual violence had held no place. In all the crooked schemes in which he had figured—and they were many—he had preferred to gain his ends by trickery rather than by force. He had no desire to get into the hands of the law.

Yet, could he allow this daring youth to go his way unhindered, possessed as he was of knowledge that might make Gold and his tool amenable to the law as thieves? His mind was in a tumult of conflicting emotions.

He resolved to temporize.

“Not yet, Bill,” he said, waving his confederate back with a magnanimous gesture. “The cub ought to have his neck broken for butting in here the way he has. But I ain’t a revengeful man, and I’m willing ter let him go with a whole skin on certain conditions.”

172

“That’s mighty good of you,” remarked Don sarcastically, inwardly amused, though he knew the danger that threatened from the two men, each heavier than himself, if it came to open combat. “What are these conditions you speak about?”

“That you promise to forget anything you’ve heard and seen, while you’ve been prowling about here,” replied Gold promptly.

“Why should you want me to?” asked Don with apparent innocence. “You haven’t been doing anything wrong, have you? Not anything that would make all decent men despise you? Not anything like stealing valuable papers? Not anything that would land you behind the bars?”

Gold almost choked with fury.

“None of your lip,” he roared, “or you’ll be beaten into pulp. As to that gab of yours about stealing papers, I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“How about that manuscript there?” asked Don, pointing to a box behind Gold, where the latter had hastily thrown a large number of typewritten sheets.

“They’re my own private papers,” averred Gold. “How dare you question me about them, you impudent pup? For two pins I’d knock your head off.”

“Others have tried to do that, but you notice that the head is still there,” replied Don calmly.

“It won’t be there long,” growled Bill. “What’s the use of foolin’ with him, boss?”

“I’ll give him just one more chance,” declared Gold.

He fixed his malignant eyes on Don.

“Now answer me and answer quick,” he snarled. “How about that condition? Do you accept it or don’t you?”

“Suppose I don’t?” parried Don.

“Then you’ll be beaten up good and proper,” threatened Gold. “After that you’ll be trussed up and kept as a prisoner till we think best to let you go.”

“In other words, until you’ve put those stolen papers in a safe place,” amended Don.

Gold grew so purple with rage that he seemed to be on the verge of an apoplectic fit.

“You impudent young whelp,” he stormed. “I’ll——”

What he was going to say remained forever unsaid. At that moment a surprising thing happened.

Don hurled himself like a catapult at the legs of Bill, caught them up and threw the ruffian backward on his head with a force that stunned him.

Then like a flash he whirled to face Gold.

That scoundrel had been taken so thoroughly by surprise that he stood with mouth agape and bulging eyes.

174

Don's fist shot out and caught Gold right between those bulging eyes.

The fellow staggered back and almost fell.

The next instant Don's arms were swinging like flails and his fists were raining a shower of blows that ended only when a crashing right to the jaw laid Gold prostrate on the ground.

A glance at Bill showed Don that the former was coming out of his coma and trying to struggle to his feet.

Reaching out over the prostrate body of Gold, Don snatched up the pile of manuscript and rushed out of the tent.

Down the beach he went like the wind.

He reached the water's edge.

A glance back over his shoulder told him that both of his antagonists had recovered sufficiently to join in pursuit.

Don pushed his boat off into the water from the shelving

beach, jumped in and grasped the oars.

He was not a second too soon, for even as he dipped them into the water Gold and Bill were splashing into the shallows, wading out wildly, trying with outstretched hands to grip the stern of the boat.

A few powerful strokes, however, sufficed to take Don out of their reach, and, muttering fearful threats and imprecations, the discomfited and bedraggled pair made their way back to the beach. 175

Gold was fairly dancing with rage, and Bill was looking about desperately for some missiles that he might hurl on the chance of knocking Don out.

Confident that he could dodge any such, however, Don rested on his oars and laughed.

“How about that condition of yours?” he taunted Gold. “How about beating me to a pulp? How about trussing me up and keeping me a prisoner? When does the show begin?”

Gold gnashed his teeth in impotent fury and shook his fists at his questioner.

“I’ll get you yet,” he howled. “I’ll make you sorry you were ever born. I’ll—I’ll——”

“Yes?” said Don politely. “Go ahead. What will you do? I’m real interested.”

He ducked swiftly as a stone from Bill’s hand whizzed

dangerously near his head.

“Fairly good,” he said approvingly, “but not quite good enough.”

A few additional strokes took him to a safer distance, and again he ceased rowing.

“Listen,” he told them, dropping his light tone for a sterner one. “You rats had better hunt your holes. I’ve the evidence here—” he lifted up the manuscript—“that will send you both to jail for a good long term if I choose to use it. You’ve been caught red-handed with the stolen goods in your possession and you wouldn’t have a chance with a jury.”

There was a renewed outburst of epithets from Gold that provoked a mocking smile from Don.

176

“Sing on, sweet singer,” Don urged. “A nightingale hasn’t anything on you.”

“Let’s send a bullet after him, boss,” growled Bill, at the same time putting his hand to his hip pocket as though to draw a weapon.

Gold grabbed his hand.

“Cut it out, you fool,” he snarled. “Ain’t we in bad enough already with what that fellow’s got on us? Do you want to put both of our necks in a noose?”

“I wasn’t aimin’ to hit him,” replied Bill sullenly, “but that boat of his’n has a glass bottom in it, an’ if we cud break it,

he'd have ter tumble out an' make fur shore. An' when he got here, he'd find us waitin' fur him."

"Too risky," declared Gold. "You're not a good enough shot, Bill, to chance it. You might hit him, and I ain't anxious to stand in the dock for murder. We'll get even with that kid some other way."

"One thing more," called Don, as he picked up his oars. "You keep that submarine of yours away from our life lines. If you don't, you'll find yourself in a heap of trouble."

"Think you own the sea, do you?" bellowed Gold, shaking his fist.

"Not at all," retorted Don. "We object to dirty tactics. You've shown us plenty of those in the last few weeks. It won't be healthy for you to show us any more."

He dipped his oars and the boat shot forward.

177

"I wouldn't shake that fist of yours so much, if I were you, Gold," Don mocked. "It's a little late now for that. Why didn't you use your fist to some purpose a few minutes ago when I was sailing into you with rights and lefts?"

With which Parthian shot, he bent to his work and rapidly widened the distance between himself and his thwarted enemies.

His heart was singing with exultation as he drew up alongside the *Phantom* and climbed on board.

“What’s the matter with your knuckles?” cried Teddy.
“They’re bleeding!”

CHAPTER XXII

IN TONES OF THUNDER

As he uttered the startled exclamation, Teddy pointed to Don's right hand that was skinned in places from which drops of blood were oozing.

Don grinned.

"So they are," he replied. "I've been so busy that I haven't even noticed that they were hurt. I've had a peach of a good time in getting those skinned knuckles."

"How did you get them?" pressed Teddy eagerly. "Don't be a clam. Open up. Tell papa."

"I got them in beating up Rufus Gold and handing a hard one to a friend of his on the side," replied Don.

"What's this about Rufus Gold?" asked Captain Frank, coming up to the boys in time to hear Don's last words, "and what's that you have under your arm, Don?"

"The manuscript of Uncle Amos's report," the lad answered, unrolling and exhibiting the sheets. "Gold stole them through a confederate of his. I went after them and here they are."

In response to their excited questioning, he told briefly

and modestly of the fight that had occurred on the island.

“Glory Hallelujah!” cried Teddy delightedly. “So you trimmed those skunks good and plenty? Gee, what would I have given to have had a ringside seat!”

“It was great work,” declared Captain Sturdy, his eyes kindling, as he clapped his nephew on the shoulder, “but you took big chances, my boy, in tackling those two rascals all by yourself. You ought to have taken me along with you.”

“I suppose so,” agreed Don, “but I was the one who lost the papers and I felt it was up to me to get them back.”

“Get what back?” asked Professor Bruce, his step quickening as he approached the group.

“These,” smiled Don, holding out the pile of manuscript.

“Bless my soul!” exclaimed the professor, as he recognized the papers and grasped them eagerly. “You don’t mean that they were lost, do you?”

“Stolen would be a better word,” returned Don, and went on to acquaint his uncle with the facts bearing on the theft and recovery of the papers.

The professor went white with indignation.

“The scoundrel!” he exclaimed. “What will he resort to next? This is getting beyond all bearing. He and that confederate of his ought to be arrested and punished.”

“Of course they should,” assented Captain Frank, “but as there aren’t any police and courts out here, we can’t give ourselves that pleasure until we get back to port. Don’t forget that the rascals are squirming right now from the licking Don’s given them. Great Scott!” he chuckled. “I’d like to see their faces this minute.”

“And to hear their language,” grinned Teddy.

“I heard plenty of that before I got out of earshot,” laughed Don.

“I can’t thank you enough for recovering these papers, Don,” said the professor, as he handled the sheets almost caressingly. “You did wonderfully, my boy. I’d have been broken-hearted, if they’d been lost forever.”

“I knew that,” said Don, “and it was that fact which made me take desperate chances to get them. Now that they’re here, we’ll fix it so that those rascals won’t lay their hands on them again. We’ll lock them up in the ship’s safe every night when we’re through with them.”

“A good idea,” approved the captain. “I’ll speak to Captain Brody, too, and he’ll see that a closer watch is kept at night. There won’t be any more burglars boarding this ship after dark, you can bet your boots on that.”

Teddy had gotten out the field glasses and turned them upon the island.

“Those fellows seem to have made themselves scarce,” he announced. “I can’t see hide nor hair of them.”

“Probably inside the tent nursing their bruises and condoling with each other,” laughed the captain, “or possibly they’ve gone into the submarine. That seems to have disappeared.”

Two days later a defect that developed in the machinery that governed the oxygen supply of the submarine made it necessary for that vessel to make a trip to San Francisco, where the necessary repairs, it was figured, would not require more than twenty-four hours.

The boys asked to be permitted to go along on the submarine and the request was readily accorded. They were admonished, however, not to reveal any details of the expedition’s progress and to steer clear of reporters during their brief stay in port.

The vessel was favored with good weather and reached its destination without any unpleasant incident. The moment it docked, the boys slipped away to the hotel in which they had previously had rooms.

They found awaiting them letters from friends to Teddy and letters from home to Don and his uncles.

Don read first the messages from his mother and Ruth, overflowing with affection for him and with longing for his return. Then he opened the letter from his father.

His brows drew together in a worried frown as he ran over the pages.

“What’s up?” asked Teddy, observing his expression. “All well at home, I hope.”

“Yes,” replied Don, “there’s no trouble on that score, but just listen to this.”

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He read an extract from the letter:

“I am sorry to say that Marvin has entered suit against your Uncle Amos on that old charge of plagiarism. Used all the influence I had to prevent his doing so, but the man is mulish and headstrong and there was no doing anything with him. He says his lawyer advises him that he has a case and that he’s going through with it. The lawyer himself—a man of ability, but who has been mixed up in a number of shady cases—probably has no idea that he’ll win. In my judgment, he is being paid from some source to urge his client to sue, knowing that it will be fruitless, but content with the certainty that the publicity will be greatly annoying to Amos and perhaps diminish the prestige of his expedition. I have written more at length on this matter to Frank and Amos and you can get further details from them.”

“That’s all on that subject,” said Don.

“More than enough,” commented Teddy. “That spills the gravy. Of course the newspapers will get hold of it.”

“Probably have already,” rejoined Don. “Let’s go down to the reading room and look them over.”

His supposition was quickly confirmed. The filing of the suit had become public property. All the leading newspapers mentioned it—those favorable to the administration of the Governor making as little of it as possible and expressing the opinion, as far as they referred to

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it editorially, that there was no merit in the suit, while the papers of the opposition played it up as a big item in the hope of embarrassing the Governor.

Don gritted his teeth in rage.

“You can see the hand of Emanuel Rust behind all this,” he ejaculated. “Gee, wouldn’t I like to give him something of what I handed to Gold!”

“No such luck,” mourned Teddy. “The professor will be all broken up when he learns of this.”

“We won’t take any of the papers back with us,” said Don, “but of course I’ll have to give him my father’s letter to him and that’ll tell him everything. I’d rather be whipped than do it.”

He performed that unwelcome duty, however, a couple of days later as he climbed up from the submarine to the deck of the *Phantom* where his uncles greeted him and Teddy warmly.

“Brought some mail for us, I suppose?” remarked the professor after the first words of welcome.

“Yes,” replied Don, reluctantly drawing the letters from his pocket. “I found these waiting——”

There was a deafening explosion and Don was thrown headlong to the deck!

CHAPTER XXIII

A HORRIBLE FOE

So tremendous was the force of the explosion that the *Phantom* was tossed up and down like a chip and threatened to turn turtle.

All on board were thrown from their feet or their chairs, except those who saved themselves by clutching frantically the nearest support at hand.

In the workrooms and laboratories of the party, confusion reigned supreme. Papers and instruments were in one wild welter on the floors. Retorts were broken, tanks upset and the rooms swam in water.

Pandemonium was everywhere, except among the disciplined officers and crew. These, after the first moment of paralyzed surprise, sprang to their posts and prevented the possible foundering of the vessel as she wallowed in the troughs.

“What—what do you suppose it is?” stammered Teddy, as he picked himself up from where he had been flung on the deck.

“Search me,” replied Don, equally mystified, rubbing his barked shins where they had come in contact with the planks. “If we were on land, I should say it was a volcanic eruption.”

“That’s just what it is, in all likelihood,” stated Captain Frank, who had saved himself from falling by grasping a stanchion. “It’s an under water eruption, an upheaval of the ocean bed. We just had the hard luck to be close at hand when the thing happened.”

“My poor specimens!” exclaimed the professor. “I’m afraid a good many of the living ones have been thrown out of the tanks and will perish on the floors.”

“Likely enough,” replied Captain Frank. “Just as soon as this pesky boat stops trying to stand on its head, we’ll try to get them back. At present it’s all we can do to keep on our feet.”

As a matter of fact, it was more than some of the party could do, and many were on hands and knees or flat on the deck holding on for dear life to any stationary object within reach. The plight of some of the dignified scientists might almost have provoked laughter under other circumstances.

Not even Teddy, whose risibles were easily affected, felt much like laughing now. A new danger of the sea, something that had not at all entered into their calculations, had come upon them. They felt strangely small and helpless in the face of this cataclysm.

There had been one terrible explosion in the depths. Perhaps it was only the first of many to come. It was not a peril that they could fight. No power of muscle, no force of weapons could prevail against it. They simply had to wait and see what would happen, hoping for the best, yet fearing the worst.

No further explosions occurred, however, and gradually

the tremendous billows that had been provoked by the eruption grew less violent.

As the waves subsided, Don could see that all the waters round about were studded with the bodies of dead fish that had fallen victims to the shock that had come upon them unawares.

Among them were many of an altogether different species from those that they had previously seen.

The professor's scientific instinct was aroused at once.

“There may be some profit for us in this, after all,” he exclaimed. “That eruption has doubtless sent some specimens up from a depth that our nets would never have reached. We must gather some of these in just as soon as the water grows a little calmer.”

“What's that?” cried Teddy suddenly, pointing off to the right of the *Phantom*.

The eyes of the party followed his pointing finger.

“Looks like a long line of floating seaweed,” remarked Captain Sturdy.

Don put his glasses to his eyes and studied the object with growing excitement.

“That isn't seaweed!” he cried. “It's something that's alive!”

“Nonsense!” replied Captain Frank. “There isn't any

living thing as big as that in the world. Here, hand me those glasses.”

“By Jove!” he cried, after a moment’s inspection. “It’s alive, sure enough! And it’s headed this way!”

“A monster whale, do you think?” asked Don.

“Nothing like that,” replied the captain. “It’s a hundred and fifty feet long, if it’s an inch. What do you make of it, Amos?”

The professor took the glasses and looked at it long and steadily.

“Never saw or heard of anything like it,” he declared. “It must be some strange creature that never appears near the surface, but has been hurled up from the ocean’s depths by the earthquake.”

“Give me those glasses, quick!” cried Captain Brody, hurrying up to them, his face flushed with excitement.

“A sea serpent!” he ejaculated.

“What?” cried Don and Teddy in chorus.

“Call it anything you like,” exclaimed the captain. “It’s the most frightful thing I’ve ever seen. It’s coming this way like an express train. All hands below!” he bellowed. “Get under hatches! Get in the cabins! Get any place, as long as you get away from the open deck.”

“Dear me!” said the professor, rubbing his hands in glee. “This is a remarkable opportunity to study the creature at first hand. Fate has been kind to us. That eruption has driven up to us a wonderful sea reptile that would never of its own accord have sought the light of day. We mustn’t miss this rarest of chances. My description of it will stir up a tremendous sensation in the scientific world. It will——”

By this time he was talking to himself. His audience had disappeared. The captain’s order had cleared the decks as if by magic. Nobody needed a second command.

Sailors, members of the expedition, hurried pell mell into the cabins, some even seeking the hold. All doors were barred, while each sought some weapon that might avail if the terrible creature should board the ship.

There they waited with hearts beating high with excitement. Don and Captain Frank had secured their repeating rifles and had seen that they were fully loaded.

From portholes that commanded the right of the vessel, those who could crowd close enough watched the course of the serpent. As it drew closer, they felt that they were looking upon some monster from the infernal regions, some hideous creation of a nightmare.

Fully a hundred and fifty feet in length, as Captain Sturdy had surmised, its body seemed as thick as a barrel. Its scaly skin was covered with projections as big as a man’s fist from which the water dripped as the creature humped its back in horrid festoons.

The head was horrible beyond description, with a great gash of a mouth lined with awful rows of teeth, between which they caught glimpses of a lolling, slavering tongue.

It was a sight to strike terror to the stoutest heart. Consternation grew as the terrible reptile reached the side of the vessel, struck at it as though angered by this obstacle in its path and then began slowly to writhe its way up the side.

The horrible head appeared over the rail. The monster wriggled its way across the deck, reached the mast and began to climb, while the breathless spectators watched its course with a fearful fascination.

Part way up the mast it stopped. From that vantage point its awful head waved to and fro, as though surveying the ship it had captured and looking for the hapless occupants.

“There’s your sea serpent, Amos,” murmured Captain Sturdy, his voice husky with excitement.

There was no answer.

“Study him now while he’s alive,” went on the captain, “for he isn’t going to be alive long. I’m going to pot him.”

Again there was no answer.

“Where’s Amos?” the captain asked, looking about sharply. There was dawning fear in his tone.

“He must be here somewhere,” said Don wonderingly. He lifted his voice. “Uncle Amos! Oh, Uncle Amos!”

There was no response!

Frantically they hunted about the workrooms, laboratories, and individual cabins, questioning all of the huddled party. No one had seen the professor since the order of all hands below had been sounded by Captain Brody.

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Captain Frank groaned aloud.

“He must be somewhere out on deck!” he cried. “He’s been so engrossed in studying that hideous specimen that he’s forgotten all about his personal safety. Oh, what a fool I was not to have grabbed him and hustled him in here with the rest! I might have known!”

Already Don had flown to a window that faced the mast and thrown it up.

His rifle sprang to his shoulder.

The gun barked and was echoed by that of Captain Sturdy.

Two bullets thudded against the monster’s head. An instant later two more followed.

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Chapter XXIV

FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH

The great serpent shook its head as though the impact of the bullets had annoyed it. Apart from that, it seemed to have suffered no injury. Either the leathery skin or the bony framework of the head had stopped the course of the bullets.

“Aim for its eyes! Its eyes!” cried Mason Dunn.

“That’s the mischief of it,” replied Captain Frank, savagely. “It has no eyes. It’s been living in perpetual darkness miles below the surface. Eyes are of no use down there, so Nature has taken them away. The monster’s blind!”

“Yet it seems to see something,” exclaimed Teddy. “See the way its head moves over toward that one particular spot on the deck—where that lifeboat is.”

There did seem to be purpose in the way the horrid head swayed over the spot that Teddy had pointed out. If it could not see, it seemed to have caught the scent of something. There was purpose, too, in the deliberate way it began to uncoil from the mast, as though bent on a closer investigation of what had attracted its attention.

“Oh!” Teddy’s voice rose to a shriek of horror. “There’s something moving in that lifeboat. It’s the professor—I

just caught sight of his hand. He's climbed in there to hide. Oh, it'll get him! It'll get him!"

The anguish that pervaded his cry was shared by all the onlookers as they grasped its full meaning.

Now the absence of Professor Bruce from the rest of his party was explained. That explanation was fraught with a terrible significance.

Knowing the professor's absorption in anything that pertained to science, it was easy to reconstruct what had happened.

He had not been able to drag himself away from a contemplation of the awful creature as it approached the ship. If it occurred to him at all to think of danger, he had probably reasoned that the monster on reaching the vessel would swerve from its course and swim around the bow or stern.

By the time he awoke to his peril, the creature had reared itself above the rail and was between him and the cabin, whither the rest of the party had fled, thinking he was with him.

A lifeboat was near at hand and the scientist had sought refuge in it, diving under the tarpaulin that covered it. There he might reasonably hope to escape detection by the monster.

He might have done that, even if the serpent had not been blind. Though its sense of sight was atrophied, the remaining ones were perhaps the keener for that very reason. The sense of smell, for instance, was no doubt abnormally developed. The action now of the creature as it unwound, the

purposeful suggestion in its movements, indicated that it had caught the human scent—something that its instinct taught it was an enemy scent.

That enemy must be met and mastered!

“Amos! Amos!” shouted the captain at the top of his voice. “The brute’s coming down! Jump out and run, run this way!”

It was the counsel of desperation, for even as he shouted the captain realized there was not a chance in a hundred of a successful flight.

The great barrel-like coils of the huge body were heaped on the deck to a height that even an athlete could not overleap.

Perhaps the professor realized this. Perhaps he had not made out the meaning of the shouts.

In any event, there was no movement in the lifeboat. The sight of that hand drawing the tarpaulin more tightly over him had told them that the professor was there.

Now the horrible monster had unwound itself from the mast and moved in the direction of the lifeboat, its great head waving to and fro as though it were sniffing, trying to locate its prey.

Crazed with rage and agony, Captain Frank and Don, as though moved by a common impulse, drew back the bolts and rushed out on deck, regardless of the danger to themselves, their rifles pumping a perfect fusillade of lead into the creature’s head and body in the frantic effort to reach

a vital spot. Other bullets followed from the inmates of the cabin.

They seemed to be wasted. Instead of injuring, they served to enrage the reptile, which reared on high with a bellow of fury and seemed about to fling its huge head down upon its assailants.

Then an amazing thing happened!

The threatened attack did not materialize. The serpent seemed suddenly to forget that there were enemies at hand. Instead, it appeared to be conscious of an internal conflict going on within itself.

The bellowing still continued. There was no rage in it now—only a blending of pain and fear.

The onlookers were struck with amazement.

“Look!” cried Don. “See it swell! It’s twice as big even as it was before. What does it mean?”

It was true.

Before their very eyes the monster was swelling, swelling until it seemed as though its skin could not contain it.

“I have it!” cried Captain Frank exultantly. “Down at the bottom of the sea it’s been subjected to tons of pressure. Up here the pressure is suddenly removed and it can’t stand it. It’s going to burst! It’s going to burst!”

His voice rang out in fierce jubilation.

As though moved by an instinct to seek the ocean depths, the serpent heaved its great head over the side of the ship, dragging its coils after it.

As the mass struck the water, there was a sharp explosion and the body of the creature was rent asunder!

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The vessel rocked with the shock of it and air and sea were filled with bits of flying flesh.

A wild shout of joy and wonder rose from all the ship's company, and a rush was made from the cabin to the rail, where they watched with unspeakable relief the subsiding of the waters, churned into tumult by the explosion.

Don and Captain Frank with Teddy rushed over to the lifeboat, tore the tarpaulin loose and hoisted the professor out on deck.

There they patted and pounded and hugged him, babbling incoherently, while he blinked at them affectionately through his glasses.

“He's gone, Uncle Amos, the sea serpent's gone!” cried Don, fairly dancing up and down in his excitement.

A look of alarm came into the scientist's eyes.

“Not completely gone, I hope,” he exclaimed. “Don't tell me that we've lost that wonderful specimen! Can't we recapture

him? I wouldn't miss him for the world.”

They looked at each other. They looked at the professor. They looked at each other again. Then they broke into an uncontrollable roar of laughter that had in it a touch of hysteria, so tremendous was the revulsion from anguish to joy.

“You'll be the death of me yet, Amos,” gasped Captain Frank, as soon as he could speak. “I believe you'd have liked to pat that creature on the head to see if it would smile.” 196

“Is he completely gone?” choked Don. “Yes, Uncle Amos, he's completely gone, and that doesn't mean maybe. You never saw anything more completely gone. Complete, completer, completest. The sea serpent's it. There isn't enough left to photograph through a microscope.”

Chapter XXV

VICTORY

“Too bad,” mourned the professor. “Of course, I knew that it was dangerous, but—what a loss to science! However, we may see another one, its mate, perhaps,” he added hopefully.

“Don’t say that!” ejaculated the captain, fervently. “I never saw anything before that a bullet wouldn’t kill and I don’t want to again. Even for the sake of science,” he added quizzically.

It was a very long time before the excitement quieted down, and for days the near tragedy was the topic of discussion to the exclusion of almost everything else.

“Old Nature came to our help just in the nick of time, eh, Brick?” remarked Don to Teddy.

“You bet,” returned his friend. “Simple enough, of course, when you come to think of it. It was bound to happen, but I’m mighty glad it happened just at the time it did. You know how careful the professor is to have the nets drawn in slowly, for fear the fish will burst if the deep sea pressure is removed too quickly. The sea serpent was thrown up so swiftly by the eruption that it didn’t have time to adjust itself. So it went on a bust, so to speak.”

Don made a pass at him but Teddy was out of reach.

Several weeks went by, with the expedition adding enormously to the richness of its collections. With the exception of occasional squalls, which were quickly over, the weather was all that the most exacting man of science could desire.

Professor Bruce was radiant. Knowing him so well, Don was moved to wonder that he seemed so little depressed over the news that Marvin had started suit against him on the ground of plagiarism, and that the affair had probably been largely exploited in the press.

The explanation came one day when the professor, leaning back in his chair, seemed to be struck with a certain memory and reached for his breast pocket.

“Bless my soul!” he exclaimed. “I had forgotten all about that letter from your father that you brought me from San Francisco.”

Don exchanged glances with Teddy, who sat at an adjoining table, busily painting. So that explained his uncle’s good spirits! He had not yet learned of the bad news.

It was coming now, and Don shifted about uneasily as his uncle continued the search.

“That’s queer,” Professor Bruce observed. “I don’t seem to have it. Could I have lost it?”

“I’ll tell you,” broke in Teddy, as a thought struck him.

“Don was just handing you the letters when the explosion came. We were all thrown about and the letters must have been knocked out of your hand.”

“That’s so,” replied the professor. “But why didn’t I pick them up afterward? They must have been in plain sight.”

“The sea serpent came,” suggested Don, “and nobody was thinking much about letters just then.”

“No,” mused the professor. “That splendid specimen! Even then, after the creature left, the letters ought to have been there.”

“That monster took them with him!” cried Teddy. “By jinks, that’s the answer! Those slimy folds of his swept the deck clean as he went overboard.”

“That must be the solution,” murmured the professor. “Too bad. Well, it can’t be helped. Now, Don, let’s get back to work. As I was saying, that humpbacked shrimp——”

Don’s eyes were dancing with delight. His uncle need not know what would have grieved and disconcerted him beyond measure.

Teddy scribbled a line and slipped it over on Don’s table under cover of a sheet of paper. Don glanced at the five words it contained:

“Bully for the sea serpent!”

Every day or two Don or Teddy took turns in exploring the

ocean bottom, and they never wearied of the marvels it revealed.

More than once they had seen the shadow of the Rust submarine, with which Rufus Gold took a malicious delight in worrying them, pass over their heads. It was still poaching on their preserves, serving as a threat and an annoyance, frequently breaking the nets of the Bruce expedition, causing exasperation and expense.

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Usually it was in motion when the boys descried it. But one day Don was surprised to come across it lying motionless between two craggy reefs. Though the vessel was not moving, its engines were in furious motion.

Mystified at first, Don soon grasped the situation. The vessel was caught in some way and its own unaided strength was not sufficient to free it. The air within it would soon be exhausted. Its crew and passengers were in the most serious danger!

With Don to think was to act. Instantly he gave the signal and was drawn to the surface. There he explained the predicament of the Rust submarine and urged instant help.

There was no need of urging. Immediately the crew of the *Phantom* and its attendant submarine sprang into action.

Cables were lowered and adjusted, the engines of the *Phantom* were set in motion, and with this added pulling power, the Rust submarine finally worked itself clear and rose to the surface.

“There! If that isn’t heaping coals of fire on your enemy’s

head, I don't know what is," ejaculated Captain Frank, with grim satisfaction.

"I suppose they'll be sending over a delegation now to express their gratitude," conjectured the professor.

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"Not on your life!" declared Don. "If anyone but Rufus Gold were at the head of the party, he would. But catch him doing it! He isn't that kind."

Don's prediction proved correct. Not a word came from the Rust party, though doubtless many of its members were ashamed of the attitude of their leader. Gold was evidently in supreme command, however, and his will prevailed.

What that ruffian wanted or did not want soon became a matter of supreme indifference. Shortly after this episode Professor Bruce decided that the object of his expedition had been fully achieved, and gave orders for the return to San Francisco.

He ought to have been supremely happy. Never had an undersea exploring expedition come home more richly laden with spoils. It had captured and described hundreds of rare specimens that had never before been known to science. It had solved mysteries that hitherto baffled learned inquirers. It had made a glorious contribution to the knowledge of the world.

Yet, as they neared port, the professor became once more gloomy, nervous and distrait.

"He's sore because he missed getting that sea serpent,"

remarked Teddy.

“It isn’t that, though he’d have dearly loved to have brought it along,” returned Don. “He has time now to think of that Marvin matter, and it’s worrying him sick.”

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The professor had sent to the Governor by radio a resumé of the results achieved by the expedition and a statement of the probable time at which the party would reach San Francisco.

As soon as they entered the harbor and the *Phantom* and her accompanying submarine were recognized, a perfect tumult of whistles rose from the vessels that thronged the Bay.

“Gee, it’s a royal welcome!” cried Teddy.

“It doesn’t sound as though we were in bad,” admitted Don, his face brightening. “It’s a sort of ‘Hail to the Chief.’”

His wonder and delight were increased when they were met at the wharf by a mounted escort which cleared the way for the automobiles that awaited the voyagers and proceeded up to the City Hall, where they were welcomed by the Mayor and given the keys of the city.

Then the Governor himself stepped forward and told of the debt that California owed them.

In a happy daze the professor listened, bewildered at the great reception. He had difficulty in making a suitable response. He rallied as he went on, however, and at the finish was applauded to the echo.

He had feared coldness, perhaps a certain ostracism, due to the false charges that Rufus Gold had threatened to exploit. Instead, he found himself greeted as a hero.

What had become of the Rust propaganda? What of the campaign of defamation and belittlement that had been engineered by the multi-millionaire and his satellites?

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They found the answer when, at the close of the reception ceremonies, they reached the hotel.

There was a letter from Don's father telling them that the Marvin case had utterly collapsed. Mr. Sturdy had ferreted out the fact that Emanuel Rust was financing the suit and using Marvin simply as a tool with which to wreak vengeance on his opponents. Marvin, who, though stubborn and pig-headed, was decent at heart, was convinced of the facts, and had withdrawn his charges.

More than that, Marvin had issued a statement to the press, telling of the whole unsavory mess into which he had been innocently inveigled, and mentioning Emanuel Rust by name as the arch instigator of the conspiracy!

It was a body blow to the arrogant, purse-proud magnate and a corresponding enhancing and strengthening of the Governor's position. What was left of Rust's standing collapsed like a house of cards when, on the heels of this exposure, came the revelation that his manipulations had been the chief cause of a bank failure that involved loss to thousands of poor people. His name was execrated where formerly it had been respected and even jail was looming up

before him.

When the expedition that he had financed came back, a little while later, its results proved to be so meagre and the popular feeling against anything connected with Rust's name was so strong that, in Teddy's elegant phrase, it was a "perfect flop." 204

One thing they did give marked attention to, however, was the fact that Rufus Gold was not with the party. The radio had apprised that rascal of Rust's connection with the bank failure, and as he, Gold, as Rust's henchman, had had a heavy part in that crookedness, he had decided—again to quote Teddy—to "beat it while the going was good." He had stopped at a Mexican port and taken a steamer for parts unknown, a fugitive from the justice that a few months later overtook him and consigned him to a term in prison.

"We've routed them, horse, foot, and dragoons," cried Don exultantly, that memorable afternoon in the hotel when he and his companions had learned the full extent of their victory.

"They've found their proper places," jubilated Captain Frank.

Professor Bruce beamed blissfully.

"This is the end of a perfect day," sang Teddy.

"Yes," assented Don. Then his countenance took on an assumed worried look. "That is, almost perfect. If we could only have brought back that sea serpent——"

THE END



Transcriber's Notes

- Copyright notice provided as in the original—this e-text is public domain in the country of publication.
- In the text versions, delimited italics text in underscores (the HTML version reproduces the font form of the printed book.)
- Silently corrected palpable typos; left non-standard spellings and dialect unchanged.

[The end of *Don Sturdy on the Ocean Bottom* by Edward Stratemeyer (as Victor Appleton)]