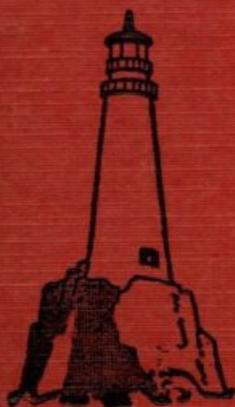


DAUGHTER OF THE COAST GUARD

BETTY BAXTER



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Daughter
of the
Coast Guard

By BETTY BAXTER



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CHAPTER I

A Mysterious Accident

Winifred Travers tossed her books recklessly into the locker, and turned to her friend, Cherry Hudson.

“How’d you like a chauffeur for that interview?” she offered, gaily. “The Gas Gull is outside with itching tires.”

“Grand! It’s a two-mile hike from town, and I have to go to the *Tribune* office first.”

The two friends were almost the first to leave Lake Haven High’s doors that brilliant October afternoon, and Win’s small roadster sped away from the parking lane.

“What a day!” Cherry murmured. “Wouldn’t you know I’d arrange to go talk to an old lady about her collection of hooked rugs on the best kind of day for sailing?”

“Don’t mourn too much,” the dark-haired girl consoled her, as she dexterously parked the car. “I’ll bet Denny is busy, and wouldn’t be bothered with us anyway.”

Cherry led the way through the small front office of the *Lake Haven Tribune*, which was now a completely Hudson family enterprise, since her brothers had returned from college to take staff positions. Her father, Dennis Hudson, Sr., had been editor and publisher of the small daily for more than twenty years. Twenty-three year old Denny had assumed the advertising manager’s post two years before, and twenty-one year old Bill had become city and news editor at his graduation last spring. Cherry joyfully followed in their footsteps; she covered the school news, gathered personals, wrote minor features and longed for the day when she’d discover a really important scoop.

Now, as the girls entered the crowded little newsroom, they were greeted with a whoop by Bill. “My goodness gracious, but I’m glad to see you!” He

tossed his green eyeshade on top of a litter of proof, letters, pamphlets and copy paper which covered his desk. "You can take the dog watch. Miss Lippincott's at a Woman's Club tea; Dad and Denny have just left to see a big accident out on Indian road, and I want to follow them."

"But I've an interview—," Cherry wailed.

"Better change it," Bill shouted, as he rushed out the front door. "Don't know how long I'll be gone. . . ."

"Well!" Cherry sank to the wobbly swivelchair at Bill's desk, and reached for the telephone. "It looks as if our ride were out, let alone the sail——"

She telephoned old Granny Williams, maker of dozens of hooked rugs, to postpone the time for the interview.

Winifred chuckled. "A newspaper office is almost as exciting as a Coast Guard station—but there'll always be the dog watches, when nothing ever happens."

Cherry looked around the room with a rueful little smile. "There's one major difference. A Coast Guard station is always neat. I wonder if there was ever a tidy journalist?"

Winifred, tall and graceful and dark-haired, perched on the corner of the absent society editor's desk. "Is there anything I can help you do while we're waiting?"

Cherry glanced fondly at her friend. "My dear Win, there is no reason why you should sacrifice yourself on this glorious day, because of my bad luck."

"This is the kind of day that's dull at the station. If anything really exciting crops up, this is where we will learn of it first."

"All right. You're bringing it on yourself. Which would you rather take—the ten years ago, or the twenty years ago?"

Win looked a little startled, then laughed. "Oh, you mean for the Old Times Column?"

Cherry nodded, and went into the little cubby hole off the news room, which housed the newspaper files; the small morgue for pictures, mats and clippings; and the International Press Association machines, silent now. She brought a huge bound volume, and opened it before Winifred, on the society editor's desk. "Since you didn't have a preference, you may take the ten years ago." A moment later, she brought a slightly smaller volume for herself, and placed it on top of the litter on Bill's desk.

The girls found the out-of-date ads for clothes and movies and automobiles amusing, and read bits to one another. Both scribbled brief paragraphs from the papers—one or two on national affairs; a few about local political or civic news; and a sentence or two about prominent marriages or parties of the previous decades.

"I've finished October fifth's. Shall I do the next day's?"

“Might as well. Certainly no signs of returning news hounds, as yet.”

The girls worked on for almost an hour. The telephone rang at infrequent intervals. One of the newsboys strode through, and left a copy of the freshly-printed paper on each desk. The girls took time to glance at the day’s issue, then returned to the dusty files.

“The Dillons entertained one hundred guests at dinner and a musicale, twenty years ago,” Cherry remarked. “Too bad there’s no one here to do things on such a huge scale, any more.”

“Perhaps the Masons will, now that they’ve opened the Dillon mansion after all these years.”

Cherry made a wry face. “Think we’d be invited if they did?”

“Seriously, what do you think of that gal?” Win gathered her notes, closed the big volume with a bang.

“Through? So am I.” Cherry replaced the files before answering the question. “I haven’t made up my mind about Myra Mason. She’s friendly enough, but it somehow doesn’t seem sincere. And I think she overdoes this ‘mysterious past’ business.”

“She’s awfully pretty—and little.” Win had the usual tall girl’s sensitiveness about size.

The front door banged, and all three Hudson men hustled into the tiny office. Cherry’s father, after a brief greeting for the girls, went on into his private office. Bill shoved his sister unceremoniously from his chair and reached for copy paper. Denny, whose advertising work for the day was over, sat on his desk and planted his feet on the chair in front of it.

“Well, isn’t anyone going to tell us about it?” Cherry demanded, in an aggrieved voice.

“It was a nifty wreck,” Denny said. “Went off into one of those sixty-seventy foot ravines, on the Indian road, about four miles south of town. Could have been there hours. No one knows how or when it happened, but that old truck was cracked up plenty.”

Bill looked up in disgust. “It’s a good thing you went into the half-witted advertising end of this business. Poorest summary of a news story I ever heard.”

He turned to the girls and said crisply, “The driver is still unconscious. There are no identification marks of any sort on him or the car. No license plates. No driver’s card. The doctor may be able to estimate the time of the accident, but it must have taken place before daylight, because the lights on the truck were still burning. Accident discovered at three-thirty this afternoon by Bill Lonesby, nearby farmer, who was looking for a strayed calf. The car was full of unmarked fur pelts.”

Cherry’s eyes were shining. “Bill! That sounds like an International Press

Association story!”

“It will be,” her brother replied shortly, “as soon as you rattle-tongues clear out, and I can finish writing and filing it.”

“That’s queer,” Win said slowly, as she rose. “It doesn’t strike me as being any particular sort of story. It sounds like smugglers. Are you coming with me, Cherry, to tell Dad?”

The Hudson brothers stared at one another, after the girls hurried out. “My goodness gracious, Denny,” Bill said in a hushed tone, “do you suppose she’s right?”

CHAPTER II

The Captain Is Told

The Gas Gull flew swiftly over the familiar route to the Coast Guard buildings, clustered at the top of the cliff overlooking Lake Michigan. Abruptly, Win stopped the car, not bothering to put it in the parking space.

“Come on, Cherry—.” The tall girl raced over the clipped lawn to the glistening white building which was the living quarters for Captain and Mrs. Travers, Winifred and the crews.

The enticing odor of freshly-baked doughnuts filled the huge square kitchen. Mandy, the colored cook, turned with a grin to greet them. “Ah might a-knowed Ah’d never get these here friahed cakes finished without the smell floatin’ clear up to that high school!”

“Where’s Dad, Mandy? It’s important.” Almost unconsciously, Win’s hand dipped into the half-filled crock of warm doughnuts.

“Ah think he’s at the lookout station. What’s wrong, honey?”

“Tell you later—.” Winifred turned and sped out the door. Cherry hesitated a moment, grinned, winked at Mandy, reached for a couple of doughnuts, and followed her friend, all in a split second.

Win was half way up to the observation tower, on the edge of the cliff, shouting for her father.

Captain Travers’ blue-clad figure seemed to hurtle from the lookout. “What’s wrong, child? Have an accident with your car?”

“No. But it’s about an accident,” Win told him, a little breathlessly. Cherry joined the group. “I went to the *Tribune* office after school, and Bill just got back and told us about a truck that was wrecked last night or early this morning on the Indian road. It was just discovered this afternoon.”

“Anybody hurt?”

“The driver. He’s still out of his mind. But, Dad, here’s the queer business.

The truck is full of unmarked fur pelts, and there wasn't any identification mark on the car, or the driver."

The man's eyes narrowed and he whistled softly. "So—o—o. Maybe I'd better look into it."

"I'll be glad to drive you out in the roadster," Win said eagerly. "Then Cherry and I can go along——"

The Captain laughed. "No need to run an unnecessary risk. I'll take my car." At the disappointed look in the girls' faces, he added, "Would you like to go, too?"

Cherry impulsively thrust her first finger, circled with two doughnuts, under the Captain's nose. "Like one? Just snatched them from Mandy."

Gravely, the tall, erect officer accepted it, and the three strode to the garages, munching.

The girls agreed that the Travers' sedan was a trifle more speedy and comfortable than the Gull, and in a quarter of an hour they reached the spot where the unfortunate driver had left Indian road. News had traveled rapidly, and a dozen cars of the curious had parked on the curve.

Captain Travers and the girls scrambled down the steep sides of the sandy ravine. A uniformed highway policeman stood guard, and saluted Captain Travers smartly.

"A bad crash, sir," he remarked.

"Yes." The officer silently surveyed the splintered truck for a moment. "Removed the cargo yet?"

"It has been taken to the court house in Lake Haven by the sheriff," the policeman answered. "Whoever claims it as the owner is going to have a bit of explaining to do." He pointed to the empty license-plate holders.

"Could the numbers have been removed, after the crash?" Win asked, unexpectedly.

Both her father and the policeman looked a little startled. "Why—I suppose so," the cop agreed, doubtfully.

"Perhaps the driver had a companion who wasn't hurt in the crash," Win pointed out.

Captain Travers gazed up the steep incline and traced the fall of the truck by the broken and crushed bushes. "Car must have turned over three or four times. Of course, it would be possible for a man to escape with scratches and bruises, but it's not likely."

"But, Dad," Win continued, "Indian road is fairly well traveled. It's patrolled, too, by the highway cops. They'd be sure to spot a truck without any license plates at all. The lights were on——"

"It sure is a mystery," the policeman agreed.

"Maybe the accident was really discovered earlier, and the identification

marks taken then,” Cherry suggested. “It just doesn’t seem possible that anyone would be cruel and mean enough to do that, though, and not try to get help for an injured man.”

“Might have thought he was dead,” Win said.

Captain Travers took a last, keen glance about the ravine and at the battered truck, sighed, and said, “We’ve seen all there is to see, girls. Can’t be far from dinner time. Shall we get along home?”

Captain Travers stopped before the handsome white stone house, “Twin Anchors,” where the Hudsons lived.

“Thank you for letting me go along,” Cherry said.

“Call me up if you find out anything more,” Win shouted, as they drove on.

Cherry pushed open the huge wooden wheel-gate, suspended between white wooden anchors, and hurried up the walk. She’d have to race to freshen up before dinner, and the scramble down the side of the ravine hadn’t helped her appearance.

A swift glance about the huge living room reassured her. Good! Dad and the boys weren’t ready yet, either.

Cherry’s room was true to the nautical motif of the entire house, but the soft greenish-blue colors made it unmistakably feminine. There were bunk beds, with a ship’s ladder mounting to the upper one, and a white chest. The trim dressing table had a round mirror etched with little stars. Book-cases lined two sides of the walls. There was a deep reading chair with a good lamp, and a small white desk.

With a glance at her watch, Cherry regretfully noted there wouldn’t be a chance for a shower. She removed her jacket, washed her hands and face, ran a comb through the rebellious and loathed reddish-brown curls, and changed the striped sweater for a clean blue blouse. “If only,” she mourned often to Win, “it weren’t for my awful hair and my terrible brothers, I could be truly happy.”

Winifred had chuckled, and said, “What if you didn’t have any brothers and your hair was straight?”

Cherry had never known any other home, and she loved “Twin Anchors” for its being different and original. She’d been just a baby when her mother had died, and her father, unable to torture his grief with the memories associated with their former home, had planned this rather unconventional shelter for his family.

The huge story-and-a-half living room, with its hand-hewn fir beams, was the center of the U-shaped structure. A picture window nine feet wide gave a priceless command of the lake below. Logs crackled now in the half-circle fireplace, on the twin-anchor andirons.

As Cherry entered, her two brothers were lounging in deep chairs drawn to the fire, and her father stood, leaning on the mantel and discussing the accident

with them.

“Captain Travers took Win and me out to see it,” Cherry told them.

“Did he, now?” Bill asked alertly. “Did he have any ideas about the smugglers? Find any clues?”

“No,” Cherry confessed. “At least, if he did, he kept them to himself.”

Denny chuckled. “That must have come as a great disappointment. I’ll bet you planned to trot right down and send off an International Press Association story and have by-lines all over the country.”

Cherry flushed, and was relieved when Mrs. Morrow, the grey-haired housekeeper, announced that dinner was ready. She’d made the error, several months before, of telling her family that it was her burning ambition to rate a solo scoop, so fine that it would be by-lined with her name by every I. P. A. paper.

Since, scarcely a day had passed that her brothers had failed to rib her about it. “I suppose I should be grateful,” she told herself resignedly, as she went in to dinner on her father’s arm, “that they seem to have forgotten to tease me about my red hair lately.”

CHAPTER III

The Fur Angle

At noon the next day, Win and Cherry left school together in the Gas Gull, as was their usual custom. “Sorry, but would you mind stopping at the office for just a second?” Cherry asked. “I have to leave the school notes. There are some announcements Mr. Linton wants in this afternoon’s paper.”

“Not at all,” Win agreed. “Ask if there’s anything new on the accident.”

Win double-parked in front of the *Tribune* office, while Cherry hurried to complete her errand.

In a few minutes, Cherry returned, her smoky-blue eyes smoldering with excitement. “Win, I’ll bet anything those furs *were* smuggled!”

“How do you know? Dad wouldn’t commit himself. I tried to get his opinion last night.”

Cherry banged the car door, and the roadster sped off to the South Shore Drive, which led to the Coast Guard station, and three blocks beyond, to “Twin Anchors.” “Well, in the first place,” Cherry continued, “not a soul has turned up to claim the furs.”

“How about the driver? Doesn’t he know where they came from?”

“He’s still in a very critical condition, and hasn’t been conscious since he was found. Doctor Knowles believes he’d lain there for hours, and gives him only a fifty-fifty chance to recover.”

“Say, Cherry, can’t you call Mrs. Morrow and tell her you won’t be home for lunch? Then you could stay at my house and tell Dad about it. I really think he should know.”

“Glad to, but I don’t really have very much definite information,” Cherry said.

The ever-cheerful Mandy laid another place on the blue-checked luncheon cloth in the Travers’ dining room and whispered, “You is in luck, Miz’ Cherry.

It's waffles and maple syrup today!"

Cherry nodded appreciatively, and turned to motherly Mrs. Travers. "I really feel guilty about this unexpected visit, but Win thought I should tell her Dad the latest news about the accident——"

Mrs. Travers leaned over and patted Cherry's shoulder affectionately. "My dear, you should know you're always welcome. What's more, you should know that the first bit of equipment in any Coast Guard station is an inexhaustible larder."

"That's true," Cherry dimpled, "but you couldn't call me a shipwreck victim now."

Captain Travers bustled in, apologetic for being late. "Had to explain the elementary routine to that pair of recruits who came down from Pentwater this morning."

"Are they cute, Dad?" Win asked impudently.

"Now, see here, young lady! I'll have no nonsense like that around my station——"

"Phil! Phil!" Mrs. Travers was chuckling. "You should know she's just saying that to tease!"

"You'll have to admit," Win said, her eyes twinkling, "it never fails to work."

"Won't have my routine upset," Captain Travers went on, grumpily.

"I coaxed Cherry to come to lunch, so she could tell you the latest developments in that accident."

Briefly, Cherry summarized the news she'd learned at the *Tribune* office.

The Captain listened in silence, and failed to comment for several minutes. The hungry girls did justice to Mandy's golden-brown waffles, and then suddenly the officer demanded, "What kind of furs were in that cargo?"

"Why—I don't know," Cherry replied. "I didn't hear anyone say. I'll call Bill, though, at the office. Perhaps he can tell us." She excused herself, and went to the telephone in the hall.

When she returned, there was a puzzled look on her face. "Bill says," she reported, "that that is one of the strangest angles on the story. The sheriff claims no one around the court house is able to recognize the pelts. No one's ever seen anything like 'em."

The Captain sighed. "It's a queer business. Looks like nothing to do now but wait until the driver comes to. Pretty slim evidence to report to my superiors. No indication, at all, that the load was landed from Lake Michigan. And no real indication that the pelts were smuggled."

"Doctor Knowles, according to Bill, isn't very hopeful about the injured driver. It may go down," Cherry said dramatically, "as one of the great unsolved mysteries."

“We’ll go down,” Win giggled, “in Mr. Linton’s black book for being tardy, if we don’t hurry. Come along, Cherry.”

The guest thanked Mrs. Travers, praised Mandy for the waffles, and turned to follow her hostess.

Just before the roadster reached its familiar parking spot near Lake Haven High, Cherry said impulsively, “Win, how’d you like to go sleuthing with me after school?”

“Fine. Shall we run up to the hospital and throw cold water in the unknown victim’s face, and get an exclusive interview?”

“No, silly. But I’ll bet Sheriff Doty would let us see those furs. Maybe we could tell what they are—and if we can’t, maybe we can find out.” Cherry’s tone was pleading.

The dark-haired girl sighed, as she slipped the key from the ignition. “Something tells me that if I trail you around much longer on the hunt of big stories, I’ll walk right into trouble.”

“Aw, Win! How could we *possibly* get into trouble on this business?”

CHAPTER IV

Pointing to a Discovery

Cherry led the way boldly into the county attorney's office in the court house, and asked the girl at the desk where she could find Sheriff Doty. "I expect you'll find him down in one of the basement rooms, playing pinochle," the secretary told the two girls.

"Thank you," Cherry answered, and murmured to Win as she went out the door, "I hope he's not absorbed in a too-exciting game. Although Dad supported him in the last election, I'm afraid his gratitude wouldn't carry over to the Hudson daughter, if I were to come between him and a winning hand."

"I don't know what all this will lead to," Win replied, in a mock-martyr tone, "but you can't say I'm not sticking to you until the bitter end."

Fortunately, the pinochle game was just breaking up. Cherry approached the lanky official with her most engaging smile. "We've an enormous favor to ask of you, Sheriff Doty."

The officer grinned. "Well, now if t'aint too big, mebbe it can be arranged."

Cherry waited until they'd moved down the hall far enough from the other players not to be overheard. "Sheriff, Win and I would like to see those furs that were in that wrecked truck. Bill tells me no one has been able to identify them."

The sheriff looked a little bewildered. "Oh, I think I see! You b'lieve mebbe a girl'd know more about furs?"

"That might be it. And it would be fun to outsmart my big brother, wouldn't it?"

The officer chuckled and said, "O. K. Then you two come along with me over to the jail. We've got 'em stored downstairs."

Win and Cherry had to race to keep up with the rapid pace set by the long-

legged official. The stone jail and sheriff's quarters were two blocks from the court house, and the trio arrived a few moments later.

The cargo of furs had been dumped in an unused basement cell.

The pelts seemed to be divided, roughly, into two sorts. One, a blonde, soft fur, had hair about two inches long; the other, in shades of buff, brown or black, was shorter and coarser.

The girls examined them intently for a few minutes.

"I'm stumped," Win said, at last. "Not like anything I ever saw before. But wouldn't you love to have a coat made from that luscious, soft, creamy fur?"

Cherry wouldn't give up for a few minutes, then she had to admit, too, that the pelts were unlike any she'd ever seen. "Absolutely unmarked, too," she declared.

As they turned to leave, the sheriff said, "Too bad it didn't work out, Miss Hudson. I s'pose you'd rather I didn't say anything about this to your brother?"

Cherry blushed, and laughed a little.

Win broke in, a little shyly. "I've an idea, Sheriff Doty. Mr. Wilson, over at Wayne's Department store, is considered quite an expert on furs. Why don't we ask him?"

"By gosh, you girls have got my curiosity all upset, now," the officer said. "I guess it'll be all right to take a couple of these hides over for him to see. Got time, before closing?"

Cherry glanced at the small watch at her wrist. "We've fifteen minutes. Think we can make it?"

"Sure." The officer seized one of the blonde pelts and a couple of the darker ones, and locked the door on the remainder. "Come along."

Mr. Wilson, a nervous, alert young salesman at Lake Haven's largest department store, looked a little startled at the request. "These two," he said, after a brief examination, "are llama skins. South American, probably."

The softer fur held his attention for a much longer time. Cherry, absorbed in his examination, failed to notice the almost wild look of relief and joy which came over Winifred's face at the furrier's announcement. "This," Mr. Wilson admitted at last, "is going to take quite a bit of study."

A bell rang, and the lights flickered. It was closing time for the store.

"Would you care to leave it with me for a careful examination?" the young man asked, eagerly. "I'm very interested——"

"Guess it's all right," the sheriff consented.

"I'll call you when I decide, shall I?"

The officer nodded. When the trio reached the street, he turned to Cherry. "And I suppose you want me to telephone you as soon as I find out? Not Bill?"

"Indeed I do! Please don't tell him, now that we're so close to finding out!"

"I promise," the lanky officer replied.

The girls thanked him, and then strode up the street to the spot where they'd parked Win's car.

"I believe we're going to solve this," Cherry said, exultingly.

"You can't be any happier than I am, over what you've already discovered," Win agreed. "You'll let me know, as soon as you hear from Sheriff Doty?"

"Sounds like a round-robin letter," Cherry chuckled. "Mr. Wilson calls the sheriff; he calls me; I call you."

"And I tell Dad!"

Cherry was studying in her room, after dinner, when the expected telephone message came from the officer. "Mr. Wilson says he's pretty sure it's vicuña—v-i-c-u-ñ-a—and the reason he didn't recognize it, is because he's never actually seen any before."

"Why—how queer! Is it rare, then?"

"Yep. He can't understand how it got here. It's from South America, too, but there's been an embargo on shipping it out for a good many years. The pelts are still fairly cheap among the Indians, I guess, but they're pretty darned expensive in this country. Wilson says the stuff would be worth even more if women knew how hard it is to get 'em. But not much of a demand has been set up, because furriers just couldn't supply the pelts."

"So both kinds came from South America?"

"That's what Wilson believes."

"I do appreciate all you've done to help," Cherry declared.

"Anytime I can help a Hudson—even if it's to get the best of another Hudson—let me know." Laughing, the sheriff concluded the conversation.

Cherry impulsively decided to run over to the Coast Guard station with her news. "I'll not be gone more than half an hour," she called to Mrs. Morrow. "I want to see Winifred."

The housekeeper gave her consent, and Cherry set off, walking on the lake side of the Drive. It was a crisp, October night with a bright moon, and Lake Michigan was beautiful and mysterious in the soft light. Cherry never failed to give a little mental note of thanks that her home and life were so near the lovely inland water, whenever she saw the lake in its endless variety of moods.

Cherry's news was received by Captain Travers and his daughter with unconcealed delight. "Oh, Cherry! You don't know how glad we are!"

The bright-haired girl was pleased, and a little astonished at the effect her message had. "I'm glad, too," she said, mystified, "because I'll be able to tell that super-intelligent brother of mine something he doesn't know. But why are you so pleased?"

Winifred glanced at her father. "May I tell her, Dad?"

Captain Travers nodded.

“You see, Cherry, as a rule our foreign boats in this port are from Canada, Norway, Sweden, or England.”

“Sure—I’ve known that for years.”

“Well, don’t you understand? If these pelts were smuggled, and landed anywhere near Lake Haven, it isn’t likely that they’d be sent from South America? It’s possible, of course, but not at all probable.”

“Oh, I do see!” Cherry glanced at Captain Travers. “The load must have come from Chicago, or the Coast! And that would throw it completely out of your territory.”

“That’s right,” the ruddy-faced man agreed. “And I think it calls for a celebration. Shall we raid Mandy’s kitchen and see what we can find?”

CHAPTER V

A False Lead

Cherry's brothers and her father had gone to the office by the time she was dressed for breakfast, so she decided she'd keep her discovery about the furs until noon. It would still leave plenty of time before the two o'clock deadline for city news on the afternoon edition.

Cheerfully, the auburn-haired girl donned the blue jacket of her sport suit, pulled on a matching felt hat, and gathered her school books. This was a lovely day—she was going to have a chance to startle Bill with her brilliant detective work—Lake Haven had won its first three football games—Win and her father were pleased that the furs were from some remote South American country

Winifred was waiting in the Gas Gull when Cherry reached the Coast Guard station. They sang, from sheer exuberance, all the way to school. As they parted, for the first class, Cherry said, "I didn't have a chance to tell Bill our important news this morning, so I'll have to stop at the office for a few minutes this noon."

"Let's hurry, after math class, then," Win replied. "Mandy is good-natured about everything except having me come late to meals. She likes her food to be appreciated while it's hot."

The morning passed swiftly, and every few minutes Cherry remembered the surprise she'd have to spring on her brother, and she gleefully framed a number of announcements. After the last morning class, she raced to meet Winifred. The trim little roadster was the first to pull away from the lane of parked cars.

"I'll hurry," Cherry promised.

The *Tribune* office was almost deserted, and Bill Hudson, his hat jammed over one eye in the best newspaper-reporter tradition, was cramming copy

paper into a coat pocket.

“Any new leads on the accident story?” Cherry inquired casually.

“The fellow hasn’t come to, yet, if that’s what you mean. I’m to check with Doctor Knowles at two o’clock, to make sure before we go to press.”

“Bill, Win and I found out something last evening that might make a new lead.”

The city editor frowned at the stubs of pencils on his desk, and brushed past his sister to go to the editor’s desk for a couple of fresh ones. “Oh?” he inquired absently. “Well, why don’t you write it? I’ve got to get over to the Chamber of Commerce luncheon. I’m late now, and they’re going to talk about that new outdoor opera project for next summer.”

“Oh, do you really want me to? Write the lead?” Cherry was breathless with excitement.

“Sure. Go ahead. I can copyread it, can’t I?” Bill hustled out.

Cherry ran to tell Win that she wouldn’t be going home for lunch. “I’ll call Mrs. Morrow, and then get a sandwich next door to the office, if I get through in time. Won’t Bill be startled?”

“Um-mmm,” Win returned, “and so will Mrs. Morrow. She’ll decide not to get lunch for you, one of these days.”

Cherry, unaccustomed to writing anything but the school notes and simple personal items, struggled over the lead to the big story. Twenty attempts were discarded before she finally decided upon “Through the courtesy of Mr. Wilson of Wayne’s Department store and with the cooperation of Sheriff Doty, the fur pelts which were the cargo of the truck involved in the serious accident night before last, south of Lake Haven on Indian road, in which the still-unidentified driver was seriously injured, have been identified as llama and vicuña furs, perhaps smuggled from some South American county.”

Cherry was casting anxious glances at her wristwatch, before Bill bustled in. She didn’t want to be tardy, yet it would be worth it to see his face when he read her startling news—

“Here you are,” she said nonchalantly, placing the typed paragraph before him on the desk.

Bill exchanged his battered hat for his green eyeshade, and read the paragraph, grinning. Someone came into the outer office, but Cherry waited to see Bill’s reaction before investigating.

“Oh, that—” he said, chuckling. “Why, Wilson telephoned that tid-bit in early this morning, before he went down to the store. If you’d looked at the story on the copy-hook——”

Cherry grabbed the stories hanging on the city hook and glanced through them hurriedly. “Fur pelts found in the truck wrecked early Thursday on Indian road have been identified as vicuña and llama, Sheriff R. E. Doty’s office

announced Friday morning.

“The driver, whose name remains a mystery, is still unconscious at City Hospital.

“Thomas Wilson, expert furrier, believes the furs may have come from South America and estimates the value at more than five thousand dollars. . . .”

“If you studied those two stories,” Bill broke in, “it would be an education for you. In the first place, we’re not handing out free advertising to Wayne’s Department store. Denny might like it, until the other stores started squawking, but I don’t. You don’t have the sheriff’s initials or Wilson’s first name. You know ‘night before last’ is not the *Tribune’s* style on dates, and you’re too wordy about the location. And how’d you think your friend, Captain Travers, would like the hint about ‘perhaps smuggled in?’”

Cherry, her cheeks blazing and tears dangerously near the surface, turned to leave.

She’d forgotten the waiting individual beyond the frosted-glass door who’d come in, so she bumped blindly into Myra Mason.

“Whoops!” the blonde girl said brightly. “Sorry I’m in the way.”

“Oh, I didn’t see you—pardon,” Cherry mumbled. “Is there anything I can do for you?”

Myra unclasped the jeweled top of a smart grey suede purse, which matched her high-heeled pumps and tiny hat. “I’ve brought the announcement of the Dramatic Club’s beach picnic. It’s to be at my house tomorrow afternoon and evening, and it just has to go in this afternoon’s paper.”

“It’s too late for the society desk,” Cherry told her, “but perhaps we could persuade Bill to include it on the city page——”

She led the way back to the news room, and introduced her brother to the beautiful girl. “This is Myra Mason, Bill,” she explained. “She’s a newcomer at Lake Haven High.”

Bill, still elated at his joke on his young sister, stood and bowed in his most gracious manner. “This is a treat I’ve been looking forward to,” he told Myra. “I’ve heard so much about the marvelous Miss Mason who has come to restore the Dillon mansion to its rightful leadership in Lake Haven society.”

Myra responded to the flattery by smirking and saying, “I’ll need your help, then. I’m having the Dramatic Club for a beach party tomorrow afternoon and evening. If you could manage to get this on the society page, I’d be ever so grateful. And—Mr. Hudson, I’d love to have *you* come as my very special guest.”

Cherry was completely infuriated as Bill rose to the bait. “It’s way after the deadline, but perhaps I can wheedle the printer into slipping it onto Miss Lippincott’s page.”

“And you’ll come tomorrow afternoon? You may find our high-school fun

a little unsophisticated, but we'll do our best to make it pleasant.”

Bill, Cherry decided, was a complete ninny. To fall for such an obvious line!

“Thanks, I'll come,” Bill accepted, smiling.

“May I give you a lift to school?” Myra turned to Cherry. “We're going to have to hurry, I'm afraid.”

“Thanks.”

Bill, suddenly a little ashamed of the shabby trick he'd played on his sister on the “fur angle” of the accident story, said, “And thanks, Cherry, for your help. I do appreciate the fact that it was your idea to investigate the pelts. Sheriff Doty told me that when I checked Wilson's tip——”

Cherry slammed the outside door with a little more violence than was absolutely necessary to close it.

CHAPTER VI

The Cutter's Visit

Cherry, still disconsolate over her ruined scoop, impulsively decided to ask Win to stay all night with her. "M' motive is purely selfish," she confessed, as the girls left school, "I need cheering, and I need it badly."

"We'll stop to ask mother. I'm sure she'll let me come, since it is Friday, and no school tomorrow."

Mrs. Travers gave her consent readily, and when Mandy heard the young voices in the hall, she called, "Miz' Winifred! Don't you dare go neah my kitchen! Just got that chocolate cake frosted about fifteen minutes ago, and it's for your dinnah tonight!"

"But I won't be home for dinner, Mandy," Win exclaimed, as she motioned to Cherry to follow. "Besides, Cherry's here, and I know for a fact that she didn't have a bite of lunch."

"Why, honey! You *do* look a little peaked!" The colored cook shook her head ominously at Cherry, when she reached the kitchen. "Now, you just sit right down here while I fix you a little snack. You'd better have a sandwich from that cold roast beef, and here's some fresh bread and a glass of cold milk ____"

Winifred refused a similar lunch, but did look longingly at the triple-layer cake which graced the center of the kitchen table.

"I'll tell you what, Cherry," she suggested, as her friend finished the last swallow of milk, "let's go for a long hike along the beach. Maybe Mandy'll relent and give us a couple of hunks of cake to take along——"

Cherry giggled. "Grand idea! I'll just go call Mrs. Morrow to tell her you're coming home to dinner with me, and to stay all night. Since you aren't going to be here, perhaps you can get Mandy to cut that perfectly luscious-looking cake."

Mandy chuckled richly as she reached for the cake-knife. "I swear to goodness, you girls knew all along that Mandy couldn't help herself when you two got to coaxin'."

It was fun to walk along the white sands of the shore, and scuff a trail on the smoothly-washed surface. The lake breezes and the brisk exercise removed the last trace of Cherry's anger with her brother. She'd described the humiliating experience in detail, and had just finished telling of Myra's inviting Bill to the beach party. "What's more," she said, "I'll bet she heard every word of Bill's lecture to me on what was wrong with the lead I wrote. And loved it. She was just too sweet all the way back to school."

"Bill will probably be bored silly at our Dramatic Club picnic," Winifred pointed out, sensibly. "Of course, it will be fun to have it on the Dillon private beach. I've never been in that house, and it's always seemed so grand and mysterious, that it will be exciting really to see it."

"I do hope he's so bored he falls in the lake. But Myra was making such a fuss over his coming that he'll just be sap enough to think she's wonderful," Cherry declared.

Winifred, amused, said, "Well, we'll just have to wait until tomorrow. Hope it's as grand as it is today."

"Some day," Cherry answered dreamily, watching one of the grey fishing tugs, accompanied by dozens of hungry gulls, returning to harbor, "I'll get a really grand scoop. One important enough for the I. P. A. And just at this moment, I'm hoping it's one that Bill will have overlooked."

Winifred smiled, thoughtfully, and waited until they'd passed three dunes in silence before she said, "You might be able to, at that."

Cherry eagerly studied her friend's face. "You say that as if you had something in mind. What is it, Win?"

"Well, you know how relieved Dad was to find that those furs were from South America?"

"Sure."

"He was that relieved, I believe, because he thinks that a ring of smugglers is working in Michigan, and they might possibly be using Lake Haven as a port of entry. That's why he considered it so important to find that the furs were South American, and not Canadian or English or Danish."

"Honestly?"

Winifred nodded.

"But what else is being smuggled?" Cherry demanded. "I don't think anyone has heard about this! What a story it would be if your father were able to discover and capture them!"

"Please don't say a word about it," Winifred pled, "because I'm not supposed to know a thing about it. I just heard Dad's end of a couple of

important telephone calls, several weeks ago. They were from Washington, D. C., I know, and he mentioned furs, and jewels, and—and drugs.”

“Gee—what a story!” Cherry shook her head. “But I know it’s too big for me. I muffed this fur business so badly today, that I don’t suppose I should dream of trying again.”

Win shrugged slim shoulders. “It won’t hurt for us to keep our eyes open. I know Dad is rather badly worried.”

The sun was setting, a fiery ball of flame beyond the most distant breakers, when the two girls mounted the wooden steps leading from the beach below “Twin Anchors.”

“Only ten minutes until dinner time, and I’m starving, in spite of Mandy’s lunch and that marvelous cake,” Cherry confessed.

“After all, it has been a couple of hours and about six miles ago since we ate. I’m hungry, too.”

Bill made an enthusiastic attempt to be entertaining at dinner. Cherry knew he was trying to make amends, and she made no further reference to the accident story. Just as dessert was being served, Mr. Hudson turned to Win and said, “You and your father were interested in that accident story, weren’t you?”

“Not directly,” Win replied, “but Dad was relieved, I know, to find out the pelts came from South America.”

“We’ve been expecting,” the gray-haired man continued, “to be able to get some information from the driver when he regained consciousness. Doctor Knowles telephoned this afternoon about four, and said the fellow was conscious. I went over with Sheriff Doty, when he went to question him. And it turns out that he’s suffering amnesia—you know, can’t remember his name or anything leading up to the accident. Memory a complete blank.”

“I’ll bet he’s faking,” Bill declared. “I’ll bet he just doesn’t want to remember where he picked up that load.”

“Say, Win,” Denny said, unexpectedly. “What was the Coast Guard cutter doing at Lake Haven this afternoon? I went out for a little sail about three, and it was just leaving harbor.”

“Why, I can’t imagine!” It was plain that the dark-haired girl was puzzled. “Mother didn’t say a word about it!”

CHAPTER VII

The Beach Picnic

The first grey, gloomy day of fall greeted the girls the next morning, when they woke up in the white bunk beds in Cherry's charming room. Through the wide window they could see the tall breakers, far out on the smoke-colored, dark water.

"This," Win announced sleepily, "wasn't the happiest choice of Saturdays for the Dramatic Club's annual beach party."

"The only bright spot I can see from this point is that Miss Mason's first entertainment in the Dillon mansion may be a monumental flop." Cherry leaned on one elbow and stared at the crashing seas below. "Even the lake is in one of her sullen moods today. Hateful."

"It's trite but true," Win agreed, as she climbed agilely down the white ladder, "that Lake Michigan is never twice alike, even in the memory of the oldest inhabitants, or something."

"What shall we do this morning?" Cherry shouted, above the noise of Win's shower in the adjoining bath. "It's too nasty to think of outdoor activities."

In a moment, Win answered: "I've been toying with the idea of getting yarn to knit a sweater, against the long winter evenings. Wouldst like to shop with me?"

"Maybe I'll do one, too—if you'll show me how."

"It'll be fun," Win promised.

The breakfast passed with a gay discussion of the various weights and qualities of yarns, and a decision on a variegated blue-and-white for the color of Cherry's first attempt. Mrs. Morrow promised her assistance, and the two girls set off on their shopping expedition. "I'll have a roaring big fire in the living room for you, when you come back," she offered, "and hot muffins for

lunch.”

The *Tribune* was published at noon on Saturdays, so the employees could have the afternoon off. The male Hudsons joined the girls for luncheon. Bill offered gallantly to escort both Cherry and Win to the picnic—it was a “no-date” affair—but Cherry suggested that Myra might persuade Bill to stay later than she wished the others to remain. Her brother blushed, Denny added his bit by pointing out that Cherry “certainly scored one that time,” and Win hastily sought peace by saying that she and Cherry were on the committee, and would have to go early to butter sandwiches.

Surprisingly, the picnic turned out to be fun.

The committee girls were duly impressed with the baronial dimensions and decorations of the ancient house. The huge kitchen and pantries, modernized by Mr. Mason, were especially overwhelming in spotless white enamel and metal. There was really very little for the committee to do, since white-coated men servants took charge of the baskets, as soon as the girl club members arrived.

Myra, in a trim blue woolen sports suit, greeted the guests in the circular reception hall, and sent the girls to her suite of rooms in the right wing of the second story. “Looks like a Hollywood set,” Win murmured to Cherry, as they entered the creamy-white upstairs living room. Everything, including the clipped carpet and the satin chaise longue, was of the same delicate shade. The dressing-room and bath beyond was lined with mirrors, and the bedroom, with quilted-satin twin beds, faced a gorgeous view of the lake.

“Have you ever heard,” Cherry inquired curiously, “where Mr. Mason made all this money?”

Win shook her head. “I gather he is sort of retired now—just looks after his investments.”

“No wonder Myra puts on airs,” Cherry remarked, in a charitable tone. “It would be difficult not to, in a setting like this.”

As soon as the boys, faculty advisers, and special guests had arrived, Myra pulled on a jaunty little fur coat, and led the way across the terrace and down to the beach. Two servants, in heavy blue uniforms, were tending the enormous fire. “I’ll have to confess,” she told the group nearest her, “that this is my very first entertaining on the beach, so I’m probably doing it incorrectly.”

The fire was blazing in the shelter of a break in the cliff, and a variety of chairs, deep pillows and blankets had been arranged in a half-circle around it. A table, also sheltered by the cliff, was arranged for buffet serving. “And I thought we’d better eat rather early, because I’m afraid it’s going to be dark soon.”

With Bill, the blonde hostess led the suddenly shy group past the table. In

addition to the platters of sandwiches, huge pots of baked beans and the variety of cakes furnished by the committee, Myra had provided hot tomato juice and assorted canapes, individual molds of salad, olives, pickles and other relishes, and a choice of steaming hot desserts. "Such a grand scale affair," Cherry heard one of the teachers remark. "It doesn't seem much like our usual school picnics."

Although the air was nippy, the hot food and the blazing fire made the party a success. Just as the guests finished, Myra made an announcement: "Since it was so cold, I knew we couldn't continue with our plans for stunts and songs on the beach after supper, so I planned a surprise. We'll go back to the ballroom, if you'd all like, and I've asked a small orchestra of five pieces to play for dancing——"

"Say!" a boy on the outer fringe of the group shouted, "there's a boat in distress off to the right!"

Winifred leaped to her feet. It was still light enough to see the small fishing tug, listing badly. "I've got to get down to the station," she said to Cherry. "The lookout won't be able to see it around the curve in the beach, and it doesn't look as if it were a big enough boat to carry a radio——"

Myra's face, under the carefully applied makeup, had gone white. She turned and spoke to the two men servants.

"We'll be back," Cherry shouted, as she trailed Win across the sands. "I'm going with Win to report it at the Coast Guard station."

"Oh, don't bother! I'll send——" Myra shouted, but the roar of the breakers and the wind drowned her voice. She turned, nodded abruptly to the uniformed servants, and they raced across the sands to the private pier and boat house on the Mason's stretch of beach.

"What are you doing?" Bill demanded.

"Sending out help in the motor launch," Myra answered.

"But they'll just get in trouble, too, in a light boat," the boy objected. "I'll go stop them! The Coast Guard will get to the tug in plenty of time."

Myra's face hardened, her voice deepened. "You'll not stop them. It's a big launch and they're experienced sailors. They'll have no trouble, and if the men in the tug are in danger, they can reach them in half the time it would take the Coast Guard."

As she spoke, the sound of the motors was carried to them, and the doors of the boat house were flung open. A wickedly-powerful launch plowed through the rough waves breaking beyond the pier. It was darker, now, but Bill could see well enough to discern the streamlined craft. He whistled softly at the terrific speed and power exhibited by the Mason's boat. "I guess you're right," he agreed. "That boat could outdistance anything the local Coast Guard station has, without a head start."

It was no longer possible to distinguish the shape of the boat in the dark waves.

Myra shivered expressively. “There’s nothing else we can do now, to help them. Shall we go in and dance?”

It had taken Cherry and Win less than ten minutes to reach the Coast Guard station in the Gas Gull. “Probably should have telephoned,” Win said, “but I was afraid it would be pretty hard for the men to get the position of the boat. I think I’ll be able to tell them fairly clearly.”

Captain Travers was in the lookout tower, when the girls hurried across the sands with their message. He barked swift orders into the station telephone, and seconds later, the girls could see the lifeboat crew, dressed in their oilskins, hip boots, life jackets and sou’westers, race down the steps from the station to the boathouse below.

The keen-eyed captain watched through his marine glasses. The twenty-five foot surfboat, cradled on a four-wheel truck, was rushed over the sand to the bridge across the channel. “Good!” Captain Travers approved. “They got my orders. Save several minutes by launching on the north side——”

“We can’t watch, much longer, from here,” Cherry said. “They’ll be around the curve.”

Captain Travers buckled his oilskin, and prepared to leave the tower. “I’m going out on the end of the pier,” he told the watch.

Win wisely refrained from asking permission to follow, but whispered, “Cherry, I’ve a slicker and an old rain cape in the car. Let’s follow Dad.”

When Cherry and Win caught up with the Captain, breathless with running, they could scarcely see through the tall and vicious breakers lashing at the end of the pier. The spray bit at their faces and the wind whipped their inadequate wraps.

After a moment, however, their eyes found the badly-listing fishing tug. Racing toward it was a sleek power boat!

“The fools!” Captain Travers shouted above the roar of the water. “Now we’ll have two crews to rescue!”

CHAPTER VIII

Coast Guard in Action

The lifeboat crew was ready to launch now; the girls and the Captain could see the skipper's expressive gestures as he ordered the boat wagon run down into the surf. Then the king pin on which the front wheels pivot, was withdrawn; the wheels removed. Down the skidway formed by lowering the front of the truck the boat slid into the water. Pausing for the wash of a huge breaker to roll high on the beach, the men then raced in water up to their hips, pulling the boat by the gunwales.

With a mighty leap—the result of great strength and long hours of practice—the crew was aboard, each at his station.

It was thrilling to watch. Shooting straight into the next roller with short, choppy fisherman's strokes, the crew forced the boat ahead. The craft would disappear, and then a moment of vision would be granted the watchers. Teamwork, timing, precision met the approval of a smile on Captain Travers' face.

Dusk soon completely obscured their view, and they turned back from the cold, water-swept pier. Above them, now, the light house was sending out its encouraging beams.

On the north side of the pier, the surfmen were making the beach bright with gaslights burning from acetylene tanks. Trained for emergency, each man knew his duty.

Cherry and Win trailed Captain Travers as he crossed the narrow drawbridge over the channel.

In spite of the rough seas, the anxious group on the beach had very little time to wait.

The lifeboat returned with two frightened, bedraggled fishermen. The skipper reported that the tug's motor had failed and it was necessary to

abandon the boat. It had been anchored, and would be brought ashore in calmer seas. The motor launch Captain Travers had seen was able to return to the Dillon boat house under its own power, although the crew hadn't seen it, or its lights, until they'd completed the rescue and had turned back toward shore.

"We'd better go back to the party," Win said. "Everyone will be worried until they hear the news."

Captain Travers was leading the rescued men back to the station for dry clothing and food; the surfmen were drawing the lifeboat out of the water and replacing it on the boat wagon, by the light of flares.

Cherry nodded in agreement, shrugged out of the dripping raincape as soon as they reached the car.

The party was in full swing when the girls returned, but the dance floor was instantly deserted when the girls stepped through the door. Myra and Bill were the first to reach them. "Was the Coast Guard able to get to the boat and save those poor men?" the blonde girl demanded.

Cherry nodded and smiled. "It was thrilling to watch. First time I ever saw the lifeboat crew in action."

"My men tried hard, but the seas were too rough for them to make a contact. They saw the Coast Guard lifeboat coming, so they turned around and came back."

"Was that *your* boat?" Win asked curiously. "Dad thought for a little while there'd be two crews to rescue."

Myra smiled, a little superiorly. "No danger of that. It's a very fine boat, and the two men I sent are excellent sailors. They've been with Dad for years."

Now that the rescue had been completed so successfully, the restraint that had fallen on the group since that moment on the beach when the tug was sighted, disappeared, and the party was one of the gayest and most hilarious that the old Dillon mansion had ever seen. Myra had planned a series of feature dances, and the confetti, horns and favors which were brought out later in the evening added to the fun.

Myra was a generous and gracious hostess.

The chaperones had been making pointed remarks and finally stopped the orchestra, before the party ended. High school social affairs, confined to Saturday nights, were supposed to stop at eleven, but it was almost midnight before all farewells were said.

Bill, to his intense embarrassment, found that his ancient car had failed him. He was forced to beg a lift from Win. "What's wrong with Miranda?" Cherry asked.

"Don't know," Bill answered, shortly. "Have to send a mechanic after her in the morning, I suppose."

Win and Cherry, keyed up by the excitement of the rescue and the gaiety of

the party, chattered volubly all the way home. They discussed the Mason's mysterious wealth; the beautiful furnishings in the old mansion; Myra's hospitality. They almost reached Twin Anchors before the girls noticed Bill's silence.

"Do you suppose," Cherry demanded, "that it's chagrin over Miranda's stubborn behavior—or do you believe that my brother has fallen under the spell of the blonde siren?"

Win chuckled, but Bill's response was unexpected. "Oh, rot! I don't expect you to believe me, but I was thinking about something entirely different."

And he slammed the roadster's door, and strode off to the house without waiting for his sister or thanking Win for the ride.

CHAPTER IX

Cherry's Feature Story

Sunday was a leisurely day at "Twin Anchors." The family usually gathered around the breakfast table for a huge meal, late, just in time to go to church.

"Too bad," Denny began, when Cherry came in, "that the Coast Guard was able to rescue only two unimportant fishermen. I understand you were right in the thick of it, during all the exciting action. If it had been a missing millionaire, for instance, think how you'd have been headlined in all the papers for your description of the breathless rescue!"

Cherry belied her red hair, and calmly sipped her orange juice.

"I can just imagine the effect," Bill added, dreamily. "It would be something like this: 'COAST GUARD RESCUES JOHN D. MONEYPENNY—by Cherry Hudson. John D. Money Penny, who will be sixty-five on his next birthday, fabulously wealthy sportsman and philanthropist, was rescued Saturday evening from a watery grave in Davy Jones' locker in Lake Michigan, just north of Lake Haven, when the gallant lads of the local Coast Guard Station hurried to the rescue in their twenty-five foot cedar lifeboat just in the nick of time—'"

"If," Cherry broke in, with admirable calm, "I had a grapefruit or a custard pie handy, it would be spread over your unpleasant features in just one-half second."

Mr. Hudson lifted quizzical eyes from the morning Chicago paper. "This is no sort of talk for Sunday, children. As for your destructive criticisms of Cherry's work, Bill, I suggest that you loan her your books from the school of journalism. She's honestly and sincerely interested in becoming a newspaper writer, and I think you could be of some assistance."

Cherry looked smug, and was glad she'd controlled her quick temper as

well as she had.

Bill grinned engagingly, as he could in a good mood, and said, "At that, young sister, I'll have to give you credit for doing an excellent bit of sleuthing in that fur business. Now, if you'll just back up your ambitions with a little study——"

"Anything you say, Bill," she answered sweetly. "Wouldn't you like to give me some simple assignments, so I can understand what you want?"

"Such loving understanding," Denny murmured, as he finished the last slice of toast. "A very nice mood, indeed, for us all to go off to church. However, may I point out that the last one ready to take off in the family equipage for our Sunday worship is a niggah baby?"

Cherry was studying at the white desk in her room late that afternoon, when Bill staggered in under a load of books, papers and note-books. "I thought," he announced, "that you might like to run through my college education. Where shall I put these?"

"Wow! That residue from just four years?"

"That's right." With exaggerated movements, Bill managed to reach the bed in time to dump his burden. "And when you absorb this, my dear, you'll be able to rip off spectacular stories, worthy of the I. P. A., in less than two minutes."

"Too bad you didn't absorb it, then," Cherry said, innocently.

"See here, young lady, I'm doing you a vast favor by letting you see the inside workings of a master mind."

"I'm truly grateful, Bill. As soon as I finish my math assignment, and the French reading lesson, I'll go into it."

"Don't lose or destroy any of it," Bill admonished, "because it's extremely valuable. When I become famous, some of those little bitsy papers may bring a fortune."

Cherry shook her head, and said in an awed tone, "I do appreciate my overwhelming opportunity and huge responsibility. Since I haven't a treasure chest in which to lock them when I'm not present, I shall put them in the most revered spot of the room. I think, if I crowd my rag dolls and other mementoes of my extreme youth, I may be able to squeeze some of this junk onto the toy shelf of my bookcase."

With a pained expression, Bill left the room.

In spite of her kidding, Cherry did appreciate Bill's following her father's suggestion, and she read avidly in the books until much later than her usual bedtime hour. The chapters on "feature writing" in a couple of the text-books particularly attracted her attention. "It said that a feature story existed within a hundred feet of you, no matter where you happened to be," she told herself, after she'd sorted the books and placed them in her bookshelves, "and Lake

Haven must be chock-full of them, if you just had the vision and the ideas _____”

It was late when she finally managed to drop to sleep, but she'd been visited by no great inspiration.

Just before journalism class, the following day, Cherry had her feature story hunch. She'd seen Madame Mathilde Carelle at church the preceding morning; the great artist had told her father she had returned to Lake Haven from her city home in Chicago for a few days, in order to close her summer residence for the season.

Madame Carelle was the most famous of all the painters who made Lake Haven their summer art colony headquarters. She'd be grand to interview. Cherry knew her rather well, and had treasured her little hand-decorated Christmas cards for several years. That was it! She'd get a feature story about Madame Carelle's very famous and original greeting cards!

Cherry was so thrilled with the idea that she asked and got permission to be excused from journalism class to get the story. Madame Carelle had said she planned to return to Chicago Monday evening. She'd telephone for the appointment at noon, go out to "Carelle Towers" at one, and still get back in time for the last class.

Her plans worked to perfection, and the white-haired artist greeted Cherry warmly. "My dear child, it's simply amazing to me that you're old enough to be interested in the Hudson family pursuit of writing. It's just been no time—I can remember your lovely mother when she wasn't a day older than you—Ah!" she broke off, sighing. "It is the penalty one pays, I expect—this becoming so attached to a spot that one returns to it, summer after summer, for forty years!"

Cherry smiled, and glanced at the notes on questions she wanted to ask. She was trying, as the text-book had said, not to be too obvious in her note-taking. She wouldn't attempt to do as the trained reporters did, and take no notes at all.

"How many years have you sent your delightful Christmas cards?" she began, and to her delight, Madame Carelle responded in crisp, quotable sentences. She volunteered a number of fascinating ideas and information, and Cherry's pencil flew over the paper. She talked for more than an hour, and then insisted that Cherry stay for tea. With a regretful thought for the unexcused absence from her last class, Cherry accepted. It was too great an opportunity to miss—having tea with this gracious celebrity. . . .

Meanwhile, Lake Haven High was experiencing the most exciting afternoon in its history.

The first inkling of important events was when Mr. Linton, the principal,

burst into journalism class and asked for Cherry Hudson. The astonished teacher told him that Cherry had gone off to interview Madame Carelle, who was in Lake Haven for the day.

“What a great pity!” Mr. Linton whispered to the instructor at the door.

The class members were goggle-eyed with curiosity at this break in routine. “What’s so important?” Myra Mason demanded of Vic Starzinger, the football captain, who sat near her in journalism class. “Do you suppose Cherry’s in some sort of jam? I’ve never seen Mr. Linton so flustered.”

Vic shrugged.

The principal scurried back into the hall, and hurried to his office, without explaining further to the teacher.

“Call Bill Hudson,” he ordered his secretary, “and tell him to waste no time in getting here.”

For several years, all the schools in the state had received the very great benefit of a wealthy automobile manufacturer’s philanthropy. Adolph Pickert, who’d assembled a vast fortune through his development and promotion of the popular Pickert Motors, had decided to donate a considerable slice of his money to the state schools for the betterment of health in children. His endowments included several nurses and a doctor for each county, and their work in prevention of disease had attracted international attention during the five years the plan had been in operation.

And today, in the company of Governor Nathan, Adolph Pickert had come for a surprise inspection and visit at the Lake Haven school health office!

So far as Mr. Linton knew, the philanthropist never had visited other schools since the inception of the plan. He was confident that the Lake Haven nurse, and the county doctor, who’d been summoned from one of the rural schools for the conference, would make a good showing. On the other hand, it had seemed extremely necessary to give this trip the proper publicity. And so fitting, if Cherry Hudson could have been found, to have a student cover the story!

Bill Hudson, in the ancient and noisy motor which was his “press car,” drove over to the school in a nasty temper. It was only half an hour to the deadline. Linton couldn’t possibly have anything *that* important at the school, and besides, if he did, why couldn’t he use Cherry?

Fortunately, Linton’s secretary volunteered the news. “Governor Nathan and Mr. Pickert are down in the health office now, with Mr. Linton,” the bespectacled girl in the office told him.

“Do me one more favor, will you?” Bill asked in his most wheedling tone. “Call the *Tribune* office for me and tell them to hold the paper until three o’clock, if they have to——”

He raced out, then, on the trail of the biggest story of the season.

Adolph Pickert was in a genial mood, and talked at length to the eager young reporter. He expressed himself as delighted with his health experiment as shown in the Lake Haven records, and discussed financial and political questions with freedom. Governor Nathan added his bit to the formation of good “copy,” and the school principal beamed happily at everyone.

The county’s Pickert physician arrived, and Bill, with a swift glance at his watch, decided this was an opportune moment to get back to the office and write his big story. It was after two, but there’d still be time to make the mails if the presses could start rolling at three—

“I’m glad you could come, Bill,” Mr. Linton told him, as the young reporter left. “Sorry Cherry wasn’t here. It would have been a good idea for a student to get the story, even if it weren’t, perhaps, as professional and polished as yours will be.”

“Where is she?” Bill asked, in the most pleasant tone he could command, at the moment.

“She was excused from journalism class to get a feature story, I believe.”

Bill grinned, thanked the principal for calling him, and hurried away to his roadster.

So Cherry had gone out to seek a silly feature, while the opportunity for the interview of a lifetime slipped through her fingers!

CHAPTER X

Win's Startling News

School was just out, when Cherry returned from her pleasant afternoon with Madame Carelle.

Myra, leaving with the football captain to take him over to the practice field in her car, chuckled in greeting the auburn-haired girl. "You missed the most excitement Lake Haven high school ever had in one afternoon."

"Really?"

"Yes. The Governor and Adolph Pickert came to inspect the health project. Mr. Linton tried to find you, and I guess he called Bill when you weren't here."

Stricken, Cherry was silent a moment before murmuring, "Well, I'm glad the *Tribune* is going to have the story."

"Bill probably got a marvelous interview. Come along, Vic. I don't want the coach scolding me again for making you late to practice."

"Tough luck, Cherry," the handsome boy at Myra's side said, sympathetically. "Chance like that doesn't come very often."

Cherry hurried on to find Winifred, and see if her friend could tell her more details of the unexpected visit of the celebrities.

She found Winifred in the school library. "I was just waiting for you," her friend told her, as she closed the new *Scholastic* and returned it to its shelf on the magazine rack. "You certainly are running in bad luck."

"It must be all over school that I muffed the story," Cherry said, a little bitterly. "Myra greeted me on the steps with it."

"It couldn't be helped. Besides, you must have had a good talk with Madame Carelle, to have taken all this time." Her tone was consoling.

"Yes, I did. Stayed for tea. But what does that matter now? And Bill will have another I. P. A. story to his credit, to gloat over."

“Come on. Let’s go for a long ride along the North Shore drive. Maybe we’ll both feel better.”

“Why?” Cherry asked quickly. “Have you been running in bad luck, too?”

Winifred smiled. “That can wait. I’ll tell you later.”

As the two girls left the parking lane in Winifred’s car, Cherry said a little sheepishly, “Perhaps we’d better stop at the *Tribune* office. The least I can do is congratulate Bill.”

Winifred nodded her approval of the idea. “Besides, the paper must be out by now. I’d be interested in knowing how Mr. Pickert reacted to Lake Haven High, and just how much Bill was able to learn from the Governor.”

The paper was still damp with ink, and Bill was just distributing the day’s issue to the staff members when the girls came in. “Sorry I wasn’t at school, Bill,” Cherry said. “It was a shame that you had to leave the *Tribune* office just before the deadline.”

“Oh, that was all right.” Bill was at his genial best. “It was a swell opportunity. Want to read the story?” He extended copies of the paper, with the bannered and by-lined account of his interview splashed on the front page. Fortunately, the *Tribune*’s meager morgue had yielded mats of photographs of both Governor Nathan and the philanthropist.

“Have you written your International Press Association story yet?” Cherry asked. It was difficult to suppress the envy in her voice.

“Just got it off. Didn’t change ours much—just condensed it a little.”

Both girls read the interview, and then praised Bill for his work. “The amazing thing, to me,” Winifred confessed, “is how you’re able to write coherently under such terrific pressure. You must have dashed most of this off after the deadline.”

Bill was becoming more and more smug and self-satisfied under this admiration. “Oh, it’s not such a trick. Just comes with experience. Say, how’d you like to have me treat you to a malted, by way of celebration?”

Cherry winked at Winifred. “Sounds grand. Of course, I’ve had tea, but I’ll join you in something light, like a chocolate-marshmallow-nut sundae.”

Bill monopolized the conversation, while they sat in a booth in the corner drug store. He expressed his opinions of the appearance and personalities of the two famous visitors of the afternoon; repeated most of the information that had been included in his newspaper story; and expanded visibly when some of his acquaintances stopped to express approval.

“Let’s get out of here,” Cherry whispered. “I can’t stand much more of this.”

The girls excused themselves, after thanking Bill for the treat, and went for their ride.

Silently, for several miles, they sped along the beautiful shores of the lake.

Finally, Cherry said, “Winifred, I’m so grateful that I have your shoulder to cry upon. You’re the only one I dare confide my hopes and ambitions in—and lately, they’re just turning out to be disappointments.”

Winifred smiled affectionately at her friend. “I’m still hoping that our two expectations will be the same.”

A little puzzled, Cherry waited for the dark-haired girl to continue.

“You remember—I said I hoped we’d be able to discover the smugglers that have been working on the Great Lakes? It would be such a feather in Dad’s cap—and it certainly would be for the *Tribune*.”

“Oh, that!” Cherry sighed, hopelessly. “It would be wonderful. But what chance have a couple of girls against a ring of organized crooks?”

“I don’t know,” Winifred answered. “Guess we’d better be getting back.”

After she’d turned Gas Gull around, and they were once more headed for Lake Haven, she repeated, “I don’t know what we could do about it. But I do wish we could manage something.”

“Has anything new developed?”

Winifred nodded. “You remember Denny’s asking about the cutter’s visit last Friday afternoon?”

“Yes, of course.”

“I asked about it at the station, and no one would say a word. Dad hasn’t been himself since—so glum and silent. Well, this morning, I forgot some books and went back to get them. Dad and Mother were talking about his superior’s visit on the cutter. He’s pretty sure that the smugglers are using Dad’s strip of coast. And if the ring isn’t exposed within a few weeks, Dad is likely to be demoted!”

“No!” Cherry’s cry was stricken.

“It would break his heart,” Win replied. “You know the great pride he’s taken in Lake Haven’s excellent record. If the command is to be taken away from him—I—I don’t know what will happen!”

CHAPTER XI

Denny Suggests a Clue

Saturday was a glorious day, and Cherry sighed when she glanced at the early morning blue of the lake and remembered that she'd promised to help Miss Lippincott at the *Tribune* office. "If it were anything but gathering personals over the telephone, I wouldn't mind. But it's a dull way to spend one of the very last Indian summer days—especially a Saturday," she told herself.

Since the *Tribune* went to press at noon on Saturdays, the morning hours were particularly busy. Before she had time to realize it, Cherry found that the eleven o'clock deadline had been reached, and her work was finished.

Denny came in, beaming as the result of a successful morning at selling ads. "Say, Cherry," he stopped his sister, as she finished dusting Miss Lippincott's desk, "did you and Win have anything planned for the rest of the day?"

"Not a thing, since we couldn't go up to Pentwater for the football game."

"How'd you like to go for one last sail in *The Champ* before she goes into dry-dock for the winter?"

Cherry's face was brilliant with her delight. "Oh, Denny! Do you mean it? What a gorgeous day for it!"

"Sure, I mean it. A couple of the boys are going to help me put her on Smithson's boat wagon tomorrow, and she's out of water until next season."

"Oh, I'll call Win right away—how soon can we go?"

"Now, if you want to. Ask Mrs. Morrow to put up some sandwiches for us, and we'll take off as soon as we can change our clothes."

Win was delighted with the invitation, and less than an hour later the trio was on board *The Champ*, tacking round the end of the pier.

The Champ was one of the finest small sloops in the Lake Haven harbor. It was a swift, expensive knockabout, polished and fine, which Denny had

managed to pick up at a rare bargain, two summers before. A wealthy Chicago lad, bored with sailing and in need of a little ready cash, had offered the boat. Denny, who'd worked on the *Tribune* only a few weeks at the time, had managed to meet the price.

Denny ordered Win to take the tiller and head upshore, while he and Cherry ran up one of the fancy, imported spinnakers that had come with the boat. Cherry, in navy blue slacks and a striped basque sweater, stepped surely and quickly in her rubber-soled sneakers, as Denny gave the commands.

There was a steady breeze, and soon Denny expressed himself as pleased with the stiffening sails and sure motion of the boat. "Sailing is better than anything," Cherry declared, as she joined Win on the upholstered seat. "It's better than riding or flying or swimming." The sweet lake breeze lifted her bright curls into a halo around her head. Win smiled in agreement, and Denny relaxed happily against the tiny cabin.

"I'm hungry," he announced. "How about our sandwiches?"

Cherry scrambled down into the cabin and returned with the picnic basket. There were ham sandwiches and egg-and-olive sandwiches; brightly polished apples and crisp cookies, and a thermos of steaming hot coffee. Denny relieved Win at the tiller, bracing his body against it as he ate.

"I've never seen the coast-line so brilliant," Win remarked. The foliage and trees on the high dunes were an incredible mass of color against the white beaches and the faultless blue of sky and lake.

"October has been neglected as a sailing month," Denny contributed. "It's a shame to put *The Champ* away, but it's just about the last clear weather we can dare depend on."

"Not many boats out. Just a few of the fishing tugs."

"Things are likely to be quiet from now on at the Coast Guard station," Win agreed. "There'll be eight or ten more of the big foreign boats in, before the end of the month, and perhaps a dozen coal freighters."

"Well—guess we'll have to change our minds," Cherry remarked, as they rounded another cove. "There's a strange power boat. Ever see it before?"

Neither of her companions knew the sleek craft, and Cherry and Win exchanged questioning glances. Could this possibly be one of the smugglers' boats?

"Gosh, I believe they're in trouble—" Denny leaned on the tiller, and the responsive sloop silently sped toward shore.

A fellow in white slacks and a blue yachting jacket climbed to the cabin of the large launch. He formed a megaphone with his hands and shouted across the stretch of water. "Motor's fouled. Could you give us a tow to Lake Haven?"

"O. K.!" Denny yelled.

"I don't think the wind will hold," Win objected. "Perhaps we'd better find out what's wrong, then whip back and get the Coast Guard to come out for them."

"Maybe you're right," Denny agreed, frowning. "If the wind goes clear down, then we'd both be out of luck. Well, maybe it's just something simple wrong with the engine."

They were closer now, and could make out the silver letters *Mary Ann* on the white prow. A woman and a little girl were watching their approach.

"What's wrong?" Denny asked, as he gave the sail a whiff of wind, and brought *The Champ* expertly alongside the larger craft.

The man laughed, ruefully. "My wife and daughter and I have been planning this trip for five years. We're on our way to Miami. Left Fox Point this morning, early. Going across the Lake to Chicago, down the Illinois river, and then on down the Mississippi to the Gulf."

Denny whistled. "Aren't you starting a little late in the season?"

"Well, we thought we could make it. But I guess I tried for too much speed at first. Burned out something in the engine. Probably will be laid up for several days in Lake Haven, now."

The woman and the little girl had added nothing to the man's explanatory remarks. Win and Cherry surmised that this trip had been more the enthusiastic whim of the captain than the crew.

"My father is Captain Travers at the Coast Guard station," Win volunteered. "We're afraid the wind might go down, and if we attempted to tow you, both of us might be out of luck. I suggest that we race down to the harbor—it's only a couple of miles—and send a tow boat from the station. You'll still get in before dark."

The skipper of the motor launch agreed, and Denny shoved the tiller over and crawled out into the wind. It was slower going, and Cherry went down into the cabin to start the small battery radio set. "Thought I might pick up some music or news flashes," she explained.

The pleasant dance music was interrupted by an excited voice. "Washington, D. C.—A reliable authority, close to the secret service and the Coast Guard, confirmed the rumor that a vast ring of smugglers is operating in the Great Lakes region. A notorious jewel fence was arrested in Chicago today, and it is expected that further confirmation will be forthcoming from the federal officers. For further details, see your local newspapers."

"Well," Denny remarked, "that's interesting, wonder if any of their boats land at Lake Haven."

Cherry chuckled. "You know, when I first saw that launch just now, almost out-of-sight in that cove, I thought it looked like a smugglers' boat. Long and slim and powerful."

“A smuggler,” Denny contradicted, “would be likely to know a lot more about motors than that befuddled gentleman. A smuggler, to be worth his salt, wouldn’t dare call in the help of the Coast Guard whenever his engine failed.”

They sailed on, in silence, for several minutes. Then Denny added, “You know, if I were setting out to be a smuggler, I’d use an old fishing tug or a harmless-looking tub of some sort. People are always suspicious of the racy, fast vessels, and if there were a smuggling scare, the officers would be on the lookout for speedy boats.”

Winifred’s face was thoughtful, as they rounded the pier. “Denny, perhaps you’ve got something there. Maybe that’s exactly what the smugglers *do* use.”

CHAPTER XII

Tracks in the Sand

The telephone shrilled in the hall, and Cherry left the breakfast table to answer it.

“Cherry?” Win’s voice asked. “I just thought I’d call to tell you that the *Mary Ann* left the harbor this morning, hitting on all six.”

“It must not have been so serious, then,” Cherry answered. “The skipper said they might be laid up several days for repairs.”

Win chuckled. “One of the boys in the crew turned some little business on the timing device, and off she buzzed. Dad tried to discourage them from leaving so late in the season, but the man was determined. They promised to send us cards from New Orleans and Miami, to let us know how long it takes.”

“I don’t know but what I envy them,” Cherry sighed. “We’ve had our last swim and our last sail until next spring, and it looks like a long dull winter.”

“We can still go hiking on the dunes. The colors looked so lovely from the lake yesterday. Why don’t we go gathering autumn leaves this afternoon?”

“Fine. I can be ready about two.”

It was a bright, but chilly day, so the girls wore laced hiking boots, jodhpurs, sweaters and leather jackets. The Gas Gull sped along the Indian road for several miles, and Win finally guided it over one of the more secluded trails leading from the highway to the lake. Most of this section was wild and uninhabited, being a part of the long state park along the shore. A few old summer homes—built before the government took charge of the land—were scattered among the dunes above the lake shore. These were closed now, and the boarded windows seemed a stronger indication of approaching winter than the riotously colored trees.

As the little-traveled track lifted over a slight rise and around a curve, Win exclaimed sharply and twisted the steering wheel of the roadster violently to

the right. Her quick action saved them from a head-on collision with a speeding truck. The driver of the other car was a grim-faced man, who gave not an inch of the road. Win's car, at a perilous angle, managed to miss the massive truck by inches.

Furious, Cherry whirled to catch a glimpse of the other car's rear license plate.

Although the unmarked truck side-walls were clean the license plate was obscured by a heavy layer of mud!

It was a moment before either girl could speak. "Wow! That was a close one!" Win said, at last. "And that old fool driver didn't even have the decency to stop and see if we were hurt."

Gingerly, she backed her car to the trail. "Did you happen to get the numbers, Cherry?"

"No. The license plate looked as if it had been daubed with mud, deliberately. The rest of the truck was clean."

"Did you have a chance to see the driver's face?"

Cherry laughed, a little shakily. "Only enough to see that he had a jaw like a dictator's. He was wearing dark goggles."

"Can't imagine what a truck would be doing down this road."

"Well, if it's one of those long-haul trucks, the driver might have pulled off onto this sideroad for a snooze. I think I read that they do."

Win drove to a parking spot near one of the deserted cottages, and took the key from the ignition. "Shall we start our hike from here?"

"Good as any."

For more than an hour the girls climbed over the rolling, high dunes, admiring each new vista, each fresh view of the blue lake beyond. Cherry confessed to being a little weary, so they walked, slowly now, toward the beach.

"We can go back on the sand. Much easier walking," Win said.

"You know, I am tired," Cherry confessed, "but it's a little too cold just to sit awhile and look at the lake, and it's much too early to go home. Why don't we build a fire here on the beach, and rest an hour?"

"Grand idea," Win agreed. "If you're tired, I'll gather the wood——"

"I'm not *that* tired," Cherry interrupted. "Fine egg I'd be to suggest a fire, and have you do all the work."

The girls roamed in opposite directions, gathering the wood that had been tossed beyond the reach of the breakers, by the lake.

"Say, Cherry!" Win called, an excited note in her voice. "Come here a moment, will you?"

The red-haired girl dropped her arm load of wood, and ran across the stretch of sand at the urgent tone of her friend's voice. "What is it, Win? Find a

treasure chest?”

“No. Too late for that——”

Win was pointing at fresh boot marks on the sand, and at the obvious depressions where the prows of small rowboats had rested recently. “You see?” she demanded. Then she led Cherry alongside the boot marks, to the more evident marks of large tires showing in the sand along the beach.

“The truck!” Cherry guessed. “It was loaded from the lake!”

“I’m positive of it,” Win nodded. “And if that license plate hadn’t been covered with mud, I honestly believe we’d have had a clue to the smugglers!”

CHAPTER XIII

On the Trail

Both girls turned, then, toward the lake.

There wasn't a sign of a boat in view—not even a fishing tug or a motor launch.

“Let's follow the truck tracks,” Cherry suggested, her fatigue forgotten. “We might possibly find a clue.”

Win frowned, in concentration. “It's only about a quarter of a mile to the cove—you know, where most of these summer residents have boat houses. Let's just stroll along there, and see if we can find any signs of life.”

“This might be a little dangerous,” Cherry pointed out.

“All we have to do is play dumb,” Win said, grinning. “We're just a couple of high school girls out for a Sunday afternoon hike.”

“Just the same,” Cherry said, as she selected a sturdy pole from the pile of wood that Win had gathered, “it won't hurt for us to have a couple of clubs handy, just in case.”

Win agreed, and chose a stout cane from the discarded firewood.

Walking swiftly, yet with alert eyes, the girls soon reached the cove. “We'll come back to follow that trail,” Win said, as she pointed to the tire marks leading up a rough road over the dune. “It will take us back to the car, anyway. I'm sure it was made by the same truck that forced us into the ditch.”

The cove was deserted.

The half-dozen boat houses, like the empty summer homes, were nailed shut.

“Guess I'll take a look in the window of the Tyron's water garage,” Win said, “as long as I'm here. I always feel responsible for their property, when they're so far away in Florida.”

Mr. and Mrs. Tyron were an old couple who'd had a summer home in the

Indian road section for more than forty years. They were particularly good friends of Captain and Mrs. Travers, and since they'd had no children of their own, they'd unofficially adopted Winifred as a favorite grandchild. Win regarded their summer residence as a second home, and when the white-haired couple left for their annual winter trek south, they left the key with the girl. They urged her to use the summer house for parties, but she'd never taken advantage of the offer.

The two girls peeked in the window of the Tyron boat house, and saw the trim motor launch, covered with tarpaulin, pulled high and dry on wooden horses. "Everything's shipshape here," Win announced. "We might just glance at the house, too, to see if everything is in order."

"Did you bring the key?"

"No. We can just peek through the cracks at the window to make sure."

The girls took a path, leading up a crude stairway made of rocks, from the boat house to a trim cottage hidden in the trees on the dune above. "Seems so strange that trees and bushes grow on dunes," Cherry remarked. "Whenever you see pictures of dunes, you think of the Indiana variety—here today and shifted somewhere else tomorrow."

"The Michigan variety is really far superior," Win chuckled.

The neat, brown-shingled cottage was securely boarded, and there was no sign of intruders.

"That's a relief," Win said. "I don't know why I should feel so responsible—maybe just because I have the only key."

Not until then did Cherry voice the suspicion that had been uppermost in each girl's mind, since the encounter with the rude truck driver. "Win, I'm sure that truck had been down on the beach loading a smuggled cargo."

"It looks like it," Win replied unhappily. "Why shouldn't they pick up the load in the harbor? It would be much simpler than bringing cargo from the big boat to the beach by rowboat."

"It just must be," Cherry concluded. "I may get that big story yet."

Win sighed. "I hate to have to tell Dad. He's so worried now, I'm really afraid for his health."

CHAPTER XIV

Win Has a Plan

Sunday evening supper at the Hudsons was an informal meal. Cherry presided at the waffle iron, since Mrs. Morrow had gone out for the evening, and had little chance to satisfy her own ravenous appetite as the boys consumed unnumbered quantities of the golden-brown circles.

“Did you have a satisfactory hike?” Denny inquired idly. “Thought maybe you and Win would come around to help put *The Champ* away, since you were honored with the last sail of the season.”

“Oh, could we have helped? We’d have been glad to!”

Denny laughed. “No, we had about eight more hands than we could use, as it was. It was quite a job, though.”

Cherry simply couldn’t resist telling them.

“We had the most exciting afternoon,” she burst out breathlessly. “First, an awful old truck driver on one of the trails off Indian road almost forced us into the ditch. Then, when we were hiking back along the beach, we found where a truck had been loaded from some small boats—rowboats, it looked as if—and we traced the tire marks back, and it was the same truck!”

All three—her father and her two brothers—burst into guffaws.

As soon as he could speak, Bill asked, “Didn’t see any dropped pearls, or anything, did you? How about an old genuine South American fur coat?”

Cherry, annoyed, ate an entire waffle before she allowed herself to speak. By that time, she’d made up her mind to tell them nothing else—about the mud-caked license plate—the true reason for the Coast Guard cutter’s visit—about Captain Travers’ telephone calls from officials in Washington, D. C.—in short, she’d tell them not one word if she made the most amazing discovery in the world.

Winifred was faring little better.

When she told her suspicions to Captain Travers, that gentleman became more ruddy-faced than ever, and shouted "Where in the world did you ever get such a rattle-brained idea as that?"

"Well, the truck was a little bit like that one that had the furs in it," Win said, surprised at her father's violent reaction to the news. Of course, she didn't dare admit overhearing those conversations——

"It's a silly idea, and I want you to forget it," Captain Travers said, a little more gently. "However, we could file a complaint about his driving. You didn't happen to see the license plates, did you?" Although his tone was artless, Winifred wasn't fooled by the question.

"Cherry looked, but she thinks they had been covered with mud, intentionally."

Captain Travers sighed. "I'm afraid Cherry's journalistic aspirations have made her a little melodramatic-minded. It was probably just a coincidence that the boat marks were near the tire tracks."

"But the footsteps were thick between," Win objected.

"You say it was near Tyron's cottage?"

"Less than a quarter of a mile away. We looked all around the boat house, and then went past the cottage, but everything was in order."

"Too dark now, to do anything about it, and the waves will have washed the beach clean by morning," Captain Travers remarked, half to himself. "But see here, Winifred, you and Cherry aren't to spread this wild, unfounded rumor all over town, understand?"

"Of course not, Dad."

"You didn't get a good look at the driver, did you?"

"I didn't see him at all. The truck appeared so suddenly and unexpectedly that I was concentrating on keeping out of trouble." She giggled a little. "Cherry said he had a big chin, like a dictator's, but he was wearing dark goggles."

"Well, just forget the whole incident. You were lucky not to have had an accident."

The next morning, as the Gas Gull took the two girls to school, they reported on their families' reactions to their suspicions. "Guess we'll just have to keep it to ourselves," Win concluded. "Nevertheless, Dad was interested enough to ask me about the license plate, where we saw the tracks, and what the driver looked like."

"I know," Cherry said. "Of course, the boys and Dad don't know anything about the smuggling ring, but they treated me as if I were repeating something out of a wild movie. From now on, I'll tell them nothing. And if we do manage to get the big story, I believe I'll send it directly to the I. P. A. Serve Bill right,

if his own sister was the means of scooping the *Tribune*.”

All day, Cherry’s mind was preoccupied with the possibility of helping Win uncover the big smuggling ring which was baffling the whole United States government, and of seeing Bill’s face when he’d receive the by-line story first from the I. P. A. machine in the *Tribune* office.

Several times during the day, she was caught day-dreaming of that big moment, when the teachers would see her vague, far-away expression and ask her questions. At noon, when she and Winifred sped home for lunch and back to school, she could talk or think of nothing else.

She was totally unprepared, then, for that frigid moment when she walked into the *Tribune* office, a half hour after school was out.

Bill failed to return her light-hearted greeting.

Miss Lippincott, the stern-visaged spinster who presided at the society desk, broke the silence. “Cherry, will you please explain this?”

She extended the Monday afternoon edition of the *Wellington Gazette*, the nearest daily and liveliest rival of the *Tribune*. Aghast, Cherry read the three head-lines which had been circled in red pencil by her father. “LAKE HAVEN HIGH LOSES STAR FULLBACK,” “NOTED EXPLORER TO SPEAK AT LAKE HAVEN HIGH” and “LAKE HAVEN HIGH DRAMATIC CLUB INVITED TO NATIONAL CONTEST.”

Absorbed in her thoughts of the smuggling ring, Cherry had forgotten completely to make her regular round of news sources in the high school! She’d failed to glance at the bulletin board. She’d neglected her daily responsibility.

“How does it happen that the *Wellington Gazette*, fifty miles away, has this news?”

Cherry had no answer, and after a brief silence, Bill demanded, “Who’s their school correspondent here?”

The girl was completely miserable as she said softly, “Myra Mason.”

Bill whistled. “Smart girl. Maybe we’d better hire her. She had sense enough to realize the news value of these stories, and telephoned them in, rather than waiting until tomorrow when she was sure we’d have ’em, even with you as our school reporter.”

“Your father has decided,” Miss Lippincott added, icily, “that hereafter you will confine yourself to personals. We agree that perhaps you are too young to realize the importance of covering your beat daily.”

“That means,” Bill went on, “that I’ll cover the school news. I’ll run up before lunch each day. Of course, that also means that your four-dollar-a-week pay check will cease, and will be added to my salary. You’ll be paid the regular space rates for the personals you turn in.”

Struggling to keep back the tears, Cherry turned and left the office. She walked swiftly toward the lake front. It had been her habit, always, when she

was discouraged and depressed, to stroll on the beach. Somehow, the beautiful calm lake soothed her and comforted her.

In addition to the terrific blow to her pride, Cherry's "demotion" would mean the sacrifice of other things she'd been planning. Her personals, on space rates, would never amount to more than a couple of dollars a week. With her small salary for school reporting, she'd had a comfortable allowance. This would mean fewer games, plays, sodas, movies——

"Hi!"

The greeting came from above her, on the cliff, and Cherry shaded her eyes against the reflected glare of the setting sun on the water.

It was Winifred. She was hurrying down the steps, now.

"Didn't know you planned to take a hike!" she shouted. "Thought you had to stay at the *Tribune* office."

In halting words, Cherry confessed her failure as a journalist. "And it wouldn't be quite so terrible," she concluded, "if it hadn't been Myra Mason who scooped me! On three different and important stories!"

Wisely, Win withheld the words of sympathy which she felt. She knew it would only add to Cherry's unhappiness. Instead, she matched her stride with her friend's, and together they tramped through the white sand of the beach.

Under the neat black braids, wound coronet fashion around Win's head, her thoughts were racing rapidly. What—oh, what could she do to make Cherry feel better? Knowing the strength of Cherry's ambition to become a star newspaper woman, she appreciated this blow.

"If only I could think of something to take her mind off this upset today," she thought. "And if I started to talk about the smuggling ring, it would only make her feel worse. In a way, I feel responsible for her missing these stories. If I hadn't been so excited about the smugglers, I shouldn't have talked to her about getting an I. P. A. story—It's just got to be something entirely different. . . ."

For almost an hour, the two girls walked along the shore. Win noticed that a stiff wind was coming up, and that the high breakers on the dark water stretched out to the horizon. "Probably have the storm signals up, by the time we get back," she thought, a little absently.

Now, however, she had her idea. Rapidly she formulated the plan, before suggesting it to Cherry.

They'd turned back, and almost reached the steps nearest "Twin Anchors," when Win said softly, "Cherry—we don't have a home football game, week after this, do we?"

"No."

"Well, what would you think of the idea of getting four other girls and going out to the Tyron's cabin for a week-end house party? School's getting a

little monotonous, and we need a change.”

Cherry nodded appreciatively. “Sounds like it might help.” Impulsively, she squeezed Win’s hand. “You’ve already been a great help. Thanks for hiking with me.”

She raced for the steps leading up the bluff. It wouldn’t do to let Win see the tears of gratitude in her eyes!

CHAPTER XV

Attempt at Rescue

It was a restless, uneasy night. The piling surf on the beach made a continuous rolling thunder, and the howling wind threatened a night of terror to the men and ships on the lake. Win was unable to sleep, and pulled on a warm robe to join her mother at a lonely vigil at the fireplace in the living room.

The entire crew was alert, ready. Her father, she knew, had taken his station with the lookout. There'd been no word, yet, of a ship in distress, but the Coast Guard was ready.

Now an icy, sleety rain was falling, and Win's sympathies went out to the new lads on the crew who were patrolling the shoreline. Once she'd gone along, and her memory went back to that black night—The sleet and spray had frozen on her oilskin. It was necessary to fight for every step, into that driving wind. Then the surfman would stop, and look out to the water, superhumanly trying to break through that blackness of vision.

Instinctively, Win went now to the wide window.

Was that a ship out yonder, this side of the pier, or was it a nightmare of her imagination?

As she watched, a thin trail of light shot upward and broke into a bright red shower.

It was a ship! In distress! It had overshot the long pier, and gone aground.

The surfman had seen it, too. His answer was made with a Coston flare. Win had seen him, in imagination, jerk the tape which ignited the dazzling red glow. And sleet, wind nor spray could smother its courageous message. To the stranded ship, it sent the news that the Coast Guard was ready.

The message had been telephoned from the lookout tower to the rooms beneath the Travers' quarters, and Win could hear the tremendous activity as

the crew prepared to go to the rescue.

Then she turned to her mother. "It's a ship aground, this side of the pier. I'm going to dress and go out——"

Mrs. Travers was ready for the emergency, too. "Wait, dear. While you're dressing, I'll get Mandy, and we'll put some hot food on the stove. First, I'll make a couple of quarts of hot coffee. You can take them with you, down on shore. . . ."

The telephone shrilled.

It was Cherry. "I couldn't sleep, and I saw the flares from my window. What's happened?"

"Don't know yet, for sure," Win answered. "A ship's gone aground. Mother's making coffee and I've got to hurry to get dressed and take it down to the beach."

"I'm coming, too. Maybe I can help. . . ."

Cherry, in her warmest sweaters and heaviest raincoat, hurried to the back door, just as Winifred was leaving. Without a word, she seized the handle of the big thermos container, and helped Win carry it down the sleety steps to the beach.

Already, the men were launching the surfboat.

The cart, loaded with life-saving equipment, was drawn into place. Win noted the life-car, the Lyle gun, the axes, shovels, lights and flares with an experienced eye.

Captain Travers was giving orders to the life crew. With expert motions, they launched the boat; hurried into the treacherously high breakers; leaped into their places.

The beach was bright with gaslights, and a powerful searchlight sought the wreck.

Win looked about, found the weary surfman who'd lit the Coston flare, and urged him to drink some of the hot coffee.

The searchlight suddenly found the hulk of boat, only about five hundred yards from shore. It was one of the big Norwegian freighters, and its heavy cargo added to the dangerous listing. From its precarious position, it was evidently impossible to launch its own life boats.

Win and Cherry could make out the members of the crew, huddled together in fright and exhaustion. They were crowded around the prow, watching intently the surfboat as it alternately disappeared in the trough of water, then shot into view, bow pointing skyward. With perfect teamwork and timing, the oarsmen kept shooting straight for the next roller.

Nearer and nearer the sheltered side of the big ship, the surfboat came. The rescuers must get into the calm water, away from the wind.

Cherry and Win gasped as a particularly vicious wave leapt at the boat. It

rose at the bow, turned a half loop, and came down, keel up!

Even above the roar of wind and waves, the girls heard the skipper's command. "Stick to the boat!"

The oarsmen grasped the hand holds of the capsized craft, and righted her. It was just a few minutes, but it seemed hours to the girls, until every man was back in his place.

Win rapidly explained to Cherry that the surfboat was self-bailing. "It has two bottoms," she said, "and drain pipes—scuppers—run from the floor through the lower bottom."

Cherry nodded, although she couldn't understand.

Tensely they watched as the skipper tried to get a line aboard the doomed boat. He attempted to use the heaving stick. "It's a ball of lead," Win told her friend, "attached to a bamboo handle. A line is tied to it, and usually it can be thrown quite a distance by hand." Again and again he threw, but each time the stick fell short, dropped into the sea, and had to be pulled back to the life boat.

"He's giving up," Win told Cherry, as the crew heaved the water parachute overboard, and prepared to return to the beach, stern first through the rough water.

"Does that mean," Cherry demanded, in a stricken voice, "that all those sailors can't be saved?"

"No," Win answered. "But the Coast Guardsmen couldn't take them off in the lifeboat if they can't contact the ship." She pointed at the operations which had been going on about them, as they had been absorbed in watching the lifeboat.

The Lyle gun, carefully aimed over the ship, was already in position.

The girls were astonished to see, too, that quite a crowd had gathered. "How'd they find out?" Cherry asked, as she noticed several Lake Haven friends grouped at the edge of the lights.

"Same way you did," Win answered. "It was a restless night, and probably dozens of people saw that exchange of rockets and flares."

"I've heard about the Lyle gun," Cherry said. "Does it have to land right on the ship? I should think that would be more difficult than throwing that heaving stick on board."

"No, it just has to go straight," Win explained. "The shot line, attached to the projectile, is the only thing that has to fall on the ship."

"But what's this business over here?"

A half-dozen Coast Guardsmen were erecting a huge crotch—wooden poles in the shape of the letter "A"—on the beach. Several yards behind it was a sort of sand anchor, made of two crossed timbers. Fastened to this was the tackle which made the hawser taut over the apex of the crotch.

"I'm sorry I can't tell you all about it right now," Win said, a little

impatiently. “You’ll just have to wait and watch it work—if it works!”

CHAPTER XVI

Win Takes a Trip

Captain Travers, assisted by a couple of surfmen, was carefully aiming the Lyle gun.

Cherry held her breath as the officer fired.

The shot landed true!

Several of the sailors on the boat struggled to their feet, and hauled the line in slowly.

The hawser left the shore, the shingle-like tally board dangling.

“I hope they can read English!” Win wished fervently.

“Why?”

“Because the instructions to make the tail block fast to the best available anchorage, and to check the rope in the block, so that it runs free, are written in English on the tally board. They’ll signal when they’re ready.”

“Oh, gosh! I’ve got to go!”

Appalled, Cherry had remembered the newspaper. “I’d probably lose my home if the *Tribune* didn’t get a story and pictures of this rescue. And just when it gets most exciting!”

Winifred scarcely heard, as she made an effort to see the activity on shipboard. It was difficult, for a silvery sheet of sleet obscured the vision, even with the aid of the powerful searchlights.

The men on the ship had the tally board now, but it was as Win had feared. They couldn’t read the instructions.

It was a horribly discouraging realization.

The surfmen on the beach had already tightened the shore end of the hawser firmly, and were ready to send the breeches buoy along its length.

“Oh, those poor, stupid sailors!” Win said, under her breath. The huddled group on the ship was simply holding the other end of the hawser, waiting for

a miraculous rescue.

It was then Win had her daring idea.

She rushed to her father's side. "Listen, Dad! Let me go out to the ship in the B. B.! I don't weigh very much, and they'll be able to hold the hawser. Then I'll see that it gets fastened correctly out there, and come right back!"

Captain Travers glanced proudly at the resourceful, brave girl shouting so eagerly to him above the sound of the storm. "We'll wait a little, daughter. They may get the idea."

Faint streaks of grey heralded a gloomy dawn, but the storm had abated little. Restlessly, the groups on the beach waited for action. More and more onlookers were joining the curious.

Cherry returned, without her brothers or her father, but there was no time to explain to Win now.

That dark-haired young heroine was being assisted into the breeches buoy by her father. She was wearing a life jacket, and a sou'wester hid her braids. She looked slim and helpless in the life ring, her slender legs in hip boots, thrust through the heavy canvas breeches suspended from the circle. Clinging to the ropes, she was able to signal to the sailors on ship board.

Would they understand her signs?

A moment later, the survivors on the listing ship seemed to realize what was wanted. One fellow stood away from the group, and started to pull on the thin strong line—the whip—which propelled Win through the grasping waves.

Would the sailors be strong enough to hold the other end of the hawser steady?

Win didn't allow herself to be frightened. If the men were unable to hold the hawser, she'd just be in for a ducking—she'd be in the life ring—of course, it would delay things for hours—the line and hawser would have to be pulled back to shore, to be shot again!

Cherry made her way to Captain Travers' side. "Oh, Captain! I do wish you'd have let me go! I'm five pounds lighter than Win——"

"This is all highly irregular," the officer answered gruffly. "Should have sent a surfman, I suppose, but Win is so much smaller and it's better that my own daughter take the risks——"

His voice trailed off, and both concentrated intently on that small figure, so helpless looking, as she was carried jerkily above the tops of the high breakers.

At last!

The sailors were helping Win on board, and with expressive gestures, she was explaining how they should anchor the tackle at the end of the hawser. They raced to her bidding, and after she'd checked to see if the pulley were working easily, she hopped into the breeches buoy again.

This time, her trip above the waves was smooth and gliding, as the

practiced hands of the Coast Guardsmen pulled on the whip. As soon as she was free of the water, her father and several guardsmen lifted her from the buoy, and rushed her to the bonfire. Cherry was waiting there with a blanket.

“You’d better take her up to the station, soon’s she’s able,” Captain Travers said. “Don’t want any pneumonia——”

“No, I can’t,” Win said, a little desperately. “You see, the first sailor they’re going to send over has a broken leg. Fell on the sleety deck. He’s just a youngster——”

The buoy had reached the ship again, and the watchers saw the sailors lift a young fellow into it. With half-frozen hands, he clung to the ropes, as the men on shore hauled him to safety. One leg dangled queerly, and as soon as Captain Travers had heard of the accident, he’d dispatched a surfman to the station, to summon a doctor and the ambulance.

Even through the dim light, Cherry could see that the survivor in the breeches buoy was suffering agonies. He had bit his lip until it was bleeding. Suddenly remembering her obligation to obtain the news story, Cherry rushed up and snapped a picture. “May not be enough light, yet,” she told herself, “but I’d better make the effort.”

With unbelievably tender hands, the Coast Guardsmen lifted the boy and carried him to the bonfire. Cherry gave him hot coffee, and encouraged him to talk. She felt it might ease the pain a little. In broken English, he told her his name was Olaf Leifson; he was seventeen; he’d shipped six weeks ago on this, his first and ill-fated voyage. Cherry was surprised that he was able to speak any English, but Winifred explained that several of the Norwegians could understand it; none on shipboard could read it.

The ambulance arrived before the breeches buoy made its next trip to the ship, and Doctor Knowles gave the lad a drug which would ease his pain during the trip to the hospital. “Win and I’ll come to see you,” Cherry promised, and the boy smiled his gratitude.

A weary old man, his white beard glistening with freezing spray, was the next one to be helped from the breeches buoy. Cherry was busier than she’d ever been in her life, for she was everywhere; pouring coffee for the weary Coast Guardsmen and the exhausted sailors, and at the same time, not neglecting her duty of gathering every survivor’s name and a little of his story. Miraculously, she managed to be near when each of the dozen survivors was brought safely to land, and somehow, she managed to get pictures of all of them.

Win had gone up to the station and changed into dry clothing. Now she was assisting with serving the hot breakfast that Mandy and her mother had prepared. The sailors had been brought to the shelter of the station; to dry clothing, warm blankets and steaming hot food.

It was not until after Cherry had snapped a picture of the last man rescued, the grizzled captain of the grounded ship, that Win had a chance to question Cherry. “Why aren’t Bill and Denny and your father here? I can’t imagine why they’d miss a story like this—particularly after slapping you down so, just yesterday.”

“I went home after them, you know,” Cherry explained, “and the place was blazing with lights. Mrs. Morrow told me that there had been a horrible murder, clear over in the eastern part of the county, and that dad and the boys had gone over there with Sheriff Doty. They’d gone about half an hour before. She was frantic—after they’d left, she’d found me missing! But there wasn’t anything for me to do but come back and try to get as much of the story as I could. Bill had taken his Graflex, so the only camera I could find was his old Brownie. Probably my pictures won’t be any good, but Bill can take some of the survivors in the Coast Guard station when he gets here.”

“Cherry!” Win exclaimed, happily. “Maybe this is your big chance at that I. P. A. story!”

“You would think of that, and of me,” the red-haired girl replied admiringly, “when you’ve just accomplished one of the most heroic rescues ever seen on the shores of Lake Michigan!”

“Oh, not me!” Win denied, sincerely. “It was the Coast Guard, silly!”

CHAPTER XVII

One Mistake

The sleet and wind had lessened, gradually, and the sun was making an effort to break through the clouds, when the Coast Guard crew brought the captain from the wreck.

The two girls, who had worked so tirelessly more than half the night, were turning to mount the steps to the station when Bill, followed by a couple of strangers carrying photographic equipment, hurried toward them.

“Gosh, what a night!” he exclaimed. “Did you get any dope on the wreck?” he demanded of Cherry. “Wouldn’t you know there’d be two big stories breaking at the same time—and what a time!”

“I’ve been here since midnight,” Cherry answered calmly. “What would you like to know?”

Hurriedly, Bill introduced the strangers. One was a reporter from a great Chicago daily; the other was a special writer sent by the I. P. A. “We were on our assignments to cover this double shooting over in the other end of the county and didn’t hear about the shipwreck until we got back to the *Lake Haven Tribune* office.”

“Well, the biggest part of the story is right here,” Cherry said, smiling. “This is Win Travers—her father is in command at this station, you know. . . .”

“Just a minute, Cherry,” Win interrupted. For a tense moment, she whispered into her friend’s ear. “Please don’t tell them about my trip in the B. B. It might be against all Coast Guard regulations, for all I know. Why don’t you send the reporters to Dad? I shouldn’t like to do anything to add to his difficulties, particularly at this time.”

“Oh, sure,” Cherry said, aloud. “That would be better.” She turned to the others. “Win believes, and I agree with her, that you’d better get the story of the rescue directly from the captain. It will save time, for you. Won’t have to

check it twice.”

“Good idea. Would you girls mind taking us to him? Which one is he?”

“He’s gone up to the station,” Win explained. “I’ll be glad to show you the way.”

The well-trained surfmen had replaced their equipment, and the crowds, drifting away from the beach, now could see little evidence of the tremendous activity of the night.

“I don’t think I’d better go with you fellows,” Bill said. “Got to get back to the office and pound out this murder story. I’ll wait and see Captain Travers later.”

“It looks as if we’re going to be late to school,” Cherry told her friend. “I’ll have to go home and change my clothes and eat a bite of breakfast, and it’s almost nine o’clock now.”

“Mr. Linton will understand. I’ll come for you in half an hour, shall I?”

Cherry nodded her thanks, and strode off toward home. She’d scarcely started on the scrambled eggs and bacon which Mrs. Morrow had prepared for her while she bathed and dressed, when the telephone rang.

Bill’s voice was excited.

“Cherry, do you have any dope on the rescued sailors? Names, and all that stuff?”

“Sure. And, my word, I forgot! I took some pictures, too!”

“Swell! Call a taxi and get down here, just as fast as you can toot.”

Mrs. Morrow insisted on her finishing breakfast, so it was an impatient girl who left the house ten minutes later. She’d had Mrs. Morrow telephone Win, to tell her that she couldn’t come directly to school. Now, she urged the cab driver to greater speed in his run for the *Tribune* office.

She found Bill, furiously typing his “murder copy,” while the two Chicago reporters looked on disconsolately.

The older of the two strangers explained. “Captain Travers had just put all the exhausted sailors to bed. Left orders they weren’t to be disturbed until this afternoon. Our deadline is twelve, so you see we’re in a spot.”

Cherry produced her notes. “I haven’t had time to go over these,” she explained, “but I do have all their names and ages. And these pictures probably aren’t any good, but I thought I’d try ’em——”

“Hurrah!” the younger reporter shouted. “I’ll race over to the photographer’s with these and whip ’em through while you get the dope. If any of ’em are good, we can send them over the telephone.”

Cherry was a little surprised at this partnership handling of the news and pictures, and very curious about the equipment used in sending telephoto pictures over the telephone, but she reconstructed the rescue from her vague notes for the other reporter. He listened intently, jotting down only the names

and ages of the survivors. His eyes glistened as Cherry told of the first lad, and his bad luck in breaking his leg and being shipwrecked on his first trip to sea, and he nodded appreciatively as she told of the old captain's lingering farewell to his boat.

Cherry was oblivious of the rest of the office, as she went on with her tale. "It was all very thrilling," she concluded, and looked up from her notes to find her father and Bill among the interested listeners.

"Sure of those names and ages?" Bill barked.

"Yes," Cherry answered, simply. "I've no doubt that Captain Travers will have information to add. I'll never forget my own despair when the surfboat was overturned, and the skipper decided to bring it back. I had no idea the Coast Guard had so many resources. Why, they were even ready with the life car."

"What's that?" It was Dennis Hudson, Sr., who asked the question.

"Why, it's a sort of last resort, I guess," Cherry explained. "It's a steel boat completely decked over. Queer-looking thing. The only opening is a small hatch, just big enough for one person to squeeze through, although it'll hold as many as seven. The only ventilation is through a small perforated circle, with the holes punched out from inside. Not much air can get in, but then, neither can very much water. It's enough to last from ship to shore, and it's pulled right through the water. Almost like a submarine."

"Why didn't they use it?"

"Well, I guess Captain Travers decided there wasn't a great deal of danger of the boat's going on over or smashing, so there wasn't much hurry. But if Win hadn't been able—I mean, if the Lyle gun hadn't reached the boat or the sailors hadn't fastened the pulley, or something, I suppose they'd used the life car."

By the time Cherry had finished, the other reporter returned. "Say, these snaps are small, but they'll blow up all right. Over half of them are good enough to send. Could you identify them for us?"

Cherry consulted the numbers on the negatives, and then compared them with the numbers on her notes. The shots of the first survivor, Olaf Leifson, and of the captain of the boat were good, she was relieved to learn. When she'd given all the information she could recall, to the two city newspapermen, she turned to leave the *Tribune* office. "Have to go to school," she explained. "I'm more than an hour late, now."

"Don't see why you bother with going to school," the older journalist told her, grinning. "You know all the answers."

Cherry returned his grin. "Thanks—but don't ask my brother Bill about that."

Just as Cherry stepped outside the *Tribune* office door, her father called.

He followed her to the street, and Cherry glanced at him, puzzled.

“Cherry, see here, you’ve done a mighty nice piece of work, and I’m proud of you.”

“Thanks, Dad.”

“And about that school beat—consider yourself re-instated. After all, everyone is entitled to one mistake in this business.”

CHAPTER XVIII

The Odd Guest

The following week marked the end of the first six-weeks period of school, and the usual tests were in order. The days were packed with studying. Somehow, Win and Cherry did manage to get to the City hospital each day with some little gift of puzzles or food for Olaf Leifson. They had great admiration for the cheerful manner in which he accepted his misfortune.

On Thursday afternoon, when the last test was over, the girls put their books in their lockers with sighs of relief. "Now, I feel like celebrating," Cherry announced.

"We're going to," Win answered. "First, I'm going to stand treat to hot chocolate at the Lake Inn. And we're going to make large plans for that house party."

"The house party! You know, I've been so surrounded by books and notebooks all week that I'd forgotten all about it!"

Neither girl knew that their conversation was overheard.

The Lake Inn was the favorite gathering spot of the high school crowd, and Cherry and Win had a little difficulty in finding an empty and secluded booth. They graciously refused the many invitations to join other groups.

When they'd given their orders to the waitress in the nautical blue slacks and yachting cap, Cherry produced a folded wad of copy paper from her jacket pocket.

"The first question—whom shall we ask?" Win announced.

"How many?" Cherry countered.

"The cottage will accommodate four, besides ourselves," Win answered. "There are three double bunks in the dormitory room, and Mother can have the Tyron's bedroom to herself."

"Had you thought of a guest list?"

“Just a tentative one.” Win checked the names on her fingers. “Helen Pringle—she’s fun and so amiable that she never gets angry, no matter what goes wrong.”

Cherry nodded, and wrote down the name.

“And Dorothy Holoubek. She’s always ready for fun, and enthusiastic about everything, has ideas, too, for games and things. Then there’s Bonnie Vogel, she’s so pretty, and such fun, besides, she’s capable. I’m no good at planning menus and things like that, and she’d love it. And of course, we can’t leave out Patricia Killean. If we get bored or tired, we can just sit around and let Pat entertain us with her Irish wit.”

“A grand list. Now, the next in order of importance—” the waitress interrupted just then with their cups of hot chocolate. “As I was saying,” Cherry continued, after the first sip, “when do we go? Saturday morning?”

“Why not tomorrow afternoon? Right after school?”

Cherry whistled softly. “We’re going to have to hustle, then. Why, these girls aren’t even invited, yet!”

“As soon as I’ve finished my chocolate, I’ll call them from here,” Win promised. “When we find out for sure if they can all go, we’ll know about ordering food and assembling bedding and getting fire-wood. We may have to drive out now, just to see if everything is in order.”

When Win returned from the telephone, there was a line through Patricia Killean’s name on the list. “They can all go,” the dark-haired girl reported, “except Pat. She has relatives coming from Detroit.”

Win had spoken before she rounded the corner of the booth, and she failed to get Cherry’s frantic facial signals.

Myra Mason, uninvited, had flopped down in the booth while Win was at the telephone. “Oh, you’re planning a party!” the blonde girl exclaimed, delightedly. “How very elegant! We’ve all been so bored with school this week that it will be all the more fun. What kind are you going to have? Would you like to have me help plan it? I’d be delighted to have it at my house.”

As graciously as she could, Win outlined the plans for the house party. “Of course,” she concluded, “you may not like it. It will almost be roughing it, you know, and we are rather unsophisticated in our fun.”

“I’d simply love it,” Myra declared. “You know, although I’ve been in Lake Haven for six weeks now, I don’t really feel acquainted with any of the girls. You’ve all been simply lovely to me—I don’t mean that—but it just seems as if the boys have been a little easier to know. I just can’t understand it.”

Win stood. “You’ll have to excuse us, Myra. We’ve quite a lot to do before dinner.”

“That’s quite all right—so nice of you to let me sit with you in the booth

when the place is so crowded. And it's so simply marv that you're including me in your exclusive little house party!"

The Gas Gull had travelled almost the entire distance on the Indian road toward the Tyron summer home, before either of the girls spoke. Finally, Cherry burst out, "The nerve! The absolutely unlimited nerve of that girl!"

Win chuckled. "I think it's sort of funny. And probably we should have included her in the first place. I don't think we've been very friendly with her."

"You're too charitable for comfort," Cherry stormed. "Fancy anyone's pushing in, like that!"

Win turned off on the trail that led to the lake. "We have been curious about her," she said, thoughtfully. "Perhaps on a long week-end party like this, she'll tell us a little about her background and her travels."

The girls found that with a little airing and dusting, the cheerful cottage would be ready for the party. It took some time to remove the winter boarding at the windows. A fire was laid in the huge fireplace, and there was plenty of wood stored in the small lean-to at the rear of the brown-and-white building. "We will have to bring bedding," Win reported, after trying to open a couple of locked chests. "I just have the key to the house and boat-houses."

"That won't be hard. We'll each bring our own." Cherry snapped the switch on the radio, and soft music filled the room. "'Ray!" she shouted, "they didn't have the electricity turned off!"

"I imagine we'll find everything—the telephone, hot water heater, even the refrigerator—ready to go. The Tyrons have been urging me to use their cottage for house parties for a long time. If this is fun, we could have a longer one during the winter holidays, and another in the early spring."

Cherry checked, and found that Win was correct in her guess. She turned on the electricity for the hot water heater and the ice box. "This way, we can have ice cubes or a shower, the minute we arrive."

Win finished dusting. "I think that's all we can do, now, to get ready. And we'll just have time to get home for dinner."

"What food shall we bring?"

"Bonnie is planning the meals," Win said. "She'll let us know in the morning what we should bring as our share."

Friday dragged interminably for the half dozen girls who were going on the party. At last, however, school was over, and they met outside the building. Each girl had brought her bundle of bedding and box of food to school. The Gas Gull's capacious rumble was crowded to overflowing with the belongings of Cherry, Helen Pringle and Win; Bonnie Vogel and Dorothy Holoubek were going with Myra Mason in her father's huge foreign sedan, which had been borrowed for the occasion. Captain Travers had taken his wife down earlier in the afternoon, so she'd be able to have the fires going and the dinner started.

While Helen was stowing the last of her packages in the rumble, Cherry leaned toward Win and whispered, “You know, I think we’re going to have a lark in spite of Myra.”

Win’s dark eyes twinkled. “I know. I feel as if we were on the trail of a really great adventure—not just a week-end frolic.”

CHAPTER XIX

Quarrel on the Dunes

It was cold, with a hint of snow in the air, when the two cars reached the Tyron cottage. A wisp of smoke curled invitingly from the chimney; gaily the girls grabbed their packages and bedding. The sun made a valiant effort to warm the chill air, and Win pointed out that there would be a gorgeous sunset across the lake.

Bonnie, always the practical one, suggested that they make up their bunks before following Cherry's impulsive plea for a hike.

"Oh, there'll be time for that after dinner," Win said. "Let's be out of doors as much as possible while it's still light."

Mrs. Travers good-naturedly added her urgings to Win's, when the girls made a half-hearted offer to help with the dinner. "Mandy fixed most of it at home," she said. "You'll all have your turns to cook tomorrow and Sunday. Bonnie tells me she's made out a schedule for the meals, and after tonight, I'm to be a lady of leisure with nothing to do but chaperone."

Singing, the girls set off on the trail toward the beach. "Oh, I'd rather hike through the dunes," Myra protested, mildly. "You see, I've walked on the beach a lot and I see the lake dozens of times every day, but I don't know anything about the dunes."

Helen Pringle, who was leading the procession, turned to the left to strike off through the untrailed wilderness.

"Just so we can get down to the beach in time to see the sun going down in a blaze of glory," Cherry added. "I love the dunes, too, but I never tire of seeing the sun set beyond the old lake."

The other girls agreed, and they walked briskly for half an hour through the autumn-bright dunes. It was cold, and in spite of themselves, the girls were beginning to be a little depressed with the thought of how soon this brilliant

coloring would be hidden with the snows of winter.

“Oh, let’s go down on the beach now,” Helen Pringle suggested. “It’s much easier going. Won’t take us any time to get back on the sand—and I’m beginning to feel ol’ man hunger creepin’ up on me.”

“Let’s go back through the dunes!” Myra cried. “I just love them! I’ll never get my fill of them!”

“Oh, no! The beach!”

“You’re forgetting the sunset on the lake!”

“Aren’t you hungry, Myra? We’ve got all day tomorrow to hike through these hills!”

Although the sentiment for going back on the beach was so overwhelming, Myra petulantly demanded that they owed it to her—the stranger and guest—to return through the dunes when that was what she wanted.

“I particularly wished to go back by way of the beach,” Cherry whispered to Win, “to see if there are any fresh boat or truck marks.”

“So did I,” Win murmured, “but it isn’t worth getting everyone in a fuss.” Aloud, she remarked, “I suggest we return through the dunes, since the rest of us don’t care a lot, and Myra wants to so desperately.”

Silently, the group turned to retrace the trail. Myra was all sweetness and smiles, now that she’d had her way, and chattered brightly all the way back to the cottage.

The dinner of ham, baked potatoes, huge vegetable salad, with a dessert of Mandy’s delectable caramel-nut pudding, was relished by the hungry hikers.

After the dishes were done, Win asked her guests what they would like to do. “We’ve brought a lot of games and puzzles. Or we can knit and listen to a play on the radio.”

“Let’s play games—silly games,” Cherry suggested.

At once, all sorts of pet games were named.

First, they did Helen’s favorite—“Art Consequences.” Each girl and Mrs. Travers drew the head of a man, woman or child, and then folded her piece of paper so just the bottom of the neck showed. This she passed to the neighbor at the left, who added neck to waist. This was folded, and sent on to the next person for waist to knees; then knees to ankles, and last, the feet. It was difficult to decide which of the seven grotesque objects was the most hilarious.

Win, who played popular tunes on the piano so irresistibly that it was difficult to keep from dancing, was pressed into service for a musical memory contest. She played a dozen old and new dance tunes, keeping a list of the titles as she went. Dorothy won this easily, having every name correct. Myra excused herself, went into the dormitory and returned with a huge box of candy. “First prize for the winner,” she explained. “However, I do hope you’ll keep in mind that it was really brought for all of us—I didn’t know we were

going to have contests.”

Dorothy laughingly passed the candy, threatening to count each person’s number of bonbons.

Just when they were beginning to weary of the games, Myra said she knew a mysterious one, but she’d need an accomplice. She chose Bonnie, and the two girls went out of the room. Bonnie didn’t return, when Myra came back in and demanded a wand.

“Now, with the aid of this magic wand,” Myra announced, after she’d confiscated the stick from one of the window blinds, “I’ll be able to have secret and mysterious communion with Bonnie. Select any object in the room, and with the aid of nothing but my wand, she will be able to tell you what it is.”

After a bit of whispered discussion, the girls decided on the radio. “You may come in now, Bonnie,” Win called.

“Really, this will be a most amazing performance,” Myra said, making all sorts of queer cabalistic designs on the carpet, ending with a decided tap. “Don’t answer too hastily, Bonnie. Just concentrate.” More markings, then three taps. Still more strange writings, and four taps.

Bonnie pressed her hands to her temples and closed her eyes. “I seem to see—” she announced in what she fancied was a ghostly tone, “yes, I do see—radio!”

It was a grand performance, and the girls were called on to repeat, time after time. Cherry thought she’d guessed the trick, but failed miserably. Finally, Myra explained. “The taps are for the vowels—one for a, two for e, three for i, four for o, and five for u. The first letter of the first word in each sentence I say is the needed consonant. Suggest another object, and I’ll show you.”

“Mother,” Win suggested.

“My trick has confused the crowned heads of Europe,” Myra said instantly. Then she traced some meaningless letters on the floor, and tapped four times. “There is no trick so mystifying.” More tracings, this time without the final taps. “However, I shall be glad to explain it to you.” The tracings, again, followed by two taps. “Right?”

After each girl had tried giving and receiving the message, Mrs. Travers said gently, “I don’t want you girls to regard me as the world’s worst example of chaperone, but I know you’ll be wanting to do lots of things all day tomorrow. Don’t you think it’s time to make up your beds and call it a day?”

“You’re quite right,” Cherry said, yawning frankly. “I didn’t really realize how sleepy I am. It’s a good trick, Myra. Let’s try to catch my brothers with it, sometime.”

Hastily, for they were all weary from the hike and the long evening of

games, the girls made up their bunks for the night.

“What a perfectly beautiful spread you’ve brought, Myra!” Bonnie exclaimed, in admiration. “No danger of your being cold, ever, with that.”

“I love it,” Myra confessed. “Daddy gave it to me for Christmas last year. It’s so soft and warm.”

Startled, Win and Cherry exchanged puzzled glances.

Myra had thrown a cover of vicuña fur over her bed!

CHAPTER XX

Olaf's Phantom Boat

After a mammoth Sunday dinner, prepared by Bonnie and Helen, the girls started to pack for the trek home. "My, but this has been so much fun," Cherry sighed. "I haven't once thought of school or studying or our late tests."

"That's the trouble with vacations," Dorothy grumbled. "Always have to come to an end, sometime, and it's always too soon."

Before Win could send her a warning glance, Mrs. Travers chuckled and said, "Win was waiting to see if you liked this, before she started planning another one for the Christmas holidays. I'm sure she'll do it now."

"Oh, that will be too, too gorgeous!" Myra exclaimed. "I was wondering if Lake Haven slept through the winter vacation. Of course, I was planning to have a couple of formal dinner dances, but this will be a real treat."

Too late, Mrs. Travers realized her error, and apologized mutely to her daughter, with expressive eyes. Although she'd said nothing of it to Win, the older woman couldn't fail to notice the difference between Myra's artificial manner and secretive ways, and the genuine sincerity of these other girls.

Win drove Helen to her home first, and then headed the roadster toward "Twin Anchors." Cherry groaned. "It looks like back to battle and books for me. My, but I do hate to see the party finished, in spite of all Myra could do to spoil it."

"After you've unpacked, and I've taken my luggage back to the station," Win said, "let's run over to the hospital and see Olaf. We haven't been there since Thursday."

"That's right! And Sunday is likely to be a long and lonely day, without callers."

They found the blond boy surrounded by stacks of Norwegian newspapers. His smile was brilliant as he greeted them. "Some kind people in Chicago," he

explained, “read of me in the newspapers. They are of my own country, and sent to me all these papers from home.”

“It looks as if you had a lot of fan mail,” Cherry said, as she glanced at the packages and letters piled on the bedside table.

“Fan mail?”

The two girls spent a busy ten minutes, trying to explain the phrase, and then the talk turned to the wrecked ship. “Dad says the Captain believes it can be salvaged easily, and as soon as the equipment and boats come up from Chicago, they expect to be able to get it off the reef. The crew is staying in Lake Haven. They’ve already discharged part of the crude codliver oil cargo.”

“I know,” Olaf said. “They have come to see me and it will be bad luck for me when the ship is back in work. They are to sail for home, and the doctor says it will be six weeks before he can take this”—he thumped the plaster cast on his leg—“from me.”

For the first time, the girls saw the courageous boy openly discouraged.

“I’ve got an idea!” Cherry exclaimed. “Why don’t you stay in Lake Haven, at least until the spring shipping season starts, and go to high school? We’ll ask Mr. Linton to come over and talk with you, and he can figure out what books you should study, and then Win and I can be your tutors!”

Olaf’s face glowed. “Oh, I would like that! It has been bad luck that I can speak a little English, but cannot read or write in it. I am too poor to go longer to school at home, but now that I can’t sail, I can think of going to your wonderful free schools.”

Olaf’s enthusiasm grew rapidly, and it was almost an hour later when the girls got up and drew on their coats.

“Oh, I’ve been wanting to ask!”

The girls paused.

He turned to Winifred. “Was your father able to rescue the other boat—the small boat?”

The dark-haired girl looked completely bewildered. “What other boat, Olaf?”

“The one I saw, just before I fell. It put out from a small pier, north of the harbor. I could see its lights and hear the motor, even through the fog, because it came so near. I could not see why anyone should want to leave shore, when we were trying so hard to reach it safely. Of course, a little boat didn’t have much chance in those big waves.”

“Olaf, are you sure you didn’t see and hear this *after* you fell?”

“You mean—you think I might be out of my head?”

“Well, it might be easy to imagine something like that——”

“No. I was alone, forward, when I fell, and I don’t think anyone else heard it or saw it. But I am sure.”

“I can’t understand it,” Win said. “Not one of the surfmen reported it, and there has been no report of another boat in distress over all great Lake Michigan, in spite of that terrible storm.”

“Perhaps they reached land safely,” Olaf replied, “but I still don’t know why one would want to leave shore in a storm like that. It would have to be pretty important business out on the water.”

“It must have been.”

Cherry, who knew Win so well, looked at her sharply when she heard her speak in that queer tone of voice.

Had Win known before of the mysterious motor launch?

The two friends were thoughtfully silent as they left the City hospital steps.

“You know, I’ve just had a far-fetched idea. It’s probably crazy, and I wouldn’t have the nerve to say it out loud to anyone else.” Win’s smooth brow under the coronet braids was wrinkled in an unaccustomed frown.

Cherry waited for Win to continue.

“You know, it’s right down fantastic, but here it is. There’s something—something phoney about the Masons.”

“You mean Myra’s father, too?” Cherry was startled at this unexpected turn in the conversation.

“Oh, I know it sounds completely crazy, but they are suspicious-acting. I mean, you can’t get Myra to say a thing about her travels. We wouldn’t even know that she’d been in a lot of queer places in the world, if she didn’t let it slip occasionally. Immediately, when you try to ask her questions about Java and Singapore and Brazil, she just shuts up, or starts talking about something else.”

“Well, she’s certainly been in South America,” Cherry said, decidedly. “Weren’t you startled speechless when you saw that vicuña fur spread?”

“It was queer,” Win agreed, “but she said her father had given it to her. And that’s when I started wondering about him.”

“Well, do you think they’re crooks?” Cherry demanded. Then an incredible thought occurred to her, too. “Smugglers, Win? You don’t really believe they could be our smugglers, do you?”

Win drove almost to the gate of “Twin Anchors” before she replied. “A lot of vague, indefinite clues point to it, Cherry. In the first place, evidences of a smuggling ring working through the inland lake ports didn’t show up until this fall. And that’s when the Masons arrived here.

“Myra is secretive about her past. She brought that vicuña fur spread with her to the house party, and we know how rare those pelts are in this country _____”

“And the only ones we’ve ever known about were smuggled in!” Cherry

interrupted, excitedly.

“Myra made too much fuss, that first afternoon, about our going back to the cottage across the strip of beach where we’d seen the boat and truck marks.”

“Not only that, but she invited herself to the party in the first place!”

“And now,” Win concluded, “Olaf tells us that he saw a motor launch take off from a place which must have been the Mason’s private pier, in the midst of the storm. I don’t believe he was suffering hallucinations. I think that the Mason’s launch was sent out on an important and secret trip, in spite of the worst storm on Lake Michigan for years!”

“Oh, you’ve got to come in and stay for Sunday night supper!” Cherry said. “We can talk about it more in my room, later. It’s much too exciting to drop right now.”

“Mother will begin to think I don’t like my home!” Win chuckled. “She won’t mind, really—I’ll telephone.”

Mrs. Morrow had prepared a hot buffet supper of Italian spaghetti, a casserole of peas and mushrooms and crisp rolls, ready to serve. There was also a wooden bowl, heaped with vegetable salad. “After that dinner at noon, I didn’t think I’d ever be hungry again,” Cherry said, as she made a trip back to the electric warmer on the sideboard, for second servings.

The meal had been a gay one, with the girls interrupting one another to tell of the happenings at the cottage. After the dessert of chilled fruit, Win and Cherry worked the mystifying message trick on Mr. Hudson and Denny and Bill. They were properly astounded, and the girls finally had to tell them the secret.

Then, suddenly, Cherry announced they were going to her room.

“More study?” Bill inquired. “I thought you had enough of that last week.”

“Not exactly,” Cherry said. “We’ve something we want to talk over privately.”

“Oh-ho! Secrets!”

Cherry was afraid that Bill would tease them, but he seemed to be content with her explanation.

“Why do you leave the fire?” Mr. Hudson inquired. “Denny and I are going over to the Mortons for the evening, and Bill will be going out later, no doubt. At least, he can read in his room until you girls have finished your important discussion.”

“It would be more pleasant,” Cherry said. “Thanks, Dad.”

A few minutes later the two girls were seated on deep pillows, their toes turned toward the cheery blaze in the huge fireplace. At first, their voices were low, but as they became more and more absorbed in the discussion, they forgot caution.

“The very queerest thing of all,” Cherry said, “is why the Masons would want to send their motor launch out into a storm that was wrecking ocean-going ships.”

“No one would,” Win agreed, “unless it was a desperate matter—a warning to be carried out to another boat, or something like that——”

“Pardon me, girls,” Bill’s mocking voice broke in, “but I just came out to get the rest of the Chicago papers, and I can’t keep out of this interesting conversation. What about the Masons’ motor launch?”

“Oh, Bill! You old rat! You old listener-inner!”

“It isn’t anything much,” Win said, recovering smoothly. “It was just something queer that Olaf told us this afternoon.”

“Olaf?”

“Yes—you remember—the young sailor who broke his leg? The first one rescued?”

“Oh, sure. But what does he know about the Masons?”

“Well, Cherry and I have been going over to see him almost every day, in the hospital.”

“Sounds like a three-cornered romance.”

“Oh, Bill! Don’t be silly all the time,” his sister said, in an exasperated tone. “We feel sorry for him. He’s a foreigner and a stranger, and awfully young to be thousands of miles from his home while he’s ill.”

“All right! All right! But you still haven’t told me about the motor boat.”

“It isn’t much, really,” Win continued. “But Olaf asked me today if Dad had been able to rescue it. He’d seen it take off from shore, above the pier. That is, he saw the lights and heard the motor. And he didn’t think it had a chance in that rough water, so he thought the Coast Guard had pulled it in. But it wasn’t reported by any of the surfmen, it didn’t send up any rockets, and there hasn’t been any report since, I’m sure.”

“But how did he know it was the Masons’ boat?”

“He didn’t, goop!” Cherry said. “We guessed that. You know, as well as we do, that the Masons have a launch like that, and the only private pier on the North Shore.”

Bill looked very thoughtful, before he told them, “There is something queer about that motor launch. It’s a much more powerful boat than any along this stretch of Lake Michigan, as far as I know, and those boys who took it out the night of the picnic really could handle it. Naturally, I’ve never said anything about it, because the light wasn’t any too good, and the Coast Guard didn’t have any difficulty pulling in that fishing tug, but I’m pretty darned sure that the Masons’ boat *did* contact the tug, before the Guard fellows got there.”

The three absorbed this new bit of information without comment, and then Bill said unexpectedly, “You know, that Myra is a right pretty gal. I think I’ll

cultivate her. Isn't there a benefit concert at the school tomorrow night? My goodness gracious, I believe I'll telephone right now and see if I can get a date."

He grinned at the astonished pair seated before the fire. "You never can tell when girls are going to give away more information than they *think* they are!"

CHAPTER XXI

The Tug's Secret

“Say, what do you suppose Bill meant by that remark?” Cherry demanded, after her brother had left the room. “Do you suppose he overheard more of our conversation than he pretended? Do you suppose he heard us say we thought the Masons were our big smugglers?”

“I don’t believe so,” Win answered, thoughtfully. “I just think he intends to have some dates with the beautiful Myra, and quiz her about the mysterious actions of their launch. He’d feel extremely proud of himself if he managed to discover from Myra, herself, what the launch was doing out in that storm.”

“I hope that’s it,” Cherry replied. “It would be just our luck to point the way, and then have Bill make the actual discovery.”

The clock struck nine, and Win jumped to her feet. “I’ve got to run along home. I’ve some studying to do before I go to bed, and Dad will think I’ve deserted the home crew completely.”

After school on Monday, Cherry told Win that she was afraid her brother had overheard more than they had suspected. “He’s been going around with a very smug look on his face, all day, and he made so-called subtle remarks all during lunch about his power over women—how easy it was to pick off a date with the most popular blonde in high school, if you just knew your technique.”

“That means that he’ll take Myra to the concert tonight, then?”

“Exactly. And before we know it, he’ll probably have the whole mystery solved.”

“Well, then there’s only one thing for us to do,” Win announced practically. She headed the roadster on the familiar route to the Inn. “We’ll have a cup of chocolate and plan a course of action.”

“If Myra doesn’t drop in to interrupt us!”

The Inn was less crowded than usual, for it was an open practice night, and

most of the high school students had gone out to the football field to watch the team's workout.

"I have an idea," Win announced, "but it's going to take a little nerve."

"What is it?"

"I know where that fishing tug is stored—the one that the Coast Guard brought in the night of the Dramatic Club picnic. If the Masons' launch contacted it, as Bill suspected, then it may be connected with the smuggling ring."

"You mean—you think we should go look it over?"

"That's it."

"I make a motion that we do it," Cherry said stoutly, "right away. Where is it?"

"In one of the private boat houses on the wharf."

Cherry sipped the last of the hot chocolate in her cup. "We've more than an hour before dinner time. Let's go sleuthing."

It was late in the fishing season, and few of the small grey tugs were going out in the uncertain weather. The great reels of nets were drying, however, and several fishermen were loafing back of the warehouses along the dock.

As innocently as possible, the two girls strolled idly past. Curiously, the men watched. It was unusual for two well-dressed school girls to be walking down the railroad tracks back of the warehouses.

Winifred spotted the grey tin building which housed the particular fishing tug for which they were searching. "You know, one of the fishermen had pneumonia quite severely, after the rescue. The other one just sort of disappeared, so Dad had to see about having the tug stored. That's how I happen to know where it is."

"But the building is locked," Cherry objected. "How are we going to get in to see it?"

Win smiled. "It's a building that belongs to Mr. Tyron—and the cottage key will open it! He's so absent-minded that he had the same locks put on all his buildings. That way, he has to carry only one key."

"What a break!"

As Win inserted the key in the lock, she whispered to Cherry. "See if any of those men we passed are watching us. . . ."

Cherry made a swift survey. "No—they all seem to be busy at the moment."

The girls slipped inside the door, and relocked it. A half-dozen small boats, of different varieties, were mounted on wooden horses around the rectangle of water. "Only the canoe belongs to Mr. Tyron," Win explained. "He rents out the space to other summer residents for dry-dock, and leaves his own launch at the boathouse near the cottage. Dad knew there was room to moor the tug here,

until the fisherman gets well enough to decide what to do with it.”

Cherry nodded, and stepped to the narrow deck of the squatty little boat. “Looks just like all the rest of the fishing tugs I ever saw.”

“Won’t hurt to look around.” Win followed, and jumped down into the small cabin. She lifted the lids of the two small seats within. The compartments underneath were empty. “That doesn’t really prove anything,” she said, doubtfully. “The other fellow—the one who left—may have taken the slickers and food and stuff I suppose they usually carry here.”

They turned their attention next to the hold, still smelling strongly of its usual cargo of fish. Cherry wrinkled her nose in distaste. “Didn’t scrub up, any too well, after the last voyage,” she said, as she kicked at some dried fish heads. The girls exchanged puzzled looks. The deck, when Cherry had kicked it, had made a peculiar, hollow noise!

“I’ll bet anything it’s a false bottom!” Win announced. “I read about a fishing boat—a larger one than this, of course—that the Coast Guard found out on the Pacific coast. It had a false bottom, and underneath it they found ten live Chinese, being smuggled into the United States from Canada!”

“Must have been awfully little men,” Cherry giggled, “or else they have larger fishing tugs on the coast!”

Without answering, Win started to scrutinize the deck of the hold. Cherry joined her in the search, but it was almost half an hour later before they discovered the clever and simple levers which worked the sliding floor. The compartment underneath was steel-lined, a foot deep, and six feet square.

“What do you suppose they smuggled here?” Cherry demanded in an awed tone.

“I wouldn’t know, but I’d be willing to wager any amount that it wasn’t fish.”

“Well, whatever the cargo was,” Cherry said, “it was taken off by the Masons’ launch, before the Coast Guard had a chance to get there. And what’s more, Myra gave the order to those servants to go get it.”

“She is involved in it, there’s no doubt,” Win declared. “And Bill has a date with her tonight. You know, Cherry, he may just get the wind up—he may give away a lot more information than he pries loose.”

“We’ve got to do something, and do it right this minute.”

It was beginning to get dark, as the two girls left the boathouse, after returning the false bottom of the hold to its original place. “I do have a plan, but it’s so daring that I hesitate to tell you about it,” Win said.

“Come on,” Cherry insisted. “After finding out what we have about that innocent-looking fishing tug, I’m ready to detect all over the place.”

“Well, first, it involves going without dinner.”

“Even that sacrifice I am willing to make for the sake of the Coast Guard,”

Cherry announced, striking a noble pose.

“And perhaps an I. P. A. story.”

“That’s all I needed to clinch my determination. Lead on, Winifred Eaton Travers. I am ready.”

CHAPTER XXII

Night Adventure

Winifred outlined her bold plan of action.

Cherry thought it over, and then said, "Sounds grand. I've just one objection. If I don't turn up for dinner, Bill may suspect something. But if I do go to dinner, and then make some excuse about getting back to school early to help with the concert, he won't catch on."

"Perhaps you're right. It would be better to get there while they're still at dinner."

"And in another hour, it will be dark."

It was agreed, then, that Win was to call for Cherry in the Gas Gull at a quarter of seven; they would wear dark clothes for the adventure.

The plans worked, and the two girls, shortly before seven, parked the small roadster more than a block from the old Dillon mansion where the Masons made their home. "It would be better if we approached from the beach," Win suggested, "rather than risk being seen going through the gates and up the driveway."

Unquestioning, Cherry followed the dark-haired girl's lead.

It was a black night, cloudless but without a moon. Both girls pulled their dark hats low, so that their faces were in shadow, and hurried along the expanse of beach leading to the private pier on the North Shore.

"You brought a flash?" Cherry asked, in a guarded tone.

"Yes. I knew we wouldn't dare turn on the boathouse lights."

After a quick survey of the beach to make sure they weren't followed, the two girls darted down the pier to the boathouse. A stiff wind was dashing the breakers against the stone, but Cherry and Win managed to keep dry by walking near the protected side.

"We'd better make sure there isn't a guard, or anything at the boathouse,

before we try to get in,” Cherry warned. She cupped her hands to make her voice carry to Win above the roar of the water.

“Right.”

“What if there’s a burglar alarm on the door or windows?” Cherry asked, in a stricken tone.

“We’ll just have to run that risk.”

Cherry started to laugh, amazingly. “How in the world would we ever explain to Myra what we’d been up to, if we were caught?”

“We just don’t dare to be caught,” Win answered, ominously.

The boathouse seemed to be deserted, and the two girls gazed back at the huge house above them on the cliff, ablaze now with light.

“Well, we might just as well try to get in—” To her everlasting surprise, Cherry stared at the door. She’d tried it, idly, and it had swung open! “Can’t be very much of value in here, or they’d lock up at night!”

“Just when I was all set to dive under the big door,” Win giggled, following Cherry inside.

“Would you really have done that?” Cherry whispered, shocked. It was dark outside, but this was an impenetrable gloom. She thrust out her hand; clung to Win’s arm until her eyes could become more accustomed to this thick blackness.

“Well, it would have been a way to get in, if we couldn’t find an easier.”

“We’ll never be able to see a thing,” Cherry said, in an exasperated tone, “Through this total eclipse. Why don’t we have the flashlight?”

Win turned the narrow beam toward the center of the boathouse, and the two girls gasped with genuine pleasure at the trim launch. It was a beautiful boat, beautifully kept. The metal and wood were highly polished; the sleek cabin was artfully streamlined.

“How fast do you suppose she’d go?” Cherry demanded.

“Hate to guess. I’m afraid, faster than anything we have at the station.”

“Well, let’s get on with our investigation.”

Win hopped onto the boat, and kept her light focused on the edge so that Cherry could duplicate her leap.

They gasped at the incredible fact the light revealed.

The floor of the cabin was half-lifted in the air, and underneath was a steel-lined compartment, similar to the one in the fishing tug!

“Why do you suppose it’s open?” Cherry demanded. “We’d never have discovered it if it hadn’t been.”

“I can’t understand—the boathouse unlocked, and now this——”

“I know!” Cherry exclaimed. “I’ll bet they’re going to make a haul tonight!”

Win jerked the flash a little higher, and drew in her breath sharply. A

machine gun was mounted inside the cabin, fitted so that it just cleared the prow!

Everything happened so rapidly in the next few minutes that Cherry was a little dazed.

Suddenly, they heard angry voices and running feet outside, above the pounding sound of the breakers. Win instantly clicked off the flashlight, and thrust it into Cherry's hand.

Win dived, Cherry knew, for she heard the splash. At almost the same moment, the small door swung open and a brilliant beam of light struck her in the face.

"Great heavens!" a man's gruff voice shouted, "it's a girl!"

Cherry could see the shadows of two other faces. The men were standing at the shoulder of the fellow holding the light.

"A girl!" One of the men exclaimed, incredulously.

"What are you doing here?" the first man demanded.

Cherry, recovering her wits a little, leaped from the deck of the boat to the runway. She'd go to meet them. Maybe the men wouldn't notice the rippling of the water or discover Win's hiding place.

"Oh, I was just out for a walk," she replied, airily, "and I found the door open and thought I'd look over this boat. I've wanted to have a good look at it, ever since the Dramatic Club picnic. It really is a beauty, Mr. Mason—you are Mr. Mason, aren't you? It's so hard to see against that strong light——"

"Evans!" The gruff voice was thicker now, with anger. "Did you leave the door of the boathouse open?"

"Why—I guess I must have, sir. I remembered to set the burglar alarm, though. Must just have been a little careless, knowing we'd be back to use the boat soon after din——"

"Shut up! So, you were just investigating, young lady! And you know my name. I don't believe I've had the pleasure?"

Cherry thought rapidly. It would only make it worse if she gave the wrong name, and then be exposed by Myra. Boldness would be better——

"I'm Cherry Hudson, Mr. Mason. I'm in the same class at Lake Haven High as your daughter."

"Well, isn't that just too, too interesting? We'll take a trip up to the house and find out if she agrees with you. Just how long had you been in the boathouse, young lady? Don't you know you're guilty of breaking and entering?"

"Entering, perhaps," Cherry answered flippantly, "but not breaking."

"Just how thoroughly had you looked over the boat?"

"Well, if it was your burglar alarm which told you I'd arrived, you know I'd just got here." Cherry walked toward the door. It wouldn't do to play too

innocent and dumb. “Say, what’s the funny hole in the bottom of the boat for? Extra luggage? It’s a good idea, really. Wonder why more boats don’t use it? Must be a lot of waste space on most motor boats.”

“It’s for bedding,” Mason answered shortly, “on long cruises. The side seats extend and can be made into beds.”

Cherry almost sighed her relief. He wouldn’t suspect, now, that she’d seen the gun.

“I must say, Evans,” Mason said roughly, “that you certainly left things in fine shape for any passerby to see. You know what I think of such carelessness. I believe, after tonight, that we can dispense with your services.”

The oily voice of the servant was insolent. “As you say, sir. However, I believe I’d think twice before I’d do anything rash. You’ve found my particular knowledge useful in the past, you know. Indeed, others might be willing to pay highly for the added knowledge I’ve obtained while in your employ.”

Mason was silent a moment before replying. “We’ll discuss it in the morning. Come along, now, to the house. See if you can lock the door, this time.”

He turned all the lights on in the boathouse, for a swift survey, and Cherry ceased to breathe for a moment. If he should find Win now!

Evidently satisfied, he snapped off the lights and signalled to the servant to lock the door. Grasping Cherry firmly by the arm, he marched her up to the house.

The boathouse door was locked!

How could Win escape, now, without setting off the alarm again?

CHAPTER XXIII

The Blue Room

When Cherry was propelled roughly into the Mason living-room, Myra was seated before the fireplace.

“Is she your burglar?” she demanded, gazing unbelievably at Cherry.

“Right. Says you know her,” Mr. Mason answered.

“I do.” Myra was suddenly seized with an uncontrollable fit of laughter. “What a priceless joke, Dad! The daughter of the local newspaper proprietor—a common, sneaking thief!”

“I’m no such thing,” Cherry flared, “and you know it, Myra Mason.”

“Then what were you doing in our boathouse?” All mirth was gone from Myra’s voice.

“As I told your father, I was just out for a walk, and went down your pier. The boathouse was unlocked, and I wanted a look at that fast boat. Didn’t have much of a chance to see it, the night of the Dramatic Club picnic.”

“I see,” the other girl said, sarcastically. “Just going out for a walk, and you’re due at the schoolhouse in less than an hour. Do you always take a flashlight when you go snooping around?” She turned to her father. “How did it happen that the boathouse was unlocked? How much did she see?”

“Evans. Just carelessness. Evidently she’d just been in the place a few moments before we got there.”

Myra stood, and Cherry was appalled at the hard, merciless expression on her face. She ignored the girl, now.

“You know what this means, Dad.”

“I’m afraid I do. It’s the second bad break for us, and we don’t dare risk a third.”

“Well, you’d better go ahead with your plans to make the contact tonight. I’ll go on to the concert, as planned—” she started to giggle. “It’s her brother

who's taking me!"

"No!" The older man was startled. "Well, at least I can trust you not to make a slip."

"You're quite right, my dear." Myra turned to glance scornfully at the culprit, Evans. "I'll be home from the concert by eleven at the latest. We can be clear by twelve. I'll pack now."

As Myra left the room, she said to the other servant, "take her to the blue room and see that she stays there. Sorry, Cherry darling, but you are going to have to miss the treat of attending the musicale this evening. I shall be duly puzzled when your brother begins to wonder audibly where you are."

With scant ceremony, Cherry was ushered by the silent guard to the room Myra had named. It was a rather depressing little room, and its new occupant guessed that the old-fashioned heavy furniture and faded draperies were left from the Dillon era. She wasn't exactly sure of its location, but it was on the third floor.

The guard took the one comfortable chair in the room, and tipped it against the wall by the door. He still had said nothing. Cherry dropped to the spindly chair at the desk. It was going to be a dull evening, she thought vaguely.

Her mind turned relentlessly to the fear and worry that was uppermost.

What had happened to Win?

Was she, too, still a prisoner in the boathouse? She must have overheard that about the burglar alarm, and there'd been no bell since Cherry'd been brought to the house. If so, she would still be there when the men went to make their last 'contact.' What would happen to her, then?

Bill!

Bill would be coming to this house, in a very short time. If only she could get a message to him! Did the drive come under this window?

She rose and sauntered idly across the room.

"Get away from that window!" It was the first sound from her silent-tongued guard, and it startled her.

"Oh—oh, yes. Sorry, I didn't think."

It had just been a glimpse, but the white gravel of the drive did wind below this room, from the entrance gate to the parking lots and garages at the other side of the house!

For several moments, Cherry sat with an expressionless face at the desk, but her mind was racing furiously.

There was no stationery in this useless hunk of furniture, and she'd neglected to bring any copy paper——

Surreptitiously, she felt in her jacket pocket. There was a stub of soft pencil, but not a scrap of paper.

There was something else, though! A fresh white linen handkerchief, with

her monogram in the corner.

She looked at the guard. He was staring at her, suspiciously.

“Would it do a bit of good,” she asked, in a hopeless tone, “to ask for a drink of water? I really am frightfully thirsty. You could lock the door, and I promise I won’t jump out. I know it’s three flights to the ground.”

Without a word, the guard rose.

Cherry dropped her eye-lids to conceal the gleam of triumph. At least she could use this chance to write the note—time to worry about getting it to Bill, when he came.

Hastily, she wrote: “I’m a prisoner here. Don’t let on, but notify Capt. Travers. Mason is to contact smugglers tonight.”

She wanted to add that Win was probably in the Mason boathouse, but she heard the guard fumbling with the key on the other side of the door.

She thrust the handkerchief and pencil into her pocket, and in an inspired flash, the quaint glass paper-weight that had graced the desk.

To the wary guard, she appeared motionless.

She thanked him for the water, and drank it all thirstily. “Had ham for dinner,” she explained, smiling.

There was the familiar sound of Bill’s old Miranda chugging up the drive!

Cherry held out the empty glass. “Would you mind, terribly, getting me another?”

The guard looked annoyed, and Cherry held her breath. Would the ruse work again?

He turned and left the room, locking the door behind him. Cherry forced herself to remain rigid, although the seconds were precious.

Then she crossed swiftly to the window, her fingers busy with tying the handkerchief securely around the paper-weight.

The window was unlocked, and there was no storm window.

Cherry took a careful aim. Thank heaven, Bill’s old jalopy was a topless number!

The paper-weight struck the seat, and by a sort of sympathetic action, the car stalled. Cherry slid the window down, and was apparently tugging at it when the guard returned to the room. “Getting a little stuffy in here,” she said, brightly.

“Oh, is it, now?” the guard barked, advancing. “Thought I told you to stay away from that window——”

Cherry walked toward him, still smiling. “Thanks for the water,” she said, taking the glass from his hand. “It seems to be stuck, though. Maybe you can get it up.”

“Oh, yeah!” He crossed to the window, locked it, and jerked the blind down. He locked the other windows, and pulled the shades, and while he was

doing this, Cherry calmly took the chair by the door.

Far away, she could hear the doorbell.

Had Bill missed the whole point of the message? Was he going to take Myra to the concert, anyway?

She could hear Myra's voice from the floor below. "Be down in a minute, Bill! I'm not quite ready!"

"Don't hurry," her brother's voice came booming up the stairway. "Had a little difficulty with the old Press car, and she's stalled right in the middle of the drive. I'll run down the block and bring Tom Dunker to push me——"

"No need to do that," Myra called back. "Evans can take one of Dad's cars _____"

"Sorry, that won't work," Bill shouted back. "Mine's a temperamental old bus. Has to be shoved from the rear before she'll turn over. Won't take ten minutes, though. Be right back!"

"Good old Bill," Cherry thought, fervently. "He's fixed it so the drive is blocked, and he can still get away to carry my message to Captain Travers."

CHAPTER XXIV

An Unexpected Snag

The shock of icy water, when Win plunged into it, made her gasp for breath. She was grateful for the commotion and noise at the door, for it covered the noise of the splash and of her labored breathing.

The dark hat, water-soaked, had covered her ears. She managed to get it off, silently, as she clung to the mooring rope at the far end of the boat. Then she could hear the voices.

Good for Cherry! She'd certainly given the right answers. For a moment, there, she'd been afraid that Cherry would give away too much, when she started talking about the hole in the floor of the boat. But, then, she'd just been playing dumb, and Mr. Mason fell for it.

In the dim light, Win saw a ladder, leading down into the water. It might be a good idea, in case they decided to search the place, to be able to pull herself down and hold herself under——

Just in time!

She'd just reached the ladder when all the lights blazed. Gulping her lungs full of air, Win silently pulled herself down the ladder.

The water was so cold!

She clung to the ladder, her ears pounding with the pressure of the water and the effort of holding her breath. If only they failed to see the tell-tale bubbles——

At last the lights above flashed off, and Win pulled herself cautiously to the surface. Lucky she'd remembered to hang on to her hat. It would have floated on the surface and given her away, for sure.

With a tremendous effort—the dark woolen clothes were horribly heavy—Win climbed the ladder.

Shivering, she sat in the dark boathouse, thinking rapidly of the

conversation she'd just heard.

She couldn't stay here, long, even if she'd wanted to, for the servant had said something about planning to take the boat out, soon after dinner. And she didn't dare open the door to leave, for fear of setting off the burglar alarm. She'd have to swim out, under the large doors, then climb up on the pier at the nearest ladder.

And the sooner the better——

She took off the water-soaked jacket and thrust the felt hat into one pocket. This she tied to the first rung below the water's surface on the ladder. It wouldn't do for those men to suspect, when they returned, that Cherry had had a companion in this adventure.

Her eyes were more accustomed to the gloom, and Win studied the sleek, trim lines of the powerful boat. If it came to a race, the Coast Guard's patrol boat would be outdistanced in fifteen minutes. If only there were something she could do— She stared at the boat, her mind working swiftly, and then she chuckled.

Less than ten minutes later, Win walked to the front of the boathouse and plunged. It wasn't easy, even without the jacket, to swim in this cold water and in the dark. Seasons of daily swimming in the lake had steeled her to such a performance, however, and her second surface dive carried her under the door.

It was tougher going, in the open water, but the light was a little better. The white metal rungs of a ladder, set in the cement of the pier, glistened through the darkness, a dozen feet away.

Win was sure she'd never felt anything as cold as the wind which struck her when she'd pulled herself to the top. Maybe the race to the Gas Gull would warm her a bit——

She ran as fast as she could in the water-logged clothing.

It was better, running, but how she wished the roadster had been a closed car, with a heater going! It would be a miserable drive to the station. More than a mile in that stiff wind, with clothing clammy and freezing——

Somehow, she managed to get through it.

She burst into the living room, where her mother and father sat before the fire, reading.

"Winifred!" Her mother rose and ran to her. "What in the world has happened to you, child!"

"Get me a blanket, Mother, quick, and I'll tell you." She crossed to the fire, where her father still sat, staring at her in bewilderment.

Winifred unloosed the wet braids around her head, and shook the damp strands in the welcome heat. "Dad, Cherry and I have discovered your smugglers." She couldn't help being a little dramatic about it.

"Nonsense! What are you talking about?"

Mrs. Travers came back into the room, just as Win was launching into a description of the discovery of the false bottom in the fishing boat. "And Dad," she went on excitedly, as she drew the blanket about her, "Bill Hudson saw the Masons' motor launch contact that fishing tug, before the Coast Guard got there."

Silently, Captain Travers listened, his face grim.

"So Cherry and I decided to have a look at the launch."

"Winifred!" It was her mother, now, who was shocked.

"Well, we did," the dark-haired girl went on, a little defensively. "We had lots of clues. Myra had a vicuña fur spread on that house party—you remember, Mother—and it's the kind of rare South American fur that was found in that truck that overturned early this month. And she made a huge fuss about our going down on the beach, where Cherry and I had seen the boat and truck tracks, last week. And Olaf Leifson had seen a launch set out from the Masons' pier, during that terrific storm, just before he broke his leg. And Myra is so close-mouthed about her travels and where she used to live——"

"You still haven't explained why you're dripping wet and why you aren't at the school concert," Captain Travers interrupted.

"Well, Cherry and I went down to their boathouse. The door was open and we walked in. And Dad, that motor launch has a big secret compartment, under the cabin floor, and a machine gun, mounted in the prow!"

Captain Travers sat up straight in his chair. "Winifred, you and Cherry have been seeing too many lurid movies. You're hysterical—you imagined all this."

"But I didn't!" Win wailed. "I jumped in the water, when those men came down, and they took Cherry away with them! But one of the men said something about using the boat tonight, so I swam out underneath the big doors, so I wouldn't set off the burglar alarm again, and came home to tell you!"

"This is serious," Captain Travers said. "I think this smuggling business is all nonsense, but we must get Cherry out of this scrape if we can. Mason can prefer charges against her, if he chooses. Didn't you realize what you were doing, Winifred?"

"But, Dad! Aren't you going to do anything about capturing them? Cherry and I knew we were running a risk, of course, but we knew you wanted to catch those smugglers."

"You'd better get to bed," Mrs. Travers warned. "After all, we can't have you getting pneumonia out of this wild escapade."

"But Dad doesn't believe it!" This problem hadn't occurred to the girl, before. How could she convince him of her sincerity?

"I'll change from these wet clothes," Win promised, "but I won't go to bed

until Dad believes me. He has a marvelous chance to catch the ring in action tonight, but he's got to get ready to go."

"You'd better get to bed, daughter."

Win tried one last appeal. "Dad, if I change to dry clothes, and then take you down to the wharf to show you that fishing tug with the hidden compartment in it, will you believe me? And try to catch those men, tonight?"

Captain Travers considered this a moment, gravely. "Are you sure you feel all right? You haven't caught cold from this exposure?"

"No. I'll change. It won't take two minutes——"

CHAPTER XXV

The Chase

It wasn't necessary to see the fishing tug in order to convince the captain.

Just as he and Win were leaving, the telephone shrilled. The captain listened to the message with a solemn face. "Just a minute—I want to think what's best to do," he said, into the mouth-piece. Then, "You go get Sheriff Doty and go back and watch the place. When you see the men leave, get the message to me. Doty can have his men surround the house, but I expect them to try to make their getaway by the lake. Understand? Would you repeat that message?"

Win listened breathlessly.

"Yes," her father continued, "it's no joke. Winifred was with her and she got away by swimming under the boathouse doors. Just came home. Let me know, Bill, the minute you see any activity. Good-bye."

"It was Bill!"

"Yes. He had a date with the Mason girl tonight and was just coming up the drive when a stone lit in the car. A paper-weight or something. Cherry had scribbled a message on her handkerchief and managed to throw it to Bill. Said she was a prisoner, and to notify me that Mason was to contact the smugglers tonight."

"Good old Cherry! You should have heard the way she stalled those men off, on the reason why she was in the boathouse and how much she'd seen!"

"Well, I'd better telephone district headquarters, and have them get in touch with the cutter. I'm afraid it's way up on the other side of Ludington."

"You'll chase them in the patrol boat, won't you?" Win demanded, incredulously.

"Don't think it would do much good, if that launch is as speedy as you say," the officer replied. "It'll be running without lights, too."

“But, Dad! You’ll have to chase ’em! What good will all this do Cherry and me if someone else makes the arrest?”

“I appreciate your interest,” the officer replied, sincerely, “but I wouldn’t dare risk my men against that fast boat. Mason and his men will be desperate, and they won’t hesitate to use that machine gun.”

Win laughed, joyously. “Oh, Dad! I forgot to tell you. After those men took Cherry away, I crawled out of the water and dumped all the rounds of ammunition overboard, and then put the empty boxes back.”

The captain grinned delightedly, and paid Win the highest compliment she’d ever received. “I’ve always felt sorry you weren’t a boy, so you could join the Coast Guard, but I realize that you’re twice as helpful as any boy I ever saw.”

“Then you will chase them in the patrol boat?” Win demanded.

“Why not?”

“And,” Win pressed her advantage, “can I go along?”

“It’s contrary to the regulations, but this once, I think I’ll make an exception.”

Captain Travers was extremely busy, the next few minutes. His orders were barked over the telephone, to the crew room below. He reported to the district office, and confirmed his fears that the cutter was eight hours away.

Twenty minutes later, the message came from Bill. Mason and two men had dashed down the cliff to the pier. The girl had stayed, evidently, keeping Cherry a prisoner. Doty and his men would wait ten minutes, then break into the house to rescue Cherry.

There was terrific activity, then, at the station. The doors of the largest boathouse on the wharf rolled open. The seventy-five footer, lights up and motors humming, was ready for the chase.

“She’s an old boat, but a good one,” Captain Travers said fondly, as he gave the orders to go ahead. There was a tense coolness everywhere, and Win tried to make herself inconspicuous in the cabin.

Faint moonlight lessened the gloom on the dark waters.

“Dad,” Win suggested, “wouldn’t it be a good idea to douse the lights? I mean, if they don’t know they’re being followed, they’ll lead you to the smuggling ship. But if you catch them right away, or they realize they’re being pursued, you won’t have much of a case.”

Captain Travers agreed, and gave the orders in a low, firm voice. For the first time in the history of the Lake Haven station, a Coast Guard boat broke one of its own maritime laws.

Outside the length of pier and beyond the light house, Captain Travers ordered half speed. Keen-eyed, he watched, and was rewarded with the sight of the rakish craft which was his quarry, already a half-mile out. Orders were

now, "Full speed ahead!" and the chase was on.

It would have been much easier if the Coast Guard patrol boat could have used the powerful searchlight mounted on top the compact little cabin, but Captain Travers agreed with Win that it would be better to let the launch lead them to a more important capture.

"They've seen us!" Win shouted suddenly. The craft ahead was letting out to full speed.

"Might as well have the lights, then," Captain Travers decided, and he gave the orders.

"Just about now," Win chuckled, as the searchlight located the swift launch, "they'll be discovering something wrong with the machine gun."

"And I see the larger boat!" Captain Travers reported. "Off the starboard! The Mason boat is trying to lead us away, now!"

Win was grinning over a secret joke——

"They've stopped!" Captain Travers announced. "Must have decided to give themselves up."

"It's engine trouble, sir," said the pilot.

The steady ray of the searchlight revealed the frantic faces of the men on the smaller boat, as the patrol ship drew alongside. Captain Travers ordered the men in the launch to toss over a towing line, and a couple of crew members made it fast to the bits. Ignominiously, the sleek, streamlined launch was conveyed to a position near the larger vessel Captain Travers had spotted.

The officer and a couple of the Coast Guardsmen were strapping on life-jackets. In a sterner voice than Win had ever heard her father use, he ordered the steamer to lower one of her boats. Armed, the officers ordered the men from the launch to join them, and the queerly assorted group climbed to the deck.

Win learned later that the tramp steamer was a Canadian boat, which Mason and his ring had been using for months for their illicit trade in narcotics, jewelry and furs. In addition, they had been shipping guns and machinery illegally to several obscure South American ports. Mason had planned to contact the ship and remove the valuable cargo of heroin and jewels to his launch. The remainder of the smuggled shipment—furs from South America—was to be landed by the ship's own rowboats at the strip of beach where Cherry and Win had found the evidences of a similar discharge. It was nearing midnight when the patrol, still conveying the launch, escorted the ship to harbor.

The smuggling ring was shattered.

Cherry, with Bill and Sheriff Doty, was waiting at the Coast Guard station.

Joyously, the two girls embraced one another. While Captain Travers telephoned the report that would insure his official future, the two girls told

one another of the evening's exciting events. After Win had told of the chase and the capture, she asked, "But how did you get away? And where's Myra?"

Cherry gave an amused glance in her brother's direction. "Bill behaved brilliantly, after I got the note to him. Stalled Miranda in the drive, and went to tell your father and to notify the sheriff, but he forgot one little thing. He left his key in the car!

"Myra came out, saw that she couldn't get past Bill's car in her own roadster, and also saw the key. She hopped in, and drove his buggy around to the parking lot in the rear. Then she tossed her luggage in her own car, and dashed away. I was locked in, you see, on the third floor, and couldn't do anything about it. I did get her license numbers, however, and Sheriff Doty turned them over to the state police. She'll probably be picked up, sometime soon."

"But why didn't they stop her as she left?"

"Because Bill hadn't come back from telephoning, you see. She was out and away, ten or fifteen minutes before the men left the house."

"Mason has signed a confession," Captain Travers announced jovially, as he returned to the room. "Wouldn't one of you newspaper Hudsons like to interview him?"

Bill grinned at his sister. "It's your story, cub. Go to it."

Cherry smiled brilliantly at Win. "You finally did manage to hand me an I. P. A. story, all neatly packaged and tied."

"Best thing about the whole business," Bill said, magnanimously, "is that it sounds very much as if your news source was also the heroine of this tale."

Win blushed, and her father beamed with pride. "There's just one thing I can't understand," he said, in a puzzled tone. "It was that piece of luck in the launch's developing engine trouble. If we'd had to chase Mason much longer, the freighter would have had time to get up steam and make its getaway."

"Oh, I know about that," Win said, unexpectedly. "I thought about letting out the gas, when I was in the boathouse, but I knew they'd notice the gas on the water, no matter how great a hurry they might be in. So I put water in the oil. That way I knew they could get out of the harbor and perhaps lead us to the cargo. . . ."

Bill and Cherry stared at Win in open-mouthed admiration. "My goodness gracious!" the boy finally said.

"Young lady," Captain Travers boomed, in a gruff voice, "you intended all along to join the chase." His eyes were twinkling. "I believe you planned this whole thing, just so you could break Coast Guard regulations and go for a night ride on the patrol boat!"

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *Daughter of the Coast Guard* by Betty Baxter Anderson (as Betty Baxter)]