

**TOM SLADE
AT
SHADOW ISLE**

PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH

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TOM SLADE AT SHADOW ISLE



“MY GRANDPAP HAD ME IN HIS ARMS.”

TOM SLADE
AT SHADOW ISLE

BY
PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH

Author of
THE TOM SLADE BOOKS
THE ROY BLAKELEY BOOKS
THE PEE-WEE HARRIS BOOKS
THE WESTY MARTIN BOOKS

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TOM SLADE AT SHADOW ISLE

CHAPTER I

PETER PEARSON

There was something about Peter Pearson that struck a responsive chord in Tom Slade. He felt it the very first time he saw the little pioneer scout sitting quite alone outside the “eats” shack at Leatherstocking Camp.

Peter’s attention was fixed upon the lake. A certain wistful expression shadowed his tanned face and crinkled the skin about his temples. His mouth was puckered as if in thought and his two small hands were clasped about his drawn up knees.

Tom watched him through the window just over his desk. No one was in the Lodge and he had time to ponder over many reasons that could have brought about Peter’s self-imposed exile.

Tom had lived and worked with boys so long that he could tell at first glance why and when a boy didn’t fit in. And he had only to glance at Peter’s misty eyes to know that he wasn’t fitting in at all.

The corners of Tom’s generous mouth smiled understandingly. He had seen so many kids at the end of their first day in camp, sitting in that same pensive attitude. They all sat apart from the bustling camp life after supper just as Peter was doing. But unlike Peter they all looked wistfully down toward the wagon trail that led out to the main road and thence to Harkness and the railroad station—to home. That is, all except the happy-go-lucky ones. To them, home

was a place to go to when they couldn't go anywhere else. Tom knew that type well.

Certainly Peter did not fit under that category. Neither did he add his name to the list of those who watched the wagon trail. He was simply in a class by himself, Tom thought. For never before in the short history of Leatherstocking Camp had any scout gazed so steadily upon the sombre waters of Weir Lake after the supper hour. It was a record worth noting.

With the sun going down, the lake presents more or less of a depressing picture. No last lingering scarlet ray of sunset ever skims its leaden surface. Old Hogback, like the perverse, towering giant it is, shuts out Weir's full measure of daylight and sunlight, and casts great, black misty shadows full upon it in a premature twilight. It is a scene to turn away from.

Still Peter stared on.

Tom's curiosity was aroused. He rose determinedly and strode quickly out of the Lodge. He just had to find out the why of Peter Pearson.

At Peter's side, he stopped short and turned, facing the lake. He said not a word, hoping the scout would voluntarily enlighten him as to the mist's evident allure.

Peter glanced sideways without moving his head. He said nothing and looked confused. Tom felt disappointed but decided on another course.

He leaned over and gave Peter a cordial smack on the shoulder. "What's so interesting out there?" he asked. "Are you wondering whether you'll get trout for breakfast?"

Peter grinned sheepishly. Tom gave him a friendly shove and sat down beside him on the bench. "Come on," he urged

gaily, “what is it all about? I’m here to hear all that’s to be heard. Don’t you like our Camp?”

Peter chuckled audibly. “S-u-ure,” he answered falteringly. “I like it fine, Mr. Slade.”

“But you don’t like the kids. Is that it?” Tom queried.

“Oh, honest—” Peter began.

“That’s understood,” Tom laughed. “The main thing is to unload all your difficulties before bedtime. You’ll sleep better. Are you getting enough to eat?”

“Uh huh,” Peter answered. “I even had more than I could eat.”

“Well that’s better than not enough, isn’t it?” Tom smiled. Peter nodded.

“Outside of being homesick, there’s no other difficulty that I can think of just now. Perhaps you could tell me a new one.”

Peter’s face brightened and he moved closer to Tom. “I like the scouts here, Mr. Slade,” he confessed in a low voice. “I *do* like them. Only I never met any scouts before I came here. I never even talked to boys, except big fellers. That’s the trouble—I don’t know what to talk about.”

“Explain all that,” Tom said, kindly.

“It’s funny,” Peter said softly, “about me, I mean. I can see I’m funny, just since I came here today.”

Tom looked down at him inquiringly. “How do you mean?” he asked.

Peter flushed. “I mean I can see I’m different from other boys,” he answered. “I spose it’s ’cause Grandpap never lets me have any friends or nothing. He taught me how to read and write and everything. I’ve never been inside a school

even. I guess that's what made me different, don't you think so?"

There was a sort of appeal in Peter's question. Tom sensed it. He put his hand over on the boy's knee. "That's not such a difficulty to get over, kid," he said, consolingly. "You'll know every boy here by next week and you won't have time to feel different. Get the idea?"

Peter smiled. "Sure," he answered. "Only you can't understand what it is to be me, Mr. Slade. Even if I do get to know the scouts here I'll have to be careful not to be like them so I might as well stay alone by myself. Grandpap'd be mad if I came home acting and talking like other boys—I had to promise him I wouldn't before I could even come here. He hates everybody in the world he says and that's the reason he doesn't want me to be like everybody else."

"Your grandfather must be an odd number," Tom said half aloud.

"He is," Peter agreed. "Everybody over at Rhodes (that's the mainland), they say he's queer and that he's trying to make me queer too. No one is friendly with him, not even old Jones. He's Grandpap's helper and he lives with us. Sometimes he's nice to me."

Tom looked puzzled. "Where do you live, Peter?" he asked.

"At Shadow Isle, Maine. It's a mile from the mainland."

"How is it," Tom spoke at length, "that your grandfather allowed you to come here? How is it he will recognize scouting if he hates all the rest of our civilization?"

"He says most of scouting is sensible," Peter answered. "He says it isn't like other modern things—a lot of trash where you don't learn anything. He just let me have this one

vacation he says because I'll soon have to learn to tend the light."

Tom whistled low. "Oh," he said, "so you're a lighthouse scout, eh?"

"Yep," Peter answered. "I'd rather do other things though. I like the land better than the ocean all the time. That's why I got the idea of selling fish over at the mainland. I go in the spring and summer twice a week and I earned enough money to come here. A man I sold some fish to gave me a scout handbook. Grandpap wouldn't let me read it for a long while."

"But then he finally did," Tom interposed.

"Yes, all of a sudden," Peter went on. "He never was so nice to me before. He gave it to me and he said I should write to the scout headquarters and find out what camps there were and that I could pay my way with the money I had saved. Gee, I was surprised because he's always been so cranky about me talking to anybody."

"So that's how you come to pick on the Adirondacks and Leatherstocking Camp, eh?"

"Yes," Peter admitted. "It's fine here I think, especially that great big cabin you call the Lodge."

Tom smiled. "It is pretty nice," he said. "This was once owned by a very rich man and he lived in the Lodge in the summer. We built all the cabins since the Scouts took it over. It was intended for a scoutmaster's training camp but afterward they decided to use it for all purposes. That's the reason I'm here—to take charge of you kids."

Peter grinned. "Well I'm glad it's you, Mr. Slade," he said, naively. "It's nice to have an older person treat me like I was

grown up. Grandpap don't do that. He's most always mad at me."

"Except when he decided you could come here," Tom said. "He couldn't have been mad then, I guess."

"Oh no, he wasn't," Peter admitted proudly. "Gee, he acted like I wasn't going away fast enough. Even old Jones noticed it because he asked me one night what had come over Grandpap to get so kind hearted all of a sudden. But I couldn't tell him. I was only too glad to come here and see what the rest of the world was like."

"You poor kid," Tom said sympathetically. "Is it the first time you were ever away?"

"Sure," Peter answered. "That is, as far back as I can remember. Grandpap said my father and mother died when I was a baby. He said I was born at the lighthouse and afterward they took me away for a couple of years."

"Do you remember any of it?" Tom queried with interest.

"Well, a little," Peter answered. "It's sort of like a dream. I remember a nice tall lady—I guess she was my mother. And I remember a great big man that I called Father and we were out on the ocean like, because the waves were high just like I've seen them at the light in a storm. After that I sort of got sleepy and the next thing I knew my Grandpap had me in his arms and was climbing up the rocks to the lighthouse. That's all I know."

"That's strange," Tom said, aroused. "How do you know that it wasn't all a dream?"

"I've always been sure it *wasn't* a dream, Mr. Slade," Peter said. "But Grandpap says it was a dream and if I tell it to anybody he'll give me a licking. So don't you ever tell on me, will you?"

“I should say not, Peter,” Tom promised. “You can depend upon that.”

CHAPTER II

A TURN OF THE DIAL

Tom watched closely over Peter during the following week. He did all he could to encourage his participation in the numerous activities that the big camp offered to its scouts. And on several occasions he paired him off with a boy his own age and sent them off on hikes through the mountains. But Tom's every attempt proved futile.

In the games, Peter would either miss his turn or make some blunder and it wasn't long before he was quietly frozen out of everything. On the hikes, he would almost always return alone, sad and despairing looking. He wasn't fitting in.

One sunny morning, Tom made a final attempt to pair Peter off with a scout from Connecticut. There was to be a hike down to Harkness village. The scout looked rather disdainfully at the young camp manager for a moment, then stepped up close to him. "Say," he said in an undertone, "can't you pick out somebody else for me? Gee, that Pearson kid's a flat tire. He never says a word and he looks as if he's afraid to laugh half the time. He's as good on a hike as a dummy."

That was almost too much for Tom. He felt the scout's criticism of Peter as much as if it directly affected himself. He wanted so much to make the short summer weeks a memorable time in the little scout's uneventful life. Yet Peter's fear of his grandfather would put to rout the noblest effort. Tom realized that.

The knowledge made him angry. What right had that fanatical old man to instill such fear, such a creed of life, into that wistful young boy? He felt it would soon destroy all that was fine and upright in him.

Tom recalled what Peter had told him of the opinion of Rhodes. Perhaps those people knew what they were talking about. Perhaps they suspected the reason why the grandfather was pinning the boy down.

He felt sure there was a motive in it. And about Peter's dream—why did he forbid him to tell of a simple thing like that? There was something more or something less than fanaticism underlying Pearson's rigid discipline of his grandson.

The more he thought about it the more aroused Tom was to protect the boy from the kind of life that seemed to be threatening. He felt a strong desire to go up to Maine and teach Pearson some of the fundamental principles of scouting and show him that his grandson was a very part of the fine old world that he professed to hate.

Now that Peter had been discarded by his brother scouts, Tom's sense of injustice had received its final blow. Pearson had gone a little too far when his discipline had prevented Peter from laughing and talking like a normal young boy.

He swung around in his desk chair considering a letter to Shadow Isle when Peter's voice broke in upon his thoughts. Tom looked up to see him standing outside the window. He motioned him to come in.

Peter ran in breathlessly, holding an opened letter in his hand. "It's from home, Mr. Slade," he said. "From Grandpap. He says he has to go away on business after the first of the

month and that he'd like to get a helper for Old Jones without anyone in Rhodes knowing about it."

"Why," Tom said, "I should think the government would take care of that. Don't they usually send one in cases like that?"

"Yes, they do," Peter admitted. "That's what I can't understand. Grandpap writes that he doesn't want the government to know nor anybody else because it's a secret. He's not even going to tell Old Jones until the day he goes."

"I wonder why?" Tom asked.

"Gee, I don't know," Peter answered. "All I know is, he asked me if there was anyone down here who could keep his mouth shut. He said most people down here will do that for a little money and he'd pay well whoever would come."

"What an admirable thought," Tom said, drily. "Still it's no more than I expected somehow. This would be an agreeable situation for Brent Gaylong," he added more to himself than to his listener.

Peter looked at Tom inquiringly.

"Brent's my best friend, Peter kid," Tom said, answering the look. "You'd like him. He lives in my town, Bridgeboro."

Peter smiled. "If he's your friend I'd like him, no matter what," he said, sincerely. "Do you mean you'd want Mr. Gaylong to go to Shadow Isle?"

"Indeed," Tom answered. "I intend to go too. I have a hunch that the trip will be worth the trouble. And I don't think your grandfather will mind there being two of us—not in his present evident need for secrecy. As long as we remember to keep our mouths shut. That's the main thing, eh? Brent looks harmless and he doesn't say much but he can think an awful lot."

Peter looked plainly puzzled. “You really mean you’re going, Mr. Slade?” he asked, incredulously. “How can you get away from this camp?”

“Oh, they can spare me, I guess,” Tom laughed. “There’s always someone around to look after things. I don’t very often take a vacation during the season. Camp closes in four weeks anyhow so that will only make three I miss if we get off next week. And the week after that you’ll be heading for Maine too.”

“I’ll miss you, honest I will,” Peter said, keenly disappointed. Then he brightened up again. “Anyhow, maybe Grandpap wouldn’t be so cranky after he talks to you and Mr. Gaylong. Maybe he’ll even be nicer to me when he comes back from his business.”

“That’s what I’m hoping for, Pete,” Tom said, feelingly. “I’ll miss you too, but you’re better off with the kids just as long as you can stay here.”

Peter smiled.

“One thing though,” Tom continued, “you won’t be better off if you keep on sitting in front of the ‘eats’ shack and staring at the lake. You’ll just have to forget your grandfather’s hating this and that. Think of yourself and what fun you can have with the rest of these nice kids. Laugh when they laugh and talk when they talk. Your grandfather can’t hear you. Get the idea?”

Peter laughed happily. “I’m going to try, Mr. Slade, honest I am,” he said. “And when I get back home if I’m talking and acting like all the other boys here, why Grandpap won’t be there anyhow. *You will.*”

“That’s it,” Tom applauded. “Now let me have your grandfather’s letter so I can answer accordingly. There’s only

one way for me to find out why he's so queer. That's to go there."

Peter laid the letter down and looked at Tom appealingly. "You won't tell him I talked about him to you?" he pleaded.

"There you are back at it again," Tom said, reprovngly, yet kindly. "My name's Tom Slade. That doesn't mean much to you but it means a lot to some of the scouts down in Bridgeboro, New Jersey, where I come from. I was brought up in the slums there and then the scouts caught hold of me and took the stones out of my hands and taught me not to lie. They did everything for me that was good and kind so that in turn I'd be fit to do that same for other kids—*for you*.

"Read your handbook over again. A scout is trustworthy and a scout is loyal. I'm out to help you, Peter kid. Not make things worse. Now run along so I can write to Brent and your old grandfather."

Peter beamed at Tom. He walked to the doorway and lingered there just a second. "I bet you're going to Shadow Isle on account of me," he said smilingly. "I bet you're going to help me with Grandpap."

Tom looked up and winked fraternally. "I bet I am!" he said.

CHAPTER III

PREPAREDNESS

A week later Tom was on the train bound for New York. Brent and he were to meet there at the railroad station and journey on to Maine together.

Brent's reply to Tom's letter had been brief but enthusiastic over the contemplated venture at Shadow Isle. And as for keeping his mouth shut, he wrote Tom that he would promise faithfully not to say a word after they reached Maine.

Tom smiled at the thought. It sounded just like Brent. And it would be comforting to have him along. Especially now that he had heard from Lightkeeper Pearson. His reply had been very interesting.

Evidently he was a very shrewd man. He reiterated the need for secrecy and courteously warned Tom and his friend against talking of their plans. He told them to inform whoever might ask that they were merely on a few weeks' visit to the lighthouse at Shadow Isle, and concluded by saying he would meet them at Rhodes in a dory.

This thoroughly aroused Tom. He was positive now that there was something underlying Pearson's business venture. He couldn't wait for the train to get in so that he might ask Brent his opinion.

That long, lanky person strolled leisurely up the platform to greet Tom. As usual, his spectacles were perched halfway down his nose and he gave one the impression of being made for his clothes, rather than his clothes being made for him.

“Well, Tomasso!” he drawled. “I’m here on the stroke of the hour you see.”

“I see,” Tom returned and clasped his hand feelingly. “It’s good to see you, Old Scout! All set for Shadow Isle?”

“All set,” Brent answered in that droll way of his. “My microscope is in the bag.”

Tom laughed. “Is that all?” he queried.

“No,” said Brent, “I haven’t overlooked a single necessity. I stopped in the five and ten too, before I left and bought a pair of canvas gloves.”

“What for?” Tom asked.

“Fingerprints, old dear,” Brent drawled. “Suppose I should confuse my own with someone else’s? The trusty canvas gloves will prevent any such catastrophe. One can’t be too careful.”

“Still the same old Brent,” Tom laughed. “You may need them at that. From the tone of Pearson’s letter he has something more than business in his head.”

“Didn’t I tell you!” Brent said in that funny, drawling way. “I shall put them on the moment we reach the place.”

“I’d wait till I was seated in the dory if I were you,” Tom advised.

“Safety first,” Brent said, solemnly. “I take no chances with old geezers who are willing to pay big money to people just because they promise not to talk.”

“There’s something in that,” Tom agreed. “But seriously, Brent, what do you think we ought to do first?”

“Get our tickets, Tommy,” said Brent. “It’ll be a load off my mind to set down this bag and take a nap in the Pullman. I’m not fond of manual labor you know. It just tires me out.”

“I know,” Tom grinned.

They pushed their way laboriously through the late August vacation crowd. The station fairly hummed with activity and heat. Finally Tom espied their ticket window. A long line stood waiting to be accommodated, moving forward at a snail's pace.

"Do we have to wait behind that?" Brent asked, pointing a despairing finger at the line.

"You don't," Tom said, affably. "You can hold the bags, if that will suit you better, and I'll get the tickets."

"I'll wait on the line, Tommy," said Brent, promptly. "You hold the bags."

Tom laughed. "Just as you say, Brent," he said. "Only make it snappy before the line gets longer."

Brent had never hurried in his life. He strolled. And by the time he reached the line there were a half-dozen people or more ahead of him, perspiring and excited. Not so Brent. He took his place, cool and calm looking, and motioned Tom to come nearer and move along beside him.

Tom shook his head in answer. He had already found a place to deposit the bags a little out of the crowd and was sitting contentedly on top of them. Brent stared at this picture of comfort, then pulled a wry face in mock disgust.

Ten minutes later Brent found himself facing the ticket seller. He also faced the fact that he had forgotten the name of the place that the train would take them to.

He turned and shouted at the top of his voice to Tom. "Before Shadow Isle," he yelled, "where to?"

"Rhodes!" Tom roared back above the din of the crowd.

In his anxiety not to miss Tom's answer, Brent unconsciously stepped backwards. He felt his rubber heels pressing down on someone's toes. Quickly he turned, all

apologies, to a dark, straw-hatted man behind him, upon whose toes he had trodden.

The man whisked away the offense with a half-grin. He looked curiously at Brent but said nothing. And the tall, lanky adventurer proceeded with his business of ticket buying.

As Brent turned away from the window he felt the man still watching him. He instinctively looked up and their eyes met. Then the man took his place at the window.

Brent was still thinking of the man's curious look when he approached Tom. "Did you see the way that chap gazed at me?" he asked.

"No," Tom answered. "What did you do to him?"

"Not enough to warrant him staring, that's sure," said Brent. "My rubber heels might have caused a little pressure on his pet bunions but that's all."

"Isn't that enough!" Tom exclaimed. "Be thankful you didn't get more than a look."

"But I apologized," Brent exclaimed. "And the man grinned and started staring at me as if I ought to be quarantined or something worse."

Just then the dark haired subject of their discussion walked past. He was busily stuffing his railroad tickets into a bulging, green leather wallet and did not seem to be aware of either Tom's or Brent's presence.

"Some fancy blue band he has around his hat," Tom commented as the man disappeared through the revolving door. "He didn't give you a tumble that time, Brent."

"It's fortunate for him that he didn't," Brent said.

"Why?" Tom queried. "What would you have done?"

“I’d have said, *Tag, you’re it,*” answered Brent. “No other words could express my feelings more effectively, Tommy.”

“Maybe he senses that you’ve a Sherlock Holmes complex,” Tom laughed.

“In that case,” drawled Brent, “I’d reverse my opinion of the brute. One must make allowances for him if his staring was prompted by noble impulses. He’s evidently recognized the genius that’s in me.”

“Oh, don’t we love ourselves,” Tom said in sing-song tones and picking up his bag.

“It’s my one means of encouragement,” said Brent in his droll way. He took up his bag and followed Tom out to the train.

“It’ll be a toss-up who’s worse,” said Tom as they climbed the short steps into the Pullman, “you or Lightkeeper Pearson.”

CHAPTER IV AND AGAIN

“Now I feel normal,” Brent said, as he stretched his legs out the full length of their Pullman section.

“And I feel uncomfortable,” Tom said. “I’d like at least a quarter of the seat to sit on. What do you think I am, a fly?”

“Pardon the oversight, Tommy boy,” Brent drawled. He hugged his long legs closer to the window. “I do love comfort.”

“As if that’s news to my young ears,” Tom laughed. “Were you ever exhausted from working too hard, Brent?”

“No,” Brent admitted solemnly. “I’ve kept all my surplus effort in reserve. Stored it away, so to speak, for some momentous occasion.”

“When will that be?” Tom queried.

“Perhaps at Shadow Isle,” answered Brent. “Who knows! Maybe old boy Pearson will set me to work sweeping the ocean off the rocks every morning.”

The train started off for Boston and Brent and Tom lapsed into the silence that seems so usual at the beginning of a journey. Tom’s head drooped after a little while and Brent’s right leg rudely slipped off its resting place on the opposite cushion. He made no effort to restore it to its former position. He seemed not to have a care in the world.

An hour passed by in this manner when Brent was startled out of his lethargy by the train’s coming to a stop. Sleepily he raised a heavy eyelid nearest the aisle only to find a man in the next forward section staring curiously at him.

Brent roused himself and sat up straight. The man, evidently embarrassed, quickly turned and reached for his straw hat hanging on the upper hook. He placed it on his head and strode out toward the smoking room.

Astonished, Brent watched him. Then he shook Tom roughly and woke him out of a nice, peaceful nap. “Hey, Tomasso,” he said, “there’s something suspicious about that bird.”

“*What bird?*” Tom asked drowsily, trying to pull himself together.

“The fellow that came under my heels in the station,” answered Brent.

“Gosh,” Tom said with a sigh, “are you still thinking about him?”

“Certainly,” said Brent. “Why wouldn’t I? He has the next section to ours and I woke up to find him still staring at me. Why wouldn’t I think about him? He hasn’t given me a chance to think about anything else.”

“I told you a couple of hours ago,” Tom said, “that maybe you interest him. Anyway, he has as much right to be riding on this train as you or I. So where’s the kick?”

“None,” drawled Brent, “as long as he keeps his eyes to himself. It makes me feel like a flapper.”

“If I were you, I’d go and question him,” Tom suggested. “He might tell you a different way to knot your necktie.”

“Not a bad suggestion, Tommy,” said Brent. “I’ll act upon it at once.” He rose lazily out of the seat and strolled in the direction of the smoking room. Tom snuggled back into his unfinished slumber.

Brent entered the smoke filled room. A number of men were lolling about on the black leather seats, their knees and

shoes flecked with cigar ashes, and the man he had come in to see was sitting on the divan at the end nearest the window.

He seemed not to be taking any part in the conversation; rather he seemed quite out of it, for he kept his face averted, looking out at the passing scenes.

There was the usual smoking room talk and, bored, Brent walked to the wash basin, took up the cake of soap and indifferently rubbed it on his palms. Meanwhile he glanced through the haze at the buzzing group.

Suddenly a bald-headed man removed a cigar from his mouth with a flourish. "I'll leave it to that young man washing his hands there, if it ain't so," he said.

Brent stopped and looked at the man inquiringly. "I beg your pardon," he said. "Did you speak to me?"

The bald one threw his stub to one side and looked up at Brent. "I was just trying to tell this thick article here that Bangor's the capital of Maine. And I just happened to see you standing there and wanted you to back me up on it. I leave it to you, young man. Now ain't Bangor the capital?"

"Not since I went to school," Brent drawled. "Augusta's the capital. I could always remember it because a fellow in my class named Gus came from there."

They all laughed, all except the man at the window. He had not yet turned his face. Brent wondered why he hadn't turned and stared then.

The bald one jarred him out of his thoughts. "Hey, young fella," he said, "how about it? You seem to know your little geography of Maine. Do you know a good up-and-comin' fishin' village where we could get good accommodations?"

Brent shook his head. "Sorry," he drawled, "but I don't. The only fishing village I know of is the one I'm bound for

and I know nothing of it except that its name is Rhodes.”

“Humph!” the bald one said. “What accommodations you gettin’ there?”

“None,” Brent answered. “I go further on to a lighthouse about a half-mile from the mainland, I believe.”

The man at the window turned quickly, glanced at Brent a second, then averted his face again. It really didn’t signify anything—that look. It was just a curious glance. Yet somehow it left in Brent a rather dissatisfied feeling. He wished the fellow had said something.

He hung around for a few minutes more until the talk switched to reminiscences. He decided that was his cue to move on. Staring people annoyed him but reminiscences were worse.

He found Tom quite wide awake and expectant looking. “Well, is everything O.K. now?” he asked Brent.

“I know less than I did before,” Brent admitted, trying to infuse sadness into his tones.

“Didn’t he talk to you at all?” Tom queried.

“No,” Brent answered. “I’m beginning to think he just doesn’t care about my looks. Or it might be as you say, Tommy, he doesn’t like the way I knot my tie.”

CHAPTER V

RHODES

They tumbled sleepily out of one car at Boston and into another one. And when they alighted upon the platform at Rhodes, Brent was not fully awake.

He stood blinking his eyes while Tom inquired of the wizened looking station agent the way to Rhodes Beach. Then a Ford taxi wheeled around into the driveway, Tom hailed the driver, they piled in with their bags.

After they were settled comfortably the taxi started away and swung them unceremoniously around as it turned into a rut filled road. Brent commented upon it and mumbled that it was worse than any Jersey detour.

“After this then,” Tom said, “I hope you’ll never make another mean remark about my flivver.”

“Bring your flivver out here first, Tommy,” Brent said. “Drive her along a road like this and then I’ll give you my honest opinion.”

A man carrying a small bag was walking the road just ahead of them. Brent noticed him indifferently at first, but the nearer they came to him the more familiar did he appear.

He grasped Tom’s arm. “Look, Tommy!” he exclaimed. “As I live, it’s that bird *again!*”

“What bird?” Tom asked, looking around. All he could see was the man’s back about fifty yards away.

“The bird with the hat band,” said Brent. “The fancy blue one.”

“Well, what of it?” asked easy-going Tom. “Why the excitement? Can’t he come to Rhodes too?”

“Sure,” Brent answered in that droll way of his, “as long as he stays in Rhodes. But he can’t follow us out to Shadow Isle and stare at me there. I won’t let him.”

“What’ll you do to him?” Tom laughed.

“I’ll throw him out in the ocean,” said Brent.

At that juncture their cab whizzed by the man, raising a cloud of dust that obstructed any further view of him. Then they turned again, leaving him in full possession of the road.

“He probably came up here for fishing,” Tom said.

“He ought to make a good catch,” Brent said. “He has patience enough, that’s certain.”

Then the vast expanse of ocean spread before them. A small sandy beach rolled down to meet it. To the left, a large pier jutted its nose far out into the white foam.

The cab stopped in front of a little, white painted building. A huge gilt-lettered sign hung dejectedly from its porch bearing the inscription:

WHITE HOUSE
HOTEL
RHODES BEACH

At odd times it was used as a bulletin board as was evidenced by numerous thumb tacks and bits of faded paper stuck fast under its ornate lettering.

Brent scrutinized it while Tom was paying the driver. Then he turned his attention to the farther side of the street where a yellow painted building stood imposingly in the

early sunlight. A hitching post outside in the road added to its old-fashioned atmosphere.

A number of small shacks dotted both sides of the road. The curtains were all drawn and from the backyards came the crowing of the busy roosters. Nothing else stirred, not even in the White House Hotel. Only the ocean pounded below on the beach, like many distant drums.

The cab turned and rattled its way back to the station. “Where are we to meet Old Man Fearful?” Brent asked.

“Right here,” Tom answered. “He said he’d be watching for us.”

“We might as well look the village over while we’re waiting,” Brent said. “It’s too early to see the populace, I guess. Evidently they don’t get up with the chickens in these fishing villages.”

“That ought to suit you, Brent,” Tom laughed. “Want to walk around?”

“Me?” Brent asked, indignantly. “I should say not. I’m tired out. I think I’ll go up on the White House porch and rest my weary bones. I can see all of the village from up there.”

“Some thriving village,” Tom commented, looking around. “I wonder if this is all that comprises Rhodes.”

“There might be some houses holding out on us,” drawled Brent. “They’ll probably come out of their hiding places when we’re not looking.”

Tom smiled, then his features grew serious. “You can just imagine why that little Peter kid ducks the crowd at camp. This crowded metropolis probably boasts of at least twenty-five families.”

“I wonder if the White House man will give us breakfast before we sail the high seas,” Brent mused.

“I’m hoping so,” Tom said. “Still, an empty stomach might be better to ride the waves on.”

They both looked toward the deserted beach. It was high tide and the waves dashed swiftly up on the shore. They saw no sign of a boat upon the horizon. Nothing but sunlight, sky and water.

To the east a stretch of rocky land abutted upon the ocean. Sharply it swerved, making a decided turn away from the little village. From that point the rocks piled high, stretching along as far as the eye could see. Thick growths of stubby pines hung tenaciously from the cliffs.

“I imagine the lighthouse must be off there, east,” Tom said. “It’s all woodland to the west so it can’t be there. Little Pete said the lighthouse had lots of rocks about it so I guess the island is just a good sized reef.”

Even as he talked, Tom could see a moving figure out at the pier’s edge. Brent, too, saw it and they watched in silence. Then they discerned that it was the figure of a man walking landward.

“Tommy,” Brent drawled from his easy chair on the porch. “I’ve a sneaking feeling that it’s Old Man Fearful himself.”

“So have I,” Tom said. “Think I ought to wave to him?”

“You can run on down and kiss him if you want to,” Brent answered. “But I’ll sit here and wait until he comes. I have my reputation to think of.”

Tom laughed. “I hope he understands you,” he said. “He’s likely to think you’re kidding him half the time.”

“There’s an even chance I will be,” Brent said whimsically.

The man drew nearer and nearer. As he left the pier he walked over toward the beach and his figure loomed larger with each step.

He was a little over six feet tall, a trifle bent and wore a small black cap atop his white, straggling hair. One could see even at that distance that his frame was spare, but powerful.

“Heavens, Tommy!” Brent exclaimed. “I think he’s Jack the Giant Killer in disguise!”

CHAPTER VI

A PRICE

He hailed Tom with a sort of snort, giving neither hand nor smile in greeting. "Reckon yore Slade and that's yore friend Gaylong settin' up there," he grumbled in a deep, hoarse voice.

"And you're Mr. Pearson, I believe," Tom said, smiling pleasantly.

"Jonah Pearson. Old Lightkeeper Pearson," he snapped. "That's what the nosey ones call me in this here cursed place. Yer kin call me what ye like, long as yer don't speak out o' yore turn. Talk little. That's what I say."

"Are you any relation to the first Jonah?" Brent asked innocently and dragging himself unwillingly out of his chair.

"Don't b'long ter nobody," Pearson answered tersely. "Glad I don't. Relations never was comfortin'."

Brent studied him intently as he spoke. He had watery blue eyes that were almost hidden beneath shaggy white lashes. His nose was long and pointed and his lips resembled two straight purplish lines, so thin and compressed were they. The chin was pointed in keeping with his nose and his ears were remarkably small for so tall a man.

"We haven't had our breakfast, Mr. Pearson," Tom spoke up. "We thought perhaps the hotel would open soon."

Jonah Pearson looked from Tom to the hotel and back again. His features instantly became distorted in a contemptuous sneer. Then he made a sweeping gesture with his clawlike hands. "Pity the sea wouldn't sweep 'em all

away. The whole pack o' 'em. Breakfast—hmp! Like as not ye'd git pizened by his food. Yer kin have breakfast soon's we git ter the light."

With that he turned and started back toward the beach. "I suppose that means he's ready to go right now," Tom said in an undertone and picking up his bag.

"Without a shade of a doubt," said Brent falling into step beside Tom. "One thing, he's right to the point. No ceremony with him."

Tom smiled. "Are your canvas gloves ready, Brent?" he asked in a low voice.

"Leave it to me," Brent answered. "I intend to take note of the smallest detail. And further, I'm convinced that no whale will ever swallow this Jonah. He's too mean to die."

"Sh-sh!" warned Tom. Then in a loud voice, "I think it's going to be a nice day."

If Jonah Pearson thought so too he did not say so. He just slouched along ahead of them, his ill-fitting clothes flapping against his bony frame. And his little black cap looked quite absurd upon his large head.

Tom and Brent exchanged significant glances but said no more. They followed Pearson up on the pier and out to the end. He stood there waiting until they came up to him.

"I'll git in first," he said tersely. "Yer kin give me yore junk one at a time. Got ter take it easy. Sea's heavy."

He proceeded down the ladder and into a dory that bobbed gaily upon the swell. Tom followed and Brent handed him the bags which in turn he passed into Pearson's grasping looking hands.

That done they entered the dory carefully. Tom looked around the little boat in wonderment that such a frail

structure could ride the heavy waves with so much buoyancy. “Wouldn’t you think it would get swamped!” he remarked to Brent.

“Not with such light spirits aboard,” Brent said, dryly.

Pearson was untying the little craft from the pier. He looked Brent’s way, puzzled, but said nothing. Then he leaned down and brought up a pair of oars which he handed to Tom. Brent, comfortably seated in the stern, nodded smilingly to Tom.

As the lightkeeper seated himself at the prow he scowled toward Brent. “You Gaylong,” he snapped gruffly, “get the rudder. Take her easy.”

It was really Tom’s turn to smile at Brent but he had to concentrate on helping to guide the boat away from the pier. They were instantly swung around by the mountainous waves and he had all he could do to keep the oars fast in his hands. His eyes and his face smarted keenly from the salt spray.

“Take her easy,” Jonah Pearson shouted. “Let her go with the tide. Jest hold her steady.”

Tom did as he was told. He felt soaked to the skin and wondered if Brent was too. The thought made him smile. “We should have put on our bathing suits or our raincoats,” he laughed.

“If I could let go of this thing I’d get out my folding umbrella,” Brent said. “I packed it in right on top.”

“Little thing like water won’t hurt yer,” Pearson grumbled. “Yer’ll git wetter ’n that before yer go back to the city.”

After they passed around the bend the swell seemed to calm down. Tom felt relieved. He released an oar to dash

away the spray trickling from his forehead. Brent looked at him and winked slyly, then looked interestedly over his shoulder.

“What do you see?” Tom asked curiously.

“The lighthouse,” Brent answered. “Quite a skyscraper.”

“Be there in ten minutes,” Jonah Pearson called quite humanly. “Git along faster when there’s three on the job.”

Tom felt quite encouraged at that. “I should think so,” he said cheerfully. “I can’t understand how you come over all alone. Especially near that pier. It sure is rough.”

“Don’t mind a’tall,” Pearson called gruffly. “Sooner be alone any time. Don’t like folks nowheres.”

“So agreeable,” Brent drawled between his teeth. “We’re in for a jolly time, Tommy!”

Tom moved his eyes frantically for Brent to be cautious about his remarks. But he could have spared himself that worry as Jonah Pearson was not aware of anything but his own thoughts. His brows were drawn up into many little lines and his mouth worked convulsively as if he were talking to himself. Brent watched him.

Suddenly he looked up. “Give yer a hundred dollars apiece,” he said quickly. “If yer willin’ ter do as I tell yer.”

Brent glanced at Tom.

“What,” Tom asked, “do you want us to do?”

Jonah Pearson rowed on for a few seconds in silence. Then he leaned forward confidentially, as if to even exclude the ocean from his secret. “There’s a man comin’. He’ll come next week ter see me. But I won’t be there. I won’t talk ter nobody if I kin help it. Leastways a smart aleck city chap like him. Most all of ’em’s trash.”

“Oh,” Tom said, ignoring the sarcasm, “you want us to interview him for you. Is that it, Mr. Pearson?”

“Yes,” Pearson grunted. “Old Jones hain’t got sense enough ter do it. You’re ter keep him up in the tower till after the city feller goes. Old Jones, he’s kind o’ deaf. He hain’t got no license ter know my business anyway.”

“You know best,” Tom said. “Could you tell us beforehand what the city chap is coming for?”

Tom could almost feel Pearson’s watery blue eyes boring through his back. He sensed the man was floundering about for a logical reason to give.

Finally he coughed. “He’ll ask yer questions ’bout me. ’N ’bout Peter. But you and Gaylong don’t know nothin’. ’Cept ye were jest knockin’ ’round nosin’ in lighthouses. Understand?”

Tom nodded. “Of course,” he answered. “Naturally, Mr. Pearson, you do not want to tell every stranger your business. I can understand that perfectly.”

Just then Brent caught a crafty smile passing across Jonah Pearson’s face. He looked off in the distance before he spoke again. “One thing,” he snapped, “no matter what he asks you there’s only one answer.”

“What’s that?” Tom queried, interestedly.

“Yer tell him Peter Pearson hain’t never lived here. Yer tell him he jest came vacations and he was no relation. And yer tell him he hain’t a-comin’ here no more, either—that he’s dead!”

Tom’s hands instinctively pressed down firmly upon the oars. And Brent’s long sensitive fingers clenched the rudder rope tightly.

CHAPTER VII

OLD JONES

No further word was spoken. Jonah Pearson's face seemed to indicate that he didn't want to hear any. And Tom felt a tenseness that he had not experienced before. Every swing of his muscular arms seemed a blow in defense of little Peter.

He could not explain to himself why he should feel so. But there seemed to be an undercurrent, some evil spirit emanating from Jonah Pearson that threatened Peter's happiness.

He tried to argue himself out of his morbid deductions. After all, old Pearson's words did not have to be taken literally. Filled with portent though they were, it did not necessarily mean that Peter really was going to die or that he wouldn't be at Shadow Isle again.

Pearson might merely want those words conveyed to the city chap in order to cover up his real motive. And the real motive? In some subtle way Peter was concerned in it. That much was evident now.

Pearson called to Brent to guide the dory around. "Have ter drift in a piece," he said. "Tide's goin' out."

Tom was struck with his first view of the light as the little craft turned around. It stood so imposingly upon the little rocky isle, vividly painted in bands of black and white with its gallery and tower of steel high up in the billowy clouds and dazzling sunshine.

The isle itself rose gradually but determinedly out of the sea with the lighthouse like some tall, graceful guardian of

the dangerous rocky reefs. It spread around the edge of the ocean for a distance of about one city block. And the booming surf hurling itself mercilessly against its shore line formed a continuous screen of transparent spray about the isle.

Pearson nosed the dory up to the lowest level. Two other good sized boats stood well out of range of the surf. Farther up nearer the lighthouse was a lifeboat sunning itself upon the warm rocks. Tom couldn't help wondering how many dark nights and stormy seas that mute looking craft had battled with.

Pearson grasped a jagged rock tightly and held the boat steady while Tom and Brent climbed out with their luggage. After they were high and dry the lightkeeper directed a watery eye at Tom. "Yer tell Old Jones yer a couple o' city fellers what wants ter study lighthouses. Understand? Yer go on up while I run her up on the rocks."

"Can't we help you?" Tom asked as pleasantly as he could.

"Yer just do as I tell yer," Pearson grunted. "That's all the help I want."

Tom nodded for want of something to say and he and Brent went on. As they glanced up at the tower a figure moved upon the gallery, then disappeared.

"Must be Old Jones," Tom commented. "He's been watching us coming in."

"I expect, Tommy," Brent drawled, "if we come out of this adventure unharmed that we too will be fit subjects for the Old Men's Home. Everything around here seems to be decrepit and old. I feel my hair getting white already and I'm darned if I'm sure of my step. I have a premonition that

we're walking into an ancient trap of some kind. Old Gaylong and Old Slade—how does that strike you?"

"Seriously, Brent," Tom said, "what do you make of him, anyway?"

"I think," Brent answered, "that Old Fearful has more up his sleeves than his elbows."

"I'm afraid so," Tom agreed. "Don't you think there's something off color, criminal, about it?"

"Well, it isn't any Hallowe'en party that the old duck is planning. You can be sure of that. And did you notice he didn't answer your question as to why that city bird is coming! That excuse of his about not wanting to talk to city trash is a lot of bunk. He's hiding something all around, that's what's the matter."

"It's a good thing little Peter kid is safe in camp. Gosh, that old man gives me the creeps all right. He sure is gloomy," Tom mused.

"Well, I wouldn't enjoy spending a rainy Saturday night with him, I know that," Brent drawled. "It's a good thing I brought my crossword puzzles along or I'd have visions of throwing myself off the rocks into the sea."

They climbed the long, iron stairway and stood at last before the stout looking door. "Shall we go in?" Tom queried.

"Might as well," answered Brent. "If Old Jones is in there you can knock after we get in. He won't hear you anyway." Tom pulled at the knob and the door swung out with great force.

No one was about as they walked in. "Old Jones probably sticks to the tower," Tom commented as he gazed about the little, circular room.

“I would too,” said Brent, “if I had to live with that mean old geezer Pearson.” He strode over to a mahogany rocker that stood under the tall, narrow west window. True to himself he thumped down wearily and stretched out his long, lanky legs.

“What’s the matter?” Tom asked. “Pulling the rudder rope was too much for you, I guess.”

“Too much,” Brent sighed, adjusting his spectacles as his eye lighted upon the little bookcase standing opposite. “We can read here and everything.”

“Yes,” Tom said. “And we cook and eat here too. Just like a modern one-room New York apartment.” He walked over to the east window and inspected the trim looking little stove with its cupboards adjacent. Then he strolled back to the center of the room where the little dining table stood with its clean red cloth spread carefully.

“That looks like Grandma’s time, doesn’t it?” Brent remarked to Tom. “And they’ve even pushed up the four chairs in readiness for the banquet in our honor. One for Old Jones, one for Old Pearson and the other two for Old Gaylong and Old Slade. What a hilarious party we’re going to have!”

Tom laughed and tripped over the faded green carpet, landing almost plunk against the iron stairway that wound itself around by the inner wall. “Gosh,” he said, breathlessly, “I wouldn’t want to come down that thing in the dark. Sh-sh, Brent! I think I hear someone’s footsteps now!”

Distinctly they could hear the click of hard leather striking the metal stairs. Nearer and nearer it came. “It’s Old Santy Claus Jones,” Brent drawled languidly as he tried another easy chair near the door. “I wonder who’ll get here first—

Jonah or Jones? That'd make a good team name in vaudeville, eh Tommy?"

Tom laughed outright just as two feet appeared on the stairway descending from the room above. Both he and Brent looked up expectantly.

Old Jones descended into the room, a short rounded bit of body and tiny bald head. His clear gray eyes looked curiously at Brent and Tom. Then his gray-fringed eyebrows drew up and his full, red lips parted in a friendly smile.

Tom stepped forward and smiled, shouting in his ear an introduction of themselves and the nature of their stay. He hated using a subterfuge, even though he knew it was not a permanent one. There was something so frank and honest looking about Old Jones that he felt mean in deceiving him.

Jones studied both young men thoughtfully. Then he patted down the bosom of his faded shirt and looked toward the half-opened door. Suddenly he raised his hand and motioned. "Old Jonah," he said, trying to speak low, "yer can't tell 'bout him."

Tom nodded understandingly.

"Alius he wuz queer," he went on, shaking his round head tragically. "But now fer a long spell he's like crazy. All of a sudden he's goin' ter git wealthy. I'll show yer."

Brent and Tom were not aware of it at first. Neither was Old Jones. Then suddenly the realization came leaving in them a curious chilled feeling as of some awful impending calamity. They all looked up.

Jonah Pearson stood framed in the doorway. His hands were clenched tightly at his sides and his mouth had sucked his cheeks into great hollows. The bell in the gallery boomed the hour.

CHAPTER VIII

OFF WATCH

Old Jones backed away nearer to Tom. But Jonah Pearson merely turned and quietly shut the door. "Spouse yer want breakfast," he said hoarsely, and walked toward the stove.

The silence was so tense that Tom strolled over toward the window. Brent never stirred but keenly observed Pearson's furtive glances toward his old helper as he shuffled up the stairs back to the tower.

The coffee soon bubbled in the pot and Pearson stood silently frying some bacon and eggs. Brent wondered just how much he had heard of Old Jones' remarks. It was hard to tell as Pearson scowled whether he was ill-tempered or pleased.

"Yer'll know where ter git things after this," he said quite pleasantly. "Dishes, pots and food's in these here cupboards. Old Jones and me mostly git our meals separate. Yer kin do the same if yer want. Wash 'em up when yer git through. And sweep up. That's a rule with me."

"I like that idea, Mr. Pearson," Tom said for want of something to talk about. "When do we start at the light?"

Pearson was busily setting the plates on the table. He walked to the stove and fetched the hot food, putting some on each plate. Then he poured the coffee.

He looked at Tom, paused, coffee pot in hand. "Gaylong'll sleep bedroom 'bove here. You next, 'bove him. I sleep 'bove you and Old Jones, he's next ter the tower."

“All right,” Tom said as pleasantly as he knew how. “We’ll unpack our bags and get ready for business soon as the dishes are washed.”

Pearson walked back to the stove and set the coffee pot down. Then he walked to the stairway. When he was halfway up he paused and looked back down. “Yer kin start polishin’ lenses,” he snapped. “Old Jones, he’ll show yer. I’ll be up in the tower too. Goin’ up now.” With that he went on.

Brent and Tom listened until the sound of his footfalls died away. “Whew!” Tom exclaimed. “A wet firecracker would explode in this place.”

“If poor Old Jones talks out of his turn again today there’ll be no light in the lighthouse tonight,” Brent said. “Can you imagine the loving words that old geezer is pouring into the ears of Santy Claus Jones?”

“Well, one thing,” Tom answered, “unless Pearson shouts he won’t get a tumble from Old Jones. It’s a good thing he’s deaf.”

“What you say is very true, Tomasso,” Brent drawled. “But one look at Old Fearful when he’s mad is very convincing indeed. He doesn’t have to say a word to tell you what he’s thinking about.”

Tom laughed. “Perhaps things will quiet down after we get on the job.”

“It’s the working part of this job that doesn’t attract me,” Brent drawled. “I’d much rather sit out there on the rocks and hear what the wild waves are saying.”

Fifteen minutes later they mounted the steps to Brent’s room. A small rug covered the center of the floor, a trim white bedstead faced the stairs and alongside of the long, narrow window stood the tiny dresser. “It’s all in the

handling,” murmured Brent, as he laid himself down leisurely upon the bed.

Tom laughed and went on upstairs. Brent raised himself up on his elbow and gazed through the window out to sea. At some distance off toward Rhodes, a lone dory bobbed up and down on the tide.

Brent unwillingly parted from the bed and went up to Tom’s room. “We’re twins, Tommy,” he said critically looking around the room. “Your dugout’s the same as mine.”

“I guess the other rooms are too,” Tom said. “They do that in lighthouses way out like this one. They strike a simple keynote.”

“They struck a simple keynote for the chappie that loses his collar button,” Brent drawled. “These turret rooms are good for that purpose. There’s no corners that hide in the dark.”

Tom shut his bureau drawer. “Now for work, Brent,” he said, cheerfully.

“Don’t mention it, Tommy,” Brent said in mock despair. “I was watching a lone dory out of my window a minute ago and envying its lone occupant. All he has to do is sit and catch fish in the sunshine and I have to go up and polish glass in a dark tower.”

Tom laughed and walked to his window. He stopped, leaning forward. “That dory’s heading for here, Brent. Sure as you live.”

“Hurrah!” said Brent. “I don’t have to polish glass. We’re going to have company!”

Tom walked to the stairs and smiled. “Come on, Ambitious, on to the tower for us. That’s probably some hick from Rhodes dropping in to see Pearson. We can’t entertain

his company.” Tom went on up the winding stairway and Brent followed resignedly.

Past Pearson’s room they climbed and then past Old Jones’. The metal floor containing the huge, circular base of the great light looked dim and spooky. “There’s lots of places to play hide and seek in this tower,” Brent commented.

“Are you picking out a place to hide already?” Tom asked, laughing.

“I think I told you, Tommy,” Brent whispered, “that I intended to take note of the smallest detail. And we may have occasion some dark night to want a place to hide from Old Fearful if he gets running around after Old Jones with a gun. You can never tell.”

Tom was still smiling when they came upon Old Jones diligently polishing his lenses in the tower. Pearson sat by on a stool watching and incidentally enjoying the breeze from the gallery.

“Here we are,” Tom said, almost gaily.

Pearson snorted. “Yer jest watch Old Jones fer today. See how he does it. He’s almost through.” He rose abruptly and went out on the gallery.

In a few minutes he came hurrying in and passed them by without speaking, going straight on down the stairway. Brent stepped out on the gallery and looked. The man in the dory was now walking up toward the lighthouse. He called Tom and told him.

Old Jones stopped in his labors and looked questioningly at Tom. Brent came in then and shouted the reason for Pearson’s hasty descent.

The little old fellow hurried to the stairway to make sure of Pearson’s being well out of the way. Then he came back

giving his tiny round head its usual tragic shake. He stepped out on the gallery with the boys and watched the man, slowly but steadily climbing the rocks below.

“There’s queer goin’s on in this here light, Mr. Slade,” he said again, trying to subdue his voice to a whisper. “Since he’s got jewelry crazy and money crazy, there’s queer goin’s on.”

“In what way?” Tom queried, close to his ear.

Old Jones looked almost sad. “I can’t tell ’zactly,” he answered. “It’s jest that I found letters of his’n. He’s been gittin’ letters from some place in Noo York and once they sent him a big check. I saw it. ’N I don’t think it wuz an honest check neither.”

Tom opened his mouth in astonishment. Old Jones looked encouraged to tell more. “’Nother letter I found,” he confided, “was ’bout a man comin’ ter see him ’bout some joolry he had sent them ter sell. I know where that letter is too. I kin lay my hands on it when he’s on watch ternight.”

“What makes you think it’s queer?” Tom asked him.

Old Jones leaned close to him. “He’s hid ten thousand dollars in his old boots for one piece of joolry he sent to that joolry place in Noo York. That’s what the letter said they would send him for it and they did. I found the money one night when he was on watch.”

“Where,” Tom asked in amazement, “did he ever get such a valuable piece of jewelry?”

“That’s what’s queer,” Old Jones answered. “That’s what’s queer. He thinks I don’t know nuthin’ but I do. He let little Peter go ’way on purpose. He didn’t want him ’roun’ ’count of the goin’s on. I know.”

“And you think Peter’s concerned in it then?” Tom asked.

Old Jones shook his head mournfully. "All I say is, time'll tell. That's all I say."

The stranger was close enough to observe that he was being watched from the tower. He waved cordially and they waved back.

"That's why I know things is queer," Old Jones said close to Tom's ear. "No one ever comes ter visit Jonah. Not in years. So it must be the man the letter said would come. And Jonah wuz plannin' ter go way 'fore that man showed up. He didn't want ter see him and talk ter him fer some reason. I know it."

"I wonder why?" Tom asked, thoroughly aroused.

Old Jones looked at Tom; then went over to the stairs and looked down once more. He came back, a far off look in his eyes. "It's jest since he got that letter," he said more to himself than to his listeners. "He's skeered o' somethin'. Jest plain skeered!"

CHAPTER IX

THAT MAN

“Let me help you finish up,” Tom said to Old Jones. “It’s better than standing around waiting for things to happen.”

“That’s a good idea, Tomasso,” Brent drawled. “You get the idea of the work first and I’ll sit out on the gallery and report to you each development in our little mystery.”

“Has that fellow gone in down below, Brent?” Tom asked nervously.

“Yes,” Brent answered lazily, stretching his long legs luxuriously before him. “All’s as quiet as a tomb, Tommy.”

Tom instinctively shuddered. He took the polishing cloths from Old Jones and set to work polishing the topmost lenses. As the minutes passed, he found himself staring into the hyper-radiant ribbons of glass and trying to visualize all that was taking place below. But he succeeded only in puzzling himself more. The whole affair was far too steeped in mystery.

“Polish the clock case, Mr. Slade,” Old Jones said courteously. “I likes everythin’ ter shine when I’m on the job.”

“I bet you do,” Tom returned smilingly. “What’s this clock for anyway?” he asked, standing before the clock-like contrivance that was snugly sheltered in a glass case.

“Yer have ter wind that a coupla times a night,” Old Jones explained willingly. “That’s ter keep the lenses swingin’ roun’ so the light’ll shine far out ter sea. If that gits busted yer have ter turn her by hand and that hain’t so easy.”

Tom looked at the intricate mechanism of the great beacon with interest. "I'd like to sit up with you on your watch tonight," he said to Jones.

"Jest as yer say," Old Jones returned. "Jest as yer say. Yuh'd be a heap o' company with things so queer aroun'."

Tom was wondering if Old Jones knew more than he had already told when his musings were interrupted by the clang of a heavy gong from below. He started. So did Brent.

Old Jones smiled. "It's Jonah," he explained. "That means he's went and got dinner ready fer all of us. He hain't cooked a meal fer me in years."

"Maybe that's in honor of the company," Brent shouted at him.

"Mebbe," Old Jones returned, "but yer kin never tell 'bout him though. He's either got conscience stricken or he's schemin' somethin' else. I know him."

"As long as he doesn't put poison in my soup I don't care," drawled Brent. "That's one thing I'd object to strenuously."

"Can't you think of something a little less fatal?" Tom queried smilingly.

"Not where that old geezer's concerned, Tommy," said Brent. "I can't picture him not being tempted to put a dash of something in the pot after he opens up a can of soup. Don't you think he looks as playful as that?"

"Oh, very," Tom said soberly. "You certainly aren't encouraging my appetite, Brent. I'll be thinking over your cheerful words with every mouthful of food."

Old Jones motioned them to come on. Tom followed him and Brent was last. Each one eagerly listened for telltale

sounds from below. But none came. Only the savory odor of cooking drifted up to greet them.

Pearson was at the stove when they descended into the living room. He looked up and greeted them a little more pleasantly than usual. “Everythin’s ready,” he announced. “We have comp’ny fer dinner. Yes sir, we have comp’ny.”

Tom looked up in time to meet his eyes. He smiled vividly. It came almost as a shock—that smile. And Tom knew not which he liked less, Pearson’s contemptuous scowl or his vivid smile.

He noticed that the iron door was propped open. “Your company out looking at the rocks?” he ventured.

Pearson smiled again. “Yep,” he answered. “Likes it roun’ here jest fine. Says he’d like ter stay here allus. I told him he cud.” He ended his words with an unpleasant cackle.

Brent looked at Tom questioningly. Old Jones shuffled over into the further end of the room and stood in front of the bookcase. Idly he took down a book and looked curiously at it.

Without warning, Jonah Pearson made a sudden, almost superhuman leap across the room, landing at Old Jones’ side. “What yer nosin’ fer now, eh?” he rasped in guttural tones. His face was dark with temper.



“WHAT YER NOSIN’ FER NOW, EH?” HE RASPED.

Poor Old Jones raised a deprecative hand and replaced the book without a word. Pearson looked at Tom and Brent rather sheepishly, then walked back to the stove, a purplish tinge coloring the back of his tanned neck.

“Come on!” he snapped out. “Pour out the coffee, yer old fool! I’ve got ter fetch that feller in.” With three great strides he stepped out of the room and kicked the prop away from the door. It slammed behind him with a resounding bang.

Old Jones went to the stove and took off the coffee pot with trembling hands. After he had filled each cup he set it down and looked up appealingly.

“Yer see,” he said, “it’s jest as I said. The man’s gone plumb crazy. Yuh’d think them books wuz gold. The idea—makin’ all that fuss. He don’t even own ’em. The government does.”

“Never you mind,” Tom said sympathetically, “there comes an end to everything, Jones.”

“It’ll be an end ter me,” he said tragically, “if I stay here. It’s cuz he’s tryin’ ter hide things frum me. He doesn’t want me ter know nothin’ ’n’ all the time he’s afraid I do. And he’s right.”

Brent glanced at the bookcase a moment, then strolled slowly to the window and looked out thoughtfully. Then he gave a little start when he saw Pearson and his visitor coming up the long, outside stairway.

Tom walked over to him. “What’s wrong? Seen a ghost or something?” he asked curiously.

Brent pointed to the man. “Look, Tommy! He’s with us again. Our friend with the fancy blue band. *That man!*”

CHAPTER X

THE WEB

In another second the door swung out and the two men entered. Pearson, seemingly, was feeling quite genial. He wore the vivid smile that Tom was beginning to dislike and his attitude was one of cordiality.

He introduced Tom and Brent. "Meet Mr. J. P. Oliver of Noo York," he said. "Mr. Oliver and me have some important business ter talk over after we eat. Hain't we, Mr. Oliver?"

Mr. Oliver smiled pleasantly and bowed to Brent and Tom. "I believe I met you gents somewhere before," he said with a sort of humorous twinkle in his dark eyes.

"Many times, Mr. Oliver," Brent drawled, smiling back. "My friend Slade here thought maybe you didn't like the knot in my necktie."

Mr. Oliver laughed heartily. "No," he said apologetically, "I was just puzzled as to what you were going to do after you arrived here. I heard you shout where you were going on the ticket line, remember."

"Yes," said Brent, "I remember. No wonder you were curious about us when you were coming here yourself."

Jonah Pearson stood listening to the conversation and watched all three furtively. Tom thought he acted uneasy as though he were afraid something might be said that he didn't want to hear. And now and again he shifted from one foot to the other. "I told Mr. Oliver how yer aimin' ter study

lighthouses,” he said abruptly. “Come on now, yore suppers are cold.”

Their talk at the table was general. Before they were quite finished, Old Jones rose from the table and silently mounted the stairs to the tower. After his heavy footsteps died away Pearson said, “Hmph! Old Jones, he sleeps from now till five. He has first watch.”

“Don’t you get tired of this life year in and year out?” Tom asked impulsively.

“No,” Pearson snapped, quite his unpleasant self again. “Git tired o’ nose people. That’s all.” Then he caught himself up, looked at Oliver and smiled.

His smile was getting on Tom’s nerves. He knew that it was forced for Oliver’s benefit—that it wasn’t sincere. In point of fact, Pearson’s show of temper with Old Jones about the book was proof enough of what lay under the smiling countenance.

After a little pause, Mr. Oliver smiled across the table to Tom. “What is your line, young man?” he asked pleasantly.

Pearson’s brows gathered a trifle. Then he brightened. “Slade’s jest out o’ school, Mr. Oliver,” he lied. “Jest out o’ school ’n’ he hain’t nothin’ better ter do than ter traipse aroun’ lookin’ at lighthouses.”

Tom reddened with consternation. Mr. Oliver saw it and glanced toward Pearson. Long afterward, observant Brent remembered the understanding gleam that lighted his eye.

Oliver looked steadily at Pearson, then back to Tom again. “I’m from Hedley’s Incorporated, Jewelers, New York,” he said quietly. “I’m a detective. How about it, Mr. Pearson?” His voice was vibrant with meaning. It told Pearson that he had caught him.

A glow of deep red slowly mounted Pearson's throat and suffused his cheeks. His anger and confusion seemed to conflict within him. After an embarrassing silence he burst out with, "Hmph! Yes, yes!" He then rose and hurried with some dishes over to the cupboard.

Brent looked after him and as his eyes roved back to the table he felt Oliver looking too. Their eyes met in a look of understanding. Then a faint smile lighted Oliver's face and he winked.

Tom too had caught that wink and yawned audibly to suppress a smile. "We didn't get much sleep last night," he said to Oliver. "That is, I didn't. I don't know about Brent."

"Yer kin take a nap now," Pearson called out rather eagerly. "Yer'll prob'ly need it if yer goin' ter stay up on watch ternight."

"And what about these dishes, Mr. Pearson?" Tom asked.

"Never yer mind 'bout them," Pearson answered. "I'll tend 'em while me and Oliver's talkin' business. Then we're a-goin' ter take a walk 'roun' while I show him the island." He chuckled.

"Just as you say," said Tom. "We'll have to take a walk around too. Some time before the day is over."

"Yes, yes," Pearson said tersely.

Tom and Brent rose and made their way to the stairway. Before they started up they smiled farewell to Oliver, who in turn gave them a friendly nod. "I'll see you later, boys," he said significantly.

"Sure thing!" they answered.

Brent stretched himself out on his bed. "Well, Tommy," he said with a yawn, "the gods have played right into our hands. We got out of doing the dishes. And I got out of polishing the

glass. I say we give three cheers for Mr. Oliver's timely presence and Old Fearful's crooked business!"

"Sh-sh!" warned Tom. "We're right above them. Do you realize that?"

"Sound always goes up, Tomasso," Brent answered indifferently. "I have an idea that young Oliver Goldsmith has Jonah's number."

"Whatever that is," Tom said. Then he lowered his voice perceptibly. "There *is* a number to him, Brent, and I'd like to know what it is. Darn it all, he's a pretty crafty individual."

Just then loud voices were distinctly heard from below. It was Oliver's voice that they distinguished first. "What my employers want to know, Mr. Pearson," he was saying, "is how you acquired this jewelry. It's worth a fortune and having been the former property of their client they are naturally interested to know."

Tom and Brent sneaked on tiptoe to the stairway and listened eagerly. But Pearson's answer was a hoarse whisper and impossible to understand.

Then Oliver's voice came up to them once more. "But that is impossible, Mr. Pearson," he went on. "No metal box, however airtight, would float on the surface of the water. With all that jewelry in it, it would sink at once to the bottom."

Brent and Tom stared at each other in astonishment. Jonah Pearson's hoarse whispering sounded like a rusty buzz-saw below. Then all became quiet.

The iron door banged shut.

CHAPTER XI

GATHERING CLOUDS

Tom rushed to Brent's window and looked out. Oliver and Pearson were going down the stairway. The lightkeeper's pointed features were set in a smile.

They turned to walk back of the lighthouse. Oliver paused just a moment to watch a lone gull flying high above the sea. Suddenly the sun became blotted out by a passing cloud and the winged creature loomed against the sky like a dark, fluttering shadow.

"Pearson's taking him for the promised walk," said Brent looking over Tom's shoulder at the scene below.

"Why is it, Brent, that I feel like shouting to Oliver not to go?" Tom said.

"Go ahead and shout," Brent said. "Oliver would be glad to get rid of Pearson, I bet. I know I wouldn't relish exploring this lonely place with that suspicious old duffer."

"That's it," said sensitive Tom. "It's *him*. He gets on my nerves with that smile since Oliver came here at noon. It means something."

"Sure it does," Brent agreed soberly. "It's the face he puts on for company. The scowl he just keeps for week days and Sundays."

"*You'll* get on my nerves, Brent," Tom said quickly, "if you don't quit your nonsense. Things look too serious, somehow. I feel that way about it if you don't."

Pearson and Oliver passed out of their sight toward the back of the island. A few slate-colored clouds were gathering

in the east, spreading ever so slowly. The sun seemed loath to show its cheerful face again and from the sea, a heavy damp breeze was blowing. Tom withdrew from the window, slowly, thoughtfully.

“Well, Tommy,” Brent said, “while the cat’s away this mouse will play. The mouse meaning me.”

“Now what are you getting at?” Tom asked, rather irritably.

“I mean that it’s our turn to play at Old Jones’ game of hide and seek,” drawled Brent.

“I wish you’d stop beating around the bush and explain what you mean!” Tom demanded.

“Everything comes to him who watches,” Brent said enigmatically. “Follow me downstairs, Tomasso, and I’ll see if I can find who’s it.”

Tom looked searchingly at Brent’s face, but no trace did he find of his usual dry humor. “All right,” he said. “Let’s see what you’re up to.”

In the living room, Brent strolled at once to the bookcase. He stood in front of it studying it thoughtfully. “Wasn’t it about center front on the second shelf that Old Jones took out the book, Tommy?” he asked.

“Yes,” Tom answered with evident interest. “Why?”

“I’ll tell you better when I know myself,” Brent drawled. “This is just a hunch I’m acting upon. Nevertheless it’s a strong one. Keep a watchful eye on the stairway, Tommy. We don’t want a repeater of the Old Jones episode this morning.”

Tom hurried to the window overlooking the stairway. Brent began taking books out one by one and looking through them carefully. As he finished with each one he put it back exactly as he found it.

Finally he brought forth a large, red leather volume of Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. "I supposed I would find a copy here," he said, holding it up for Tom to see. "One couldn't picture a lighthouse not possessing *Treasure Island*, eh Tommy?"

"Hardly," Tom answered smilingly. "I'm curious, Brent, to know what you're up to."

"So am I," Brent said as he dropped into the rocker and opened the book. He turned page after page with a precision that thoroughly aroused Tom.

About in the center of the book, from between the leaves he drew forth a medium sized white envelope and held it up. "Here is the cause of the old geezer losing his temper before. He thought old Jones would come across it."

Tom looked to the stairway and seeing no one in sight, took the envelope from Brent's hand. "Why, it's the one Old Jones told us of," he said. "The letter from Hedley's."

Brent nodded. "See what's inside, Tommy," he said.

Tom puffed open the envelope. "It's in pieces," he said. "He's torn the letter in pieces." He stepped over and shook the contents out into the open book resting on Brent's knees.

"He's torn that up quickly," said Brent. "Then he's heard someone coming before there was time to dispose of it."

"And he's just thrust it in there as the likeliest hiding place," Tom interposed. "Most likely when he came to meet us. I suppose he'd be wild if he knew Old Jones has already seen it."

"Yes, I suppose. Still, Old Jones didn't remember half that he read," said Brent. "It's quite a coincidence that he should thrust it in *Treasure Island*, eh?"

“It is,” Tom agreed. “Old Jones must never read. That’s what Pearson counted on when he put it there.”

“Well, he didn’t count on us, that’s certain,” said Brent, studying the pieces thoughtfully. “Some crossword puzzle putting them together.” He gathered them up and put them carefully into the envelope.

“Aren’t you going to piece them together?” Tom asked.

“And have Old Fearful walk in at the crucial moment? Not me,” said Brent. “No one with true sleuthing ability like mine would commit such a gross error.”

“I beg your pardon,” Tom said solemnly. “When is this great piece of detective work to take place?”

“Just before the midnight hour,” Brent answered.

“Oh,” said Tom. “Then you’re going to sit up on watch with Old Jones and me, eh?”

“Correct,” said Brent. “You’ll do yet, Tommy. I’ll need you and Old Santy Claus to keep a watchful ear at the stairway, won’t I? I demand privacy and protection on an important clue like this.”

“Well, you’ll get it,” Tom laughed. “What’s worrying me is how you’ll keep awake long enough to do it.”

“I’ll take care of that now,” said Brent. “I’m going to take a nap. You might as well too. Old Jones must be snoring by now.”

“Not a bad idea,” Tom agreed.

Brent found a stray safety pin hiding in the corner of his dresser drawer. He took possession of it and pinned the envelope fast to his undershirt. Then he went to bed.

Tom’s shoes thumped twice upon the floor over Brent’s head. He smiled at the thought of Tom taking a nap in the daytime—ambitious, nervous, active Tom.

Brent's eyelids closed. In his drowsy state he could hear the ocean as if from a distance. The surf, ceaselessly pounding away at the rocks and the spray making a slight, swishing noise as it rose and fell. The wind was coming up—a whistling summer gale. A black pall seemed to be hanging over the sea and island. A storm was coming on, Brent thought, unable to fight off the sleep that was weighting down his lids.

Above the din and roar of the storm-tossed ocean, the bell in the gallery dolefully boomed the hour.

CHAPTER XII

STORM AND SUSPICION

In a daze, Brent saw Pearson standing alongside his bed and watching him. “Don’t git up,” the lightkeeper said to him. “I jest looked in ter see if ye were asleep.”

“I was,” Brent answered.

“Bad storm,” said Pearson. “Might’s well sleep as anything else.” He turned and walked down the stairway.

Brent patted his chest to make sure of the envelope and turned over, listening to the rain beating around the lighthouse. He could almost feel the bed shake beneath him. The very motion of it lulled him to sleep.

When he again opened his eyes, Tom was smiling at him. “H’lo, Tommy boy,” he said.

“Hello yourself,” Tom said. “What are you going to do, sleep right through?”

“What time is it?” Brent asked rousing himself.

“Six o’clock,” Tom answered. “Time to eat anyhow. I smell something cooking. Pearson must be feasting Oliver after their walk.”

“Against his will,” Brent said. “They must have been caught in the storm. I woke up a couple of hours ago I guess, and saw the old geezer gazing at me in my peaceful slumbers. He said something about it storming and for me not to get up.”

“Very considerate of him,” Tom said. “He must have just come in then.”

“I guess so,” said Brent. “No doubt he had just been up to see if Old Jones was still unconscious. I think he even begrudges the poor old bird his rest.”

“I wouldn’t wonder,” said Tom. “I’m going on down and see how the land lays.” He went down, leaving Brent struggling with a pair of knotted shoelaces.

He walked into the living room to find Pearson at the table, eating. Oliver wasn’t anywhere about. The man’s absence struck him immediately. “Why, where’s Oliver?” Tom asked.

“Gone,” Pearson snapped. “Noo York. Best place fer him.”

“In all this storm?” Tom asked incredulously. Then his face brightened. “I suppose you rowed him over to the mainland.”

“Did not,” Pearson replied, without raising his eyes from the table. “He wouldn’t let me row him over. No sir. Said he could go just as well by hisself.”

“In that little dory that he came in?” Tom asked amazed.

“Why not?” Pearson snapped. He looked up and seeing Tom’s incredulous stare, turned quickly away.

“Of course, you know more about the sea in a storm. Maybe it could be done in a dory. But it’s beyond my comprehension.”

“And beyond anyone else’s,” said Brent, stepping into the room. “Little as I know of the sea, I know it would be a grave undertaking for an inexperienced man like Oliver.”

Pearson looked up at Brent and away again. His tight lips were parted, ready to utter the thought that was mounting in his brain.

“It’s true, Mr. Pearson,” Brent said quietly. “I can’t imagine you letting him go.”

Pearson’s mouth opened and his eyes watered profusely and shifted uneasily. “Hmph!” he snorted. “What did I have ter do with it, eh? He wanted ter go. Said he just remembered he had ter git back. I couldn’ tie him ter the island, could I?”

“That rests with your own conscience, Mr. Pearson,” said Brent firmly and walked over to the window. “We’ll have an early twilight if this storm keeps up.”

“That’s why I’m a-eatin’ naow,” Pearson said with something like relief. His attempt at pleasantness was almost painful to hear. “Have ter put the light on sooner. That means Old Jones and me’ll have longer watches. Got ter git ter bed.”

Tom watched over the cooking supper and said nothing. Brent walked to the cupboard and took out some plates, setting them on the table for Tom and himself. Pearson rose in silence and betook himself toward the tower.

“I suppose he’s going to sleep,” Tom remarked.

“He ought to,” Brent said. “It’ll do him good, perhaps.”

“Why the *perhaps*?” Tom asked.

“I don’t know, Tommy,” he answered. “I just feel that he sent Oliver away for one purpose.”

Tom had thought the same thing but did not like to say so. “Pearson’s been acting queer ever since Oliver came. That’s why I felt like shouting for him not to go.”

“Did you notice that Pearson couldn’t look us in the eye?” Brent asked. “He really looks guilty now.”

“Oh, my heavens!” Tom exclaimed. “*You mean...*”

“Pearson realized that Oliver had his number,” Brent interposed. “And he’s just ignorant enough to feel that Oliver

must not go back to New York and report that he caught Pearson hedging.” Brent paused and sat down to eat.

“I imagine,” he continued, “that Hedley’s promised him some fancy price for that jewelry if he could prove that he acquired it honestly. And of course he can’t so he has thought that Oliver’s absence would give him time to go to New York and sell the stuff. Sort of take Hedley’s unawares, you know. He’s ignorant enough to think in a circle like that. Watch and see.”

Tom tried to eat but the food was tasteless to him. He pushed his plate away and watched Brent. “No matter how ignorant he is,” said Tom, “I should think he’d know that poor Oliver was only doing his duty. If it wasn’t Oliver coming here it would have been someone else.”

“Try and make him see that, Tommy. See how far you’d get,” Brent said between mouthfuls. “He has a kink in his old cranium, that bird.”

“I can’t believe he’d be that bad,” Tom said.

“He admits Oliver’s gone, doesn’t he?” Brent queried.

“Yes,” Tom answered. Then suddenly he jumped. “Brent! Listen! We’re talking whys and wherefores and all the time Fate is poking a question at us. Would Oliver be such a fool as to go? Even on Pearson’s advice?”

Brent looked up and smiled. “Tommy, you’re a lad after my own heart. I never thought of that side of it. Oliver was nobody’s fool. We know that.” He walked to the window and looked out.

“And?” Tom queried eagerly.

“You’re right,” Brent answered without looking around. “Oliver never stepped in that dory of his own accord.”

“It’s terrible to think of!” Tom exclaimed, his voice betraying all that he felt. “Perhaps, though, things broke right for Oliver. Perhaps after all he was guided safely across in spite of that fiend’s wish for it to be otherwise!” Tom’s voice trailed off optimistically.

“We’ll know that in the morning,” said Brent. “Either you or I can go to Rhodes. He’s probably stopped at the White House. They’ll soon tell us if he came back.”

“And if he hasn’t...”

“Come on, Tommy,” said Brent quietly. “Let’s go up to the tower. The light will soon be on.”

“I wonder what Old Jones will say?” Tom asked.

“Well, there’s no one knows Jonah like Jones,” Brent returned.

CHAPTER XIII

THE EYES HAVE SEEN

As they passed Pearson's room they looked in. He was lying on his bed, apparently asleep. His shade was drawn and the room quite dim.

Entering the tower they saw that Old Jones had already lighted the lamp. He was diligently dusting off the lens once again before the great light was set in motion.

"Here we are," Tom said.

Old Jones looked up, his face set and grim. "*Him*," he said significantly, "where is he?"

Brent clapped his two palms together and put them against his left cheek, inclining his head a little.

Old Jones nodded understandingly. His shining forehead was drawn up, painfully. "He ought ter sleep," he said vehemently. "With what he's got on his soul now he shouldn't ever sleep again!"

Tom and Brent listened expectantly. "Tell us," Tom called into his ear.

"Wait'll I start 'er goin'," Old Jones said. "Have ter keep 'er burnin' a few minutes afore she starts off good." He walked over to a little cabinet, opened it and brought out three pairs of black glasses. One pair he put on and the other two he handed to his watchers. They adjusted them at his suggestion.

"We look like a dashing trio of the nineties on a motor ride," said Brent.

Old Jones didn't smile. He looked as if nothing would ever make him smile again. "Have ter keep yer eyes pertected," he said solemnly. "Can't look at 'er in motion 'less yer do." Then he stared in the direction of the stairway. "One o' yer'll have ter listen fer him while I tell yer. I don't trust him now, nohow!"

"I will," said Brent. "You can relay the story to me afterward, Tommy. While I'm piecing the puzzle together." He smiled and strolled away.

Old Jones went over to the clock and wound it up, shutting the glass case carefully. Tom sat down on the stool and watched the old man while he hurried to release the springs at the base of the lens.

The entire mass began to revolve and the great light alternately swept against the black walls of the tower and a moment later shot past the gallery and far out to sea.

The sweep of the lens made a slight swishing noise as it moved through the air. Tom sat tense, awed by the whole weird scene—the piercing shaft of light against the dismal black walls and little Old Jones, his round face so grim and sad looking as he moved about his duties.

Finally he came over alongside of Tom, moved a stool close to him and sat down. "*He's a murderer!*" he announced in a shaking voice. "I seed it with my own eyes, Slade. That's what he is."

Suspicious though he had been, Old Jones' statement left Tom almost unnerved. "What did you see, Jones?" he asked with effort.

"It's what I didn't see that proves it. And what I did see proves it more."

“This afternoon?” Tom asked, looking thoughtfully at the light through his glasses.

“Yes, sir,” Old Jones nodded. “I came up ter sleep and I did. Then I heard the door bang shet and I got up ter look out o’ my window.

“Jonah and Mr. Oliver was walkin’ ter the back o’ the island and Oliver was talkin’ fast like. His hands were movin’. And by the smile on Jonah’s face I knew he was mad at that city feller. Jonah allus smiles when he’s right mad.

“Anyway, I sat by my winder and watched. The storm came up ’n still no Jonah nor Oliver. It was rainin’ hard fer ’bout twenty minutes when I seed Jonah come ’round and lookin’ up here ter the tower ter see if anyone was lookin’. He was plumb alone.”

Tom gasped audibly.

“Yes, sir,” the old man went on. “Then I got back ter bed and soon I heered that sneakin’ step o’ his a-comin’ up the stair so I closed my eyes tight shut. I had a hunch he was up ter somethin’. And he was, fer he came inter my room on tiptoe and right up ter my bed and leaned close over me ter listen if I was asleep.

“All the time I was breathin’ heavy and snorin’ like I was dead ter the world. He thought I was, fer he went on down agin and I heerd him sneak in yore room too.

“Then I heerd the door shet and I run ter the winder and there he was in the pourin’ rain a-goin’ straight down the rocks. Every once in a while he’d look back up here.

“Quick I went up ter the tower and fetched my binoculars. I follered him with ’em right down till he come ter where the dories are hauled up. He looked back fer a minute first, then like a flash he pushed one out smack ter sea.”

Tom gazed at Old Jones in consternation. “Where,” he spoke in hushed tones, “do you think *it* happened?”

Old Jones shook his head, sadly. “I figgered he took the pore feller ter his favorite hidin’ place. It’s a place he likes ter sit and think in, he says. It’s a big cave what’s mysterious lookin’ ter me. I don’t like ter go there never. It’s dry at low tide but look out at high tide ’n’ with a storm a-brewin’!”

“And you think in *there*?” Tom asked in measured tones.

“They went fer the walk ’bout the last run o’ low tide, I know that. When Jonah come back alone the tide had been up fer onter an hour or more,” Old Jones answered.

CHAPTER XIV

A NIGHT

The storm lashed about the tower and the sea broke upon the great rocks below with a mighty roar. There was no lull in the driving tempest and the terrific noise of the elements only accentuated the ominous silence in the lighthouse.

The night wore on. Old Jones sat and gazed intently from behind his black glasses at each revolution the great lenses made. Tom, sitting near him, was watching Brent dozing idly on his stool against the black wall.

Brent's long, lanky legs were stretched out at full length and his spectacles were perched more than halfway down his nose. Nothing, not even the black clouds of suspicion hovering over the storm-tossed light, could disturb his peaceful slumber and calm repose. Tom watched him, not a little amazed.

The bell upon the gallery droned out the hour in sepulchral tones. The three watchers all started at once. Old Jones shifted his position and Tom began to pace the floor. Brent's hands dropped listlessly to his sides and he looked for all the world like some startled animal blinking in the blinding light.

"I'd much rather they had a buzzer for this lighthouse instead of the bell," he complained in his drawling tones. "That gong sounds too much like the bell in Bridgeboro Cemetery. It's rather trying for my delicate nerves."

"I'm glad to hear you have nerves," Tom said. "No one would know it from your actions. To watch you sleeping is

enough to convince me that nothing short of an earthquake would make you lose your head.”

“You do me an injustice, Tommy,” said Brent. “It’s just that great minds need a lot of rest.”

“Goodnight!” said Tom. “Yours ought to be great by now, then. You’ve been sleeping ever since we came here.”

“Again you’re wrong,” Brent protested. “I remember distinctly one whole hour yesterday that I didn’t.”

Tom smiled. “Anyhow,” he said, “it’s about time that you started in using your great mind to think of things right here. Something ought to be done about the awful business.”

The delightful aroma of coffee stole about the tower. Old Jones sniffed the air like a rabbit. Then he turned to Tom. “It’s *him*,” he announced grimly. “He’s making coffee for hisself. That means he’ll soon be up on watch. Yer better watch yer talk. He might sneak up on us agin.”

“I don’t care about seeing him just now, somehow,” said Tom. “To look at his face during the grim hour of midnight would keep me awake for the rest of the night.”

“I agree with you,” said Brent rising. “He certainly hasn’t a countenance to inspire one to carefree dreams.”

They went down after that, each one sitting quietly in his darkened room until Pearson came up on his way to the tower. Tom waited five minutes or more before he stole quietly down into Brent’s room.

That lanky individual had seated himself upon the floor, the area surrounding him lighted by the small oil lamp on the dresser. As Tom came into the light, he was carefully unpinning the envelope from his undershirt.

“Are you going to start and puzzle that out now?” Tom asked, complainingly. “I don’t see what good that’s going to

do poor Oliver.”

“Everything helps that throws some light on the mystery, Tomasso,” Brent answered. “If it doesn’t help Oliver directly, it helps him indirectly.”

“How can it?” asked Tom. “He’s dead. Nothing will bring him back now. Not if you sat there all night long trying to figure out what was in the letter.”

“Hand me that newspaper on my dresser, Tommy,” said Brent, calmly. Unwillingly, Tom did as he was told.

Brent spread the paper out on the floor and shook the pieces of the letter on top of it. “At least I’ll satisfy myself why the old geezer thought Oliver would be better out of the scene,” Brent said, as if to himself.

“There you go with your detail,” Tom said irritably. “We know it’s as good as sure that the poor chap *is* out of the scene. The reason why won’t help now. It’s what to do about that heartless....”

“Tommy,” Brent interposed without looking up. “Go down and make me a weak cup of tea. I have to consider everything. Even myself.”

Tom went down and started making the tea in a sort of mental tempest. This was plainly evident as he slammed a cup and saucer down on the table. He was out of sorts with Brent’s easy-going attitude toward Oliver’s fate—toward the whole affair. And when he thought of the calm perusal of the letter over his head he felt like shouting for action.

And yet Tom knew that Brent had really never failed in a crisis. He knew that in his whimsical remarks, in his calm acceptance of all things, he had a motive. It was just a means to an end—all those pleasantries of his. In his heart Tom knew it.

But in this night of storm, when words and even thoughts were dark and inexplicable, it was difficult for Tom to stop and consider this. Indeed he did not ask himself what else could be done at that hour! It was long past midnight and they were virtually marooned by the rain and wind a quarter of a mile from the mainland. In any case, nothing could be done before morning.

He could only rage inwardly in company with the storm. He was impatient with everything that added to their inactivity and helplessness. To him, dawn seemed to be far in the dim future.

He was still fretting when he handed the steaming tea to Brent. "I'm going over to Rhodes as soon as it's daylight," he said crisply.

"What will you do while you're waiting for Rhodes to get up?" Brent asked, picking up the papers.

"I'll sit on the porch of the hotel and wait for that fellow to get up," answered Tom.

"Then I'd start at seven, Tommy," Brent said. "You'll get there in plenty of time."

Tom looked at him thoughtfully. "What'll we do about Pearson if I find out Oliver didn't get there?" he said.

Brent raised his body off the floor with some effort. Then he strolled over and sat down on the edge of his bed and sipped the tea. "Tommy," he said at length and smiling, "I've an idea that Old Fearful will do himself. I told you I thought he was ignorant enough to think that with Oliver out of the way it would help him. And from what I read of that letter I think I'm right.

"He knew Oliver was on to him right from the start. And he knows that the detective's report would be pretty

incriminating. Just a word from Oliver and the old duffer knew he wouldn't get a cent from Hedley's. What he didn't stop to think of was that Hedley's must have a dozen or more Olivers. You see he's just chasing up a blind alley and he's going to bunk right into himself. You just wait and see!"

Tom dropped his hands to his sides in a gesture of despair. "Brent, you do nothing but dish out riddles," he said. "How do you expect me to understand them?"

"You'll understand them all right," said Brent in the tones of a patient parent. "Just have patience and listen to Papa Brent. Go to bed now!"

Tom grabbed a pillow from Brent's bed and made a movement to hit him with it. "You're hopeless, Brent," he said, trying hard to suppress a smile. "Things are steeped enough in mystery without you pulling a cloak of it around yourself."

Brent looked at him seriously and lowered his voice. "There's no mystery about the letter, Tommy," he said. "Hedley's just wrote and asked Pearson where he had obtained the jewelry which he asked them to buy. It seems he sent them a sample piece for which they forwarded that big check. Then they discovered it was the same piece of jewelry that they had made many years ago for a client of theirs, a James Howard Corlett of New York.

"The piece of jewelry that Hedley's bought from the old bird was one of a large collection belonging to this Corlett who lost it along with his four year old son when their yacht was wrecked during a storm. It happened somewhere along this part of the Maine coast."

Tom wheeled around on his two feet. "Did they say how many years ago?" he asked quickly.

“No,” said Brent, “but from the tone of the letter, I imagine it was quite a few years ago.”

“And they asked Pearson to tell them how he came to get the jewelry. Is that it?” Tom queried.

“Exactly,” answered Brent.

A step was heard on the stairway. Tom and Brent stopped talking and listened. It came on slowly with measured tread. Then presently Old Jones stepped into the room.

He looked as grim and sad as ever. From one to the other he stared and shook his head. Then he took from his back pocket a white envelope which he handed to Tom.

“Old Jonah,” he mumbled, “he says yore ter mail that there letter in Rhodes first thing in the mornin’. He says yer both ter go. That’s all the words he spoke ter me. I could hardly hear them, he grumbled so.”

Tom looked at the envelope and saw with surprise that it was addressed to Hedley’s. “Why,” he said handing it over to Brent, “I wonder what’s the idea of it?”

Brent looked at it thoughtfully and silently but said nothing. Old Jones shook his head sagaciously. “Hmph,” he said with an air of disgust. “He’s tryin’ ter play off innocent now. That’s why he’s writin’ ter them people. I bet he’s said how he had a nice interview with pore Mr. Oliver and how he saw him off safe in the dory and all. Hmph! That’s all he said I bet. I know him. Tryin’ ter play off innocent, that’s what he’s tryin’ ter do!”

The storm was subsiding and through Brent’s window they could see the faithful light still flashing out across the dark waters. “At least Pearson sticks to his job,” murmured Tom as if he was groping to find something commendable in the man. “He hasn’t tried to run away—*yet!*”

With that Old Jones turned to go below. “He can’t look me in the eyes,” he mumbled softly. “Not once while he was givin’ me the letter ’n’ talkin’ could he look me in the eyes. That means enough!” His voice mumbled and rumbled on down the stairway. Then all became silent again. Brent looked at Tom and shrugged his shoulders.

CHAPTER XV

DRIFTWOOD

“Somehow I’m inclined to believe Old Jones,” Tom said. “I think Pearson just had us mail this letter to see if it wouldn’t throw us off the track.”

They were pushing the dory out from the rocks of Shadow Isle. It was seven o’clock and the sun was already glistening upon the surf. To the east some white clouds peeped from under the blue sky as if quite loath to leave the world a perfect day.

They turned the dory toward Rhodes and Tom settled himself, oars in hand. Brent had his usual place at the rudder. “Don’t you think Old Jones’ surmise is right?” Tom persisted.

Brent kept an untroubled gaze upon the water. “I don’t know,” he answered. “But I’m quite sure that neither of the old birds are yearning to embrace each other. They remind me of a bulldog and an Angora cat.” He let his right hand drop and trail along in the water.

“You can’t blame Old Jones,” said Tom. “Look at the way Pearson’s treated him! Anyway what has that to do with what happened yesterday?”

“Just this much, Tommy,” said Brent. “Old Jones hates the old geezer enough to enlarge upon all he sees him do. He may not do it intentionally, but do it he does. He sees Old Fearful’s every action through a pair of green glasses.”

Tom rested one oar for a moment and looked at Brent with amazement. “You don’t believe what he told me last night in

the tower?” he asked incredulously.

“About Old Fearful shoving the dory out to sea?” asked Brent calmly.

“Yes,” answered Tom. “Do you?”

“Oh, I believe it,” drawled Brent. “But I think there’s an even chance that Oliver was in it.”

“Old Jones saw it was empty!” Tom insisted. “He saw it through his binoculars—how could he see wrong?”

“In his excitement he might have held them upside down,” said Brent smilingly. “Such things have happened before, you know. And to better people than Old Jones.”

“You make me sick,” Tom said disgustedly and rowing furiously. “You have to be an eye witness to everything or you won’t believe it. Other people are as well able to see things as you are. You’re just downright conceited!”

“Those are harsh words, Tommy,” said Brent with a yawn. “You misunderstand me entirely. I’ve the soul of a detective and I won’t accept statements based on prejudice. I don’t disbelieve Old Jones exactly, I just want conclusive evidence.”

“You win,” said Tom. “But I don’t know how much more evidence you’d need to call it conclusive.”

“Time will tell,” said Brent.

“Where do you think Pearson was this morning?” Tom queried as they turned in at the pier.

“In bed, I suppose,” Brent answered.

“Would you say that proved conclusively that he was trying to keep out of our way? That he couldn’t face us in the light of morning?” Tom asked sarcastically.

“No,” smiled Brent. “I’d say that he just had a nerve getting me out of bed to mail his letters at the ghastly hour of

seven. I've as much right to stay in bed as he. Regardless of age, my health ought to be considered."

"Oh, shut up!" said Tom as he swung the boat around and up to the pier. He proceeded to tie her up and Brent sat in an amused silence watching him.

Tom scrambled up the ladder and then looked back down. Brent was slowly climbing up and just before he reached the top he stopped to survey the stretch of water behind him.

"Does the water meet with your approval?" asked Tom with a suggestion of a smile.

"Everything, Tomasso," drawled Brent as he came up on the pier. "Nothing more is required."

"Gosh!" exclaimed Tom as he noticed a little group of men gathered about on the Rhodes beach. "I wonder what's happened here!"

"Only one way to find out," said Brent. "We'll stroll over and see."

Tom was already three laps ahead of Brent and had stepped off the pier onto the beach. He walked briskly toward the little group and noticed that they began to draw apart one by one to watch himself and Brent.

As Tom drew near, one of the older men hailed him. He was a small, thin man, a typical weatherbeaten fisherman clad in a worn, but clean jerkin. "You be the city fellers what's visitin' the light?" he asked. Tom nodded and smiled. "We are," he answered. "Anything wrong?"

"Dunno," said the old salt turning to point to a dory lying limp and broken on the beach. "That pore thing belonged ter me and I rented it out yistiddy ter a feller what wanted ter go and see Old Jonah at the Isle."

Brent came up and stood beside Tom. “Did he tell you his name?” he asked.

“Kind o’ guess so,” the old salt answered. “He stopped with Seth Blucher at the White House yistiddy mornin’. Said his name was Oliver. Seth saw my dory git washed up here early evenin’ so he run down and pulled her high ’n’ dry.”

“And what about Oliver?” Tom asked breathlessly.

“That’s jest what we hated ter ask yer!” the old man said. “We hain’t seed hide nor hair o’ him since he set out fer the Isle. Don’t s’pose yer saw him either, eh?”

Tom turned to Brent and nodded solemnly. “Didn’t he show up ter the Isle?” the old salt repeated.

“Yes,” said Tom quietly.

“Gosh-a’-mighty!” exclaimed the old man. “’N’ he started back in the storm, eh?”

“That’s what we understood,” said Tom. “That’s what Mr. Pearson told us.”

“Is this Seth Blucher up out of bed yet?” Brent interposed.

“This half hour o’ more,” the old salt answered. “Smelled his coffee as I was a-comin’ down ter see my pore ole dory. She’s done fer fair, I guess.” The little group turned and looked at the broken boat.

Tom and Brent started up the beach.

CHAPTER XVI

SETH BLUCHER TALKS

Blucher must have seen them coming for he was out on the porch of his hotel when they walked up the steps.

He stepped forward, rosy cheeked and stout, his hands clasped nervously over a huge white apron that covered him from chin to toe. He nodded as if he wanted to be friendly but was afraid to appear so.

“We’re visiting the light,” Tom said to him. “We just heard about the dory.”

Blucher looked worried. “I saw you,” he said. “Come up stairs, you fellers, till I show yer somethin’ what’s mighty strange.” He turned on his heel and beckoned them in.

They walked through a long, dim hall, cool and damp smelling, then up a narrow stairway, Blucher puffing and seemingly agitated. He led them to the back of the second floor and at the last door stopped. Turning the door knob he looked back and winked, then without a word he opened the door wide, walked into the center of the room and stood there.

When he thought Tom and Brent had thoroughly inspected the room he walked over and closed the door. Then he turned to them, his brows still drawn. “Mr. Oliver had this here room,” he said waving his fat arm about. “It was all in order when he left for the Isle, yesterday. Last night after I pulled the dory up on the beach, I came upstairs right away ter look.

“Nothin’ was disturbed. I shut up the winders tight and I noticed his bag was standing there unpacked jest as he had

left it. The bed was all nice and in order.

“Now this mornin’ after I seed you fellers standin’ there a-talkin’ on the beach, I knew you’d come with bad news from the Isle. I knew you came ter ask about Mr. Oliver.”

Tom and Brent nodded.

“Sure, I knew it,” Mr. Blucher said with worried assurance. “I had a hunch yuh’d come. Gosh knows I was worried enough when I seed the dory washed up but when I locked up last night and still he wasn’t here I was well nigh sick and feared the worst.

“But when I was eatin’ breakfast and seed you fellers steppin’ down off the pier fer the beach I says ter myself, Oliver *did* start back alone and them fellers got worried and come ter see if he was safe.

“So quick somethin’ told me ter come up and open the winders, that yu’d want ter breathe some fresh air when yer looked at the pore feller’s room. And when I opened the door I almost fainted at what I saw.

“The winders were opened wide. The bed was mussed like somebody had set on it. And the washstand and the towels—everything was like it had been mussed up in a hurry. To cap the climax, when I went ter pick up the towels at the washstand, what did I see!”

“I can’t imagine,” said Tom, aroused.

“Pore Mr. Oliver’s bag was gone,” said Mr. Blucher. “Yes sir, it sure was gone. And everything was left jest like yer see it now.”

“You say all this happened between the time you locked up last night and this morning before you opened?” Brent asked in even tones.

“Yes sir,” said Mr. Blucher. “That’s when it happened a’right. And a mighty strange thing too. The pore feller’s bag gone. Who could o’ took it?”

Brent walked to the window facing down on the beach and looked out. A pretty sturdy looking trellis, covered with ivy, climbed to within easy reach of the sill.

“You’re sure the front or back doors weren’t disturbed?” he queried further.

“No sir,” answered Mr. Blucher. “I padlock both o’ ’em nights. Not that we ever had thieves aroun’ but yer kin never tell when there’s summer visitors.”

“Absolutely not,” said Brent from the window. “Summer visitors are a bad lot sometimes.”

Mr. Blucher looked at him uncomprehendingly. Then he turned to Tom. “Funny, but the pore feller must o’ had a hunch he wasn’t comin’ back. He insisted I should take the money yesterday when he hired the room. It was agin’ my principles but he made me take it.”

“That was odd,” Tom agreed and looking around the room. “I can’t understand it at all.”

Brent said nothing. He stood staring out of the window, down upon the little stone walk that wound around the hotel. “Did you lock these windows last night?” he asked at length.

Mr. Blucher shook his head. “Can’t say pertickler ’bout that, young feller. Mostly I do but sometimes I’m likely ter forget. ’Specially when I’m excited like last night.”

Brent glanced casually around the room and walked out. Tom and Mr. Blucher followed, the proprietor bursting into a tirade against Jonah Pearson for allowing Oliver to go out in such a storm. This lasted until they reach the porch again.

“We all say ’roun’ here,” said Mr. Blucher indignantly, “that Jonah Pearson is a’ ole tyrant. He’s a liar and none o’ us believes little Peter is any kin o’ his’n.

“Why, no one ever seed a son o’ his’n, much less a daughter-in-law. Jonah Pearson came ter that lighthouse alone ’n’ four years after Old Jones came. Then all o’ a sudden we heered Jonah’s son and wife died somewhere’s in Europe and that he had a grandchild ter bring up.

“Peter was quite a lad when we first laid eyes on him. Old Jones, he never would say a word ’bout any o’ it. Said it was none o’ his business. But we say old Jones knows more’ll he lets on. That’s what we say.”

Someone called Mr. Blucher from the back door. When he had gone inside, Tom turned to Brent with something like triumph in his eyes. “What about your conclusive evidence now, eh? There’s no doubt but that Oliver’s gone. As sure as anything!”

“And don’t leave out the bag, Tommy,” Brent smiling.

“And the bag,” Tom repeated.

CHAPTER XVII

ALONG THE WAY

“How ’bout it, young feller, d’ye think I ought ter write ter Oliver’s boss?” asked Mr. Blucher as he came out upon the porch again.

Brent nodded. “It would be wise,” he answered.

“What business was the pore feller in?” Blucher asked curiously.

“Write to Hedley’s, Fifth Avenue, New York City, Mr. Blucher,” answered Brent. “I have a letter to mail at your general store and then we’re going back to Shadow Isle to tell the sad news.”

“Yer goin’ so soon!” exclaimed Mr. Blucher in tones of dismay. “We hain’t hardly had time ter talk this thing over.”

Brent smiled. “Oh, you’ll see us in a day or two. We have lots to do over at the light today. Meanwhile you might hear something from Hedley’s yourself,” he called as they walked away.

“Hope so,” Mr. Blucher answered and looked after them, disappointment darkening his face.

“I bet that old bird was all set to hear what’s been going on over at the light,” Brent chuckled after they reached the pier.

“Sure, he was,” Tom said. “Can’t blame him either. It’s human to be curious. Especially in a thing like that when they’ve all been suspicious of Pearson right along.”

“It’s dangerous to be curious sometimes,” said Brent. “And there’s just about enough people in on this mystery

without including the whole hamlet of Rhodes. If we told Blucher we might as well tell the bunch.”

“There’s a whole lot in that,” Tom admitted. “Still if Blucher hears from Hedley’s, some of it’s bound to come out.”

“You leave it to Hedley’s,” said Brent. “They’re not fools. They have a client to protect as well as themselves.”

“Well, we’re not getting anywhere with it,” Tom said, discouraged. “The mystery deepens, if anything. Who took that bag?”

“Whoever climbed up the trellis and into the room,” answered Brent. “That was a cinch. Anyone could do that with the window unlocked.”

“But who would want Oliver’s bag? Who knew it was there?” Tom hammered out.

“That’s why we’re going right back to Shadow Isle. To find out,” said Brent.

“Then you *do* think Pearson’s had a hand in it, don’t you?”

“I know the dead can’t walk out of the sea and up into a hotel room,” said Brent by way of answer. “I know they can’t wash up and then disappear with a travelling bag.”

“What else do you know?” queried Tom, smiling.

“I know that between one o’clock and six thirty this morning, Old Jones and you and myself were sound asleep,” answered Brent.

“And the light goes out before dawn,” said Tom. “What did Pearson do then? None of us saw him this morning when we got up. Old Jones said he thought he was in bed and that he didn’t want to look for fear of getting him started.

Anyway, he could have accomplished lots of things between dawn and six thirty in the morning.”

“You’re coming on fast, Tommy,” drawled Brent. “You’ll be a big help to me some day.”

Tom grinned. “At least I won’t be as stubborn in admitting things as you are,” he said.

“You’ll learn to do that too,” Brent returned whimsically. “All good detectives do. And now for a ride on the ocean wave again.”

The sea was calm as they turned the dory about once more. The tide was running out; a light, warm breeze fanned their faces. Some gulls were whirling overhead, occasionally cleaving the sparkling surface of the water with their gleaming, white bodies.

“You know, Tomasso,” said Brent, looking at the large birds, “I think Old Fearful must have been a sea gull in some other life.”

“Why?” laughed Tom.

“Well, his nose is shaped like the beak of that big fellow there,” said Brent, pointing to the largest of the birds which had just soared out from between the stubby pines on the cliffs.

The gull circled about several times and dipped into the water. When he reappeared he held a large fish in his beak and flew back of the pines again.

The boys watched him with interest. They looked at the spot where he had disappeared. Suddenly Tom leaned forward. “Isn’t that something sticking out from under those rocks there, Brent?” he asked.

Brent turned fully around. “So it is, Tommy,” he said. “Let’s take a peek.”

Tom rowed the dory in slowly. As they came under the cliffs they saw the tip end of an oar. Brent balanced himself in the boat and looked under.

A dory was tied to a long jutting piece of rock. It was empty save for the one oar. “Who would want to tie up here?” Tom asked.

“Only someone who wanted to risk climbing those cliffs and so over to Rhodes,” answered Brent. “Someone who didn’t want to go down to the pier. It’s not been very long, that’s sure. Only since the last lap of the tide. You see there’s hardly any water in it.”

“Shall we untie it?” Tom asked.

“Wouldn’t be a bad idea,” said Brent. “Maybe Old Fearful could use it. No one will come back for it, I’m certain. Whoever climbed those rocks knew they couldn’t come down again.” He untied the little craft and tied it to their own.

They were soon back on their course to the Isle, the abandoned dory gaily bobbing on the waves behind them. “Pearson would be tickled to get anything free, I imagine,” Tom remarked.

“That’s why he likes living on the ocean,” said Brent. “It’s so free.”

They came in sight of the isle and could see, even at that distance, Pearson standing almost at the water’s edge and watching them. “What’s this,” said Brent, “the welcome back committee?”

Tom laughed. “It’s a wonder he’ll show himself in the sunlight,” he said.

“He’s looking for something,” said Brent. “He’s stretching his neck.”

Tom turned and saw that Pearson was standing on tiptoe, eagerly trying to see what it was they were towing. “His curiosity will get the better of him in a minute,” said Tom.

“Looking for anything?” Brent called between his hands.

Pearson nodded. “What yer got there?” he shouted.

“Dory,” answered Brent.

“Missin’ one from off’n here m’self,” he wheezed.

“Where’bouts yer git her?”

“Found her along the way,” lied Brent calmly. “Picked her up.”

Tom looked at Brent, open-mouthed. “Why, what a lie!” he exclaimed.

Brent smiled almost indulgently upon Tom. “Didn’t I tell you that little boys shouldn’t question Papa Brent?” he said softly.

“You big fakir!” Tom murmured in an undertone.

Brent held up an admonitory finger to Tom. “Naughty, naughty!” he said smiling.

CHAPTER XVIII

DISCOVERY

Tom laughed and unconsciously released an oar from his hand. Before he had time to grasp it it slipped swiftly and silently into the water.

“Git that there oar,” Pearson snapped from his perch on the rocks. “Hain’t got ’nuff as ’tis. Don’t let ’er git away frum yer!”

Tom leaned far out and reached but the errant oar seemed bent on eluding him. Brent quickly unfastened the abandoned dory and in one shove sent her sailing into Pearson’s outstretched hands. Then they proceeded to capture the oar.

Their chase took them around the Isle. With each attempt made to capture it, it skillfully took a high wave. “You’d think they cost a thousand dollars apiece,” complained Tom. “All this fuss and trouble for an oar.”

“Be careful, Tommy,” said Brent, “Pearson may inherit some racial qualities that are responsible for this. If he heard you complaining he might think you were reflecting on his ancestry.”

“Something is responsible for it,” said Tom. “I only wish he was chasing it himself.”

“Call it some sweet name,” suggested Brent. “Kindness always pays. Even with Pearson’s oar.”

“You’re the one made me lose it,” Tom called back from his stooped position. They had swerved again and were now at the extreme southeast end of the Isle.

As they watched, the surf threw the oar upon the rocks, high and dry at low tide. They quickly nosed the dory in to capture it, and jumped out to look around and survey the place.

Tom pulled the dory up and Brent stood soberly gazing around. His hands were hanging loosely by his sides and his eyes had a sort of quizzical expression behind his spectacles. He looked down at his feet. "Kind of sandy here, Tommy," he remarked nodding at the clear sand seeping through the rocks.

"It is," Tom agreed, looking toward the south. "It's still sandier there. Let's take a look around." Brent followed to where the rocks and sand jutted out into the sea. Tom scrambled out over the rocks and looked over. Presently, he uttered a long, low whistle.

"Do you see a mermaid, Tomasso?" Brent asked calmly. "They come out at low tide, you know." He walked over and stood behind Tom.

"No, I didn't know when they came out," answered Tom. "But I've discovered something better."

"Do I get three guesses or only one?" Brent asked solemnly.

"No fooling, Brent," said Tom. "Do you know we're standing right over Pearson's cave!"

"Heavens!" Brent exclaimed. "In pursuit of the oar we come upon the treasure cave."

"And it's low tide, too," said Tom. "Remember? Old Jones said you could go in at low tide."

"All right," said Brent. "But let's hurry before Old Fearful starts to worry that we're not coming back with his oar. I've

a reason for wanting to keep him in a cheerful frame of mind.”

“The dickens with him,” said Tom, jumping down onto the sand.

They entered the cave, sandy and dry. Now, at low tide, it was entirely above sea level and extended back into the rock formation for a distance of thirty feet. Coarse sand covered its floor and it was easily fifteen feet in width and height.

“Some place, eh?” Tom said looking around enthusiastically.

“Fine,” agreed Brent, “while the waves keep outside.”

“I wonder what Pearson finds so interesting in here?” Tom said to himself more than to Brent.

“Maybe he uses it as a playhouse and brings his dolls here,” Brent suggested. “You can never tell what these vile old duffers will do.”

Brent sauntered leisurely around scanning the rocky walls. Then he stood for a moment kicking determinedly at the sand. He looked up at Tom.

“Hard blue clay under here,” he said. “There’s only about six inches of sand.”

“What does that mean?” queried Tom.

“That it’s sand and clay,” Brent answered, dryly.

Tom grinned. “Naturally you’d have your little joke,” he said. “Even in Pearson’s cave.”

“It’s no joke, Tommy,” said Brent, solemnly kicking his toe into the sand. “See!” He dug the tip of his shoe in farther and turned it around between the rocky wall and the cave floor. He felt his foot strike something.

As he bent over and brushed the sand away with his hands, they came in contact with something hard and he got

down on his knees and looked.

It proved to be a man's hat—a straw one, wedged tightly down between the wall and the cave floor. Its position led Brent to believe at once that it had been crammed there intentionally. He gave it a few energetic tugs and pulled it out.

Tom took it from him and looked at it. “Why, it's Oliver's!” he exclaimed.

“*Oliver's hat?*” asked Brent, walking over to the light with Tom to examine it.

“Look! The fancy blue band, Brent!” Tom cried in tremulous tones. “The very same one!”

Brent stood mute, holding the hat in his hand and staring at it. Then as if in a dream, he began turning it over and over and studying the initials inside the band.

“Why don't you say something?” Tom asked, excitedly.

“It's Oliver's hat, that's all I can say,” said Brent, patiently. “What do you want me to say?”

“Say that you know there's been foul play! Admit that you believe it now!” Tom cried.

“I'll admit that you're the most emotional gink I ever knew,” drawled Brent, “and I'll admit also that the evidence certainly isn't in the old geezer's favor, if that makes you feel better. One thing sure, it doesn't look as if he and Oliver were playing postoffice in here. I wouldn't believe that if they swore it under oath.” Tom threw up his hands in utter despair. “I declare, you *won't* take anything seriously!” he said with disgust.

“I refuse to weep at any place but funerals,” Brent returned, “but that doesn't prove I don't feel like it at times.”

“I’d like to believe you, but I can’t,” said Tom, hopelessly. He walked to the cave entrance, stopped short and drew back.

His quick, catlike movement caused Brent to look up. They both stood, transfixed with a sort of horror at the leering, grinning features before them.

In two long strides Jonah Pearson was standing inside the cave entrance.

CHAPTER XIX

PEARSON'S GHOST?

He wore a triumphant sort of look as if he had discovered them at some great, secret task. He seemed to enjoy the rather tense silence that followed his sudden appearance.

But Brent, slow of gait and manner, was not slow in thought. He suddenly returned Pearson's smile in his own whimsical way—a frank open look upon his studious features.

“Come right into the living room, Mr. Pearson,” he drawled easily. “We discovered this little place in chasing up your oar. It's delightful but we're out of chairs. Still, I guess you won't mind a little thing like that.”

Pearson forced a chuckle. “No, don't mind anything,” he said, looking sideways at the hat in Tom's hand. Then he turned his full attention to Brent.

Tom was determined not to let the issue pass so easily. He tightened his hold upon the hat and held it out in front of him. A flush of anger spread quickly over his face. “Do you know who this hat belongs to, Mr. Pearson?” he asked in a voice that was none the less threatening for its quivering tones.

The color left Pearson's face and as suddenly returned again. He avoided both Tom's and Brent's inquiring glances and looked intently at his feet. “Er, no,” he answered finally and unsteadily. “How should I know, eh?”

Tom stepped forward and thrust the hat directly beneath Pearson's shifting eyes. Then he turned it round revealing the

lining with its initials.

“What ’bout it?” he asked evasively. “What ’bout the hat anyway?” He shifted his tall frame onto one leg but never looked up.

Brent stepped forward and in a nonchalant manner took the hat from Tom’s angry grasp. “There’s nothing unusual about the hat, Mr. Pearson,” he drawled. “Tom means it’s unusual that you do not recognize it. Perhaps your eyesight prevents you from reading the initials—isn’t that it?”

The look of relief that overspread Pearson’s face was evident. “Yer struck it right, Gaylong,” he wheezed and broke into a falsetto laugh. “Yer struck it plumb right. I hain’t able ter read nothin’ without my specs.”

Tom glared. “That was it then,” said Brent quickly. “You might be interested to know that the initials are those of Mr. Oliver—J. P. O. Quite strange he should go off without his hat,” Brent sort of murmured to himself, then added, “He did look rather absent minded, though.”

“Yes, yes. Hmph!” said Pearson after a strained silence. “Kind o’ a queer feller anyways.”

“I didn’t think so!” exclaimed Tom sullenly. Pearson looked at him quickly, then away again. Brent adjusted his glasses and tucked the hat under his arm with a proprietary gesture. In doing so he gave Tom a sly, admonishing glance.

“Most likely Oliver forgot it,” he said. “The storm came up so quickly it wouldn’t be any wonder.”

“Hmph!” Pearson exclaimed again. “More’n likely he’ll come after it. He’ll remember where he left it. More’n likely.”

“I’m afraid not, Mr. Pearson,” said Brent quietly. “Mr. Blucher over at Rhodes told us that the dory Oliver hired

yesterday was washed up on the beach early last evening during the storm.”

Pearson’s expression changed a dozen times during the seconds following. He spread his clawlike hand against the wall of the cave and pretended to study it thoughtfully. “Now hain’t that terrible!” he said slowly. “But the feller would go! *He would go!*”

Tom sneered disgustedly. He turned his back upon Pearson and Brent and paced up and down the cave in silent fury.

“Queer thing about the whole thing though,” said Brent in his even, unhurried tones. “He must have managed to get in some way during the night—that is, either Oliver or his ghost,” Brent purposely let his voice trail off.

Pearson stifled a gasp and for once his shifty eyes looked into Brent’s. “What’s that? What’s that yer say?” he asked.

Brent surveyed the hat under his arm before answering. “Mr. Blucher said the room was entered during the night and Oliver’s bag has disappeared.”

“Sakes alive!” Pearson wheezed behind his twitching features. “N’ yit he didn’t come back in the dory yer say?”

Brent shook his head and watched him closely. “The boat was washed up alone,” he said. “No one saw Oliver after he hired that dory yesterday morning. That is, no one in Rhodes.

“The doors of the hotel hadn’t been touched by a human hand. They were safely locked when Blucher opened up there this morning. Now what do you make of that?”

Pearson’s discomfort was evident to Tom. But whether it was guilt or complete surprise was hard to detect. And yet he was satisfied that the lightkeeper was mentally wriggling under Brent’s calm but pointed announcements.

Suddenly Pearson removed his hand from its position on the wall. He pulled at his collarless neck as though his long, bony throat was an obstacle. “Tain’t likely Oliver’s ghost could o’ did it, eh?” he asked in almost hushed tones.

Brent smiled. “That’s what Tommy thinks,” he said. “They say such things do happen. I don’t know. Kind of a weird situation though, isn’t it? Think of a drowned man walking out of the ocean and up into his hotel room! I don’t think I’d care to see it.”

Pearson seemed wholly unable to speak. He shook his head and slowly turned around facing the cave entrance. Then he quickly raised his hands as if to protect his eyes from some horrifying object before him. A terrible, stifled shriek escaped his compressed lips.

Tom and Brent rushed forward. They looked at Pearson then followed the line of his horror-stricken eyes.

The sun cast little glints of gold around on the sand and the sea was foaming in gentle laps against the entrance to the cave. The tide was coming in.

The boys looked at each other, mystified. Then suddenly Pearson seemed to gather himself together and stood up to his full height. He strode out of the cave and stood ankle deep in the water outside.

“Hurry!” he called back tersely. “She comes in fast when she git’s a-goin’. In five minutes yer’d be trapped in there.”

They lost no time in following him out. Brent scrambled up first and Tom, right behind, grasped the slippery rocks to pull himself up. His hand slipped however and he slid clumsily across and down into a sort of indentation between the cave and the rocky isle. Before he realized it he had come

up out of the water and blindly grasped a piece of overhanging rock.

As soon as the water was out of his eyes he saw that he was quite safe in the tiny cove. It wasn't more than five feet in circumference and the water lapped gently there, irrespective of the incoming tide.

Another second and he saw Brent's smiling face overhead. "Heavens, Tommy!" Brent exclaimed. "What kind of a stunt were you trying?"

"I slipped," Tom laughed.

"I believe it," said Brent. He reached out and pulled Tom over.

As soon as he was on his feet he saw Pearson turn and hurry back to the lighthouse. "What's the rush?" Tom asked and nodding toward the lightkeeper's departing figure.

"I don't know," said Brent, "although he mumbled something about being tired and needing some sleep."

"Huh! I guess so," said Tom. "He must have tired himself out getting over to Rhodes and back before daylight."

Brent smiled. "He says we can pull the dory up for now. He'll help us carry it to the other end of the isle this afternoon."

"What about the other one? The one we found?" Tom asked, breathlessly.

"Oh, he says it's his all right," answered Brent. "He mumbled that too. Said it must have floated away during the storm last night."

"And tied itself up under the rocks," laughed Tom with a hint of sarcasm. "Let's see! That must be puzzle number ten, isn't it?"

CHAPTER XX

MR. BLUCHER DROPS IN

All through the long afternoon Pearson wandered to and from the tower like a man in a trance. He seemed lost for words and scuffed his feet about aimlessly, his eyes fixed on space.

Tom and Brent were below, reading. There was nothing to do until suppertime and the glaring sun outside was not alluring. A heavy humidity gathered slowly over the isle like some vast, invisible curtain.

Pearson came down from the tower and started pacing back and forth between the door and the window. He appeared to be oblivious of everything but his own thoughts as he scuffed along. After a time he stood at the window and stared out to sea as if waiting and watching for something or someone.

The bell on the gallery clanged the supper hour sonorously. Pearson turned and nodded his head, keeping time with the deep, iron strokes. Then he glanced Brent's way and yet seemed not to see him.

He wet his thin, dry lips and lifted his head a little. "S'funny 'bout that there bag," he mumbled. "Can't figger it out 'tall."

Brent and Tom put down the books and glanced significantly at each other. "We'll hear more about it from Mr. Blucher probably," said Brent. "It might have been a thief?"

“Eh?” Pearson asked, walking toward the door again. “Yer say a thief?”

“That’s my deduction,” answered Brent.

“Think it couldn’t o’ been Oliver’s ghost, eh?” he said in the same hushed tones he had used that morning.

“Not unless you believe in ghosts,” answered Brent.

“Dunno,” mumbled Pearson. “Strange things yer see and hear ’bout sometimes. All I kin figger, it must o’ been Oliver’s ghost.”

He walked over to the stairway and slowly mounted the stairs. His feet seemed to be weighted down, so heavy was his step. On he went up to the tower, each footfall resounding ponderously down the winding, iron stair.

Brent rose and walked to the window. “Didn’t I tell you he’d bunk into himself!” he said.

“I know what you mean now,” said Tom. “Gosh, he sure is beginning to act ghost ridden.”

“It’s on his mind, that’s certain,” said Brent. “That’s why he screamed in the cave. He thought he saw Oliver’s ghost.”

“Serves him right,” Tom said vehemently. “I’ll never forget that look he gave us when he first came in there. I thought our time was up too.”

“Don’t be fooled that he wasn’t thinking some such thing either,” said Brent. “He was all set to do for us (as Old Jones says) if he found out we suspected him in any way. At first he thought we had found some incriminating evidence.”

“Well, we did—Oliver’s hat,” interposed Tom. “Isn’t that incriminating enough?”

“Of course it is,” said Brent. “But you don’t think I was going to let you fly up in the air and get away with it in front of the old duffer, do you? He had us at a disadvantage in that

cave, Tommy. Believe it or not, if I hadn't kept you from going off the handle about that hat he would have been wise to it that we suspected him. As it is, I think he's suspicious of you."

"I don't give a hang," said Tom. "I'd like to accuse him right out and out."

"Your chance will come to do that," Brent said soothingly. "You have to be patient in such an intricate affair and strike at the crucial moment. Otherwise all will be lost. Everything comes to him who waits."

"So does Christmas," Tom said, annoyed. "It's the end of this year."

"And the cave is at the end of the isle," said Brent. "You'll have to have patience until we find out why that old bird came upon us like a hawk this morning. You can depend upon it, Tomasso, he has something in that cave that's of vital interest to him."

"What, for goodness' sake?" queried Tom. "Why, the place can only be entered at low tide—have you forgotten that?"

Brent smiled. "Papa Brent forgets nothing," he said drawlingly. "There's plenty of time between tides to read the paper and smoke a cigar. If Old Fearful can do that we can make better use of the time."

"Snooping again, I suppose," Tom said with a sigh. "If you're counting on going in there you'll have to have a quicker eye than Pearson. He seems to see everything."

"And I see another visitor rowing his way to our lonely shores," said Brent, his face close to the window. "Nothing so interesting at Shadow Isle as visitors. We can see them come but we never see them go."

Tom shuddered and walked over to the window. He watched the boat slowly nosing in under the rocks. "Now who can that be?" he asked in a whisper.

"I bet Old Fearful would like to know that right now," said Brent. "Ten to one he's piking him off."

In another second the occupant of the boat was climbing laboriously up on the rocks. They heard the soft shuffling steps of Old Jones hurriedly descending. Presently he came into the room and up to Tom's side.

"Jonah, he's a-comin' down in a minit," the old man whispered. "I heered him jest now when I was a-gittin' up. He was a-walkin' back and forth over my head after I sighted the boat comin' in. I kin tell he's mad, how he walks. I know him."

Before they had a chance to say more, Pearson's heavy step thumped overhead. Old Jones shuffled over to the stove and began preparations for supper. Brent and Tom stayed at the window.

"Know who that is a-comin'?" Pearson snapped as he scuffed awkwardly across the room.

"No, I don't," Brent answered. "Couldn't you tell with your glasses?"

"Couldn't find 'em," Pearson answered tersely. "'Spose that fool Old Jones put 'em somewheres when he was tryin' ter spy me out! I know him."

Old Jones dropped the frying pan out of his trembling hands and hurriedly stooped to pick it up. He glanced at Pearson like an animal cornered, then bent over the stove. Brent and Tom kept their faces averted, stunned by the suddenness of the lightkeeper's remark.

The visitor came nearer and nearer and finally reached the lighthouse stairway. He looked up to the tower, scrutinizing it curiously. All three at the window recognized him instantly.

“*Seth Blucher!*” Pearson exclaimed in a hoarse voice. “What kin that pest want on this here isle?”

“Perhaps he has news,” said Brent without turning around. “Something else might have developed.”

Blucher was climbing the stairs.

“Yer mean ’bout the ghost?” Pearson whispered to Brent.

“Yes,” said Brent.

“Gosh-a’mighty,” wheezed Pearson. “What more kin a ghost do ’sides that!”

Blucher knocked upon the door—once, twice and a loud, long knock.

Pearson hesitated, then scuffed over and let him in.

“Wa’al,” he said, by way of greeting. “What’s wrong with Rhodes, eh?”

“Nothin’ much,” answered Blucher, eyeing him thoughtfully. “Station agent sent me over with a telegram fer yer. Day was nice ’n’ nobody had time ter bring it so I come myself. It’s from Noo York.” He took the yellow envelope from his pocket.

Pearson almost snatched it from the man’s hand. “How come yer know it’s from Noo York, eh?” he asked, his voice strangely quiet.

“Station agent told me,” answered Mr. Blucher, sounding a trifle cowed. “Nothin’ much to it, Jonah, ’cept them there people what Oliver worked fer sent it to yer and asked yer ter bring what yer had ter sell and they’ll give yer a price. Nothin’ much to it.”

Jonah Pearson's face became livid with rage. He shook the unopened envelope before Mr. Blucher's frightened face. "Yer been a-talkin' over my private business, eh?" he shouted violently. "Yer been nosin' 'bout my telegrams with that there station agent, have yer?"

He stopped and took a few steps closer to the cringing Blucher. "I'll fix yer fer nosin' some day. I'll fix yer 'n' your whole town o' Rhodes!" he screamed and left for the tower.

Mr. Blucher shook his head. "Yer kin see what I said was true," he said in hushed tones. "It hain't accordin' ter reason the way that man acts."

CHAPTER XXI

OLD JONES' VIEWS

Mr. Blucher left immediately afterward. Pearson's tirade, seemingly, was too much for even his good-natured soul. He took leave of Old Jones and Tom in a sympathetic manner as if he pitied them sincerely for having to be under that tower with the man, Jonah Pearson.

Brent accompanied Blucher down to his boat, prompted more by a desire for information than by a spirit of hospitality and courtesy.

"Haven't heard from Hedley's yourself, Mr. Blucher, have you?" Brent asked him.

Mr. Blucher climbed lumberingly into his boat. "Nary a word," he answered. "Spect I'll hear soon though. Sent 'em a telegram myself."

"S' funny thing," he continued, taking up his oars. "Jonah hain't seemin' a bit worried 'bout that young feller's drownin'. I sez he's the cause o' it, a-sendin' him out in the storm that way. There hain't a body in Rhodes what don't think it and cry a shame o' it!"

"Oh, it worries him all right," said Brent. "I guess he feels he *is* the cause of it but doesn't like to talk of it. You can see he's worried about something."

"Hmph!" exclaimed Mr. Blucher derisively. "*Him worried?* Never. Jonah hain't never worried none 'bout pore Oliver—yer kin believe what I say. Jonah Pearson only is worried 'bout hisself. He hain't never, nohow, had any feelin' fer anybody but Jonah Pearson."

Brent watched him go and stayed until the cliffs near Rhodes hid the boat from view. He was thinking of what the hotel man had said and wondered if, after all, Pearson's changed manner resulted from fear for his own safety rather than remorse for Oliver's fate.

He entered the lighthouse, wrapped in thought. Tom was hurrying back and forth from the stove to the table, helping Old Jones with the supper. He looked up at Brent questioningly.

"He's gone," said Brent with a sigh. "I wonder what next?"

Old Jones stopped at his task. "Blucher, he's on ter *him*. Everybody'll find him out. You see!"

"I'm afraid he's found you out first though, Jones," Brent said, remembering Pearson's significant remark. "How does he come to know you were spying on him?"

"How does he come ter find out everything like he does?" Old Jones returned. "Jest because he's no good. He's got a devil in him, that's what. He'll do fer me sure now. He knows he can't fool me. That's why."

The old man shuffled over to the table and put his small, fat hands upon the snowy cloth. "He knows I suspicion that he's drowned pore Oliver," he whispered. "That's why he's so mad. It'll be a sad day fer little Peter if he has ter come and see them tantrums of Jonah's. He'll take it out on the lad if he don't git his way 'bout that joolry."

"Don't worry about little Pete," Tom spoke up quickly. "He'll never live with a murderer and thief if I have anything to say about it!"

"Sh-sh!" warned Brent. "Remember what I said, Tommy!"

Old Jones' face broke into a smile. He looked at Tom as if he were his champion in the struggle with the lightkeeper. The old man bent close to Tom. "Yer really b'lieve it too?" he asked wonderingly. "Can't yer feel things 'bout here like I can?"

"Certainly," Tom answered. "So does Brent, only he thinks we ought to wait for the showdown."

Brent turned to Tom. "Hedley's have called him in to New York now," he said. "What the reason is, we don't know. It might be something decisive and we'd be plain fools to accuse Pearson and cause him to run away before we know where that jewelry is or how he really came to have it. Leave well enough alone."

Old Jones went over to the stairway and listened intently. Then he came back nodding to Brent. "Let me tell yer, young feller," he whispered, "them joolry people hain't foolin' Ole Jonah none. He hain't a-goin' ter let them have them jools of his'n 'less he gits the money first. I know him."

Brent smiled. "No one is fooling him much if it comes to that," he said. "But as I told Tommy, he's going to fool himself if he thinks he can cover things up forever. A man's sins have a way of finding him out."

Old Jones sighed. "I hope that happens 'fore he finds out any more. He's had it in fer me fer years. He alius suspicioned I knew little Peter wa'n't no kin o' his'n. 'N' I do know it! I know he kept the lad jest 'cause he wanted ter perfect hissself 'bout somethin'. Jonah, he alius has a reason fer doin' things."

"What could Pearson do to you?" Tom asked indignantly.

"What did he do to Oliver?" Old Jones returned sadly.

“I know,” Tom admitted. “We’ll be here a little while anyway and when we go you go too. That’s if we can’t prove anything against Pearson. You can get a job somewhere else, can’t you?”

Old Jones smiled wistfully. “I been here too many years,” he said slowly. “Nother thing, I’m a-gittin’ too old fer to go ter another light.”

The heavy thump, thump of Pearson’s step could be heard again—down and down.... Instinctively, all three sat down and simulated interest in the food upon the table.

Pearson stepped into the room all dressed for his trip to the city. The little black cap adorned his head. A clean flannel shirt and black string necktie were the only luxuries he exhibited.

There was something wholly incongruous in the contrast between his simple, rude attire and his sharp, malevolent face. One felt a strong desire to smile as one glanced at the oversized shoes and the ill-fitting clothes. But the scowling face and mouth and the shifty eyes dispelled all hint of amusement from one’s mind—it inspired only a certain dread—a wish not to behold again that face so devoid of all human kindness.

Tom wished it fervently as he watched the tall old man. And by the silence around the table he knew that Brent and Old Jones were thinking much the same thing.

Pearson strode to the door and opened it. He stood hesitatingly for a moment, then turned around, his head inclined toward Old Jones. “Takin’ the night train fer Boston ’n’ then ter Noo York,” he snapped. “Yer’ll have ter let these here fellers help yer out best way yer kin. I got business ter tend to. Dunno when I’ll git back. Dunno!”

He shut the door with a violent bang and was gone.

CHAPTER XXII

AND WITH THE TIDE

“I think Old Fearful must have drawn that lap as a booby prize at the Lighthousekeepers’ Outing,” drawled Brent. “No one could ever make me believe he’s carrying the jewelry in it. And his pockets are too tight. Where is it, then?”

“That’s what I was wondering,” said Tom.

Old Jones stood up and shook his fist at the departing figure of Pearson. “I told yer he wa’n’t goin’ ter git fooled by them joolry people, didn’t I? Wa’al, he hain’t a-takin’ a quarter o’ that stuff if he’s takin’ any.”

“Then why is he bothering to go at all?” Tom queried.

“Some trick o’ his’n, yer kin make sure,” said Old Jones vehemently. “Mebbe he thinks they suspicion him ’n’ he’s only takin’ a piece or two o’ it. He’ll tell ’em mebbe he hain’t got no more, thinkin’ they’ll believe it so they won’t be sendin’ no more detectives here.”

“Of course you can follow the process of his mind better than we,” said Brent. “Only it’s strange he should go to New York if he doesn’t try and sell that jewelry. After all, that’s been his one object, hasn’t it?”

“Course ’twas,” answered Old Jones. “But there’s one thing—Ole Jonah’s afraid o’ the law. That’s why he’s kept that joolry all these here years.”

The old man shuffled to the window and back. “Hain’t I seed it in them ole boots o’ his’n fer the last eight years or more? From time ter time I seed it ’n’ each time it would be different kinds—rings ’n’ fancy bracelets ’n’ necklaces.

Then I wouldn't see 'em agin fer quite a spell. He hid 'em safe away, that's what," said Old Jones.

"And you haven't any idea where he put them at those times?" asked Brent.

"That's one thing I dunno," Old Jones answered. "He's alius made sure I hain't never knowed that."

"If Jones thinks he hasn't taken it, then it must be here in the tower," said Tom to Brent.

"There's a great big maybe to that, Tommy," said Brent. "That old bird isn't going away to New York and leave a fortune in jewelry in his old boots. I doubt if he has it in this lighthouse."

Tom looked disappointed.

Brent sat thoughtfully for a moment. "We'll let the dishes go until afterward. I'd like to stroll around a bit and commune with Old Man Neptune. Perhaps he'll give us a suggestion," he drawled.

Old Jones rose from the table. "All I say," he said, "is ter be careful. I don't trust *him* even in Noo York. He's that suspicious."

Tom laughed. "He sure has you buffaloes, Jones," he said. "Nevertheless we'll promise to be careful."

The old man nodded and smiled, shuffling up the stairs. His step sounded a trifle lighter and there was a suggestion of freedom in his every footfall—something that Tom and Brent immediately distinguished as being different from the Old Jonesish step that they had become familiar with.

"I declare, I think it's because he's so delighted that Pearson's gone for a while," said Tom. "The poor old fellow really smiled just then. Did you see it?"

“We’d smile too if we’d lived with the old geezer as many years as Jones and then found ourselves suddenly free from his presence,” said Brent. “If it were me I’d kick up a racket just out of sheer joy.”

“I wish the poor old fellow didn’t have to stay here at all,” Tom murmured. “Some lonely life. And to end his days here—ugh!”

“Don’t let your emotions floor you, Tommy,” said Brent. “Things have started to move. Perhaps Pearson won’t see much more of this lighthouse—if at all.”

“I hope so,” said Tom. “For the poor old fellow’s sake. Still when you think of it, what can Hedley’s prove against Pearson? Even about Oliver!”

“I know,” said Brent. “There’s nothing really tangible. That’s why I’ve been telling you to wait. When we have evidence right in our hands then it’s time to talk.”

“You sure started him going when you struck the supernatural key,” said Tom. “He’s scared to death of it—you can see that. It seems to be his weak point.”

“Blucher informed me that the only one Jonah Pearson worried about was Jonah Pearson,” drawled Brent.

Tom laughed and rose from the table. He walked to the window. “Tide’s going out, Brent,” he said. “There doesn’t seem to be anything but that same hot land breeze we’ve had all day. Wonder if that means more storms tomorrow.”

“Did you say the tide’s going out?” Brent asked.

“That’s what I said,” Tom answered, looking around.

“How many hours of daylight have we left this calm, warm evening?” Brent asked.

“About an hour and fifty minutes to be exact,” Tom smiled. “Why?”

“Go up and ask Jones where Old Fearful keeps his pickaxe and shovel,” Brent said by way of answer. “Tell him we’re going to spear lobsters or crabs with the pickaxe and that we’re going to carry them back on the shovel. Tell him anything—I don’t care.”

“And what are we really going to do?” Tom queried.

“We’ll see what use we can make of the daylight,” evaded Brent smilingly.

CHAPTER XXIII

HIDDEN FIRES

Brent led Tom to the back of the isle and thence toward the cave. Tom laughed when he saw their destination. “Is this going to be a hunt for Captain Kidd’s stuff?” he asked.

“It’s a sort of modern Captain Kidd hunt,” answered Brent. “Whether we find any treasure or not is another phase of the matter.”

They reached the cave entrance just at sunset. That vast realm of fire was veiled with the day’s humidity and gave forth a purplish colored vapor. The ocean boomed monotonously against the rocks and even the gulls flew listlessly about in the still, warm atmosphere.

The sand inside the cave was not yet dry, so recently had the tide gone out. Tom and Brent stepped in cautiously and looked around.

“Where do we start, Sir Sleuth?” asked Tom, laughingly.

“From the top down—always,” answered Brent.

“That’s understood,” said Tom. “But you must have had some idea.”

“I have,” Brent admitted seriously. “It’s rather a vague one, but ideas are ideas. And mine was Oliver’s hat.”

Tom stared hard at Brent. “What on earth are you driving at?” he asked.

“Do you remember the spot where I found it?” Brent returned.

“Sure I do,” answered Tom. “Don’t you?”

“Yes, of course,” Brent answered. “I just wanted to make sure. Two heads you know—”

“Yes, I know,” said Tom. “But I can’t see anything practicable about that. What Oliver’s hat has to do with Pearson’s jewelry....”

“I didn’t say it was practicable,” Brent interposed. He took a flashlight out of his pocket and played it slowly upon the far corner.

“That’s about the spot,” Tom said, aroused.

Brent walked over and flashed the light carefully over every inch of the rocky wall. As the light shone down near the cave floor, he stooped over and examined it, a sort of ludicrous snoopiness in his posture that brought a smile to Tom’s face.

“Well, what great discovery have you made?” Tom laughed.

“Come and look,” said Brent seriously. “See what you make of it.”

Tom hurried over and bent low. The glaring light revealed a rude letter X in the rocky wall, apparently having been carved with a chisel. It had not been done recently as the edges were already beginning to round out, most likely from the constant surging of the undertow.

“Still ...” Tom began.

“Oliver’s hat was crammed down right here,” said Brent with something like animation. “Underneath this letter X.”

“Is it possible Oliver knew?” Tom queried.

Brent started to shovel the sand away from under the rough marking and did not answer. Tom held the searchlight and waited with interest.

Presently Brent struck the hard, blue clay. He stopped to mop his perspiring brow. “You tackle the clay for awhile, Tommy,” he said. “I’ll hold the light.”

“Tired out?” Tom laughed.

Brent smiled. “It’s difficult for me to work and think at the same time,” he drawled. “And this strange business does require intensive thinking. One can’t do both at once.”

“I see,” Tom said goodnaturedly taking up the shovel. “Now proceed with your intensive thinking.”

The soft ring of the shovel sounded throughout the great cave. After he had dug down about fifteen inches or more, Tom felt the sturdy implement strike something metallic.

“I guess your idea wasn’t so vague after all, Brent,” he said. “Not unless that’s some rock I’ve just struck.”

Brent held the light down close to the excavation. “Dig around, Tommy,” he said. “We’ll soon see.” Tom’s arms fairly flew and he soon had a square space uncovered. They both knelt down, Brent’s light gleaming cheerfully upon a rusty but once black, square box. It rested unconcernedly in its bed of blue clay.



“DIG AROUND, TOMMY, WE’LL SOON SEE.”

Brent thrust his hand down and encountered a handle. With this he pulled it up and laid it down with a pretense at groaning, finally getting it onto the cave floor. “It looks light enough,” he said, “but whatever is in it weighs pretty heavily.”

“Money, perhaps,” murmured Tom.

They carried it over to the cave entrance and saw immediately that the original lock had been pried off roughly. A makeshift one replaced it.

“Now what’ll we do?” asked Tom impatiently.

“A penknife, Tommy,” answered Brent. “Let me have yours. The old geezer wouldn’t make a cent as a locksmith.”

Brent had the lock springing open in a few seconds. Another cover inside rendered the box airtight. This opened by means of a tiny push button and as the second cover sprang backward they saw three large initials engraved upon the inside.

“*J. H. C.!*” exclaimed Tom in hushed tones. “It’s true then, Brent! It’s true!”

“Control yourself, Tommy,” said Brent calmly. “We haven’t come to the real inside yet.”

There was still another enclosure and this had no apparent lock. Neither could they see any spring by which it would open.

“Gosh, is some secret lock going to stump us now!” Tom exclaimed with evident disappointment.

Brent ran his fingers along the outer edges but encountered nothing. Determined not to give it up he slid the palm of his hand back and forth over the smooth surface of the under cover to see if there was anything there. To their amazement, the cover slid backward with a tiny click.

“That’s a trick for you,” said Brent. “I bet Old Fearful was some time in getting that combination.” He lifted the heavy velvet covering off carefully.

They bent their heads over the velvet lined compartment and stared. A fortune in rare jewels lay under their eyes,

flashing vari-colored fires in their sudden exposure to the daylight.

CHAPTER XXIV

PETER'S FUTURE

“Well, now that we have it what are we going to do with it?” asked Tom as they came out of the cave with the treasure.

“We’re going to telegraph Hedley’s the first thing in the morning,” Brent answered. “That’s one thing.”

“And the box?” queried Tom.

“I’m going to wrap it in newspaper and put it on top of my dresser,” he answered. “I’ll pile a few books around it and put the lamp on top of it. Just as a sort of guardian you know.”

“You’re crazy!” exclaimed Tom excitedly. “Why, suppose Pearson should come sneaking back? Suppose he goes to the cave and discovers that the box is gone? Do you think he won’t hunt all over the lighthouse for it? You just bet he will!”

“He’ll look under our beds and in our bags and even in the dresser drawers,” drawled Brent. “But I’ll stake my life that he wouldn’t look twice at a square newspaper bundle sitting carelessly on top of the dresser.”

“I don’t know about that,” said cautious Tom. “You’re taking more of a chance than I would.”

“We’re taking a chance walking here with it now, for that matter,” said Brent. “Let’s stop here for a moment and consider the thing in Pop Neptune’s presence.”

In that tense calm, just between daylight and twilight, they sat down on the rocks to rest with their priceless burden. No

living thing moved except themselves in all that vast expanse of sky and water.

A leaden colored sky hung dejectedly over the ever restless sea. The air was heavy with salt and the warm breeze that brushed past their faces did little to allay the oppressive heat that was still rising out of the rocky isle.

A lone gull suddenly darted out on its homeward flight, screeching its farewell roundelay along through the trackless atmosphere. The sea grasped the mournful echo in its hollow breast only to send it bounding up to the heavenly spaces. Again it reverberated with the mournful dirge of the surf and finally rolled away in a distant, muffled shriek. Silence settled upon the isle.

“One thing I’m glad of,” breathed Tom, “little Pete doesn’t belong to Pearson. There’s no doubt of it now. Peter is Corlett’s son as sure as you live!”

“No wonder he kept the kid in such seclusion,” Brent mused. “He knew if anyone suspected who Peter was that he’d lose the jewelry. The Corletts know whoever found the jewelry was pretty sure to find the kid.”

“I suppose he thinks he’s a pretty wise bird,” Tom remarked. “In keeping that jewelry all these years he thought it would be completely forgotten when he was ready to sell it.”

“And to think that little old lady Fate handed him one when he wrote to Hedley’s,” said Brent. “That’s what I’d call a clean stroke. To think they made the very stuff for the Corlett outfit.”

“Family, not outfit,” Tom corrected. “Pete will be one happy kid. He dreaded spending his life in a lighthouse. I know it.”

“You sound like Old Jones and Jonah,” said Brent.

Tom laughed. “That’s nothing,” he said. “If we stayed around here much longer, I’d be running right in their tracks. That reminds me, Brent, do you suppose Pearson counted on Hedley’s buying all of this stuff?”

“It looks that way,” answered Brent. “He didn’t angle for any other dealers that we know of.”

“I guess he intended going away for good when he once had the money. That’s why he had us come. So Old Jones wouldn’t be left entirely in the lurch,” Tom said.

“You’re getting some bean for deduction, Tomasso,” said Brent by way of a compliment. “But I don’t think Old Fearful had us come for any other reason than to give the place a lawful atmosphere when the detective came from Hedley’s. We were asked here for local color and to give the wrong information whenever it was needed. Otherwise, I think the old bird doesn’t give a gosh hang about the lighthouse. What he wanted was the money. I bet he had it all figured out where to scoot to.”

“Had is past tense, Brent,” Tom reminded him. “Pearson still has it figured out where to scoot to. Remember, he doesn’t know the box has been found yet!”

“Ah yes, the worst is yet to come,” said Brent soberly. “We’ve seen him in tantrums (as Old Jones says) over trifling things, so I’m wondering what he’ll kick up when he discovers his treasure is no longer in the cave.”

“I don’t anticipate anything short of murder,” Tom said. “Let’s hope that Hedley’s have the goldarned stuff by that time. I don’t want it hanging around me when he kicks up.”

“Talking about murder,” Brent said in his drawling way, “makes me wonder if Corlett will prefer charges against him.

Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to see Old Fearful under the wing of some nice, roomy prison. Just on general principles I wish that for him, if nothing else.”

“That’s one thing I agree with you about,” Tom said. “And the other thing we don’t agree about is getting back to the lighthouse. To work. We’ll have a night of it at watching.”

“Can’t you count me out until last?” Brent asked in his whimsical way. “By the time I get this box up on my dresser, I won’t have a leg to stand on.”

“If it will help you withstand the rigors of a whole night’s watch, I’ll carry it for you,” laughed Tom.

“I hope Old Jones won’t leave us alone with that blamed thing,” Brent sighed at the thought. “We’d be in a pickle if the mechanism should go wrong.”

Tom laughed at Brent’s dread of facing the intricate processes of the great light. “I don’t think you’ll have to worry,” he said. “Old Jones thinks too much of that light to entrust it to a couple of dubs like ourselves. He has true affection for it, do you know that, Brent?”

Instinctively they both glanced toward the tower. Twilight was fast fading into a shadowy night. That meant Old Jones was diligently giving the final polishing to his pet lenses for the long night watch.

Year in and year out the old man had been faithful to this trust, Tom thought. Even in the face of danger he was not willing to desert it. Thousands of lives yearly depended upon the fidelity of Old Jones to this great beacon of the sea. There was something fine and noble in his loyalty.

Of Pearson, one could not feel a noble motive in his labor at the lighthouse. Somehow it suggested another reason for

his greed. The light worked for him—he did not labor for the light.

As these thoughts flitted through Tom's sensitive mind, two flashes shot out from the tower and over the water. "She's started," he said quietly. "Let's go, Brent. It looks lonely up there."

As they were ascending the stairs, Tom looked back inquiringly to Brent. "Did you intend to let Old Jones in on this discovery?" he asked.

"No," Brent answered thoughtfully. "If the old geezer should come back before we get rid of the box, I wouldn't trust him to beat the truth out of the poor fellow. If he doesn't know, he can't say anything."

"I guess you're right," Tom agreed. "The poor old bird seems to get himself in dutch enough as it is."

CHAPTER XXV

SOMETHING TO PONDER

Despite their physical weariness, Tom and Brent again set out next morning for Rhodes. They left Old Jones to a slumber well deserved.

The humidity still continued. The sea surged lazily around them and the sun kept itself hidden behind slate-colored clouds and lowering skies.

“I’ll hate to see this break,” said Tom as they tied up at the pier. “It’s just like a volcano getting all set to fire.”

“Heavens!” exclaimed Brent. “I hope it doesn’t start until after we get back. I’m not in favor of navigating the storm-tossed depths. Let’s hurry.”

Tom laughed. “If it storms, we’ll just wait here until it’s over,” he said.

“Not with all that treasure on my dresser,” said Brent. “The sooner we get back the better.”

“You should have thought of that before,” Tom said. “I told you it was risky leaving that stuff—I guess you realize it now that you’re away from it.”

“I’m not thinking of human interference, Tommy,” Brent said. “Suppose we should have a terrible storm and the lighthouse is struck with lightning?”

“It’s mostly all steel,” Tom said. “What harm could lightning do?”

“Well, there’s just enough wood in that structure to make one pause and consider,” Brent answered.

“You should have thought of that before you came here this morning,” Tom said. “What would you do in the event of a storm—act as lightning conductor?” he laughed.

“Something like that,” Brent answered with a smile. “I confess my motive in coming here this morning is a purely curious one. I wanted to catch a glimpse of our friend Seth Blucher. He interests me a lot.”

“A whole lot I guess,” Tom said. “Are you suspecting him of something now?”

“Indeed not,” answered Brent. “I’m just waiting to see how long it will be before he comes out with what’s on his mind about Pearson. I think he suspects that’s who took the bag too.”

“Why doesn’t he say so, then?” Tom queried.

“He’s afraid to,” answered Brent. “This whole darn hamlet is. They’re scared to death of the old grouch.”

As they approached the hotel, Mr. Blucher came out on his porch and stood eagerly awaiting them. He smiled cordially at their greeting.

“I seed Old Jonah leave fer Boston,” he called. “Took the night train, our station agent says.”

“Your station agent must be a very observing chap,” drawled Brent. “Anything else that he saw?”

Mr. Blucher looked at Brent inquiringly. “Eh?” he asked.

“I was wondering if your station agent had anything else to tell you,” Brent answered.

Mr. Blucher’s face brightened instantly. “Oh, yeh,” he called. “Glad yer asked me ’cause I’d ’most forgot. Thar’s a telegram a-waitin’ fer one o’ yer. I was ter fetch it ter yer this mornin’, so it’s good yer come.”

“You don’t know which one it’s for, do you?” Tom asked anxiously.

“Sure,” Mr. Blucher answered with evident pleasure. “It’s fer you—Slade. Comes from some camp in York state. Agent says the town’s called Harkness.”

“You couldn’t tell us what’s in it, could you?” asked Brent in that droll way of his.

Mr. Blucher shook his head with disappointment. “Sorry ter say I can’t,” he answered. “That pesky agent was in a mean way last night. He jest wouldn’t tell me. Usually he does. Guess it’s important though. Most telegrams are.”

“Yes,” said Tom. “We’ll move along then.” Brent smiled broadly as they walked along. “Why did you ask him what was in that telegram?” Tom asked.

“As a rule he knows,” answered Brent. “If we didn’t have to send one ourselves we wouldn’t have had to walk here. They certainly have a unique telegraph system. It would be economical if they’d only put it to good use. Save on the telegram blanks and good ink to say nothing of superfluous envelopes. Pearson didn’t get any use of his last night at all. It’s a waste of money.”

“I’d tell that to the Western Union if I were you,” Tom laughed, “recommending Mr. Blucher.”

“Mr. Blucher needs no recommending,” said Brent. “He speaks for himself.”

Tom grinned, then his face grew thoughtful. “Who could be wanting me at Leatherstocking?” he asked himself aloud. “I hope no one’s been taken sick. That would mean only one thing—to go back. And just at the time when things are coming to a crisis here.”

“Don’t be pessimistic, Tommy,” said Brent. “Perhaps someone’s just died and left you a fortune.”

They walked into the station which reeked with rotten boards and the smell of old leather. Bulletins and posters of ancient date lined the dustcovered walls. In the center of the room the little rusty stove stood forlornly, bursting to its doors with the last winter’s ashes that seeped through the cracks, down onto the zinc mat below.

The wizened looking little agent sat in a worn swivel chair inside his cage, leisurely munching his breakfast. He glanced quizzically at the two young men peering through the iron grating.

Tom smiled pleasantly. “My name’s Slade,” he said. “I hear you have a telegram for me.”

The agent laid down a thick slice of bread on his desk and rose. “Who told you—Seth?” he asked.

Tom nodded. “Just a few minutes ago. We want to send a telegram away ourselves,” he said.

The agent went through a confusion of railroad dispatches and old newspapers lying on his desk. After a time he drew out the wanted yellow slip and handed it to Tom with butter-covered fingers.

“Reckoned it was important,” he said genially. “When I got it I says ter myself I wouldn’t tell no one till after that Slade feller reads it. Seth was dyin’ ter know las’ night.”

Tom read it and looked up at Brent, puzzled. “It’s from the assistant,” he said hurriedly. “Little Pete disappeared from Camp yesterday afternoon. Can’t find him anywhere around. They think he’s headed for here.”

“Homesick, I guess,” Brent remarked. “Did he have money?”

“Yes,” said Tom, “but he was paid up till closing time. I can’t figure it out. They want me to notify his grandfather.”

“Well, we can’t do anything about it,” said Brent. “You’re likely to know more before the day’s out. He’s not aggressive enough to go around the world on the strength of his freedom, is he?”

“No,” said Tom. “He’s nothing like that at all.”

Brent wrote out his message to Hedley’s and laid it before the searching orbs of the agent. “As soon as you digest that, send it right off,” he drawled.

“Say, you didn’t write that so’s he could understand it, did you?” Tom asked worriedly as they left the station.

“Tommy,” Brent said, “fifteen years from now Seth Blucher and the agent will still be wondering what I meant by that message.”

“Well, I hope I’m not wondering long about why little Pete’s disappeared. I feel kind of responsible for that kid.”

“Don’t worry, Tomasso,” said Brent. “He’ll show up here, you’ll see! He probably just couldn’t hit it off with the kids down there. That’s about it.”

“I know,” said Tom. “Still, I never sized up little Pete as being a quitter.”

CHAPTER XXVI

STORM CLOUDS GATHER

Tom waited restlessly through the afternoon to hear some word or sign of Peter. The supper hour came and went, but nothing occurred to relieve the tense suspense he felt.

While they were doing the dishes, Brent dropped the towel with which he was drying a cup. He picked it up only to drop it again. "That's a sign we're going to have company, Tommy," he said. "Twice means two people. Santa Claus and Mr. Blucher."

Tom smiled. "Well, Mr. Blucher would be a welcome visitor," he said, "if he brings some good news of little Pete. I'm sure worried, Brent."

"I don't know what you could do," said Brent. "You can't go out and hunt him up when you haven't any idea where he'd go to."

"I could telegraph the assistant at camp and ask him to wire me more explicitly about the kid's disappearance," Tom said.

"It seems to me he told you as much as anyone could," Brent said. "Still you must use your own judgment. That's what P. T. Barnum said—I think it was him, anyway."

It was still early evening, yet the clouds had lowered in a premature twilight. The sun had kept itself hidden throughout the day, only to intensify the stifling heat. No breeze blew in at the long, narrow windows. A sudden ominous calm seemed to have settled over that bit of rocky isle and vast breadth of water.

“Jones said we’re going to either have thick weather and a cool wave or a rattling good sou’easter,” said Tom.

“I’m not hard to please,” drawled Brent. “All I ask is a cool breeze.”

Tom laughed. “Before we have either extreme, I’m going over to Rhodes,” he said. “I’ll have to do something. This waiting gets on my nerves.”

“You had better snap into action then,” said Brent, going to the window. “A dory during a storm doesn’t look like the safest thing in the world to me.”

Tom laughed carelessly. “I can always swim,” he said.

“And buck the monster of the storm?” Brent asked.

“Others have made it,” Tom answered.

“You go ahead now and avoid the risk,” Brent said like an anxious parent. “I’ll go up with Old Jones and help. Try and get back before dark, Tommy.”

Tom hurried down, buoyed up by the hope that there would be some good news waiting for him. He pushed the dory out with some effort, for the undertow was unusually strong.

He glanced with surprise at the water, it looked so calm and tranquil upon the surface, but as he dipped the oars the force of it all but pushed them out of his strong grasp.

He tied the boat up at the pier with extra care. Some rumblings of thunder sounded in the distance and he thought he felt a drop of rain upon his face.

The White House was gaily lighted, despite the fact that dusk was still an hour off. Black clouds were gathering fast. Perhaps Mr. Blucher believed in being prepared, Tom thought.

He hurried on, glad that the hotel man had not espied him. He would have to sprint some to get to the station and back before the storm broke. He wished that he had brought his slicker and hat.

Along the dusty road he went, out of breath and perspiring. The little shacks of the fisherfolk looked hot and uncomfortable with their bright burning oil lamps glaring out through the tiny square windows.

He felt relieved when he saw the dim outline of the station through the gathering dusk. No one was about, neither had he met anyone. Everything and everyone seemed quietly waiting for the storm to break.

He stopped to listen and looked ahead. There wasn't a light of any kind in the station. He walked up to the rickety looking door. Even the knob felt hot to his touch.

The door wouldn't budge—it was locked. Tom murmured his disappointment. Could it be that the fellow had fallen asleep inside, he wondered, and walked around to the bay window fronting the agent's office.

There he stood, his heels together, and pressed his face close to the dusty-smelling windowpane. A profusion of shadowy objects in the dim interior seemed to swim before his eyes, but he could see nothing plainly.

Disappointed, he kicked his toe against the wooden platform and began pacing up and down. The thought occurred to him at that moment that an up train from Boston was soon due. The agent would be back in time for that, so he'd wait. He walked down along the creaking boards and espied an old dilapidated bench under a battered lamp post. The bench tipped considerably at one end, two of its rusty

iron legs having broken through the rotten boards of the platform.

Tom flopped down on the end that had kept its legs on terra firma. He gazed abstractedly up at the lamp post and for want of something better to think of, fell to pondering how many years had passed since a light had shone from its peak.

He felt another drop of rain touch his cheek and a streak of lightning darted crazily across the eastern sky. Thunder rumbled in the distance, then all became still again.

He listened and waited. It became unbearably quiet. He began whistling a popular tune but the effort fell flat. There was something alien in the sound of his voice amidst all that stillness.

He wished profoundly that it would thunder again. Anything to break the monotonous calm. A low hum seemed to vibrate along the railroad tracks. He sat up straight and listened, but try as he did, he could not catch the sound again.

A cricket somewhere near broke out in a frantic chirping. Then the up train from Boston whistled in the distance.

CHAPTER XXVII

OUT OF THE DUSK

Tom rose and resumed his pacing. The train, the lights, all would be welcome. He listened eagerly for the whistle to screech again.

As he passed the station door he tried it again, but without success. Surely, the agent would come back for the up train, he told himself.

He fell to wondering where the man lived and censured himself for not having inquired of Blucher on his way up. He might have known there was a chance of the fellow not being there.

The up train whistled nearer—nearer. Tom could hear that hum, the vibration of the train against the rails. He felt a kindred tingling in himself, increasing as the train neared Rhodes.

The monster headlight swung into view bathing everything in its path with a gleaming yellow light. The rails seemed suddenly to become alive in the welcome glare.

The station in its sombre, solitary state, seemed to stand apart from the great area of light as the train lumbered noisily into Rhodes. A terrific peal of thunder broke in the heavens as if to mock the noise of the man-made engine.

Tom hurried down the platform as the train stopped. He watched eagerly as a conductor stepped down with his lantern and looked around.

The man peered into the darkness and toward the shadowy station. Tom walked up to him. "Looking for the agent?" he

asked.

“No, I’m not,” the conductor answered, pleasantly. “He ought to be here for this train though. It’s his business to.”

The engineer was leaning out of his cab, waiting for the signal. The conductor swung his lantern. “I was looking for a passenger I had for here,” he said. “He wasn’t in his seat, so he must have got off, I guess.”

The train moved ever so slowly, puffing and snorting up ahead.

“Didn’t see him, did you?” the conductor asked, putting his foot on the first step.

“No, I didn’t,” Tom answered walking along with the train.

“He scooted off in the dark then,” the conductor called ascending to the top step. “It’s too black to see much o’ anything. Fixin’ for storm.”

“Yes,” Tom called back.

“S’long!” the conductor yelled as the train got under way.

“Goodnight!” Tom shouted.

He turned to the dark, empty platform with a feeling akin to despair. Certainly he was lonely—terribly so. The darkness depressed him.

He did not know what to do. If the agent’s business was to be there for the up train, then he still might come. Perhaps he had fallen asleep and would waken suddenly and rush up to the station.

He resolved to wait not longer than five minutes and walked to the bench and sat down. The thunder was peeling almost continuously now and the lightning flashed at short intervals.

The voice of the cricket was silenced in the roar of the heavens and Tom felt a sudden swish of rain. He rose quickly and ran down under the station shed.

A shadow, a tall figure, darted out and around behind the building. Tom stopped in surprise, then hurried after it. But he couldn't see anything when he got around the corner and told himself he was seeing things. Shadows, figures, seemed everywhere around him.

He hugged the building to avoid the rain and came back to the front again only to see the elusive figure dart out once more and disappear in the blackness of the road.

He called loudly but the echo of his voice deafened him and did not bring any answer. The rain beat down in torrents and he stood up close to the station door.

He peered through the window again just for something to do and felt angry for not having gone before the rain started. He had accomplished nothing.

In disgust, he made up his mind to go back no matter how soaked he should get. Better to go right then than to wait until the water was too rough.

As he straightened up to rush out into the rain, he inhaled an acrid smell into his lungs. He sniffed the air and the smell of oil and smoke almost choked him.

He looked about but the night revealed nothing. Yet the air he breathed was getting worse by the minute. The wind seemed to be blowing it around the shed.

He ran in that direction and at the northwest corner the whole section under the agent's window was afire. Hatless and coatless, Tom regretted his informal, negligee attire for the first time in his life and realized that, in this instance, it

was a disadvantage. If he had a coat he could beat the fire out, for as yet it had not gained much headway.

The thought occurred to him that a telegram for him might be in there and that it would be burned. Suppose he should suddenly be wanted at the camp and the telegraph system was out of order because the station had burned down? He felt desperate.

Should he smash the windows and climb in? Something would have to be done and that instantly. He determined to do it.

The flames licked upwards slowly, despite the downpour of rain. Tom felt at the window as a flame shot up under his elbow.

He drew back and felt over at the other window, rattling it vigorously and hoping against hope that it would yield. That being futile, he doubled his fist and gave the pane a smashing blow.

Something crashed inside and then he saw an object rise out of the darkness and come toward him. The next instant, the blinking eyes and sleepy looking face of the agent was outlined clearly in a spurt of flame that licked the window sill.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A LITTLE SURPRISE

With some old coats of the agent's and a couple of worn brooms they put the fire out. After that Tom wrote out a message to Leatherstocking, the agent having received no word of Peter.

The wizened little man was profuse in his thanks for Tom's timely interference with his nap. "Must o' slept so hard I didn't even hear the up train or nothin'," he said. "I'd a burned ter a crisp in thar if yer hadn't discovered that fire and smashed the winder."

"I'm thankful I did," Tom said. "It's lucky I didn't go away as I intended. Whoever that person was, sneaking around here, had something to do with it. I ought to have known something was up when I called and he wouldn't answer. He heard me all right—the dead could hear me."

"Wa'al, I didn't," the agent smiled. "Still as yer say, it's a gosh-amighty queer thing fer a body ter sneak 'round here like that. Folks all 'round knows I don't keep no money o' much account. It couldn't a been fer that."

"No, I don't think it was," Tom agreed. "And fires don't start of their own accord during a storm like this. Certainly not on the outside of a building as this one did."

After the agent had inspected the little place once more he made ready to go home. He offered to lend Tom a worn mackintosh that was kept in the station for such emergencies. An old umbrella they planned to use between them and started out with this meagre protection.

“Do you live near the hotel?” Tom asked as the agent was locking up.

“Purty near,” he answered. “Not more’n two o’ yore city blocks.”

“You can have your umbrella to yourself after we get to Blucher’s,” Tom said. “I can’t manage that in a dory along with the oars.”

They plunged into the dark road, water up to their ankles, and hardly able to hear themselves talk above the whistling wind and noisy downpour. Tom wondered how much wetter he would get before he reached Shadow Isle that night.

“Don’t know how yore a-goin’ ter handle a dory ternight,” the agent said, as if sensing his thoughts.

“I don’t know either but it’s got to be done,” Tom said. “My friend, Brent, would be worried to death if I didn’t go back tonight. He’d think I had drowned.”

“Yer wouldn’ be the first city feller ter do that here this week,” the agent said.

“I know,” said Tom, feeling his way. “But there are different ways of drowning.”

The agent glanced up from under his oilskin hat. “Wa’al,” he said quietly, “all I know is, ‘every dog has his day.’ It most alius figgers out that way.”

Tom smiled to himself at the agent’s naive way of evading the mention of Pearson’s name. “The trouble is, some dogs, like cats, have nine lives,” he said.

“This one won’t,” the agent said vehemently. “He’ll say somethin’ once too often. He’s browbeated us long enough.”

As they approached the hotel, Tom noticed a little group gathered on the porch. The building was lighted up as gayly as when he had first passed by.

Blucher stood a little apart from the group and was at his usual task of talking. He peered out into the darkened street to see who was coming.

“It’s me ’n the city feller—Slade, Seth,” the agent called in a shrill voice. “Be it?” Blucher returned. “Yer jest in time ter hear what’s been a-goin’ on.”

“What’s the fuss?” queried the agent as he and Tom climbed the steps.

“More’n a fuss, I declare!” exclaimed Mr. Blucher indignantly. “It’s a livin’ outrage!”

Every fisherman in the group started talking at once and Blucher silenced them with a loud sneeze.

“What happened?” Tom asked, impatient to get back to the isle.

Blucher blew his nose violently and turned his attention to Tom. “I was jest a-sittin’ by my back winder and watchin’ the storm without my lights on. All o’ a sudden I seed somethin’ sneak past under the still. Quick I got up ’n’ looked and what did I see but this tall figger a-standin’ by the steps ’n’ lookin’ ’round ter see if anyone was lookin’ at him.”

“The same feller, I bet,” the agent interposed and speaking to Tom.

Tom nodded. “Go on, Mr. Blucher,” he said.

“It looked ter me like he was a-pourin’ somethin’ out on my steps,” Blucher said. “I stood back so’s he couldn’t see me ’cause every once in a while he’d stop ’n’ look aroun’. Then all o’ a sudden he struck matches under the steps where it wa’n’t wet and he took some paper out o’ his pocket and lighted it.

“Fore I could git my breath he held the paper ter the steps ’n’ it burst in a flame. I ran quick ter some o’ these here fellers a-sittin’ in my parlor ter put it out and I got my revolver ’n’ went after the critter.”

“Jest the same feller,” the agent said.

“He was a-runnin’ out o’ my walk by that time,” Blucher continued. “But he wa’n’t too quick fer me ter see that it was Ole Jonah. Yes sir!”

The agent stood aghast.

“He run right on down ter the beach ’n’ ’cross ter the pier,” said Blucher. “I s’pose he thinks he kin burn our houses now.”

“*It’s a outrage,*” the group exclaimed unanimously.

“Well, it’s the first ’n’ last time he’ll try it,” the hotel man said. “I telephoned Sheriff Fuller ’n’ he sez he’ll try ’n’ git here by midnight. He’s got a case ’bout fifteen mile from here ter get ter first. We’ll git Jonah Pearson in the lock-up no matter if ’tis midnight and stormin’!”

A murmur of assent ran through the group. Then the agent told his story and feeling against Pearson mounted higher than ever. For a few moments it sounded as if some of the indignant fishermen were going to resort to methods of force and take the law into their own hands.

“Yer wait fer the law,” Mr. Blucher said, wisely.

“It’s safer. We kin go after him in my big boat if the storm keeps up.”

Tom mentioned that he’d have to go on to the isle—that Brent was waiting for him.

“Yer kin go in a minit, Slade,” Mr. Blucher said, smilingly. “I jest want yer ter come upstairs. I got somethin’ ter show yer.”

The men stood aside to let Tom pass and he followed Blucher up the stairs once again. This time, he was neither anxious nor curious as to what the hotel man had to show him. His mind was full of apprehension for Brent's safety now that he knew to what extent Pearson's malevolence would go.

He shuddered to think of the light keeper's sneaking about setting fire to the station and then the hotel. No doubt he had sneaked off the up train with that intention. He hadn't been far from carrying out his threat about fixing Blucher and the agent.

They reached the upper hall and Mr. Blucher looked back and gave Tom a cordial smile. "In all the excitement I 'most forgot I had a surprise fer yer. After yer see it yer kin go on ter the isle 'n' tell Jonah we're a-coming fer him at midnight. He can't git away far. He hain't got a boat big enough."

"I'll wait until I see you coming," Tom said. "Brent and I wouldn't care about holding him down for three or four hours."

"He'll be pretty nasty when he knows, I'll say that," Mr. Blucher predicted. He knocked, then opened a door near the stairway and looked in. He turned around then and smilingly motioned Tom to go in.

There was no one in the room. Presently, however, the door closed behind him and he heard a sort of chuckle. He turned quickly around and looked.

Standing with his back against the door and smiling, was little Peter Pearson.

CHAPTER XXIX

PETER COMES INTO HIS OWN

“Well, you little old ...” Tom began.

Peter laughed. “I knew you’d be surprised,” he said. “I made Mr. Blucher promise to keep it a secret and not tell anyone around here so you’d know it first. Something told me I’d see you soon’s we came here.”

“*We?*” questioned Tom. “Who’s the *we?*”

Peter held up a finger intended to convey a sign of mystery and ran to an inner door. His face was alight with joy as he knocked lightly and waited. The door opened and a tall, dark man came out smiling cordially.

Tom looked from Peter to the man and smiled. “There’s no need to ask, who,” he said. “It’s little Pete’s father—sure as I live! You could almost pass for twins.”

“Almost,” laughed the man. “And you’re right—Slade. I’m Peter’s father—Corlett.”

Tom held out his hand. “Some relief to know that,” he said feelingly. “I was worried some about that kid these last two days. Couldn’t imagine what happened to him.”

Peter laughed. “Think I ran away or something?” he asked, boy like.

Tom leaned over and put his arm on Peter’s shoulder. “I knew you weren’t a quitter, Peter kid. I didn’t size you up that way—even though you were pretty lonely there,” he said quietly.

“I wouldn’t have run away either,” Peter said stoutly. “Even I wasn’t willing to leave before my time was up, only

I saw it was necessary and I was so glad to know I had a father and mother. And I've seen *her*—my mother. Everything's been like a dream, yesterday and today—just as if I'd wake and find it wasn't true."

Mr. Corlett put his arm tight around the boy. "It's quite a real dream, son," he said. "After all these years there aren't any shadows."

Peter laughed joyfully. "Nor Shadow Isle," he added.

"Don't say that, Peter kid," Tom said. "I have Brent over there and then there's poor Old Jones, to say nothing of your father's jewels."

Mr. Corlett gripped Tom's hand warmly. "Without that box, Slade, and the complete collection of our jewels, we may not be able to properly establish our claim to Peter. So I am doubly indebted, as one might say, to you and to your friend, Gaylong——"

Tom smiled. "Anyone would have to be blind to deny Peter was your son. Still a whole lot of people with perfectly good eyesight can't tell the sun from the moon."

Mr. Corlett smiled. "Of course it's understood," he said, "that you and Gaylong will help celebrate this great event."

Tom looked at smiling Peter. "Well, if little Pete says so, I wouldn't say no."

Peter's face was radiant. "I say so," he laughed. "We all say so. And my father says he's going to make a contribution to your camp because you're really the one who discovered me."

Tom flushed. "Well, all's well that end's well," he said. "And the best of it is that you'll get your wish, Pete. You won't have to tend the light all your life."

“And you kept your promise to help me,” Peter reminded him.

Tom laughed. “I don’t know how, kid,” he said, modestly. “But nevertheless, you have been helped. We’ll let it go at that.”

The thunder crashed deafeningly outside and the rain beat against the windows.

“It was just such a night as this when we lost Peter,” Mr. Corlett said, reminiscently. “We were driven off our course and must have drifted around southeast of Shadow Isle.”

Tom nodded with interest.

“Suddenly we struck something,” Mr. Corlett said. “There was a crash. The captain ordered us to the lifeboats and in the confusion, Mrs. Corlett and Peter got out of my sight.

“We had no lights and there was no answer to my frantic calls. Neither she nor Peter could be found and the yacht was sinking fast. We launched the boats and hunted about for them for some time.

“The only thing that kept my hopes up was that Mrs. Corlett is a good swimmer. We shouted at intervals and presently heard a faint answer to our cries and turned about in that direction to find her swimming about and on the verge of exhaustion. Peter was not with her.”

Peter put his hand up on his father’s arm.

“Almost immediately she became unconscious and we were picked up by a passing fishing schooner,” he said. “We were taken to a little village about thirty-five miles from here. When Mrs. Corlett regained consciousness she told us that at the first warning of danger she lost her head and ran to our suite for her jewels. With Peter, she then dived overboard

and soon found it impossible to manage the heavy box and the boy.

“She felt something strike her shoulder and putting up her hand, realized it was wood. A sturdy bit of wood she said it was, and wide enough to hold Peter. She put the box on it too, managing to strap them both on with a leather belt she had on.

“In that way she managed to paddle it along until a great wave threw her out of Peter’s reach and she could not find him again. That was eight years ago, Slade. And now, tonight, we’re here together.”

“It’s a worthwhile recovery,” Tom murmured, with deep feeling in his voice. “It must be a great joy after you had given him up for dead.”

“It is,” Mr. Corlett agreed. “We took it for granted that nothing could have saved him from the sea that night. The papers were full of it for a week or more but no word came and we mourned him as dead. Some special act of Providence guided him.”

“And you heard nothing until ...” Tom began.

“Until Hedley’s suddenly called me in one day,” Mr. Corlett interposed. “They showed me the jewelry and Pearson’s letter. Said they had already sent him a check for it but would withhold all action until the rest of the collection was retrieved.”

“And you knew if you could find the jewelry you’d get me,” Peter said.

Mr. Corlett smiled fondly. “That was our fervent hope,” he said.

“And what is Peter’s name?” asked Tom.

“By a strange coincidence it’s Peter,” laughed Mr. Corlett.

Tom moved toward the door.

“I hate to tear myself away,” he said, “but Brent will be sick if I don’t get there soon. Will you be here in the morning?”

Mr. Corlett nodded. “We’re going to start back at noon. As soon as I identify the collection.”

“Another reason why I’d better go back,” laughed Tom. “It needs some protection with Jonah there.”

“I understand they’re going to hem him in at midnight.”

Tom nodded. “I think they’ll have a harder job with him than they anticipate.”

Peter smiled. “Anyway, you’re going back in the car with us tomorrow,” he said, basking in the light of his new found freedom. “That’s a promise, too.”

“And what about poor Old Jones?” Tom asked. “We can’t leave him there alone.”

“The government’s been notified about Pearson,” said Mr. Corlett. “Some men will arrive here in the morning.”

Peter smiled triumphantly and Tom turned to go. Mr. Corlett stepped up and clasped his hand once more. “I have my reward in Peter, and you....”

“So have I,” Tom interposed and looking at Peter. “I can share him with you in spirit, eh?”

“I know,” Mr. Corlett smiled. “And it’s a fine spirit—the scout spirit in you! But there’s no denying that there’s a certain amount of comfort derived from a material reward.”

Tom lifted his hand in protest. “Oh, no, Mr. Corlett. I couldn’t!”

“Don’t thank me or argue the why of it,” Mr. Corlett said genially. “I have nothing to do with it. That reward’s been

standing with my insurance company for the last eight years.”

“*What reward?*” asked Tom.

“The reward of ten thousand dollars offered by the Colony Insurance Company for the safe recovery of the Corlett jewels,” Mr. Corlett said all in one breath.

“That’s five thousand for you and five thousand for Mr. Gaylong,” Peter said delightedly.

“My gosh!” was all that Tom could find to say.

CHAPTER XXX AND PEARSON KNOWS

Tom untied the dory with a light heart. The rolling sea and beating rain seemed trivial now compared with human destinies.

But a conflicting thought crossed his mind as he strained at the oars. What of Old Jones? he asked himself. Had he not a right to some of that reward—if not all of it?

He determined to put the question up to Brent when he got to the isle. It would be settled wisely and well along with a few humorous suggestions. He smiled at the thought.

It was difficult to keep going. Some of the waves all but capsized the boat. But Old Jones was keeping him on the right course. The light flashed steadily and comfortingly, like the friendly, faithful beacon it was.

He was twice as long in getting to the cliffs as compared with the other times he and Brent had made the trip. The tide was running out and against him, but his will was strong and the desire to be with Brent was stronger.

He had no idea of what might happen to his friend but he knew that Brent's brain was twice as strong as his muscular energy. If Pearson became violent, he wouldn't have much chance to defend himself. And the lightkeeper must certainly be in a dangerous mood—now that all his plans had been thwarted.

He rowed on, battled the elements with all the strength of his muscular body. His eyes shone in the darkness, flashing the fires of courage and joy and dread.

The heavens crashed above his head and the sea all but swamped him. He pushed onward streaming with water from his head down to his oozing shoes. But he laughed aloud as if in defiance of it all.

He saw a dory nosing in between the rocks of the isle and presently a man's figure climbed up in the glare of the light. The next moment it had disappeared into the dark shadows beyond. Was it Pearson?

Tom wondered how he had been so long getting back. Or perhaps he had sneaked around Rhodes some more after Blucher chased him.

He mentally discarded all attempts at conjecture for the real task of getting in. He would soon know the truth of pretty much everything, he thought.

After a trying experience, he hauled the boat up as far out of reach of the lashing waves as possible. Pearson's dories looked pitifully lonely and grim lyin up there on the sea-washed rocks.

But there was no time to meditate. He hurried up over the rocks feeling as if he were dragging twice his weight in water. A tiny light gleamed from the lower windows but it looked as welcome to Tom as the great light itself.

Just before he reached the stairway, he saw a light moving—coming toward him from the south end of the isle. He stood still and waited.

Around and up over the rocks it came, nearer and nearer. He knew it was a searchlight for its rays covered the area about them in long, pointed streaks of white light.

He called, "Who is it?"

"T's me!" snapped the voice of Pearson. "Who'd yer think?"

The light went out.

“I couldn’t tell,” Tom answered. “I’ve just come from the mainland myself. I didn’t know you were back.”

“Now yer know!” he shouted, coming closer.

Tom couldn’t see his face, but from his voice he knew that Pearson had just come from the cave. *He knew!* The man’s voice betrayed a rage held strongly in check.

“Whatcher do at Rhodes?” he asked in shrill tones.

“I went to send a message in answer to a telegram that was sent to me from Camp yesterday,” Tom said quietly. “They sent me word that Peter had suddenly disappeared.”

Tom could feel the change in Pearson’s heavy breathing. “Eh?” he asked, as if he were not sure of what he heard.

Tom repeated his statement.

“What next!” Pearson snapped as if to himself. “Some trick in that too, I s’pose.”

“I don’t know,” Tom said. “It’s had me worried.”

“Hedley’s did it, I bet!” he wheezed. “Them thieves with their detectives ’n’ all. They found him! But he didn’t know nothin’. It’s that fool Old Jones. I got a plenty to settle with him, yer kin bet!”

He pushed roughly past Tom and went up the stairs with surprising agility for a man of his age.

At that moment the door opened and the light streamed brightly down the long, black stairway.

Brent stood in the doorway and peered out into the darkness. “Tommy, is that you?” he called anxiously.

“Sure thing,” Tom answered cheerily.

“Oh, I’m glad!” said Brent, with a ring of feeling in his voice.

“‘N’ *it’s me too!*” shouted Pearson.

CHAPTER XXXI

OLIVER'S GHOST

Bedraggled and haggard looking, Pearson shoved Brent aside and strode like a madman up the winding stairs. Tom stood just inside the doorway, staring at the tiny rivulet that the lightkeeper had left from his soaking clothes. It ran from the door sill right across the room.

“You have quite a little lake of your own,” laughed Brent, divining Tom’s thoughts.

“He’s been to the cave,” whispered Tom.

“I sensed as much,” Brent said. “He’s out for poor Old Jones’ scalp, I’m afraid.”

“Yes,” said Tom hurriedly. “We’d better go up and give him the protection of our presence at least.”

“Of course,” said Brent. “But first, you better jump into dry clothes.”

Tom told him in a few brief sentences then, all that had transpired at Rhodes. “Time’s almost up for the old geezer if they’re coming for him at midnight,” said Brent.

“He has it coming to him,” said Tom. “What about the jewels, Brent?”

“Safe,” answered Brent. “I dumped them out into my folding umbrella and put the box down under the stairway for the night.”

Tom hurried into dry clothes and Brent went on up to the tower. As Tom dressed he could hear loud voices echoing down the stairway.

A door slammed below and jarred his senses. Probably the wind, he thought. He went up two steps at a time and came upon a strange scene.

Pearson sat on a stool, still in his wet clothes and looking like a tiger about to spring. Old Jones cringed on another stool near the gallery door. Between them stood Brent, calm but watchful.

Tom murmured some banal remark, striving to make it sound cheerful. His effort was futile for it was instantly lost in the tense silence that pervaded the tower.

Pearson sat rigid. Old Jones was obviously trembling and Tom's heart went out to him. "You must be pretty tired, Jones, after being up all last night," he said.

Old Jones shook his head sadly.

"It wouldn't hurt you to take a nap," Tom persisted. "There's enough of us here tonight."

The old man looked up from behind his glasses and gave Tom a frightened smile. He looked for all the world like some old devoted dog, trembling with joy and gratitude at a kind word from its master.

Pearson shifted his stool around and adjusted his black glasses. "Old Jones'll stay where he is!" he snapped. "'Tain't no time fer nappin'."

Jones seemed to shrink within himself more than ever. He looked down at his pudgy hands and twisted them nervously. Tom walked over and stood beside Brent looking defiantly toward the lightkeeper.

The black walls seemed to intensify the silence. The slight swishing of the lenses sounded eerie and small with each fresh onslaught of wind and rain beating furiously around the tower. Pearson scraped his large feet under him and crossed

his knees, his long legs hanging down to the floor like something inanimate.

A hush, stark and terrible, crept silently about that tense little group. It came like the gradual opening of a window by some unseen hand and a chill breeze following.

Was it a draft? An indefinable sound? Tom and Brent instinctively moved their bodies close to each other.

No one stirred after that, not even Pearson. It was as if they had become petrified and their tongues stilled with icy fear. Tom felt he could never speak again.

The grim, black walls and constantly flashing light most certainly had produced some fearful mirage. But could such a thing be? they asked themselves as their attention was drawn slowly but surely to it as to some evil spirit.

Ah yes, it was there. In the shadow and just down the stairway appeared the head and shoulders of the dead man, Oliver.

Pearson screamed—shrieked!

The head and shoulders disappeared and the bell on the gallery droned out the hour.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE DEAD MAN SPEAKS

“Quick!” screamed Pearson. “See if it’s gone!”

“What?” asked Tom, too stunned to comprehend anything that had happened.

“His ghost!” cried Pearson. “*Oliver’s ghost!* It’s a-goin’ ter haunt me.”

Old Jones pushed himself back on the stool and trembled violently. Tom and Brent rushed down the stairs and looked in each room.

“Of course we know it wasn’t a ghost,” said Brent, breathlessly, as they reached his room. “There’s no such thing.”

They descended into the living room excitedly. Tom was first and stepped awkwardly across the room as if he were going to fall. Brent stood still, surprise and shock rendering him incapable of any speech.

Oliver sat in the rocking chair by the window, calmly smoking a cigarette.

“It’s *me*, boys,” he said in his deep, pleasant voice. “It’s me—alive and kicking. Guess I gave the old boy a scare just now, eh?”

“Not only the old boy,” said Brent, struggling to recover his composure.

“Well, I’m sorry,” said Oliver. “But it had to be done. He has it coming to him and more. He took me to the cave that day on the pretext of showing me where he had hidden that

stuff. Then all of a sudden he said he'd have to go back for a shovel and he told me to wait there, that he'd be right back."

Tom and Brent flopped into chairs.

"Well, I waited," Oliver continued, "and meanwhile I was nosing around with my flashlight, my back to the entrance. Then before I knew it I was almost bowled over with a wave."

"So that was it!" Tom said recovering his voice.

Oliver nodded. "Some job I had getting out of there and I don't mean maybe. The undertow forced me into a little cove, like, under the rocks and if it hadn't been for that I'd have drowned—I can't swim a stroke. I had told the old duffer that, so he knew what he was leaving me to."

"You see he has such playful ideas," said Brent in his droll way.

"You said it," Oliver agreed. "I held onto a big rock in that place. It hung out over the water and kept me from doing the drowning act. Gee, I was all in when I finally managed to paddle myself around and up on the rocks.

"I hid there till it was dusk," he continued. "And I made up my mind I'd let him think—let everyone around here think I had drowned. So then I sneaked down and swiped his boat and managed to get to a place near Rhodes when I lost one of the oars. I had to paddle in by some cliffs and tied up the boat in case I couldn't climb 'em and would have to get back in the boat again. But I made it all right."

"We found the dory," said Brent.

Oliver lit another cigarette. "I sneaked over to the hotel after everything was dark because I knew if Blucher saw me come back he couldn't keep it to himself. And I wanted Pearson to think I had drowned—understand?"

The boys nodded.

“I wanted to teach him a good lesson. Anyway, I climbed up the trellis and into my room and changed my clothes. Then I took my bag and beat it. I hoofed to the town below here and took the next train for Boston.”

“And who found Peter?” Tom asked curiously.

“We did,” Oliver answered. “I had you looked up right away because I thought you were on the level and that there was some other reason for you coming here. Corlett’s tickled silly!”

“I’m glad,” Tom said. “You had a narrow escape.”

“I’ll tell the world!” exclaimed Oliver. “And now for the jewels.”

Brent rose and went up the stairs. “They’ll be with you in a minute,” he called back.

While he was gone Tom turned to Oliver inquiringly. “Can you tell me why Hedley’s ever called him in to New York?” he asked.

“A bluff to try and get the stuff,” answered Oliver. “They thought he’d bring it and Corlett didn’t want any unnecessary publicity if it could be prevented. He didn’t want to have him arrested.”

“Pearson was too foxy to take it in,” said Tom.

“But not foxy enough for you two guys,” Oliver smiled. “You put one over on him, all right.”

Brent returned and handed the umbrella to Oliver. He hurried outside for the box and when he came back their conversation was suddenly arrested by a muffled cry. All three stood up and listened.

A shrill cry rang loud and long, down the length of the iron stairway.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE GHOST OF THE BELL

“Have you a gun?” Tom asked Oliver quickly.

“Two of ’em,” answered Oliver. “Think you’ll need one up there?”

“Don’t know,” Tom said. “Won’t hurt to have it though.”

Oliver took a revolver out of his pocket and handed it to Tom. “Run on up then,” he said. “See what the old bird is up to now. I’ve got to fix this stuff in the box first.”

With Brent close on his heels, Tom mounted the steps without another word. The name of Old Jones was crying within his brain. He realized that they shouldn’t have left him alone with Pearson so long. What was happening?

The smell of oil and smoke crept into his nostrils as they mounted. Then as they reached the top step of the tower, a terrible sight confronted them.

Pearson had piled a lot of inflammable stuff between the stair and the light. It was already bursting into huge scarlet flames. Old Jones was huddled against the wall, white as death and mute with fright.

Pearson stood just inside the gallery door leering from his victim to the watchers of that awful scene. He knew full well that one step across that roaring pyre would mean death. He chuckled at their inability to help Old Jones now.

Tom pointed the gun at Pearson. “You get Jones down here some way!” he yelled, knowing the while that Old Jones was forever beyond any human assistance.

Pearson laughed, shrill and hoarse. “I fixed him fer his nosin’, eh?” he cackled. “Guess he won’t get none o’ them jewels now ’n’ he won’t spy on me no more neither!”

Tom and Brent stood stark still, horrified and choking from the intense heat and smoke. They could do nothing but gasp at that ghastly trick of Pearson’s.

The lightkeeper turned quickly and looked out along the line of light that the lenses had just flashed. “Thar’s a boat full a-comin’ fer me from Rhodes. I know. Blucher, he saw me. But I ’most fixed him too. They won’t get me—no, sir!”

He rose to his full height and grabbed poor Old Jones by the collar. Tom trembled with anger and his hands clasped at his sides nervously, so furious was he that they could lift no hand in defense of the little old man.

He turned away, loath to witness more, but the scream of Old Jones in Pearson’s grasp brought his blood bounding to his temples. For in that flashing second the lightkeeper had pushed the old man out onto the gallery and lifted him bodily off his feet.

Pearson looked back at his horrified spectators and laughed a shrill, maniacal laugh. After one ponderous movement he stood with Old Jones in his long arms for a tense, terrible moment, and as the glare of the beacon flooded the gallery he thrust the poor old man out in midair and down onto the rocks below.

Tom felt sick and faint. Brent’s grasp on his arm was like ice and his fingers trembled. A flame shot down through an aperture followed by a roaring noise.

“Quick!” called Oliver to them from somewhere below. “Get your things and get out! The place is going to blow up.”

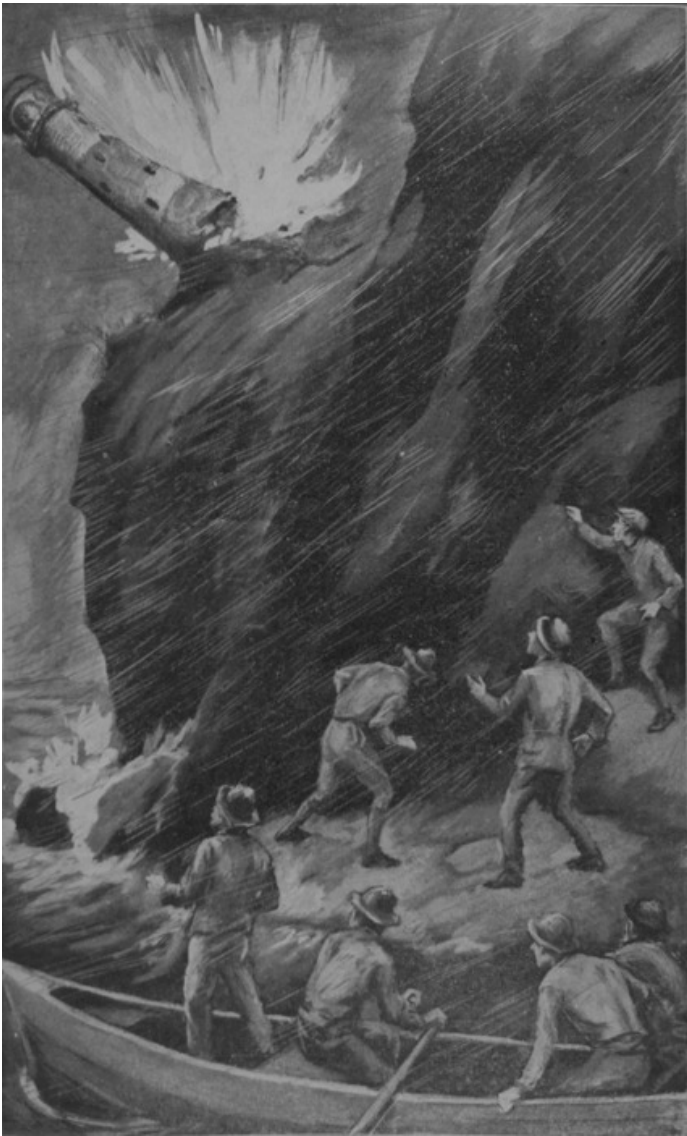
In a few seconds they had left the lighthouse burning behind them and run blindly on down the rocks. The boat with the sheriff and Mr. Blucher's force of men was nosing into the already darkened isle—just too late.

Flames shot crazily everywhere about the lighthouse. They were licking, slowly but surely, the entire structure. The great beacon was gradually dimming but in the light of the flames they could see the steel framework bending under the terrific heat.

Tom and Brent watched, spent with the horror of the tragedy they had just witnessed. Blucher, for the first time in his life, had nothing to say and gazed at the terrible spectacle in a sort of reverent silence.

In a last feeble struggle, the faithful beacon shot out over the gallery and across the water. Pearson's figure could be seen crazily clinging to the steel rail.

There was a terrible roar and explosion. A shaft of flame enveloped the gallery and like a piece of flimsy paper the tower toppled over and rolled into the sea.



THE TOWER TOPPLED OVER AND ROLLED INTO
THE SEA.

The rain drove steadily as the little boat-load of silent men rowed back to the mainland. Suddenly out of the darkness and moaning wind there came a weird, yet familiar sound.

Instinctively they rested their oars and listened. It could be heard above the moan of the storm-tossed surf, clear and distinct—the bell on the gallery, booming forth the hour.

“Gosh-a-mighty!” exclaimed Mr. Blucher in hushed tone. “What was ’at?”

“*The bell!*” exclaimed Tom in a choking voice. “The bell on the gallery!”

“How could ’at be when she’s forty foot under or more?” Mr. Blucher gasped.

“It must have been Pearson,” Brent answered. “He’s ringing it to let us know that he’s not quite dead *yet!*”

“He’s mean ’nuff not ter drown, I declare!” said Mr. Blucher.

“He’s mean enough to cheat Davy Jones out of his locker,” said Brent quietly. “That’s how mean he is.”

THE END

[The end of *Tom Slade at Shadow Isle* by Percy Keese Fitzhugh]