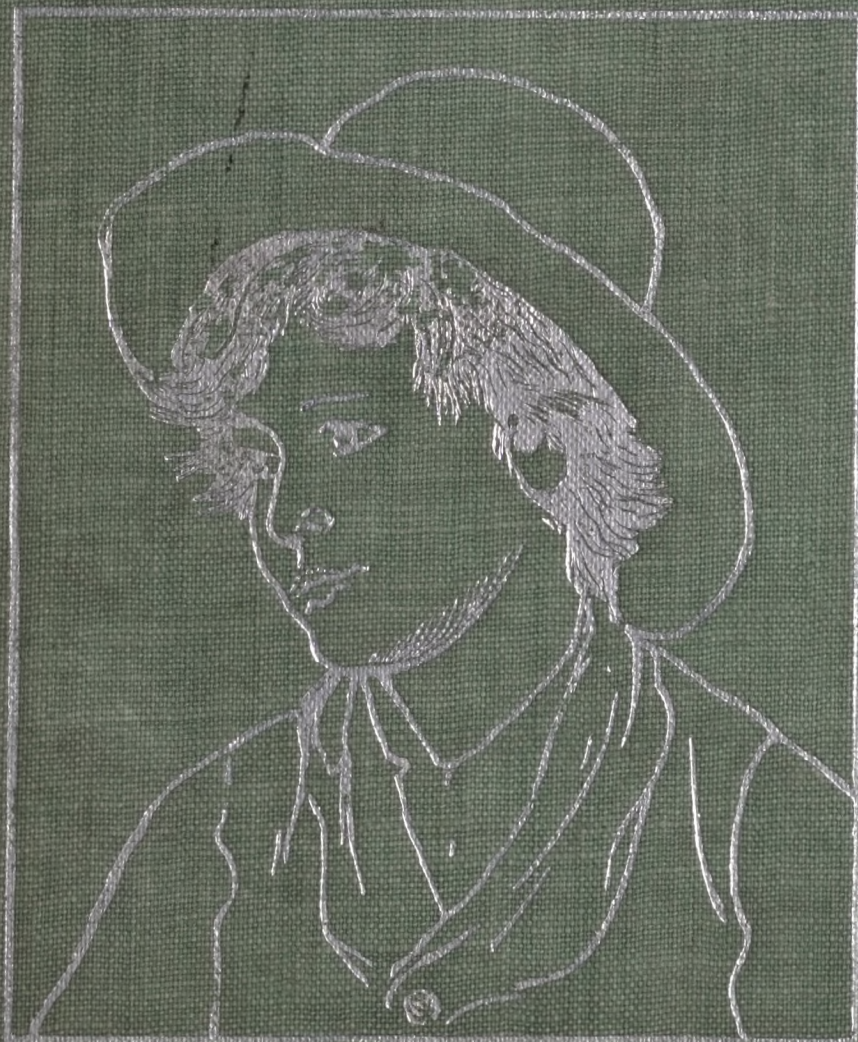


ADMIRAL J. OF SPURWINK

BY

JAMES OTIS



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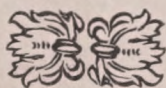


ADMIRAL J. OF SPURWINK

BY

JAMES OTIS.

AUTHOR OF "JACK THE HUNCHBACK," "JOSIAH IN NEW YORK,"
"WOOD ISLAND LIGHT," "JINNY AND HIS PARTNERS," "TOBY TYLER,"
"MR. STUBBS' BROTHER," ETC.



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ADMIRAL J. OF SPURWINK.

CHAPTER I.

MATTHEW ARCHIBALD TURNER.

HULLO !”

“Hullo yourself !”

“Do you live 'round here ?”

“Of course I do, else why do you think I'd be workin' so hard ?”

“It don't appear to me you're straining yourself very much, sitting here on the sand looking at that piece of a vessel.”

“She ain't a *piece* of a vessel ; she's a wreck, an' I'm workin' jest the same, even if I am sitting still, 'cause I am doin' a power of thinkin'.”

Then, as if to illustrate the remark, the bare-footed boy pulled the fragment of a straw hat down over his face, clasped his knees yet more tightly, and buried his toes deeply in the sand as if believ-

ing it necessary to get a firm clutch of his earth during the severe mental struggle.

The new-comer was a neatly dressed, not remarkably robust-looking boy, who any of the natives of Spurwink would have said after a single glance was one of the summer boarders from the Surf House on the bluff, half a mile away.

The boy from the city watched the young Spurwinker intently while one might have counted ten, and then, seeing nothing particularly interesting in what might have been a tableau of "meditation," said, as he seated himself in an uncomfortable position on the hot sand:—

"Do folks 'round here work the same as you are doing now?"

"There ain't many who live here, except in summer when the boarders come; but them as do hang out 'round Spurwink have to scrape mighty lively to make both ends meet."

"The same as you are doing now, eh?"

"Yes, pretty much."

"Why not tell me what you're about? I won't mind helping you a bit, if you don't move around faster than you are doing now."

"You're stoppin' up to the Surf House, I reckon?"

"Yes."

“What’s your name?”

“Spence Richmond. What’s yours?”

“Matt Turner.”

“Do you live up there?” and Master Richmond pointed toward a small weather-beaten house which stood a hundred yards or more from the shimmering sands of the beach.

“That’s where I live — Aunt Hannah an’ me.”

“Nobody else in the family?”

“Of course not. How could there be when that is all there is of us?”

“Haven’t you any sisters or brothers?”

Matt shook his head, and was evidently on the point of resuming the interrupted meditation when the inquisitive stranger continued: —

“See here, can’t you tell me what you’re tryin’ to do?”

“There ain’t any guess-work about it, ’cause I’m studyin’ mighty hard.”

“On what?”

“You see that wreck out there? Well, that was a coaster what came ashore in the line gale last fall, an’ she’s right here on our land.”

Spence looked around as if trying to make up his mind whether the sand everywhere around could really be called “land,” and then made a gesture of assent, which seemed necessary because Matt was evidently awaiting a reply.

“Now Admiral J., he allows that the wreck is what you might call common property, 'cause she's been abandoned by those who own her; but I say she belongs to me. Why you can get aboard of her at chuck high water without wading in very deep. Admiral J. don't know everything he thinks he does.”

“Is he a regular admiral?”

“I guess not, 'cause them kind of fellers have to be sailors, don't they?”

“Of course. An admiral is an officer in the navy, who has charge of a fleet of vessels.”

“And he couldn't do anything like that if he wasn't a sailor?”

“No, I suppose not.”

“Then he ain't one of them kind, though all the folks 'round here calls him ‘Admiral J.’”

“Is that really his name?”

“Well, the ‘Admiral’ isn't; but the J. ought to be, seein's his name's Joseph J. Johnson.”

“Where does he live?”

“Jest 'round the point. You'll see plenty of him if you're goin' to stay here this summer. He thinks he knows pretty nigh everything, an' folks do say he is well posted; but there's some things he ain't certain of, an' that's about who owns the wreck, 'cause she's mine.”

“What are you going to do with her?”

“There now, you have jest struck it! That’s what I was studyin’ about, an’ I tell you it’s goin’ to take a good deal of thinkin’ before I figger it out. You see about the only chance we have around Spurwink of makin’ a dollar, is out of summer boarders. Of course our house ain’t big enough for us to do much in the way of puttin’ up folks, so I’ve been tryin’ to settle in my mind how to get money out of the wreck, an’ I reckon I’ve got an idee. When you city people come down here to the seashore you’re apt to act mighty foolish over vessels, or anything of that kind, ’cause you don’t know much ’bout ’em.”

“But I do,” Spence interrupted. “I have sailed up the Hudson on a steamboat as many as five times, and father says perhaps we’ll go home from Portland by water.”

“That don’t mean anything. What do you know about vessels when you are on a steamboat?”

“But they’re the same as vessels, ain’t they?”

“Of course not. What I’m talkin’ ’bout is ships what you can’t sail without wind; when you’re apt to get wrecked, an’ pirates come aboard, an’ murder all hands of you. Now if you’d been in any such scrape as that” —

“But there are no pirates nowadays.”

‘ Oh ! There ain’t, eh ? How do you know ? ’

“ If there were you would hear of them through the papers ; and it’s only in books that you read about those things.”

“ Well, now see here, Spence,” and Matt assumed a confidential tone ; “ if you’re ’round with me much this summer, I’ll bet I can show you plenty of pirates.”

“ Right here on this shore ? ”

“ No, not exactly that ; but you can see the vessels goin’ by, an’ just as likely as not a good many of them are pirates. You can’t tell one when they’re off shore two or three miles.”

“ Of course you can’t, so what right have you to call them pirates ? ”

“ What right ? Why you don’t know but what they *may* be, an’ I’ve seen lots of craft that I’ve been certain wasn’t here for any good. Admiral J. says it wouldn’t s’prise him a bit if there were most as many now as there used to be.”

Spence remained silent and motionless for a brief interval, during which he appeared to be reflecting upon the statement made by the boy, and then, as if thinking it unwise to discredit any assertion by so eminent an authority as Admiral J. returned to the original topic of conversation.

“ Look here, Matt, how do you think you are

going to make money out of this wreck, even if she is all yours?"

"That's jest what I've been tryin' to figger out, an' the nearest I can come to it is that I might make summer boarders pay for goin' on board. Now supposin' I rigged up a ladder so's they could get over the rail easy, and charged ten cents apiece, don't you s'pose folks would pay?"

"It seems so. I know *I* would if I couldn't get there any other way."

"Well, if I opened up the show, run it two or three days, an' fifty people come, then I'd have five dollars, wouldn't I?"

"Sure."

"Then couldn't I buy peanuts an' candy, an' get Aunt Hannah to make some cakes, so's to have a reg'lar store on board? Five dollars is a big lot of money."

"I've got seven in my pocket this very minute."

"What? You?"

Matt gazed inquisitively at his companion, who, understanding that his veracity was in question, drew out a pocketbook and displayed its contents.

"Where did you get so much?" Matt asked after an unusually long pause.

"I have been saving it up all winter, for I knew when I got down here to this shore I would want

it to hire boats, and all that kind of thing. Say, suppose I went into partnership with you on the wreck? Then you could have a store the first day you opened the show. That's the way it ought to be fixed."

"Matt! Matt!"

That's Aunt Hannah," the Spurwinker said in an explanatory tone as his companion looked around inquiringly.

"She wants you, don't she?"

"Well, it kinder seems that way; but I can't humor all her whims now, 'cause it was agreed between us I should have all of to-day to fix things up about the wreck," and he added in a louder tone, "I can't come now, Aunt Hannah. I'm busy, an' I've got company."

"Admiral J. has jest sent over Miss Libby's Sarah to say you'd better come up an' talk with him if you are thinking of doin' anything with the hulk," Aunt Hannah cried shrilly, as she stood on the threshold, shading her eyes in an attempt to see Matt's "visitors."

"I s'pose he wants to say I ain't got any right to claim this schooner; but he can talk until he's grayer-headed than he is now before he'll make me believe it. Say, Spence, how much money are you willing to put out if I agree to this partnership business?"

“I’d promise to spend as much as five dollars if I could come in for half of the wreck.”

“Do you mean that you’d want to own half of it all the time?”

“No; only this summer, because it would be no good to me after I go home.”

“And you will buy five dollars’ worth of stuff to sell?”

“Yes, I reckon that’s what I’d do; but of course I should want to talk with father first. I’m pretty certain he’d think it was a good chance to make money — that is, unless Admiral J. should kick up a fuss, and show that you couldn’t do what you wanted to with the vessel.”

“I’ll take care of Admiral J.,” Matt replied stoutly and with a threatening shake of his head. “He shan’t make me believe that what I know for certain ain’t true, an’ he’s got no right to claim part of her, ’cause she’s on our land.”

“Why don’t you hear what he has to say? If he’s going to make a fuss you want to know it before you put out too much money getting ready.”

“Don’t you want to go with me?”

“Yes, if you’ll wait until I go to the hotel, an’ talk with father.”

“All right. Find out what he thinks of your goin’ into partnership, an’ then we can settle everything before night.”

“Will you be here when I come back?”

“Yes, unless I’m up to the house.”

Spence did not linger after this assurance, but started toward the bluff at a rapid pace, Matt meanwhile burying his bare toes deep in the sand, and hugging his knees yet more tightly in very joy because of what seemed a marvelous stroke of good fortune.

With a capital of five dollars he felt positive the wreck could be converted into a money-making machine for so long a time as the summer boarders remained in Spurwink.

So deeply occupied was he building “air-castles,” each having the wreck for a foundation, that he failed to hear the sound of approaching footsteps, and was decidedly startled when Aunt Hannah suddenly appeared.

“Who was you visitin’ with, Matt?”

“Your rheumatiz must be a mighty sight better, Aunt Hannah, if you can crawl up on a feller like that, for I didn’t so much as hear you step.”

“I allow that’s because you was so deep in your scheme, child. Your poor old aunt made jest as much noise as she ever did, an’ it cost her as great an effort as ever to come down here. Who was you visitin’ with, Matt?”

“A feller by the name of Spence Richmond,

what's boardin' over to the Surf House with his folks. He's got seven whole dollars, an' is goin' to put five of 'em in partnership with me."

"Sakes alive, child, what do you want of five dollars?"

"We're goin' to have a reg'lar store on the wreck; rig up a ladder so's people can get aboard, an' charge everybody ten cents for lookin' at her. We're goin' to hire you to make cake for us, and we'll sell a raft of stuff, 'cause it seems like as if it didn't take much to make money out of summer boarders."

"Bless you, child, you'll never find anybody foolish enough to give ten cents just for the sake of lookin' at that old hulk! Why it's as much as your life's worth to go on board of her."

"That's where you're makin' a big mistake. Her decks have been washed as clean as our kitchen floor. She sets on an even keel, an' it's only once a month that the tide comes up high enough to wet the cabin floor."

"That don't hinder her from bein' a reg'lar trap in which to catch rheumatism, Matt, an' even if you should find anybody fool enough to pay you ten cents for goin' on board of her, Admiral J. would make a terrible fuss 'bout it. You know he claims that she's common property, an' he's a

master-hand at interfering, if he thinks anybody else is makin' a few cents more'n he is."

"He'd better not come foolin' 'round Spence an' me, 'cause I'd just as soon throw that old heathen overboard as not, if he tried to stop me from doing what I've set my mind on."

"Why Matthew Archibald Turner! You frighten me by talkin' so murderously! It's terrible to think that boys of your age an' bringin' up have got no more conscience than to speak of throwin' a human bein' overboard."

That Aunt Hannah was making no pretense at being horrified at Matthew's threat, could be told from the fact that she unwittingly leaned against a rock which must have been damp, for the tide had overflowed it a few hours previous, at imminent risk of inviting another attack from her old enemy, the rheumatism.

"See here, Aunt Hannah, I wish you wouldn't call me Matthew Archibald Turner even when we are alone, 'cause you'll get into the habit of doin' it before folks."

Again Aunt Hannah raised her hands in mingled astonishment and disapprobation.

"Why is it, Matt, that you are ashamed of your own name? Mercy knows it's an honest one, for the Turners have always held their heads as high



in Spurwink as ever the Jordans did, and with a good deal more reason, for there was never shiftless men in our fam'ly."

"I ain't disputin' that, Aunt Hannah, an' I ain't what you might call ashamed of my name; but when you sing out Matthew— Archibald— Turner, it makes me feel mighty foolish. Why can't you call me Matt? "

"Don't I, child? "

"Yes, most of the time; but if anybody is 'round, you're certain to blart out the whole thing, an' I feel like as if I wanted to hide my head, I'm so ashamed."

Once more Aunt Hannah's hands were raised, this time as if in expostulation, and it is quite positive Matt would have heard again, as he had nearly every day since he could remember, that "the Turners held their heads as high as ever did the Jordans," but for the fact that just then Spence Richmond appeared with an expression of joy on his face which told, quite as plainly as words could have done, that his father was not opposed to the scheme of converting the wreck into a museum.

CHAPTER II.

ADMIRAL J.

MATT understood that something in the way of an introduction between his partner and his aunt was necessary, and he accomplished it by saying:—

“This is Aunt Hannah, Spence, an’ she’ll treat you first-rate ’less you try to make out that the Turners ain’t every grain as good as the Jordans. When it comes to anything of that kind, she’s mighty touchy.”

“There’s no need for you to explain so much, Matt,” Aunt Hannah said, with considerable show of dignity. “The folks ’round here know the Turners as well as the Jordans, an’ when city people come to spend the summer it don’t take them long to find out that what I’ve always maintained is true. So you an’ Matt are goin’ into the wildest scheme that two boys ever conjured up, are you?” she asked, turning toward Spence.

“Don’t you think we’ll make money by it?” Master Richmond asked quickly.

“I allow you might if you could find folks who were willing to pay anythin’ for seein’ an old wreck; but bless your souls, boys, what’s to prevent anybody from standin’ here on the beach an’ lookin’ at it as much as they want?”

“That’s a good deal different from goin’ on board of her,” Matt replied, decidedly. “Spence said if it cost ten cents, he would be willin’ to pay it rather than not see her.”

“But he’s a boy, an’ boys always want to poke ’round outlandish places. Now, I’ll warrant you wouldn’t catch his mother venturin’ on sich a hulk.”

“That’s where you’re wrong, Aunt Hannah,” Spence replied with a laugh, claiming kinship as if it was one of the terms of the partnership. “Mother said she and Florrie would be our first customers — that she would like to go aboard of the wreck if there wasn’t any danger.”

“But there is, child, an’ plenty of it.”

“How do you make that out?” Matt asked sharply. “She’s banked up with sand so that the biggest kind of a tide couldn’t wash her away, an’ if you stay on deck there ain’t the least little bit of a chance to get your feet wet.”

“I don’t mean it is dangerous so far as her driftin’ away goes, Matt; but if any of the sum-

mer boarders are rheumatically, the farther they stay from the wreck, the better it will be for 'em."

"You mustn't make that kind of talk, Aunt Hannah, after the exhibition has been opened," Spence said with a laugh; "otherwise you'll injure the business. We are goin' to advertise that we will show the wreck at ten cents a head, and shall be very careful not to explain that those who come on board are in danger of catching rheumatism. Father said he was willing I should spend five dollars in the speculation, and the sooner we get to work the better, Matt."

"Your father must be mighty reckless with his money if he is goin' to allow a child like you to squander so much!" Aunt Hannah exclaimed. "It seems like a sinful waste, an' — Why mercy on us! Here comes Admiral J., an' I don't know when I've seen him 'round the point at this time of the day before. He always allows it's healthier for him to do his chores in the forenoon, an' so, naturally, don't go callin' till after dinner."

Spence gazed curiously at the odd-looking little man who was approaching, and with good reason. Because of the title which had been given him, the boy expected to see a man, in general appearance at least, who resembled a sailor; but there was nothing about Admiral J. to indicate that he was of a nautical turn.

He was hardly an inch taller than fourteen-year-old Matt, and could not have weighed as much by at least a dozen pounds. His legs were bowed so decidedly that a plump kitten might have jumped between when he stood with his feet together, without ruffling her fur, and he toddled along something after the fashion of a duck.

Nature had been niggardly with him in every way save one, and in that particular she was most lavish.

Admiral J. was the proud possessor of luxuriant whiskers which fell nearly to his waist, and this wealth of beard caused him to look more diminutive than he really was.

“Why, he’s all hair,” Spence said half to himself, and Aunt Hannah laughed, despite the fact that the little man was so near that he might suspect he was the subject of her mirth.

“If it wasn’t for that beard of his I don’t know how Admiral J. would get along in this life,” she said in a low, cautious tone. “He’s forever comb-in’ it with his fingers, an’ folks say it grieves him terribly to lose even so much as a single hair. He’s workin’ at it so hard now that I allow he’s got on his mind what he considers is important business. You can always tell when the Admiral’s excited by the way he handles his whiskers.”

There was no further opportunity for the three to discuss the new-comer, for he was now so near that even the most cautious conversation might have been overheard.

“I declare it seems as if something must be wrong, else you wouldn’t be ’round the point this time of day, Admiral,” Aunt Hannah said cheerily, and the little man stepped back with an air of surprise, as if he had but just recognized her.

“You may be surprised to see me here in the forenoon, Hannah Gordon, but that ain’t half as wonderful as it is for a woman of your age an’ rheumatically disposition to be settin’ out here on the damp rocks.”

“I know it’s foolish in me, Admiral; but somehow I forgot what I was about while talkin’ with these boys.”

“You won’t forget to-morrow mornin’ when you’re all drawed up with the rheumatiz, and sendin’ ’round the neighborhood for liniment.”

“I don’t s’pose I shall, Admiral, I don’t s’pose I shall,” and Aunt Hannah rose to her feet, after considerable difficulty, saying, when this change of position had been effected: “I allow I’ll pay dear enough for this forgetfulness; but a big dose of panacea won’t do any harm, an’ it may work a power of good. That’s a remedy I haven’t tried

yet, but promised Miss Jordan I would the first time I felt as if a spell was comin' on."

As she finished speaking, Aunt Hannah turned as if to go toward the house, but Admiral J. checked her by saying:—

"You've been out here so long, Hannah Gordon, that I don't reckon it 'll do you any harm to stay five minutes more, an' I want you to hear what I've come to say."

"Why, mercy on us, Admiral J., you act as if somethin' had gone wrong," and Aunt Hannah, suddenly forgetting the ailments which she expected would come upon her, turned quickly, standing with her hands on her hips as she looked scrutinizingly at the little man.

"From all I can hear 'round Spurwink, something *has* gone wrong," Admiral J. said, in what he intended should be a dignified tone. "The folks are sayin' that Matthew Archibald Turner lays claim to this 'ere wreck, 'cause she happened to come ashore in front of this 'ere house, an' that he's goin' to make her over into a show-place, hopin' to get money out of the summer boarders."

"Now that's jest what we was talkin' about, Admiral, when you come in sight. I allow there never will be anybody here foolish enough to pay these boys ten cents jest for the sake of goin'

aboard of that crazy old vessel, an' yet they're countin' on puttin' five good dollars into the scheme, which is the wildest any sensible person ever conjured up."

"What's this other boy got to do with it?" and the Admiral suddenly faced Spencer. "Ain't he one of the boarders up at the Surf House?"

"Yes, an' he's goin' into partnerships with me to make a show out of the wreck," Matt replied quickly.

The Admiral clutched his beard with both hands, much as if by such a method he could hold his rapidly increasing temper in check, and appeared as if struggling to make an immediate reply.

He had, however, so far allowed his anger to gain the ascendancy that it was, for the time being, impossible to speak coherently, and he remained with his head thrust forward toward Matt in an angry sort of fashion, trying in vain to articulate.

"Mercy on us, Admiral J.! Whatever has come over you?" Aunt Hannah cried, as she moved toward the little man, seized him by the arm, and began slapping him on the back, as if fearing he was choking.

This treatment, which was such as would have been bestowed upon a child, was not well calculated to allay the Admiral's anger, and he wrenched

himself loose from Aunt Hannah's kindly grasp, just as he gained control over his tongue.

“What do you mean by treatin' me in that way?” he cried, furiously. “Do you fancy I can be cajoled by an old woman like you, an' two boys, into sacrificin' all my interests on this 'ere shore? Do you think you can wheedle me out of my rights?”

Aunt Hannah looked at the angry little man in bewilderment; Matt gazed alternately at the Admiral and his partner, and Spence said in a hoarse whisper which could readily be heard by the angry man:—

“If there's goin' to be a row, I guess I'd better go to the hotel an' wait till it's over. There'll be time enough for us to fix up about the show afterwards.”

“There'll be no time this summer, nor next, unless my rights in this matter are respected!” Admiral J. cried, as he wheeled around to face Spence.

“Why, whatever has come over the man!” and Aunt Hannah raised her hands in mingled bewilderment and surprise. “*Who* does he think is goin' to take away any of his rights?”

“Your nephew is tryin' to do it, Hannah Gordon, an' I want you to distinctly understand that he can't continue on in the course he has marked out for himself, with impunity.”

When the little man first gave evidence of being in a towering rage, Matt could not believe all this show of anger was occasioned by his scheme to make an exhibition of the wreck, but now he began to understand that such must be the case, and, instead of discussing the matter quietly, as should have been done, he very foolishly allowed his own temper to rise, as he asked hotly: —

“Do you mean to say, Admiral J., that I haven’t got any right to do as I please with what is on our land?”

“It’s not your land. That which is covered by the tide can’t be owned by an individual, an’ the wreck belongs to all who live along the shore.”

“Mr. Atwood, of the Surf House, who owns more property here than anybody else, didn’t make any such claim.”

“Then Mr. Atwood is a fool, an’ you can tell him so for me.”

“That’s what I will do, an’ if he once gets after you, I reckon you’ll behave yourself. I’ll ” —

“Matthew Archibald Turner! I’m ashamed of you for speakin’ so disrespectfully!” Aunt Hannan cried, as she took her nephew by the arm with the intention of leading him to the house. “The Admiral will be sorry for havin’ lost his temper when he thinks the matter over quietly, an’ no

matter what he may say while he's in a passion, you haven't the right to be impudent to your elders."

"I'm not in a passion, Hannah Gordon. I never was calmer in my life," Admiral J. cried yet more furiously than before. "I've simply come here to protect my interests, and you may rest assured I shan't see them put in jeopardy by Matt Turner and this city chap. I solemnly warn you both," he added, as he turned toward the boys, while with both hands he combed his whiskers in a most energetic fashion, "not to dare take possession of that wreck, otherwise you may find yourselves confronted by the law. I've lived here too long to be deprived of my rights, especially by children, and mean to go to any lengths rather than be trodden upon. Remember that, you little mischief-makers! I shall go to any lengths rather than be trodden upon!"

With this parting threat, Admiral J. wheeled with the precision of a well-trained soldier, and, still tugging at his beard, walked as rapidly as his little bowed legs could carry him in the direction of his home."

"Well," Spence said, with a long-drawn breath of relief, "I'm glad I've met your Admiral J.; but if he always acts like that, I don't know as I'd

care about having him around much of the time."

"He isn't always that way," Aunt Hannah replied sadly. "He's generally as mild-spoken, peaceable a neighbor as heart could wish for, an' I can't say how sorry I am you boys have done anything to rouse him to such anger. The old hulk isn't worth a single harsh word, an' perhaps it is jest as well he forbids your usin' her, for I'm certain you couldn't make money tryin' to entice people to pay you ten cents for goin' on board."

"But you don't mean to say that we've got to give up the speculation just because of what he said?" and Spence looked thoroughly astonished. "He hasn't got any more right to her than I had."

"But he thinks he has, my child," Aunt Hannah said mildly, "an' it would be better to give up a dozen sich hulks than to have hard feelings between neighbors."

"But I didn't give up my claim to a single timber," Matt cried hotly. "She come ashore on our land, an' Mr. Atwood, who knows more in a minute than the Admiral does in a week, told me I had a right to do what I liked with her."

"Surely, Matt, you won't think of goin' counter to Admiral J.'s wishes?"

"Why shouldn't I? What's he got to do with

me? What business is it of his whether I turn her into a show, or set her on fire?"

"He may be in the right, Matt, an' it would be terrible if, in addition to havin' harsh words with a neighbor who has always been a good friend, you should get into trouble with the law over sich a worthless thing. It isn't as if we were rich, as Mr. Atwood is; you must remember that if you did take possession of what really didn't belong to you, we might be turned out of house and home, for law-suits are awful things for poor people to undertake."

Matt looked alarmed at this suggestion of what might result in case he persisted in his scheme; but Spence was now more eager than ever to have a share in the speculation, and said decidedly:—

"If Mr. Atwood told you it was all right to use the vessel for the exhibition, he knew what he was talking about."

"But perhaps he didn't realize that Admiral J. might put in a claim," Aunt Hannah interrupted.

"Suppose that long-whiskered little fellow should put in a claim for the whole shore, would that make it his? Look here, Matt, come down to the Surf House with me, and let's ask father about it. He's a lawyer, and he'll know whether there's any chance of your getting into trouble."

“But Admiral J. is a man who knows a power about the law,” Aunt Hannah cried in alarm. “He’s always readin’ about law-suits, an’ there hasn’t been an important case tried in this county without his bein’ right on hand to know what was said and done.”

“It can’t do much harm to ask father, for anything will be better than givin’ in simply because he threatens to raise a row. Will you come with me, Matt?”

Matt looked inquiringly toward Aunt Hannah, and after a long pause, during which she was intently debating the subject in her own mind, the good woman said, hesitatingly:—

“I don’t s’pose it can do any harm for you to talk about what the Admiral has said, Matt; but don’t be rash. Don’t let any one cause you to do that which may bring us both into trouble.”

“I can promise that easy enough, Aunt Hannah, for I won’t do anything that you don’t agree to; but we may as well know whether the wreck belongs to us, or Admiral J.”

“And you will come straight back here as soon as you get through talkin’?”

“Sure. I’ll tell you one thing; if I can’t use her for a show, he shan’t, if I have to set her on fire.”

“Now you are startin’ in wrong, Matt,” Aunt Hannah said, in a tone of mild reproof. “You blamed the Admiral for losing his temper, an’ you’re doin’ the very same thing. Don’t go away with revengeful feelings in your mind; but remember that you should love your neighbor as yourself.”

“The Admiral didn’t seem to go accordin’ to that rule, Mrs. Gordon,” Spence said with a laugh.

“It doesn’t make any difference to us whether our neighbor lives as he should or not. His bein’ in the wrong doesn’t excuse us.”

“Say, Aunt Hannah, we must go right off if we want to see Spence’s father, an’ you can tell us all about that when we get back.”

Before the good woman could make any reply, Matt and his would-be partner were hurrying in the direction of the Surf House.

CHAPTER III.

DEFIANCE.

DURING the journey to the Surf House Spence behaved as if confident everything could be arranged by his father ; but Matt had less confidence in Mr. Richmond's ability to reduce Admiral J. to reason.

“If Mr. Atwood can't make things straight, I don't believe anybody else can,” he said in a sorrowful tone after they had walked for some time in silence.

“If you've got any right to the wreck by law, father will see to it that the little wretch don't make trouble,” Spence replied confidently.

“But you don't know the Admiral as well as I do. He's way up in law, an' knows pretty nigh as much as if he was a lawyer.”

“Of course that isn't so, Matt, for how could it be when he hasn't studied such things?”

“But that's jest what he has been doin' all his life. Aunt Hannah was right when she said he'd

tended out on all the trials in this county, an' everybody says he's mighty well posted."

"I don't care a cent for what he's learned hanging around court-rooms. My father is a regular lawyer, and if he says you own the wreck because she's on your land, that settles it, and the Admiral will get into trouble if he bothers us."

Matt was not convinced, even though his partner spoke so confidently. The longer he revolved the matter in his mind the more positive did it appear that the Admiral could not have made a mistake, and by the time they arrived at the Surf House Master Turner was mentally prepared to abandon the scheme, regardless of the fact that much money might be gained by carrying it into execution.

Had he been left to his own devices, Matt would have returned home without so much as asking advice from the proprietor of the hotel, who had always been friendly toward him ; but Spence insisted on laying the matter before his father, and in a few moments the famous lawyer was listening to his son's story.

Spence was so thoroughly excited that some time elapsed before Mr. Richmond fully understood the case ; but the latter at last succeeded in learning the main facts, and then, instead of questioning

the boys further, entered into a private conversation with the landlord.

“I do not think Admiral J. can legally molest you in your possession of the wreck,” Mr. Richmond finally said to the boys. “He certainly cannot do so without due process of law, and I understand that there is not sufficient value in the property to warrant anything of the kind.”

“But he says we shan’t use her for a show,” Matt said decidedly.

“I do not see how he can prevent your doing as you choose,” the lawyer replied, with a smile. “If you and Spence propose to convert her into a shop, charging an admission to such curious ones as may wish to go on board, it can be done without legal interference from Admiral J.”

Matt looked surprised, and Spence triumphant.

“What did I tell you?” the latter cried. “Now we can go ahead, and if that little wretch tries to trouble us, we’ll make him sorry.”

“It’s certain he’ll do as he threatens,” Matt said hesitatingly.

“If he should, come to me, and I will see to it that he is restrained.”

“I don’t think that you boys will be troubled by him,” Mr. Atwood interrupted. “I will make it my business to see the Admiral, and advise him not to be foolish.”

There no longer appeared any reason why Matt should not do as he pleased in regard to the wreck. With a famous lawyer from New York and the proprietor of the Surf House as his friends, there seemed little chance Admiral J. would be able to carry out the threats he had made.

“Come on!” Spence cried impatiently. “There’s no need of loafing around here, and we want to get the vessel fixed up as soon as possible, if we count on making money out of her this season.”

Matt hesitated no longer. He hurriedly thanked Messrs. Richmond and Atwood for the interest displayed in his behalf, and joined Spence in a mad race to Aunt Hannah’s, where the lawyer’s opinion on the subject was soon made known.

Aunt Hannah appeared thoroughly surprised that any one would be so rash as to say Admiral J.’s points of law were not well taken; but after hearing that the landlord of the Surf House had indorsed Mr. Richmond’s view of the case, she said thoughtfully:—

“I guess they must be right, though I never knew the Admiral to make a mistake before. Howsomever, if you boys are set on turnin’ that old hulk into a circus, I won’t say anything more to check you, though it isn’t likely you’ll find a soul who’ll be so foolish as to pay good money to go on board of her an’ ketch the rheumatiz.”

There was no longer any necessity for Spence to impress upon his partner's mind the necessity for immediate action.

Matt was now satisfied the Admiral would not dare to interfere with them, and set about the work of making the wreck ready for visitors without further delay.

It would not be possible to send to the city for such articles as they proposed to sell until the following morning; but in the meanwhile there was plenty of work to be done.

A bargain was made with Aunt Hannah for two loaves of cake to be delivered on the afternoon of the following day, and one-half the purchase money paid in advance.

Then the partners set about constructing a gangway from the hulk to the beach at the extreme high-water mark, and this portion of the work was more difficult and protracted than they had at first fancied.

There was no lack of materials with which to work, and from such odds and ends of lumber as could be found on the shore the boys began the building.

At noon Aunt Hannah called them to an appetizing dinner of fried fish, and before the meal was concluded she was quite as much interested in the scheme as the partners.

Although she did not believe any one would pay ten cents simply for the purpose of "ketchin' the rheumatiz," she was impressed by the fact that Spence's parents and sister would come immediately the exhibition was opened, and the thirty cents they would pay for admission seemed like an exceedingly large amount, even though no other patrons should be found.

Before sunset she was more excited than Matt had ever seen her.

A party of visitors from the hotel, having heard of what the boys proposed to do, and of Admiral J.'s threats, came to the wreck, and although only two timbers of the gangway had been laid, insisted on going aboard.

The price of admission was paid to Matt, and when the last dime had been laid on his palm, he, without stopping to escort his patrons over the hulk, ran with all speed to the little weather-beaten house on the shore.

"Look here, Aunt Hannah!" he cried excitedly, as he held out the coins. "Ninety cents already, an' we ain't half begun to show the wreck!"

"Mercy on us, child!" the good woman cried as she put on her spectacles that she might see the money more plainly. "Do you mean to tell me that you've got all that jest for lettin' folks go aboard the old hulk?"

“That’s where it all come from, an’ if we had our store ready I’m certain we could sell a lot of stuff.”

“Well, well, well, who’d thought there was so many fools in this world!” Aunt Hannah exclaimed. “They must have money to throw away!”

“Now all the boarders will be sure to come, an’ if Admiral J. don’t make a fuss” —

“I’ll take care of that little bunch of conceit. The wreck is on our land, an’ if he comes around here interferin’ after what that New York lawyer’s said, he’ll have me to deal with!”

“What’ll you do, Aunt Hannah?”

“I’ll — I’ll — Well, I ain’t certain jest what I shall do, Matthew; but he shan’t be allowed to break up your plans while the money is comin’ in like this, though I do hope I won’t be tempted to say an unneighborly word to him.”

Matt was too much excited to be able to remain very long in one place, and now that he had “more than surprised Aunt Hannah,” as he afterward told his partner, he hurried back to the hulk.

Spence was escorting his patrons in true showman style, and when Matt came on board he heard the ladies expressing their satisfaction at being able to inspect a veritable wreck without further inconvenience than that of a walk to the beach.

Mr. Richmond was one of the party, and when Matt came over the rail he said to him: —

“It wasn’t a bad scheme to convert this craft into a show-place, and you boys ought to be able to pick up a good many dimes before the season ends. I think, however, that you should do something more for the comfort of your patrons.”

“We’ve counted on all that, sir. We’re goin’ to rig the stagin’ so it’ll be safe, an’ have lots of things for folks to buy.”

“I was thinkin’ of even more than that,” Mr. Richmond replied with a smile. “If you had an awning over the deck, and some chairs or settees, your patrons would be likely to spend more time, and, as a necessary consequence, be tempted to spend more money. On a moonlight night when the tide is high, the young people would think this a very romantic spot” —

“An awnin’ an’ chairs would cost a pile of money, an’ all we’ve got as a starter is Spence’s five dollars.”

“I will order what may be needed, and pay for them, if you authorize me to do so.”

“But do you suppose we’d ever take in money enough to settle with you, sir?” and Matt was thoroughly surprised that the lawyer appeared to take so much interest in the scheme.

“I will take the chances of that. Perhaps the money I shall be willing to pay for the privilege of coming here whenever I please, will be sufficient to buy such articles as seem to be needed.”

“Then if you don’t think there is any risk, I’d like to have the wreck fixed up in shape; but I wouldn’t care to get into too much debt.”

“I will see to it that you are not heavily involved,” Mr. Richmond replied, with a laugh, and then he turned away, pacing to and fro the deck, as if measuring its length and breadth.

Half an hour later the partners were alone and should have continued the work on the gangway, but so excited were they that it seemed absolutely necessary to talk over the encouraging outlook before doing anything else.

“There’s no question but that this is a great snap for us, Matt,” Spence said gleefully. “It begins to look as if I didn’t put in money enough to pay for half a share.”

“Ain’t you goin’ to spend the five dollars?”

“Of course I am.”

“Then you’ve invested more’n enough to make you a half owner. I wouldn’t wonder if we doubled the money.”

“Of course we shall,” was the confident reply; “and in addition to that we’ll have what comes in

for letting folks on board. Everybody from the hotel will be here before they're many days older, an' we must get the store to running. Now what do you think we'd better buy?"

"Peanuts an' candy."

"We want more than that. Mother said we ought to have fruit, and" —

"What are you building there?" a shrill voice cried, and, looking up suddenly, the partners saw Admiral J. coming down the beach as rapidly as his short, bowed legs would carry him.

"You let me do the talking, Matt," Spence whispered. "He can't scare me as he can you."

"I ain't afraid of him after what your father said."

"What are you doin' here?" the Admiral cried in a yet more angry tone.

"Getting ready to show the wreck," Spence replied quietly. "We'd got the work done by this time if we hadn't stopped to wait on customers."

The Admiral combed his beard furiously as he stammered and spluttered, so angry now that it seemed impossible for him to speak.

"My father is a lawyer, and he says you have no right to interfere with us, so be careful you don't get into trouble."

"What do I care for your father?" the little

man cried after the most severe exertion. "I'll soon show you an' him what my rights are!"

"Go ahead and do it, instead of tryin' to frighten us," and Spence arose to his feet. "Come on, Matt, we've got to work lively if we count on getting this platform done before dark."

"I forbid you to touch a single timber of that wreck!" the Admiral screamed.

"You've said the same thing before, but yet we're going right ahead with our work."

"Admiral J.," Matt said in a conciliatory tone, "suppose you talk with Mr. Atwood about your right to boss this wreck. He told us he'd speak with you."

"If I didn't know more law than Jethro Atwood I'd never show my head on this beach again. You're takin' possession of common property, in which I have an equal interest, and I command you to stop."

"But we shan't pay any attention to what you say," and Spence made a pretense of continuing his work.

"Don't you drive another nail!" the little man cried as he rushed forward and began pulling at a single plank which had been put into position. "I'll tear down what you've already done, and then we'll see if you dare build it up again."

Spence seized a piece of plank, the first weapon nearest at hand, and raised it threateningly.

“If you so much as pull out a block, I’ll strike! If you have any ownership in this wreck, prove it legally, but don’t dare to destroy what we have built.”

The Admiral was not what might really be called a coward, but yet he stepped back quickly as Spence advanced.

The boy looked capable of carrying his threat into execution, and perhaps the little man began to doubt the legality of his position.

“I’ll have you arrested! You shall be prosecuted to the full extent of the law, and you among the rest, Hannah Gordon!” he added, as the good woman came hurriedly from the house, probably with the intention of acting as peacemaker. “You shall suffer equally with these piratical boys!”

“Joseph J. Johnson, we have lived here for nigh on to twenty years, an’ in all that time I’ve tried to do my duty to my neighbors, as we’re told to do it; but I’m too old to be threatened in that way by a little whipper-snapper like you! Walk straight away off of my land, for you are a trespasser, sir, a trespasser!”

The Admiral stood gazing at Aunt Hannah in speechless astonishment. Many times had he actually bullied her when she dared to express an opinion at variance with his, and never before had

she showed the slightest sign of anger; now this sudden and unexpected outburst actually frightened him.

“I never expected this of you, Hannah Gordon,” he finally managed to say, after standing like a statue several seconds, during which time the boys had gazed at him in astonishment, that a mild, inoffensive woman like Aunt Hannah could have reduced him to silence so suddenly. “I’ll go, because the law says I must when I’m warned away from another person’s property; but don’t think that these cubs can take possession of the wreck, for she belongs to me as much as to anyone else, and I’ll set her on fire before they shall shut me out of my lawful rights.”

Aunt Hannah stepped forward quickly as if to make an angry reply, but suddenly checked herself, and walked into the house.

“Remember what I have said,” the little man added to the boys, with a threatening gesture. “I’ll burn that ’ere hulk before you shall deprive me of my rights.”

“We’re not tryin’ to deprive you of your rights!” Matt cried, as the Admiral hurried around the point; “and it’ll be a sorry day for you when you set this wreck on fire.”

Spence looked alarmed as he asked, in a whisper: —

“Do you suppose he'd dare do anything of the kind?”

“It ain't easy to scare him, small as he is, an' I tell you, Spence, I'm beginnin' to be afraid we shan't make so much money out of the wreck as we counted on.”

“Because he'll burn her?”

Matt nodded.

“Then we'll take precious good care he isn't allowed a chance to do anything of the kind. I can get some blankets from the hotel, and we'll sleep right there on the deck. Do you think I'll stand still and let that little wretch do as he pleases with what is the same as mine — for I shall own one-half of her for the summer as soon as I've invested my five dollars.”

“Let's go and talk with Aunt Hannah about it. She's the best woman that ever lived in this world, Spence, an' now she's made up her mind we can do as we want to with the hulk, she'll stick right by all the time.”

“Come on, then; but we mustn't stay long, for fear the Admiral will come back. I was mighty glad when Aunt Hannah called him Joseph J. Johnson, because that showed she was in earnest, and I could see it scared him.”

The boys were soon at the cottage, but when

Matt pushed open the door they drew back as if alarmed.

Near the door, crying as if in sore distress, was Aunt Hannah on her knees, clutching firmly the chair in front of which she knelt as she rocked to and fro.

Spence stepped softly down from the threshold to the sandy path bordered with stunted plants of tansy, and beckoned to his partner.

“What do you suppose is the matter with her?” he asked in a whisper. “She didn’t look as if she was sick when she made the Admiral draw in his horns.”

“I dunno what’s up; we’ll hold on here a spell till she quiets down, and then we’ll hear all about it.”

In silence the two waited, keeping sharp watch on the wreck meanwhile, lest the man whom they considered their enemy should return, and when ten minutes or more had elapsed, Aunt Hannah opened the door which Matt had partially closed.

“Are you tired of working?” she asked in a mild voice, the tone of which was “tearful.”

“We come to talk ’bout what the Admiral said, but you was takin’ on so I was afraid somethin’ had gone wrong,” Matt replied.

“Something *has* gone wrong, Matthew,” Aunt Hannah said, softly. “I was a wicked old woman to lose my temper simply because I *thought* the Admiral was in the wrong, and”——

“I don’t see how you could help getting mad when he talked the way he did,” Spence interrupted.

“If he was unreasonable there was all the more cause for me to remember that ‘he that is slow to anger is better than the mighty.’ I know ‘a soft answer turneth away wrath,’ but yet I did not speak it.”

“I don’t see how you could, Aunt Hannah, when he was threatening about what he’d do,” Spence said stoutly. “Now he declares he’ll burn the wreck if he can’t do any better.”

“We’ll hope he’ll be more reasonable after he has had time to think the matter over,” Aunt Hannah replied placidly; “but even though he should work you harm, we must not allow ourselves to display anger.”

“It can’t be helped, an’ I don’t intend to stand it. Matt, you keep watch of the wreck, an’ I’ll go over to the hotel. Father will tell us what to do, and we’ll see if that little wretch is to be allowed to carry on in this way.”

“When will you be back?”

“I won't be gone more than half an hour. Keep your eye open, and if the Admiral shows his nose 'round here, keep him off until I return.”

CHAPTER IV.

ON GUARD.

WHEN Spence started off at full speed for a consultation with his father, Aunt Hannah went into the kitchen, much to Matt's surprise.

"I'd give considerable to know what she's got on her mind," Master Turner said to himself. "It don't seem reasonable that she'd lose sich a good chance to tell me about the badness of losin' my temper, 'cause that's what she's strong in, an' yet here's this time all goin' to waste. It must be she don't want to soften me up too much on the Admiral's account. She's awful good, Aunt Hannah is, but if she was the worst woman in the world she couldn't know for a fact how many cents there are to a dollar, better'n she does now. The money I showed her proves what a big thing can be made out of the wreck, an' she ain't goin' to lose no sich chances as we've got now. Ninety cents clear profit before we'd got fixed up for company! Why she works all day knittin', for half a dollar, an'

thinks she's mighty lucky when she has work. I reckon Aunt Hannah don't want to take on her own shoulders the blame of fightin' with her neighbors; but is willin' I should jump down on the Admiral rather than give up the show business."

Matt was interrupted in his revery by the unexpected appearance of Mrs. Ezra Jordan from around the point, and he muttered to himself as he went hurriedly toward the wreck:—

"Now I reckon all the old women in the village will come to talk the trouble over with Aunt Hannah. The Admiral must have let on that there'd been a row, an they'll be here thicker'n spatter 'tween now an' night."

He was convinced of the truth of his statement a few moments later, before Mrs. Jordan could gain the house, for two more ladies came in sight, both evidently bent on a visit to the cottage.

"The Admiral must have kept hisself mighty busy runnin' 'round tellin' what happened over here, else the folks wouldn't be showin' up so soon. There won't be any need of my goin' home till after sunset."

Then Matt set about the task of building the gangway; but before he had well begun his labors a visitor, who had come especially to see him, arrived.

The new arrival was Joey Pendleton, a boy who lived at the village nearly two miles away, and no words were necessary to convince Matt that he was in a high state of excitement.

“What kind of a row have you been pickin’ up with Admiral J.?” Joey asked while he was yet some distance away.

“What made you think there’d been any trouble?”

“’Cause he come up to the village after a warrant to have you arrested. I thought sure he’d lug you right off to jail; but Squire Kelley wouldn’t do what the old man wanted.”

“You mean the Squire wouldn’t give him a warrant?”

“That’s the size of it, an’ the Admiral is tearin’ mad. He says he’ll burn the wreck. Say, what is it you’re goin’ to do with her?”

Matt explained his scheme in detail, and Joey’s eyes opened wide with surprise as he learned how much “good money” was to be invested in the enterprise.

“Five dollars oughter buy a heap of stuff, Matt. I don’t reckon Mr. Hewey’s got much more in all his store.”

“Now you’re ’way outer your reckonin’, Joey, ’cause there’s plenty things at Hewey’s that cost as

much as five dollars apiece. But we'll have a nifty kind of a place in a small way," Matt added with an air of pride.

"It won't last long if the Admiral does as he threatens."

"We'll watch so sharp that he can't get the chance."

"I don't see how you're goin' to do that, less you stay right here all the time. Now if you had some feller to help out on the watchin', it would be different. Don't you want to hire a clerk, eh?"

"We can't afford to, Joey; but if you'll kinder keep track of the Admiral till he simmers down a bit, we'll make it all right with you."

"I'll be willin' to do all that I can; but if I was reg'larly hired of course I'd be bound to do more. — Hello, who's this feller?"

"That's my partner," Matt replied, as he looked in the direction pointed out by his friend, and saw Spence approaching, literally bending under the burden he carried.

"An' has he really got five whole dollars to spend as he likes, or has he been stuffin' you?"

"I saw the money, an' he's got more when that's gone. What's that on your back, Spence?" he shouted to the perspiring boy in the distance.

"A lot of blankets Mr. Atwood lent me. Father

says I can sleep aboard to take care of the property, an' he's goin to buy an awnin' to cover the deck; after that comes it'll be jest like livin' in a tent to stay on the wreck."

"Then your father must have thought there was some danger the Admiral would do what he's threatened?"

"He says he shouldn't be surprised if the old man might be so foolish as to try," and Spence threw his heavy burden on the ground at the foot of the gangway with a long sigh of relief. "Won't your Aunt Hannah let you stay on board, too?"

"I reckon so; I can't ask her now, 'cause she's got company, an' bound to have a slat more before sunset. This is Joey Pendleton, Spence; he's a friend of mine that's come down from the village to tell me the Admiral has been tryin' to get a warrant to have me arrested."

"He may find there's one out for him if he don't leave us alone," Spence said regarding the information given, and by way of acknowledging the introduction added to Joey, "Don't you want to stop here with us to-night?"

"I'd like to, first-class; but I'll have to go home an' ask mother."

"All right; skip along now, an' while you're

in the village find out what the Admiral is doing.”

Joey would have been willing to do very much more in order to gain such an invitation from the “city chap,” and he hurried off in high glee, thanking his stars that the Admiral had seen fit to raise a disturbance over the wreck.

Spence proceeded to take on board the wreck the articles loaned by Mr. Atwood, and as a matter of course Matt assisted him, if for no other reason than to learn of what the outfit consisted.

He had three blankets, a pillow, two candles, and a generous supply of bread, cheese and cookies.

At this particular time in the month the tides were running low, and it had been so many days since the cabin floor was overflowed by the ocean that everything appeared perfectly dry. The sleeping berths were yet intact, and in one of them Spence placed the blankets, saying as he did so:—

“We couldn’t have a nicer place than this, an’ I hope the Admiral won’t altogether give up trying to drive us away, for just so long as he’s making a row I can stay here.”

“It’ll be fine if I can come; but the whole crowd of Jordans and Turners are visitin’ Aunt

Hannah, an' it'll be 'cordin' to how they look at the Admiral's breakin' out, whether she'll let me come or not. I'd be dreadful sorry if the Admiral should get a chance to burn the vessel, Spence, 'cause we're goin' to make a pile of money out of her; but I'd rather he'd smash her ten times over than for me to do what Aunt Hannah has set her head against. She's an awful good woman, Spence, an' has done a sight for me."

"Well, we won't talk about it now, 'cause most likely she'll say yes when you ask her. There's no need of our stayin' in the cabin here, and we'd better get to work on the gangway."

While they acted the part of amateur carpenters, after rather a poor fashion, Spence gave an account of his doings at the hotel after having made arrangements for "camping-out" on the wreck.

"I gave Mr. Atwood the five dollars, and when he goes into the city to-morrow morning to do the marketing, he will buy for us whatever he thinks we can sell. Father is going to send in for an awning, and there is a chance he can find one ready-made that will fit the wreck; if he does, we'll be in great shape twenty-four hours from now. I heard some of the boarders talking about coming down here in the morning; but I asked

them to wait till afternoon, for by that time we shall have things in pretty good shape."

Then the boys discussed the prospects for business, and the chances that Admiral J. would succeed in doing them any mischief, working industriously meanwhile until Joey Pendleton arrived, panting heavily because of the severe exertion of running, but looking so triumphant and happy that there was no need of asking if his mother had given him permission to remain all night.

"The Admiral's gone home," he shouted, so impatient to unfold his budget of news that he began while he was yet a hundred paces away. "He found there wasn't any chance of gettin' a warrant to have you fellows arrested; but he told 'Siah Fernald you shouldn't take possession of this 'ere wreck 'less something serious happened to him."

"That means he's countin' on burnin' her, as he threatened!" Matt exclaimed in dismay. "I *was* in hope she'd give over anything of that kind."

"If he don't he'll find himself in a heap of trouble," Spence added quickly. "Father and Mr. Atwood are on our side, and that little bow-legged man won't stand much chance against them. I suppose you're going to stay with us all night, Joey?"

“ Yes, mother said I might stop as long as you fellers wanted me, if I’d agree not to go in swimmin’, ’cause she’s afraid of the under-tow.”

“ What is that? ”

“ It’s when the surf pulls your feet out from under you.”

Spence looked inquiringly at Matt, and the latter said: —

“ Joey is right. When the waves are high the upper part of them sets in towards the shore, while the lower portion of the water kinder sucks out in such a way that it pulls a feller as if there was a rope tied to his legs.”

“ I’ve been in bathing, but never felt anything of that kind.”

“ Admiral J. says its owin’ to the shape of the beach — I s’pose it slopes off in such a way that the water must begin to run out before the whole of the wave has come in. I don’t reckon you understand what I mean; but your father will explain it.”

“ Then you don’t go in swimming here? ”

“ Sometimes we take chances; but it is better to go down near the Surf House, where there isn’t any danger. Aunt Hannah don’t like to have me run the risk here.”

“ I’d like to find out how it feels.”

“Don’t ever try it,” Matt said gravely. “I got caught in it once when the surf wasn’t very strong, an’ if Aunt Hannah hadn’t been right down here on the shore with a clothes-line in her hand, I’d never got out.”

Then Joey told in a low, awe-inspiring tone, of two friends of his who had been drowned within a few yards of that very spot, having been caught by the under-tow, and when Spence turned to Matt for confirmation of the story, the latter said sorrowfully:

“Yes, I was there, an’ did the best I knew how to get ’em out, but it wasn’t any use. Better do your swimmin’ down by the Surf House, same’s the rest of us fellers.”

The boys had stopped work while Joey was telling his sad tale, and Spence had moved as if to resume the labor, when Aunt Hannah’s visitors appeared at the door of the cottage.

“The callers are goin’,” Matt said cheerily, “an’ now we’ll know what Admiral J. has been tellin’ ’em. Come up to the house an’ hear the news.”

Aunt Hannah was on the narrow platform dignified by the name of veranda, watching her friends as they disappeared among the sand-dunes, when the boys came up, and from the expression on her face it could readily be understood that she was disturbed in mind.

“You’ve been havin’ lots of visitors, Aunt Hannah,” Joey Pendleton said by the way of opening the conversation, as he seated himself on the doorstep.

“What are you doin’ down here?” she asked abruptly, but not ungraciously.

“I’m goin’ to stay all night on board the wreck, to watch out for the Admiral,” Joey replied half apologetically. “You see he’s been over to the village threatening what he’d do, an’ —”

“Spence’s father and Mr. Atwood thought it would be safer if somebody stayed on her for a while,” Matt interrupted. “Spence has brought a lot of bed-clothes over from the hotel; Joey’s mother says he can stay, an’ I want to be with ’em, Aunt Hannah. Can I?”

“I don’t know as it is exactly safe, Matt dear,” and the expression of anxiety on Aunt Hannah’s face deepened. “The Admiral has been makin’ terrible threats, an’ I’m afraid he’ll carry them out before he has time to think the matter over properly.”

“Then there’s all the more reason why we should look out for her,” and Spence pointed towards the wreck. “To-morrow father is goin’ to buy an awning, so the visitors can sit in the shade, an’ we’re to have four or five settees. I’ve given

Mr. Atwood my five dollars to purchase the things we count on selling, an' of course it wouldn't do for anything to happen to her now."

"I wish you an' Matthew had never got sich a scheme into your heads, for I'm really afraid trouble will come of it. Admiral J. declares she's common property, an' that he'll destroy her rather than let you boys make money by usin' her as a circus."

"What do the Jordans think about it?" Matt asked eagerly.

"I shouldn't be bound by their opinions any sooner than I would by the Turners', but yet every one I have seen appears to think Admiral J. is actin' foolishly."

"Of course he is," Spence said promptly; "and you won't make any objection to Matt's sleeping on board, will you?"

"I don't see how you boys could stop the Admiral from doing as he likes."

"Just let him try to destroy her, an' he'll find out!" Spence exclaimed, and, understanding that this was not the proper argument to gain Aunt Hannah's consent, Matt added:—

"It ain't likely he'd do anything when he found out there was folks on board. If he really counts on settin' her afire, as he said in the village, he'd

never be so wild as to take the chances of burnin' us up."

"You mustn't attempt to fight with him, Matt."

"N—o, not — not exactly that, but we can warn him off if he comes around."

Spence appeared to have suddenly become deeply interested in a sun-dried star-fish on the sand, and moved a short distance away, hoping by such manœuvre to prevent Aunt Hannah's insisting on his promising to keep the peace in case Admiral J. came prowling around. He was determined to do battle manfully rather than allow what he considered his property to be destroyed, but at the same time he understood that if Aunt Hannah should believe anything of the kind might be possible, she would never consent to Matt's remaining on board all night.

Fortunately, according to Spence's way of thinking, the good woman did not consider it necessary to bind him with a promise, and after a brief argument she told Matt he might do as he chose; but insisted that the three boys should have a "decent" supper at the cottage.

"What you brought from the hotel can be eaten during the evening," she said, and, in obedience to a gesture from Matt, Spence consented to this slight change in the program.

Aunt Hannah did not appear to think it necessary she should repeat to the boys what her visitors had told her regarding the Admiral's threats, but Matt felt quite positive that both the Turners and the Jordans had advised his aunt to resist the little man's claim of ownership in the wreck.

The sun was yet two hours high in the heavens when supper had been served, and there was nothing to prevent the self-elected watchers from going to their post of supposed duty.

Aunt Hannah would not venture upon the hulk, owing to her fear of being stricken with the "rheumatiz"; but she stood near by on the shore while the boys convinced her they had an ample supply of blankets by holding each up in turn, and after this had been done the good woman, with many a caution to the watchers against exposing themselves unnecessarily to the night air, went slowly back to the tiny cottage.

"Now we're in for it!" Spence exclaimed triumphantly, when they were alone. "I didn't promise not to fight in case that bow-legged Admiral came nosing around, neither did Joey, so I reckon he'll have a tough job to get on board this craft."

"Did your father say we had a right to prevent him from so much as comin' over the rail?"

“ He told me to warn him off in your name, and then to threaten if he attempted to get on board.”

“ Did he tell you to use force ? ”

“ Well, he didn't say exactly that,” Spence replied, hesitatingly ; “ but it must have been what he meant. Now how shall we fix it about standing watch ? ”

I guess we can go below for a spell, first. If the Admiral really counts on makin' mischief he won't come in broad daylight, an' I'd like to get the cabin fixed up home-like before dark.”

After a long look around to assure himself there were no evil-disposed persons in sight, Matt led the way into the cabin, and in less than ten minutes the “ housework ” was done.

The blankets had been spread neatly in the widest berth ; the candles were laid out on a beam with a supply of matches close at hand ; the food brought from the hotel was placed where it would look most inviting, and then the watchers disposed themselves in more or less comfortable positions in the little cuddy to wait until it should be time to act the part of sentinel.

Spence, who had been speculating upon what the boys told him of the undertow, inquired regarding the dangers of this particular portion of the beach, with the result that Joey described once more the drowning of his friends.

When that subject was finally dismissed because it was too mournful, Matt repeated the story as told him by Admiral J. of the murderous attacks of the Indians, a hundred years or more ago, along this very shore, and when the details of the many massacres had been given, the care-takers of the wreck were decidedly nervous.

Spence proposed they should go on deck, and the others acted upon the suggestion with alacrity.

Then Joey, eager to further entertain his friends, pointed out, on the road leading to the village, a certain gnarled, dying oak-tree, whereon, a century before, three Indians had been hanged for murdering four children, and insisted on telling the tale with as many blood-curdling accessories as he had ever heard, or could possibly invent.

Spence no longer cared to remain on deck, for his eyes would persist in wandering toward that sinister-looking tree despite all efforts to the contrary, and when at his invitation the little party had gathered in the cabin once more, all were in a most gloomy frame of mind.

The sun was sinking behind the distant hills, and the shadows on the tiny cuddy took fantastic shapes which suggested certain incidents in the stories just repeated.

The incoming tide had risen until it filled the

hollows in the sand around the stern-post of the wreck, and was gurgling and sighing in a particularly doleful manner, while from every portion of the old hulk came noises well calculated to make a nervous boy start in alarm.

“I never heard anything like this when I was down here before,” Spence said in a whisper, as he glanced furtively over his shoulder at the open companion-way.

“I reckon we wasn’t keeping as still as we are now,” Matt replied, in the same low tone.

“What is that swishing noise?”

“The tide’s comin’ in.”

“How high up will it get?”

“It won’t come over the floor now; but in a couple of weeks this cabin will be awash with water.”

“Don’t you think we’d better sleep on deck? It won’t be cold, and then we’ll have a better chance to watch out for the Admiral.”

“I ain’t sure but I’d best go home,” Joey said as Spence rose to his feet.

“I thought your mother said you could stay here all night.”

“So she did; but now I come to think of it, I’m ’fraid she’ll be worried ’bout me.”

“Of course you can go if you want to,” Matt

replied at he hurried on deck without daring to look behind him. "I reckon two of us will be a match for Admiral J."

"Will you fellers walk through the pines with me?"

"We can't do that, Joey, for somebody might come while we were ashore."

"Then I guess I won't go," and Master Pendleton seated himself on the shattered rail, fixing his eyes upon the friendly gleam of light in Aunt Hannah's window as if the yellow glow was needed to animate his courage.

CHAPTER V.

THREE ERRORS.

THAT Joey Pendleton was alarmed, and without cause, was apparent to both his companions, but yet they did not make sport of his fears as they might have done at another time.

It is probable that both Spence and Matt were as ill at ease as Master Pendleton, although neither would have been willing to admit it. Each did his best to appear as if he was not disturbed in mind, but neither wandered very far from the other; it was as if all three preferred, just at that time, close companionship.

There was a great deal of satisfaction to be found in the glow of Aunt Hannah's light; but even as they watched it the flame was extinguished, and Matt whispered: —

“She's said her prayers, an' gone to bed.”

“I suppose that's what we'd better do,” Spence replied in what he intended should be a careless

tone, but yet he made no attempt to act upon his own suggestion.

“I thought we was goin’ to stand watch,” Joey said after a brief pause.

“That’s what we came here for, but I don’t suppose there’s any need of all hands staying awake. We may as well take turns.”

“I’ll begin the work; you and Matt may go to sleep if you can.”

“But it don’t seem just right to leave you up here alone, Joey.”

“If you don’t do it some one will have to go into the cabin by himself, an’ that’ll be worse than stayin’ here.”

“You’re right,” Spence said emphatically, but yet he did not appear inclined to go below. “Suppose all hands of us stay on deck; it’ll be more sociable?”

Spence’s companions were willing to act upon this suggestion; but it was necessary all three should bring the bedding from the cabin, for neither member of the party seemed willing either to go below, or remain on deck, alone.

The cuddy was black with the darkness of night; strange noises apparently came from the hold; the water gurgled and moaned in the most foolish fashion, and no one objected when Spence lighted a match before venturing down the narrow stairs.

Once in the cabin the watchmen wasted no time ; each grasped such articles as were nearest at hand, and then ran up the narrow stairway with all possible speed.

The twinkling stars seemed very friendly when the boys emerged, and Spence said with a sigh of relief, as he carried his share of the blankets as far as possible from the sinister-looking aperture that led below : —

“ I need a good deal of air nights, and even if it should be a little cold up here, it'll be more wholesome.”

“ An' by fixin' it this way we'll all be on hand in case the Admiral comes,” Matt added as he laid himself by Spence's side, while Joey crept close to the former's back, wishing he had been sufficiently wise to have secured a position between his companions, instead of on the outside.

Now that they were covered with the blankets, and lying where they could see the stars, there seemed less reason for alarm, and during the next ten minutes the watchmen conversed in cheery tones.

Then suddenly, sounding as if it had come from the very depths of the empty hold, could be heard what was neither more nor less than a moan, and a very ghostly one at that.

The hum of conversation ceased instantly ; Joey crept yet closer to Matt, who in turn crowded upon Spence, and it has been said that the latter covered his head with the blanket.

While they might have counted ten the three remained silent and motionless, hardly daring to breathe, when the dreadful noise was heard again, this time so distinctly that it was as if the person or thing that uttered it had approached nearer.

“What is it?” Joey asked in the most timid of whispers, and one would have said from his tone that the tears were very near his eyelids.

Spence gave no sign that he heard the question, while Matt simply replied by clasping Joey’s hand tightly.

There was another interval of breathless silence, and again was heard the terrible sound.

Now the boys were literally trembling with fear, and all might have leaped over the side in another moment to seek the protecting shelter of Aunt Hannah’s home, but for the fact that the splash of oars in the water told of human beings in the vicinity.

“Admiral J.’s coming!” Spence whispered as he quickly arose to a sitting posture, and one would have said from the sound of his voice that a possible visit from their enemy was most welcome at that moment.

Now that the silence had been broken Matt dared rise to his feet, and as he stood for an instant looking over the waters at a black object which rose and fell on the swell, the dreadful moaning came again from the yet more dreadful hold.

Although he claimed the wreck as his own because she had drifted ashore on his land, Matt no longer cared about holding possession, but with a stifled cry leaped over the rail, striking the shallow water below with a mighty splash.

Before the echoes of this noise had died away Spence and Joey joined their friend, leaving the hulk in the same manner, and causing the same commotion when they reached the water-covered sand.

“What’s the matter ashore there?” a voice cried from the approaching boat.

No reply was made to this hail, but even though the watchmen were bewildered by their fears, they realized that the words had not been spoken by Admiral J.

“Ahoy on the wreck!”

“Ahoy there!” Matt replied after a brief pause, and his voice trembled so much that even Aunt Hannah would not have recognized it as his.

“What’s going on? Is there any trouble?”

“Yes sir,” Spence cried emphatically, “there is

somebody in the hold of this wreck making a terrible time.”

“Who is it?”

“I don’t know; we didn’t hear the noise till a few minutes ago.”

The boatman had evidently been resting on his oars as he asked the questions, for now the splashing of water could be heard again, and in a short time the bow of the craft grated on the sand, the noise sounding in the ears of the frightened boys like the sweetest music.

“Hello, why are you standin’ knee-deep in the water?” the newcomer asked as he leaped ashore.

“I didn’t know we were,” Spence muttered as if half ashamed, and straightway he walked up on the beach a few feet beyond the reach of the tiny waves, followed by his fellow watchmen.

“Don’t you work over to the Surf House?” Matt asked a moment later as the stranger came so near that the boy could faintly distinguish his features in the gloom.

“Yes, I’m in charge of the boats there, and was sent by one of the boarders to see if two boys who counted on sleeping aboard this wreck were all right.”

“It must have been father who sent you,” Spence cried in a tone of relief, “and it’s lucky you came just as you did.”

“What’s wrong? What do you mean when you say there’s somebody in the hold?”

“We mean just what we say,” Spence replied, grown very bold now assistance was near at hand. “Keep quiet a moment, and you will hear the groaning.”

It was not necessary to wait many seconds before the noise was repeated, and the boatman waited until he had heard it a dozen times before he spoke. Then it was to say with a laugh:—

“You boys got so frightened that you jumped overboard, eh?”

“I was going ashore, and didn’t think about using the gangway,” Spence said hesitatingly, hardly caring to admit that he had been terrified. But Joey Pendleton was not so sensitive.”

“I was frightened for a fact,” he replied decidedly, “an’ I’m scared now.”

“Well, I’ll allow it ain’t calculated to make any man feel really comfortable unless he knows just what causes it. I had to wait a spell before I could figger the thing out, but I’ve got it down fine now.”

“What is it?” Matt asked impatiently.

“The tide’s come in, the water is forcing its way through one of the splintered timbers where the sand most likely makes an air-chamber, and it’s

an accidental contrivance something after the fashion of a whistling buoy. Watch the waves, and you'll find that the noise is made when the third ripple — always the highest — comes in."

"If that is true we should have heard it when we first came aboard," Joey said, quite confident the boatman had made a big mistake, or was trying to claim credit for being more wise than really was the case.

"You didn't hear it then because the tide was low; when the water got up to the hole in the timber it began, and it'll stop after the hold is flooded. If you've got a light I can come pretty near pointing out the very spot," and the man clambered on board."

The candles were lying on the deck where they had been dropped when brought from the cabin, and one of these was lighted, after which all the party leaned over the open hatch-way while the tiny flame was lowered the length of the man's arm.

"There you are!" the boatman cried after a brief examination. "Watch near the port side forward, and you'll see a jet of water rise when the air is forced out."

Not until they heard the sound at the instant the thread of spray rose from the surface, could

the boys believe the visitor from the Surf House had given a true explanation of that which had alarmed them so greatly, and then Matt said emphatically:—

“I’m ashamed of myself, an’ that’s a fact. Of course I knew there couldn’t be such things as ghosts; but yet when I went over the rail it seemed certain there was somethin’ unearthly in this wreck.”

“Don’t you count on changing your clothes?” the stranger asked as he lighted another match that he might survey the boys whom he had saved from the danger of their own fears.

“I don’t know how we can do so without awakenin’ Aunt Hannah, an’ that I wouldn’t be willin’ to do, ’cause she says she never sleeps very much during the rest of the night if she is roused jest after she has gone to bed.”

“Better do that than run the risk of catching cold. It will be chilly here before midnight, and wet clothes won’t help matters any.”

“I wouldn’t be willin’ to waken Aunt Hannah.”

“I’ll take you over to the Surf House an’ back, if one of you will pull an oar.”

“How long will you be gone?” Spence asked.

“We can row each way in fifteen mtnutes. How much longer you are away than that will depend upon the time you spend in the house.”

“Suppose we go, Matt? I shall feel a good deal more comfortable with dry clothes on, and mother’ll find enough for you and Joey.”

“There’s no need of my going, for I’m often soaked like this, and, besides, I wouldn’t like to leave the wreck alone. You and Joey can make the trip, an’ I’ll stay here.”

“Won’t you be afraid?”

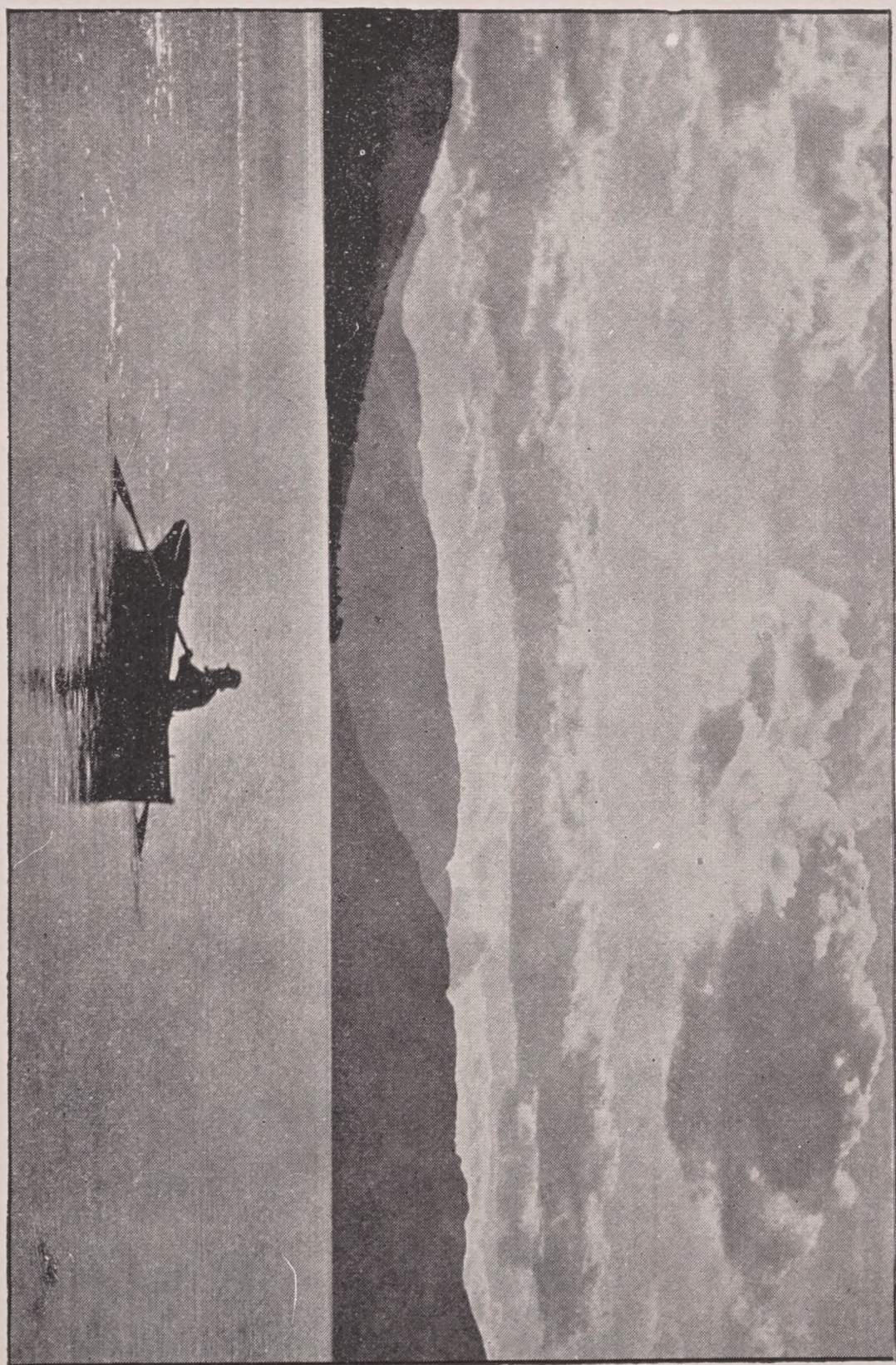
“Not much,” Matt replied with a cheery laugh. “After makin’ a fool of myself once this evenin’, it ain’t likely I’ll play the same game over again.”

Spence hesitated only because he did not think it fair to leave his partner alone; but the latter insisted he was perfectly willing to remain, and finally the boys set out with the accommodating stranger, Master Richmond crying as the little craft glided away from the hulk:—

“We’ll be back in less than half an hour, an’ you can amuse yourself by pitching into the provisions — I’ll bring more.”

“Stay as long as you like, for I’ll be all right.”

Then Matt watched the rapidly disappearing boat until she was swallowed up by the darkness, after which he fell to pacing forward and aft in what he believed to be true nautical fashion, listening to the moaning as it grew fainter and fainter, thus telling that the hold of the hulk was being filled with water.



After this one fright, Matt assured himself he would never be nervous again without reasonable cause, and as a means of employing the time began speculating upon the amount of money he and Spence would make when the wreck was properly fitted up for the reception of visitors.

He made mental note of many new things he would buy for Aunt Hannah with his earnings, chief among which was a "real silk" dress, and the longer he dwelt upon the possibilities the more positive was he that their profits during the summer would be exceedingly large.

"It wouldn't s'prise me a bit if I'd get enough to shingle the house an' give it a new coat of paint. I'd lay in plenty to eat this winter, an' could then go to school instead of hangin' 'round Hewey's store for jobs that don't pay fifty cents a week. We'd fare mighty slim sometimes if I didn't have the chance to do that, an' it ain't jest square to turn my nose up at what has given us bread many a time, jest 'cause I see a chance to earn more. Besides, it ain't dead certain the wreck will turn out to be as good a thing as I'm countin' on, an' I may be mighty glad to watch for the jobs before winter is over."

He came to a halt both in his walk and speculations, for at that instant he heard the sound of

oars apparently in the distance, and there was no question in his mind but that Spence and Joey were returning.

“I didn’t think they’d got there yet,” he said to himself. “I reckon Spence hurried ’cause he thought I’d be frightened. There ain’t no call for a feller to get scared if he’ll keep his mind off of foolish things, the way I’ve been doin’.”

Then he seated himself on the combing of the open hatch, listening to the faint sound of the oars.

“They’re a long way off, an’ by the time the boat pulls up alongside I guess I’ll think they’ve been gone a full hour.

During ten minutes he could distinguish the faint sound, and then it was as if it died away entirely.

“It wasn’t them after all,” he muttered; “an’ I might have known they couldn’t have gone there an’ back, if I’d stopped to think that I wasn’t walkin’ the deck more’n ten minutes — ”

Then he was startled by a slight shock as if the side of the hulk had been struck by a mallet, and then all was still.

Save for the fact that he had foolishly allowed himself to be terrified by the whistling of the waves, he might have been alarmed now; but he put all idea of fear from his mind, and would not even walk aft to learn what had caused the noise.

Matt was making as grave a mistake now as he had an hour previous, for while acting the part of watchman it was his duty to know, or at least endeavor to learn, the cause of every unusual sound.

Therefore it was that he remained in ignorance of what was going on until, turning by chance toward the stern, he saw a man's head rising above the rail.

It was so dark he could not distinguish the features, but his first thought was that his companions had returned, and were bent on trying his nerves once more.

The deck-house, which was between him and the new-comer, partially screened him from view, and if Spence was creeping on board to frighten him, it might be some time before he could carry out his plan.

“The fellers think I'm in the cabin, an' I'll wait here till they creep down. Then perhaps it won't be me who'll get a scare.”

He had no suspicion of the true state of affairs until the intruder had clambered upon the rail and stood outlined like a silhouette against the sky.

Then it was as if his heart literally leaped into his throat, for the pair of bowed legs before him could be owned by none other than Admiral J.

“I stayed here to watch that he didn't get aboard,

an' have been sittin' on this combin' like a chump, lettin' him do as he liked," Matt thought, and then came into his mind the fact that he was at a disadvantage.

He could have prevented the little man from clambering on board with little difficulty; but now that the enemy had accomplished so much unmolested, he was more than a match for the boy.

Matt looked around quickly in the hope of seeing something which would serve as a weapon, although he knew the decks were swept bare. On the outside, where they had been at work on the gangway, could be found an ample supply of clubs, and with a stout stick in his hand, Master Turner would have considered himself more than a match for the Admiral.

But such weapons were not for him, since he could not move without betraying himself to the visitor, and it seemed more than probable that Admiral J. would be able to do as he pleased.

"This is the second time to-night that I've made a fool of myself," he muttered, "an' it's once too often, for now that little wretch can come pretty nigh doin' as he threatened."

The Admiral stepped cautiously down to the deck; tip-toed to the companion-way, and stood for an instant in the attitude of a listener.

He had probably expected Matt and his partner would be there, but, hearing nothing, must have concluded he was alone on the wreck, for he ceased to move about cautiously, but went here or there boldly, without heed as to the noise he might make.

Matt saw him take from his pocket something which had the appearance of a bottle, and this was followed by what might have been pieces of wood.

The odor of kerosene rose on the air, and now the boy knew the Admiral was preparing to burn the wreck.

Matt had but little hope that he could, unaided, prevent the man from carrying out his plan; but he did not intend to see that which he considered his property destroyed, without making every effort to prevent it.

“What are you about?” he cried suddenly, causing the little man to start in what was very like alarm. “You stand a good show of bein’ sent to jail for business like this.”

For a single instant it appeared as if the Admiral was about to make his escape. He turned toward the rail, and had laid his hand upon it, much as though to leap over, when he must have suddenly understood who had spoken.

Then he wheeled around, and came rapidly toward Matt with a stick, or cane, upraised ready to strike.

“So you are here, eh?” he cried savagely. “You thought you would keep me from doin’ as I threatened?”

“That’s what I’m here for, an’ we’ll see whether you dare set fire to this wreck!” Matt cried, speaking as boldly as if he was well armed. Dare to so much as light a match, an’ I’ll knock the head off your shoulders!”

The Admiral stepped back a few paces, and then seeing that Matt was empty-handed, rushed forward again to seize him.

It was not a difficult matter for the boy to elude the little man, and he ran swiftly aft with no definite plan in mind until he saw the bottle of oil lying on the deck-house.

Seizing this he turned quickly, intending to use it as a club; but the Admiral was not to be caught napping. He stepped nimbly back that he might the better strike with his cane, and Matt cried:—

“I shall knock you down with this bottle if I get a chance, you sneak! I promised Aunt Hannah not to fight with you; but she wouldn’t say a word against it if she knew what you was tryin’ to do. Look out for yourself, I say! I’ll give

you two minutes to get over the rail, an' if you're not gone in that time I'll do all the mischief I can."

Admiral J. made no reply, and Matt fancied he had suddenly grown alarmed.

"I'll promise not to strike while you're goin' over the side," the boy cried, as he stepped back a pace, and lowered his impromptu weapon.

This was the third error Matt had made since sunset, and was too serious to admit of being certified.

When he gave way that the visitor might beat a retreat he laid himself open to an attack from the Admiral, who was not slow to take advantage, and before Matt had time to realize that his enemy was not doing as he had been bidden, the little man's cane came down upon his head with such force that he was stricken to the deck, senseless.

CHAPTER VI.

FIGHTING FIRE.

SPENCE had thought, when he left the wreck, that he should not remain at the Surf House longer than fifteen minutes; but after his arrival there the time passed more rapidly than he realized, and half an hour elapsed before he was ready to return.

Neither he nor his companions fancied there was any necessity for rapid traveling. Strange as it may seem, he had no idea Admiral J. might attempt to work mischief that night, even though he and his partner were to spend the night on board the hulk for no other purpose than to guard against an attack.

Both the boys had been fitted out with dry clothes, and, after a hearty lunch at the hotel, were feeling particularly cheerful.

Spence's father had said he did not believe the little man, however angry he was, would dare carry out the threats made, especially while watchers were on board the wreck, and this opin-

ion was, to Spence at least, almost a guarantee that they would remain in undisturbed possession of the property.

The boatman, who was well paid for his services, was willing to dispense with the assistance of his companions during the return trip, and the boys thoroughly enjoyed their ride over the restless waters.

“I allow you an’ Matt will make a heap of money this summer out’er that old hulk,” the man said, as he worked leisurely at the oars. “It’s queer nobody else thought of turnin’ her to account.”

“Perhaps the idea wasn’t used because Matt had a better right to her than anybody else.”

“An’ I allow he has, no matter what Admiral J. may say; but it wouldn’t been a costly job to have bought Matt’s interest. I allow he’d sold out mighty cheap a week ago.”

“And he may be willing to do so a week later, for it isn’t certain yet that we’ll get our money back.”

“I reckon there ain’t much fear. It seems as if the summer boarders had jest about gone wild over the idea of havin’ picnics on board. I’ve heard lots of ’em tellin’ what they’d do after you had her in shape for company. Them as never

thought of lookin' at the hulk before are nestlin' 'round terribly uneasy 'cause you haven't got her in shape, an' all on account of the threats the Admiral's been makin'; he's done you fellers a power of good while tryin' to work harm."

"In what way?"

"By settin' everybody to talkin'—advertisin' the show, so to speak."

"I expect he'll be wild if we make a few dollars."

"An' much good it'll do him. With a lawyer like your father to back you, an' Mr. Atwood, who owns the biggest part of the property hereabouts, as your friend, I reckon the Admiral don't stand much chance. If you rig up a few lanterns, an' keep the show open evenings, it'll bring me in a good bit of business, I'm thinkin'."

"We shall be ready for company as long as any one is willing to come," Spence replied with the air of a proprietor, and then, pointing to a dark object ahead, he asked, "Is that the wreck?"

"Sure; we're almost there, an' I allow Matt thinks it's high time. Why don't you hail him?"

Spence acted upon the suggestion at once by shouting at the full strength of his lungs:—

"Ahoy on the wreck! Ahoy! A-hoy!"

There was no reply, and the boatman added his

voice to Spence's until the watcher on the wreck must have been very deaf had he failed to hear the cries.

“Well, that's what I call queer!” the man said half to himself as he pulled vigorously, and an instant later Joey Pendleton shouted excitedly:—

“Look! Look there! Somebody's goin' over the rail!”

The oarsman did not turn his head, but pulled yet harder at the oars, for Matt's silence had given him good cause to believe some mischief was afoot.

“Did *you* see any one on the rail?” he asked, and Spence replied doubtfully:—

“I'm not certain. Just as Joey shouted it seemed as if I could make out a shadow moving” —

“Don't you s'pose I know anything when I see it?” Master Pendleton asked sharply. “It might have been Matt, who is tryin' to give us a scare, but somebody went over the rail, an' — There! Now you can see him in a boat!”

“Then it can't be Matt, for he hasn't a craft of any kind,” and a sensation of fear crept over Spence.

Now the boatman ceased his efforts sufficiently long to turn his head, and that which met his gaze caused him to give vent to an exclamation of anger.

“I can see some one now!” Spence shouted, and the man at the oars muttered angrily:—

“It’s that sneak of an Admiral up to some trick, but he shan’t get off so easy, for if I can’t row around him I’ll never take up a pair of oars again.”

“Are you countin’ on ketchin’ him?” Joey asked gleefully.

“That’s what I will do ’less something breaks. You two set still an’ keep your eyes on him, for he may try to double back on me. If I only had a rudder, so one of you could steer, this ’ere chase wouldn’t be a long one.”

“What will you do with him?” Joey asked, literally trembling with the excitement of a chase that had as yet hardly begun.

“Take the sneak to the Surf House, an’ give Lawyer Richmond a whack at him.”

“There’s a glow on the wreck now!” Spence cried, “Matt must have heard us, and has lighted the candles so we’ll know which way to steer.”

“He’s been ’round here too long to believe anything in the shape of a light is needed on a bright night like this,” the oarsman said sharply. “Hail him once more!”

“Matt! Matt! Are you there?”

No reply came, and in a few seconds latter Joey cried as he rose to his feet in excitement.



“It’s no candle-light! The wreck is afire, an’ that miserable Admiral has done what he said he would!”

“But where’s Matt?” Spence asked in perplexity, not realizing for the instant the full extent of the disaster which threatened.

“That’s what we’ve got to find out,” the oarsman said angrily, “though it rubs mightily agin the grain to let that little feller go scot free.”

“There won’t be any trouble about findin’ him to-morrow, an’ I hope Spence’s father will make him smart for what he’s done!” Joey exclaimed. “The flames don’t show yet, so I reckon he didn’t start the fire till after we’d hailed the wreck.”

The oarsman turned his head for a single instant to look, and said as he bent himself to his work:

“There’s a chance we may get there in time yet. I’ve got a big bailin’ dish, an’ the minute we come alongside we’ll go to work with it. Spence is to hunt for Matt, an’ Joey must get up to Miss Gordon’s house an’ back with a couple of water-pails in the best time he can make. Stand ready to do as I’ve said, the minute we strike the hulk. When I drop the oars, Joey, you pick ’em up an’ pull the dory hard aground—you can wade when you come back!”

The boat appeared to be literally leaping over

the waves under the impulse of the vigorous strokes, but yet to Spence it seemed as if she moved at a snail's pace, so great was his anxiety.

The fact that the task set him was to find Matt showed the boatman feared foul play, and he reproached himself bitterly with having loitered at the hotel.

"If I'd done my duty," he thought, "we might have gotten here in time to prevent all this, for I could have left fifteen minutes earlier without neglecting anything."

"The flames show plainer now," Joey cried, his voice trembling. "The fire is in the cabin, an' I don't allow you can do much in the way of puttin' it out."

"There is a chance if you attend to your part of the work in season. Luckily it's high water, and the wood-work of the cabin can't be very dry. If you find Matt, Spence, turn to an' help me, unless he's hurt badly."

"What makes you think he's hurt?" Joey asked, sharply."

"I don't allow he's run away from the Admiral, an' unless somethin' serious had happened he'd answered our hail. Stand ready to fend off, Spence, and give me the word when to stop pullin'."

Master Richmond took his station in the bow, and watched intently the rapidly brightening glow which was beginning to illuminate the deck.

The little craft was bounding over the waters as if conscious that speed was required of her, reeling from side to side when buffeted by a wave, and sending the spray high above her bow. The boatman held her steadily to the course, guided now and then by orders from Joey, and finally the race was over.

It was beyond the boy's power to prevent the dory from striking the side of the hulk with such force that she was hurled back several yards; but the oarsman, anticipating such a movement, pulled her forward again, and Spence clutched the rail.

Joey had hardly time to seize the oars before his companions had leaped upon the wreck, and then he rowed to the beach, putting resolutely from his mind all thoughts save that of performing his portion of the work most expeditiously.

Before one could have counted twenty he was on shore, running at full speed toward the house, shouting loudly as he ran: —

“Aunt Hannah! Aunt Hannah! Fire! Fire!”

The door of the cottage was opened before he gained the veranda, and, seeing a figure clad in white standing on the threshold, he cried, without slackening his pace: —

“We want buckets. Quick!”

Aunt Hannah did not waste valuable time by asking questions, and Joey had but just gained the door-way when the desired articles were thrust into his hands.

Meanwhile Spence and the boatman were doing their best to deaden the flames.

The former saw his partner lying on the deck, apparently lifeless, as he leaped over the rail, but before he could stoop to raise him up, Matt asked, in a tone of bewilderment: —

“Has the Admiral gone?”

“Yes, and the wreck’s on fire. Are you hurt much?”

“Never mind about me; I’m all right;” and Matt staggered to his feet, looking ghastly in the ruddy glow, with blood streaming down his cheeks.

The boatman was working rapidly with the bailing dish, but it was apparent that his efforts would be of no avail unless means of bringing a larger quantity of water could be obtained.”

“Jump ashore and help Joey,” the boatman cried, as Spence and Matt ran aft. “There’s a smell of kerosene here, and I reckon we’ve got a bigger contract than I figgered on.”

Spence darted forward, and had but just gained the bow, when from the shore Joey shouted: —

“Ketch these pails, an’ I’ll go back for rope. You can’t reach the water from the deck.”

“Come back an’ pass it up to us,” the boatman shouted. “The hulk would be a blaze before you’d put ropes to the buckets.

Joey dashed into the water manfully, and, standing waist deep by the side of the hulk, filled and passed up the pails as rapidly as Spence and the boatman could carry them aft.

Even this supply of water would not have been sufficient, but fortunately Aunt Hannah appeared on the scene at the instant with two more buckets.

“You must come and get ’em, Joey, for I shall have the rheumatiz, certain, if I get my feet wet. As it is, it seems like temptin’ Providence to come out here only half-dressed.”

By the time Joey had these additional implements in his possession, Matt had so far recovered from the bewilderment caused by the blow on his head as to be able to do his share of the work, and a plentiful supply of water was soon being poured into the cabin.

“We’ve got the upper hands now,” the boatman cried cheerily, as he darted to and fro. “The fire is bound to burn as long as the oil lasts, but I reckon we can keep it from doin’ much damage. It’s all right, Miss Gordon,” he added, raising his

voice ; “ you can get in out of the night air ; but I reckon you’d better not go to bed yet a while.”

“ As if I’d think of doin’ sich a thing ! ” Aunt Hannah exclaimed, indignantly ; but she followed the friendly advice without loss of time.

Ten minutes later the flames were so nearly subdued that the fire-fighters might well afford to work more leisurely, and Spence could not restrain his curiosity longer.

“ Did the Admiral and you have a regular pitched battle, Matt ? ”

“ He did most of the battlin’, I reckon,” was the grim reply. “ I don’t know much about it after the fuss began.”

Then Matt told in detail all that had occurred, and when he concluded Spence said angrily : —

“ Admiral J. shall suffer for this night’s work ! It’s nothing more nor less than an attempt at murder.”

“ I don’t s’pose he thought there was any chance of killin’ me with his cane.”

“ But you might have been burned to death if we hadn’t arrived just as we did. He left you senseless, with the wreck on fire.”

“ But he knew you fellers were comin’.”

“ Look here, Matt, it seems as if you was tryin’ to excuse that little wretch.”

“I ain’t, Spence, but I don’t want to make him out worse than he really is. I can’t think the Admiral would try to murder anyone.”

“He came mighty near doing it, at all events, and we’ll see what father has to say about it.”

“If I hadn’t been obleeged to stop here on account of the fire, I’d have settled matters with the bow-legged Admiral in sich a fashion that he’d never tried to play the same trick again. As it is, I’m countin’ on takin’ a trip over to his house on my own account.”

“It isn’t likely you’d find him there, and I think father should know at once what has been done.”

“Perhaps you’re right, an’ seein’s how there’s no need of my stoppin’ here any longer, I’ll pull over to the hotel before the folks go to bed. Matt better go home an’ let Aunt Hannah tie up his head, but you other fellows must stay on board till the last drop of oil is burned out. A couple of buckets now an’ then will do the work, an’ in half an hour from this time there’ll be no danger.”

As he spoke the man leaped over the bow, waded ashore to where his dory had been left by Joey, and was pulling rapidly away before either of the boys appeared to think it necessary to thank him for his timely assistance.

The little craft was disappearing in the darkness when Matt exclaimed, as if but just aware of what had been done: —

“We’ve let him go off without sayin’ a word!”

“And if he hadn’t been with us the wreck would be past all help by this time,” Spence added. “Neither Joey nor I could have rowed as fast, and there wasn’t many minutes to spare when we got here. “I’ll see him to-morrow, though, and he shan’t be sorry he did us such a good turn. Why don’t you go to the house now, Matt, and let Aunt Hannah fix you up? You look as though you’d been through two or three wars.”

“There’s no need of being in a hurry, an’ I want to make certain the fire is all out before I leave.”

“Don’t your head hurt?”

“It aches pretty bad.”

“Then go home, Joey and I’ll attend to the work here, and it would serve us right if we had to lug water all night, for if we’d hurried a little instead of loafing around the hotel, Admiral J. wouldn’t have had time to do all this.”

“I don’t believe much harm has been done.”

“Neither do I, but we shall know all about it very soon, for the fire is the same as extinguished. Go to Aunt Hannah, and I’ll come up as soon as it is safe to leave here.”

Matt obeyed his partner, for the wound on his head was causing him more pain than he was willing to admit, and when he entered the house he found Aunt Hannah, fully dressed, evidently preparing a meal.

“Ain’t gettin’ breakfast, are you?” he asked with an attempt to speak cheerily, but failing most seriously.

“Mercy sakes alive! What is the matter, Matthew? What has happened? You look as if you had been killed!”

“I reckon if it had been anything like that I wouldn’t be walkin’ around as lively as this. Admiral J. struck me with his cane before he set the wreck on fire.”

“Did that little, loud-mouthed—but there, I’m forgettin’ all my good intentions almost as soon as they were made. I won’t call the wicked man names; but it does seem as if I must say something! Tell me how it happened, Matt, dear, and I promise not to let my temper get the best of me very soon again.”

“You can’t say anything too hard against the Admiral, Aunt Hannah, an’ I think this is a case when we’ve got the right to be mad.”

“We haven’t forgiven him once yet, and we’re told that we should do so seventy times seven” —

“I’d be dead for certain long before we could forgive him half them times, Aunt Hannah, if he should come at me the same way very often.”

“We’ll hope the poor man didn’t realize what he was doin’.”

“Well, I had a pretty fine idea before he got through, an’ he’ll be a good deal smarter than I think he is, if he gets another such a chance at me.”

While talking, Aunt Hannah had been making ready to dress Matt’s wounds, and once she began there was no conversation indulged in, for a favorite rule of hers, which she often repeated both in and out of season, was :—

“Do one thing at a time, an’ do that with your whole mind.”

“There,” she said in a tone of satisfaction, after what had seemed to the patient like a very long while, “I guess you’re fixed up till to-morrow mornin’. When it’s light I can see to do more.”

“I should say I was fixed up for a month,” Matt cried, as he surveyed himself in the glass. “What was the use of tyin’ my whole head up when I had only one cut, an’ that nearly on top?”

“There are none too many bandages, Matthew, none too many, so we won’t discuss it.”

“But, Aunt Hannah, this cloth goes over one of

my eyes, an' surely there's no need of anything like that."

"You don't know whether there is or not, Matthew Archibald. That eye is nearest the cut, an' if you should get cold, inflammation is liable to set in all over your face."

"But there's no need of bundlin' me up till the inflammation comes."

"Matthew Archibald Turner, when you know as much about nursin' as I do, you can object to what's been done, but not till then. I don't think there's any danger you'll get cold now, so you may invite your friends in for something to eat."

Matt knew thoroughly well that when his aunt called him by his full name she would not listen to an argument; but yet he ventured to suggest that Spence and Joey could not be very hungry at such an early hour in the evening.

"Boys are always ready for something to eat, or else their natures have changed since I went to bed. I dare say that city lad and Joey Pendleton are wet as drowned rats."

"They went to the hotel after dry clothes, but I guess everything is soaked again, for we lugged water mighty lively for a spell."

"Joey won't come to any more harm because of it than you will; but a boy who has always lived

in the city must be coddled more'n others, so you'd better call 'em in."

"Are you goin' to tie up Spence's head, too?" Matt asked, with a laugh.

"I shall give him a full pint of composition tea, an' that, I guess, is all that'll be needed."

"Yes, and more too, if Spence has any say about it," Matt muttered laughingly, as he went out of the house.

The fire had been extinguished when Master Turner stood on the deck of the ruined schooner once more, and his friends were indulging in a needed rest.

At first both thought it would not be wise to accept Aunt Hannah's invitation, lest Admiral J. should return; but Matt finally convinced them there was no danger anything of the kind would happen so soon after the first attempt, and in a few moments Spence was literally forced to swallow the hot mixture prepared for him, much to the amusement of both Matt and Joey.

CHAPTER VII.

BUSINESS.

DOT until Aunt Hannah had seen Spence swallow the last drop of tea did she take her eyes from him, and then, observing that he had grown restless under her steady gaze, she said in an explanatory tone:—

“It ain’t safe to let a boy out of sight a single minute while you’re tryin’ to do ’em good. Last winter, when Matt had a bad cold, I made him a full quart of composition tea, an’ left him alone with it in this very room. When I come back every drop was gone, and I was suspicious that he hadn’t swallowed it all, for it’s a master job to make him take medicine of any kind. Howsomever, Matt with all his faults is a truthful boy, an’ I soon made him confess that he’d poured more’n half of the tea out of the window.”

“So he got clear from takin’ medicine that night,” Spence said with a laugh.

“Indeed he did not,” was the emphatic reply.

“I made more, and saw to it that he drank three pints before he went to bed.”

“He must have been well cooked by that time. I haven’t taken more than a third as much, and it seems as if I was on fire inside.”

“That’s exactly what you need to drive away a cold, an’ you must be sure to tell your mother about it, for there’s nothin’ like a good dose of composition tea for children. Now I’ll find some dry clothes for you to put on. Matt never has but one decent suit at a time; but I guess there are old duds enough somewhere around the house to fit you all out.”

An odd-looking party it was indeed when Aunt Hannah had concluded her task of “dressing them up.” Spence was allowed to wear Matt’s best clothes; Joey had on a pair of overalls, a cardigan jacket, and, as a hat, an old “sou’wester,” while Matthew Archibald was arrayed in a well worn suit of oil-skins, the bandages on his head serving in lieu of a head-covering.

“Now I allow you won’t take cold, whatever else you do, an’ I’m goin’ to bed. It’ll be the greatest kind of a mercy if I don’t get up in the mornin’ regularly crippled with the rheumatiz. I don’t suppose it would be of any use to ask you to let the wreck take care of herself till daylight, for boys

always will be headstrong, an' I can only hope nothin' more'll happen."

"Of course we must stand watch, Aunt Hannah."

"You *think* you must, so it amounts to the same thing. Where do you count on sleepin'?"

"We shall sit up all night," Spence said decidedly.

"I guess you'll be willin' to crawl in somewhere before daylight, so I'm going to leave the house-door unlocked. Here's a good supper on the table, an' you can eat it when you get hungry."

Then Aunt Hannah went to her chamber, and the boys were left to their own devices.

During the next hour they remained on the deck of the wreck keeping a careful watch for Admiral J.; but when sixty minutes elapsed and nothing had been heard from the enemy, the sentinels decided they were hungry, and returned to the cotage for a lunch.

After they had eaten all that was good for them, and perhaps considerably more, Spence seated himself in Aunt Hannah's rocking chair to "see if it was comfortable," and in less than five minutes was sleeping soundly.

Then Joey sat down in the corner with his head against the wall, assuring Matt he was "only restin'," and had hardly assumed this semi-comfort-

able position before he too was in the land of dreams.

Matt felt positive it was his duty to remain on the alert, and proceeded to do so by sitting on the veranda where he could keep the old hulk in view, and in a few moments later he decided he could perform his duty quite as well by lying down.

Before midnight the reign of slumber was heavy upon all that portion of the Spurwink shore, and had Admiral J. been able to perform such a feat, he might have carried away both the wreck and the cottage without interference.

Not until Aunt Hannah came down stairs next morning were either of the "watchers" aroused, and then Matt sprang to his feet in alarm.

"Why, it's sunrise, an' I've slept all night!"

"An' you're jest so much better off for the rest," Aunt Hannah said, placidly. "The wreck hasn't been carried away, and I guess you won't hear anything from the Admiral for quite a spell. He must be ashamed of himself by this time."

"I hope Spence's father will make him feel somethin' more than shame," Matt cried, angrily.

Aunt Hannah appeared really pained that the boy should allow revengeful thoughts to come into his mind, and during ten minutes or more she pleaded the Admiral's cause.

“I know he tried to do you a deal of harm, Matt, dear; but you must forgive him. He is old and crotchety, an’ you should make all allowances for him. I was so wicked as to get angry last night when I saw what he did; but I hope I’m in a different frame of mind this mornin’. I’m certain the Admiral is sorry for what he has done, an’ I want you to promise me you’ll treat him in a Christian-like spirit.”

“That old wretch oughter be put in jail!”

It was a long while before the good woman could induce Matt to accept her view of the matter; but before she had finished dressing his wound — which did not look as badly in the sunlight — he had agreed not to exact reprisals for the previous night’s work.

Then Aunt Hannah kissed him, as she had done every morning since he could remember, and as she set about getting breakfast, moving softly lest she should awaken Spence and Joey, Matt muttered to himself: —

“She’s too good to live ’round here, an’ that’s a fact. I wouldn’t a’ thought I’d ever promise to let the Admiral go without doin’ somethin’ to square accounts; but I’d almost rather he burned the wreck than for me to do what’ll make her feel bad.”

When the other occupants of the cottage awakened breakfast was ready, and, since no mischief had been done while they slept, the boys decided it was much more comfortable to do as they had done than stand watch on the deck of the hulk.

After the morning meal had been eaten Matt and Spence set about finishing the gangway, while Joey cleaned the cabin to the best of his ability, and all were yet busily engaged when the baggage-wagon from the Surf House was driven down to the beach.

Mr. Atwood and the boatman who had been of so much assistance the night previous were the new arrivals, and the former said, as he descended from the high seat:—

“So you managed to keep Admiral J. at a respectful distance after his first visit, eh?”

“I don’t think he came around here again, sir,” Spence replied, with an expressive wink in the direction of his comrades, as if to say there was no necessity for confessing that they had been sleeping instead of watching.

“Were you hurt very much, Matt?”

“No, sir. My head is cut a little, but it don’t seem to ’mount to anything. I guess the Admiral will keep away from us now.”

“If he is wise he will. I have just come from his house.”

“Did you see him, sir?”

“No, and judging from appearances, he didn’t sleep there last night. I fancy he realizes that he went too far when he assaulted you. I have brought the goods Spence ordered me to buy, and what’s more, have here the settees and the awning Mr. Richmond wished — found one ready-made which will fill the bill, I reckon; the seats are new. Dan Fernald shall stay and put the canvas in place.”

The boatman was already unloading the goods from the wagon, and on being thus referred to said, with a smile: —

“It begins to look as if I oughter be one of the partners in this ’ere scheme, seein’ that I’m likely to do most of the work.”

“And that is what Mr. Richmond has paid you for doing. I will send some one around with a boat just before dinner-time, and the wreck should be in proper shape before then.”

“It’s well for Admiral J. that he wasn’t at home when we got there,” Dan Fernald said, as Mr. Atwood drove away. “I allow he’d be the sickest bow-legged man in Spurwink if the landlord had got hold of him.”

“What would have been done?” Spence asked curiously, as he began an inspection of the goods left on the beach.

“That’s what I can’t say for certain, but I’ll go bail there wouldn’t been much need of calling on the law to square the work of last night, for Mr. Atwood was proper mad.”

“Improperly mad, Aunt Hannah would say,” Spence added, with a laugh. “Is that the awning, Dan?”

The boatman was overhauling what looked like a huge bag, and not until he had finished the inspection did he reply.

“Yes, this ’ere’s the awnin’, an’ I allow I’ve got pretty considerable of a job to get it into shape before dinner-time.”

“How can we assist you?”

“By stickin’ at your own work, you two; I’ll get on with what Joey Pendleton may contrive in the way of help.”

It was necessary something should be built on which the wares could be spread for the inspection of intending purchasers, and the two partners were soon hard at work on this portion of the task, while Dan Fernald and Joey Pendleton tugged and hauled at the canvas to get it in proper place.

The boat had not yet arrived from the Surf House when the young showmen were ready to receive their patrons, and there was good reason why they should be satisfied with the result of their labors.

Thanks to Dan Fernald the awning was up without a wrinkle, covering the wreck from abaft the main hatch to the stern-rail, and stretching several feet outboard on either side, while, in the coolest and most inviting-looking spots, the settees were placed.

Midway between the hatch and the deck-house was a rude table on which were exposed their wares, and the partners were thoroughly surprised that such an amount could have been purchased with five dollars.

Mr. Atwood had selected a variety of fruits in small quantities, nuts, a limited supply of candy, and an assortment of sea-shells.

It was this last item that caused Matt both surprise and dissatisfaction.

“What’s the use of puttin out good money for such stuff as that?” he asked in a tone of contempt as Spence arranged the goods in the most tempting manner. “We can get the same kind of truck without payin’ a dime, an’ I don’t believe folks would give us a cent apiece for the whole lot.”

“Mr. Atwood should know whether there would be any sale for shells, and if there are plenty here to be had for the gathering, we can spend our spare time laying in a stock.”

"I could load Dan Fernald's dory with shells jest like 'em," Joey said after a critical examination of the goods.

"Go ahead and do it. I'll run the risk of giving you a cent for every whole one you can bring in," Spence replied, determined to show his faith in the landlord's judgment. "What do you think of it, Dan?"

"My idee is that summer boarders will buy en-most anything that's wuthless, an' they'll be sure to lay in a stock when sich truck is bought outer a reg'lar wreck. Jethro Atwood ain't any fool when it comes to knowin' what'll sell, an' you can make certain he didn't throw your money away. Joey here won't load a very big boat with *whole* shells, even if he works hard all summer, for they ain't to be found so easy."

"I know where there's more'n a million bushels!" Master Pendleton replied emphatically.

"Then set about pullin' 'em in. Spence will pay a cent apiece, an' I'll give you an even dollar when you show up half a bushel as good as these."

Dan was so positive perfect shells could not be found readily, or in large quantities, that Matt began to think he might have made a mistake in looking upon this portion of their stock as unsal-able.

At all events he was decidedly pleased with the awning, and knew full well that the entire collection of goods made a very business-like display; therefore he felt that it would be a comparatively small matter if the purchase of shells had been unwise.

“Now we’ll have to stay on board all the time,” he said as he walked slowly around the booth, admiring it from every point of view. “Of course we can’t take all this stuff ashore every night, an’ it wouldn’t do to leave it, even if somebody chained the Admiral, for there *are* folks in Spurwink who might be willin’ to lug off what wasn’t theirs.”

“That’s just what I’ve been thinking about since we began putting up the counter. We must fix up the cabin, so’s we can sleep there.”

The arrival of the boat from the Surf House put an end to the conversation, and when Dan Fernald took his departure with the promise to “pull ’round that evenin’ an’ see if everything was runnin’ smooth,” Matt announced his intention of going ashore.

“I’ll try to coax Aunt Hannah aboard. I want her to see this lay-out while it’s fresh, an’ after she’s been here I reckon she won’t think our scheme is sich a wild one.”

“Go ahead; Joey and I’ll stay here cleanin’ up, for I expect we’ll have lots of customers this afternoon.”

Matt was absent not more than ten minutes, and when he returned his companions understood that he had been unsuccessful in his mission.

“I ain’t certain but she’ll be over towards night, though she didn’t promise for certain, ’cause she’s terrible ’fraid ’bout ketchin’ the rheumatiz. Dinner’s all on the table, an’ you an’ Joey are to go straight over to the house. Somebody must stay here, and after you come back I’ll get my share of the grub.”

Spence was so positive patrons would arrive early that he would not leave the wreck until he and his partner had decided upon the prices which should be charged for the various articles, and, that done, he called out warningly as he went down the gangway:—

“Don’t let anybody in without paying, Matt, an’ keep your eyes open to make sure the folks ain’t cheating you if they buy anything.”

Once alone on the wreck, Matt paced to and fro under the awning, proud in the thought that he was an equal partner in an enterprise which looked as promising as this one.

When the scheme first came into his mind he

had no hope the old hulk could be made to look so inviting, because he had no capital to invest. Now, however, there were many reasons why the summer boarders would want to come on board, aside from the fact that she was a wreck, and success seemed certain.

He almost forgot that there was such a person as Admiral J. in Spurwink, and when he gave the little bow-legged man a passing thought, it was with the conviction that no more trouble need be feared from him.

“I ought to make enough to keep us all winter, an’ buy Aunt Hannah a real silk dress into the bargain. I’ll be able to tend out on school in good shape, instead of spendin’ the time tryin’ to earn a nickle or a dime, an’ by next spring I’ll cook up another scheme that’ll show as fine as this one.”

He was interrupted in his pleasing reveries by the sound of voices from the beach, and, looking over the rail, saw three ladies gazing inquiringly toward the hulk.

“Yes, we’ve got a show here,” he cried as if answering a question. “Now’s the chance to come on board a real wreck for only ten cents, an’ you can stay all the afternoon if you like, without payin’ anything extra.”

The strangers laughed at his earnest appeal, but

since they came on board, each paying him ten cents, he was perfectly willing to be the temporary object of their mirth.

Business had begun even earlier than he expected, and he looked at the silver so admiringly as to almost forget the booth and its stock of dainties, until he heard one of the visitors exclaim:—

“What lovely shells! How much do you ask for them, little boy?”

Matt was sorry they should call him, one of the owners of the “show,” a little boy, but he hurried forward, wondering whether or not they might think him foolish when he stated the price which Spence had decided should be put upon the articles.

“The large ones are fifteen cents apiece, an’ the small ones ten. It ain’t very often you can buy such things off’er a real wreck.”

“Indeed it isn’t, and these are just the right size for painting. We must have a picture of the vessel on each, and it would be a pity if the showman was omitted in the sketch.”

Matt did not understand what the lady meant, but his brown eyes opened wide with astonishment when she selected six of the largest, and handed him one dollar.

It began to be apparent that Mr. Atwood knew better than the partners did what goods visitors would purchase. These patrons had not so much as looked at the candy and peanuts, but bought shells such as could be found almost anywhere on the beach, at what he thought a ridiculously extravagant price.

“Six at fifteen cents?” he said to himself, and then his cheeks grew crimson with shame as he realized that it would be necessary to figure the amount out with the stub of a pencil he had in his pocket, for as a mental problem it was wholly beyond him.

“Don’t you know how much six times fifteen are?”

“I can’t tell you straight off,” Matt replied hesitatingly; but if you’ll wait a minute I’ll have it figured out.”

“Ninety cents is the amount, and I want ten cents out of my dollar. How old are you, my little man?”

Matt felt more at ease when the lady called him a “little man,” and answered promptly:—

“Fourteen, marm.”

“And can’t tell without figuring, how much six times fifteen are?”

“I ought’er know for a fact; but boys down

here in Spurwink don't get as much schoolin' as fellers in the city. I'll be all right, though, if this show does a good business."

"In what way do you mean?"

"I can go to school all winter, you see, 'cause I won't have to be layin' 'round lookin' for jobs."

"Haven't you any parents?"

"Only one, an' that's Aunt Hannah, but she's as good to me as if she was my mother. Here's the ten cents change, an' I thank you for buyin' the shells."

It was evident the ladies wished to talk further with the young showman; but at that moment a party of half a dozen pleasure-seekers appeared at the gangway, and Matt was forced to attend to them.

A few moments later Spence arrived, looking exultant.

"I saw the crowd beginning to come, and hurried over before I got half through eating. Aunt Hannah says she don't believe there are any more foolish people in Spurwink, but if it should turn out that there are, and they keep coming our way, she'll bring us down a lunch. Say, I'm counting on paying for my meals; I don't want her to think I'm trying any sponging game."

"She wouldn't take money for what little you eat."

“She’ll have to, or I’ll bring my meals over from the hotel. Here come a crowd up the beach, and I’m as certain as I can be that we’ll do a rushing business to-day.”

“If it happens so you look out for the shop, an’ I’ll see that nobody comes over this rail without paying. I sold ninety cents’ worth of shells.”

Spence had no opportunity to comment on the cheering information, for several ladies had gathered around the booth, and it was necessary a salesman should be in attendance.

From that hour until four o’clock in the afternoon patrons continued to arrive, until it seemed to Matt that every summer boarder in Spurwink had given him ten cents for the privilege of coming on board.

He began his work as doorkeeper by keeping an account, in his mind, of the number of visitors; but when he had counted as high as seventy-three a large party arrived, and he became so confused trying to figure how much change he should give back for the five-dollar bill handed him that he forgot the number.

Spence’s parents and Florrie were among the late comers, and Matt would have passed them in free but that Mr. Richmond positively refused to accept such kindness.

“You must not be so generous, my boy; the sun seems to be shining brightly for you just now, and you can’t make the proper amount of hay unless you adhere rigidly to the rule of collecting a dime from every visitor.”

“But we owe you for the awnin’, sir.”

“Yes, and judging from appearances you will be amply able to pay all your bills. Have you hired Joey Pendleton as clerk?”

“No, sir, he’s only here for fun. When he got back from dinner business was rushin’ so that I told him he’d better help Spence, and we’d square it with him somehow.”

“I think you will need a clerk, or at least some one to run errands, and it may not be a bad idea to hire Joey while business is good. Has your aunt been here yet?”

“No, sir. I was goin’ to coax her mighty hard when I went to dinner, but the folks began to come so early that I haven’t had time to get anything to eat.”

“Of course you want her here while you have a large number of customers on board?”

“That’s what I’d like; but I don’t believe she’ll come.”

“I will go to the cottage, and see what I can accomplish in the line of persuasion.”

A moment later Matt was gazing in open-mouthed astonishment at the lawyer, who was walking rapidly toward the cottage, and then, realizing that the gentleman had really gone to invite his aunt on board the wreck, he turned to Mrs. Richmond and said, with a long-drawn sigh of surprise and satisfaction: —

“Well, I’ll be jiggered!”

CHAPTER VIII.

AUNT HANNAH'S VISIT.

THE patrons of the "show" appeared to think they were receiving full value for their money, if one might judge from the expression on their faces.

At least three hours had elapsed from the time the first arrived, and yet not more than two or three had taken their departure. The settees were filled; lounging places had been made by spreading shawls and wraps upon the deck, and the younger of the curiosity-seekers were promenading forward and aft, enjoying the coolness of the gentle breeze which made its way under the awning.

"We must persuade Mr. Atwood to send down some hammocks," Matt heard a young lady say to her companion. This will be a lovely spot for a siesta after a bath in the surf."

Although he should have been pleased by this praise of the wreck, the boy was greatly disturbed. He believed it would be an added attraction if a

few hammocks were slung at either end of the hulk, where they would not incommode the promenaders; but he was afraid, because he did not understand the meaning of the word, that "siestas" might interfere with business.

Therefore he forgot for the moment that Mr. Richmond had gone to invite Aunt Hannah on board, and hurried to Spence's side.

Business in the refreshment department was dull just then, and the two partners could spend a few moments in conversation without fear of slighting their patrons.

"Did you hear what that girl in the blue dress said a minute ago?" Matt whispered.

"About the hammocks? Yes, and I think it would be a good idea to have a few hung up, for the longer folks stay the more money they'll spend, and we're pulling in a pile, Matt. We must have taken considerable more than we spent"—

"She said something about havin' siesters here. What did she mean? You know we can't afford to get very much stuff on board, Spence, 'cause this craft ain't large enough to hold everything the summer boarders may want to lug on board."

Matt ceased speaking very suddenly, because his partner seemed to be struggling desperately to check the mirth which threatened to break forth into loud laughter.

“What’s the matter with you?” Matt asked almost sharply, after waiting several moments, during which Spence’s mirth grew more boisterous. “I don’t see anything funny.”

“Oh! you don’t, eh?” and Spence could control himself no longer, but laughed so loud and long that the visitors gazed at him curiously. “So you don’t want them lugging siestas aboard, eh?”

Matt was about to resume his station at the gangway, and, seeing that his temper was ruffled, Spence followed him as he whispered:—

“Don’t you know what a siesta is, Matt?”

“How should I? I ain’t one of your swells.”

“Now don’t fly off, old man, for you’ll see that you said something very funny when I tell you that a siesta is a short rest or sleep taken during the middle of the day. The girl in blue thought it would be nice to have a nap here after bathing, and if all hands of them get the same notion we shall catch just so many more ten-cent pieces.”

Matt looked at his partner an instant as if to make certain he was not being deceived, and then said, as a smile came over his face:—

“I don’t blame you for laughing, Spence. I’m awful green, for a fact; but if things keep on the way they’ve begun I’ll know a good bit more by next spring.”

Just then there were more customers for sea-shells, and Spence was forced to leave his partner to attend to them. The ladies who made the first purchase had explained to their friends how readily the shells could be converted into artistic souvenirs of their visit to Spurwink, and the demand increased suddenly.

It was nearly five o'clock. The deck of the wreck was literally thronged with visitors when, to Matt's surprise and joy, Aunt Hannah, dressed in her best gingham dress and escorted by Mr. Richmond, appeared on the gangway.

"I never believed he could coax you to come," the young showman cried joyously, as he clambered up on the rail to aid the old lady.

"I never believed it myself, Matt, dear; but the gentleman wouldn't take no for an answer, an' now I'm glad I'm here"; and Aunt Hannah stood at the top of the gangway gazing around her in astonishment. "It's the most wonderful thing I ever saw. Who'd thought so many folks could be persuaded to give good money for comin' to sich a place as this?"

"Step down here where you can see the crowd," Matt whispered. "Don't things look fine now we've got fixed up?"

"Fine? Why, it's jest like somethin' you read

about. Who'd ever thought? Who'd ever thought?"

"Thought what, Aunt Hannah?"

"That anything like this could have happened here. Why, Matt, you must have taken in as much as two dollars!"

"I had over seven in my pocket when I stopped keepin' account of the folks, an' Spence must have as much more, for he's been sellin' a lot of stuff. Wouldn't the Admiral dance if he could know what we're makin'?"

"Don't speak of him, Matt, dear. I don't want anything unpleasant in my mind while I'm lookin' at all this."

Mr. Richmond had been searching for a place where Aunt Hannah could sit down, and now he beckoned for Matt to lead her aft.

A settee nearly opposite the booth had just been vacated, and here Aunt Hannah was seated, while Spence brought oranges, bananas, and candy until she insisted vehemently that he should not be so "reckless an' extravagant."

Matt was perfectly happy. His aunt was where she could see all that was being done, and, for the time being, he desired nothing more.

Half an hour after Aunt Hannah's arrival the visitors began to depart, and twenty minutes later only Mr. Richmond and Mr. Atwood remained.

“I suppose you need more goods,” the landlord said with a businesslike air, “and I have waited until you had an opportunity to make out your order.”

“It seems as if we wanted more of everything except peanuts,” Spence replied. “I have only sold a quart of nuts, and perhaps that is lucky, for the shells are all over the deck.”

“Let Joey run over to Mrs. Gordon’s and get a broom. You must sweep the hulk at every opportunity, for no one can say when you will have another rush of customers. It is certain that you are doing a good business in sea-shells, and we’ll buy a larger stock to-morrow. How about fruit?”

“Use your own judgment in selecting the goods, Atwood,” Mr. Richmond interrupted, “for you know what is needed better than the boys can tell you. Suppose you give him ten dollars, Spence, and then perhaps there will be enough to last two or three days; I don’t think there is any danger of laying in too big a stock.”

Matt, hearing the conversasion, began counting the money he had received, thinking his partner would need a portion of it; but to his surprise Spence had more than the stated amount.

“I will come back this evening and learn how much the sales figure up.” Mr. Richmond said, af-

ter saying "good-night" to Aunt Hannah as courteously as if she had been his most valued friend. "Don't get excited over your good fortune, and keep a sharp watch for possible mischief-makers."

Then the two gentlemen went over the rail, and the partners set about counting their money, while Joey plied the broom vigorously.

"Now we'll make Aunt Hannah's eyes open," Matt whispered when the financial part of the business was completed, and the amounts received by each boy set down in a book Spence had brought with him for the purpose. "How much do you suppose we've taken in?" he asked his aunt.

"Mercy on us, child, I cannot even give a guess. I know it must be a power of money, an' I'm lost in bewilderment that I should have been so short-sighted as to believe it wouldn't be possible to make money out of the wreck."

"Well, I took eight dollars an' sixty cents at the door!"

Aunt Hannah raised both hands in astonishment.

"And Spence has got, countin' in the money he gave Mr. Atwood for to-morrow's stock of goods, fourteen dollars and a quarter!"

"Mercy on us! Can it be possible?"

“We took in ninety cents, day before yesterday,” Matt continued, “so the whole thing figgers up twenty-three dollars an’ seventy-five cents, an’ the first day’s work ain’t finished yet, ’cause I heard lots of ’em say they were comin’ over here this evenin’ for a sail.”

“I never’d thought it! I never’d thought it!”

“There seems to be a good deal more’n rheumatics in the old hulk, Aunt Hannah!” Spence cried exultantly.

“Why, children, you’ll make yourselves rich in no time at this rate. I don’t believe Matt ever earned so much money before in all his life!”

“Of course we can’t expect to do as well as this every day,” Spence said, with an air of exceeding wisdom. “It is a new thing now, and everybody wanted to see the show right away; but if only half as many come to-morrow it’ll be a fair business, and on rainy days of course we won’t have any customers.”

“An jest to think that I shilly-shallied ’round without makin’ the cake you half paid for, ’cause I didn’t think you’d need it.”

“It’ll do as well to-morrow, Aunt Hannah, and you can bake twice as many loaves as we bargained for. I’m going to see if we can’t keep lemonade; we’ve had lots of calls for something to drink.”

“I can lend you a dozen tumblers that cost me twelve cents apiece at Mr. Hewey’s store, an’ you might have milk, as well. Jim Jordan’s wife has got the best cow in the country, an’ she’d be glad to supply you with a gallon every day.”

“That’s a good idea,” Spence said approvingly. “We’ll have a stock on hand to-morrow, if Joey will attend to it.”

This was the opportunity for which Master Pendleton had been waiting from the moment it was ascertained the summer boarders would really patronize the “show,” and he took advantage of it by saying promptly: —

“I can go over to Jim Jordan’s, of course, but I ain’t sure whether mother’ll let me hang ’round here much longer. Now if I was hired for a regular clerk, it would be different, an’ I could stick right by the wreck all the time. It looks to me as if you two fellers had more business on hand than you could ’tend to alone.”

“I guess you’re right, Joey, and if Matt is willing, we’ll pay you twenty-five cents a day. I don’t think we can afford to give any more, unless trade holds on as it has begun, an’ in such case we’ll give a little extra.”

“I’ll be glad to come for that,” Joey replied in a tone of satisfaction, for he had not expected to be offered so much.

“Then you’re hired,” Matt said promptly, “an’ the wages begun this mornin’. Of course we’re bound to sleep on board now we’ve got so much stuff here, an’ if you want to see your mother about it, you’d better skip home now.”

“Am I to get my grub at Aunt Hannah’s?” Joey cried, pausing at the top of the gangway as this question presented itself to his mind.

“We’ll see to it that you have enough to eat.”

Joey was off like an arrow from a bow, and Spence said to Aunt Hannah, who was still gazing around her as if in bewilderment:—

“I’m glad Joey said what he did, because it reminds me that we must make some arrangements for our board. Of course I can’t go over to the hotel for my meals, and I won’t eat at your house unless I pay my share — ”

“But bless your heart, child, you’re as welcome as the flowers.”

“The flowers can’t pay their way, and I can. I asked father this afternoon what he thought about it, and he said that Matt and I ought to give a regular price for our board, or else buy the food, and hire you to cook it.”

“I don’t want any pay,” and Aunt Hannah shook her head decidedly. “All this good fortune has come to Matt and me through you, for he never

could have spruced up the wreck in sich a fashion, an' I can't take your money, child."

"I'll tell you how we'll fix it," Matt cried as a happy thought came to him. "Our clerk must be fed, as well as ourselves, so we'll pay for all the provisions, and Aunt Hannah shall do the cookin' for nothin'. We'll hold to the trade we first made when it comes to the cake, an' that'll give her a chance to make a little profit out of the business."

This was an arrangement which Aunt Hannah thought very generous, and thus the question of subsistence was decided.

That the partners must spend the nights on the wreck seemed absolutely necessary; but the old lady insisted that a feather bed should be brought from her home, and when that subject was dropped because of being definitely settled, Aunt Hannah, to Matt's great surprise, asked to see the cabin.

"What about the rheumatics?" he asked with a laugh.

"I guess if these city folks can prowl around the hulk all the afternoon, I can stand it for an hour. I begin to understand that I've been an old fool 'bout this wreck. Why, she's worth more'n the best farm around here, and the greatest wonder of all is that my Matt should have schemed out the idee of making her into a circus."

The boys conducted her to the cuddy, where could be plainly seen the evidences of the fire on the charred boards, and, as a matter of course, this brought them to the subject of Admiral J.

Spence announced as his belief that the hot-headed little man was already frightened because of what he had done, and knowing he might be arrested for the assault, would take good care to keep at a safe distance; but Aunt Hannah could not agree with him.

“The news that you boys have made an enormous amount of money to-day will spread over the neighborhood like wildfire — most likely Joey is tellin’ everybody he meets. Once the Admiral hears the news he’ll be wilder than ever, an’ I’m afraid we haven’t seen the last of his knack of doin’ mischief.”

“If he *does* show his head with the idea of driving us away, father must take him in hand,” Spence replied decidedly. “We can’t afford to give up such a business as we’re doing now.”

In this last Aunt Hannah agreed perfectly, and said as she clambered up the cuddy stairs: —

“Two of you must be on board all the time, an’ then he can’t do very much harm, however hard he tries. I’ll bring your meals over, an’ I’d a good deal rather do it than have either of you left here alone.”

“There won’t be any need of that,” Spence said as he assisted the old lady to the gangway. “Since Joey is regularly hired, we can fix it so that a couple of us are always on hand. When he gets back Matt shall come to supper, for he must be hungry by this time.”

“An’ I forgot to bring him the lunch I promised! It’s too bad, I declare; but I got so flustered when your father run in an’ asked me over here as polite as if I’d been the President’s wife, that I didn’t think of anything, except how to get out of goin’ where there was so many fine folks. I’m glad now I come, an’ that’s a fact.”

When he had assisted Aunt Hannah down the gangway, Spence returned to his partner, and the two stood looking over the “show” in silence for a full minute, after which Matt said emphatically:—

“It’s a great snap, Spence.”

“That’s where you’re right. It’s a dozen times as big as I counted on, though from the start I knew there wasn’t anything slouchy about the scheme.”

Then the two set to work finishing Joey’s task of putting the deck to rights, and before they had arranged the goods to their entire satisfaction the clerk returned.

"I come back by the way of Miss Jim Jordan's," he announced in a loud voice, "an' she says you can have all the milk you want for five cents a quart. She'll lend you a two-gallon can if Aunt Hannah will agree to scald it out every day. Say, the folks in the village are jest about wild over this thing."

"What has started them out?" Spence asked, while Matt began to look troubled.

"You see nobody believed you'd make any money out'er showin' the wreck; but now you've done so well it seems as if they didn't like it. Mr. Hewey says it's divertin' trade from its nat'ral channels, whatever that is, an' he ain't sure but Admiral J. was right when he claimed the wreck was common property."

"Has the Admiral been up there?" Matt asked anxiously.

"Not as I know of; but Bill Hunt saw him sneakin' 'round the point while so many folks was here. Mother says he'll make trouble for you yet, 'cause it begins to look as if Hewey would help him. You fellers want to keep your eyes open mighty wide."

"Don't worry, Matt," Spence said soothingly, as he saw the look of distress on his partner's face. "Father'll be over here this evening, and we can

tell him what we've heard. *He* won't stand any nonsense."

"But Mr. Hewey's the richest man in Spurwink, except Mr. Atwood, an' if he helps the Admiral—"

"If he was made of gold he couldn't do anything that wasn't square with the law, and I guess my father is more than a match for the whole town of Spurwink. Go and get your supper now. Joey and I'll finish this work; if we don't get something to eat pretty soon we shan't have another chance till late to-night."

It would be difficult to say in exactly what frame of mind Matt was when he entered the house. Highly elated, as a matter of course, that the business enterprise had opened so auspiciously; but in a state of anxiety lest the Admiral, now that Mr. Hewey had apparently taken sides with him, should be able to work some harm to the wreck, or those who claimed to own her.

Never before had Matt seen Aunt Hannah in such exuberant spirits; he knew that she, like himself, was looking forward to the cold, long winter with the thought that, thanks to this new scheme, it would not be a season of privation, as it so often had been.

When he left the hulk it was with the intention of telling Aunt Hannah of the news brought by

Joey, but after one glance at her face he decided to keep the matter a secret as long as possible, rather than mar her happiness on this day.

Supper was ready when Matt arrived, and while he was eating the happy old lady alternately praised him for having devised such an admirable scheme, and speculated as to whether the summer boarders would continue to patronize the "circus."

"It beats all to think you two boys have made so much money, an' all in one day! I don't believe there's a boardin' house in Spurwink that can show the same profit for twenty-four hours."

"But a rainy day doesn't make any difference to the houses, an' it'll knock us endways. Then agin, they have seven days in the week, an' we've got only six, for of course we shan't keep open Sundays."

"I hope, Matt, that you haven't so much as *thought* of such a thing as doin' that!"

"Of course I haven't, Aunt Hannah. You know I would'nt do anything to make you feel bad."

"I had rather hear you say you wouldn't do it because it would be wrong."

"It all amounts to the same thing, so we needn't waste our breath over that. I can't stop any longer, for it's time Spence and Joey were here, if we count on bein' ready for business when the sailin' parties

arrive. You allowed that I would sleep aboard the wreck to-night?"

"Yes, Matt, I expected it, an' if anything goes wrong you have only to holler for me; I'm a light sleeper."

"I'm 'fraid you wouldn't be much use in a row, Aunt Hannah; but we'll call you if there's any trouble."

"If the Admiral should—but there, I won't say anything about him, Matt dear; you're man enough to know what to do, an' I can trust you."

"When it comes to holdin' possession of what belongs to us, you may make sure I'll do my best. Now don't fuss 'bout us to-night, for we'll be as snug as if we was here with you."

Then Matt left the house hurriedly, lest he should inadvertently disclose what he intended to keep secret, and when he saw his partner and Joey he impressed upon their minds the fact that Aunt Hannah must remain in ignorance of what had been heard at the village.

"I don't want her bothered with all the neighbors say, any more'n can be helped."

"But somebody's sure to tell her," Joey suggested.

"I know that well enough; but this is one night when she'll go to bed happy, an' we won't do anything to prevent it."

CHAPTER IX.

A LEGAL NOTIFICATION.

THE partners and their clerk had eaten supper, put the finishing touches to the goods in the booth, swung two lanterns — all that Aunt Hannah owned — and discussed the prospects for business over and over again, but not a customer appeared.

“It must be eight o’clock, and if the boarders were thinking of spending the evening here we should have seen some of them before this,” Spence said in a tone of disappointment. “From what I heard I made up my mind we would have quite a rush of business to-night; but it doesn’t look much like it now.”

“Takin’ in so much money this afternoon has kinder spoiled us,” Matt replied, with a laugh. “Here we are lookin’ mournful as calves, because the wreck isn’t crowded with folks, an’ yet this mornin’ I’d stood on my head if somebody had guaranteed we’d have ’most twenty-five dollars by this time.”

“I’m not complaining, Matt; but business started off so booming that I counted on its keeping up longer than this. Now —”

Spence ceased speaking very suddenly as the sound of the voices could be heard from far out over the water, and Joey cried exultantly: —

“You fellers begun to whine too soon. The summer boarders have been out rowin’, an’ are comin’ over for a rest. I reckon you’ll have about as much as you can ’tend to ’twixt now an’ ten o’clock.”

In this Master Pendleton proved a true prophet.

With the first load of visitors came Dan Fernald, and he said in a whisper to Matt when his passengers had trooped over the rail, after paying the admission fee: —

“You’ll have a mighty good trade to-night. Every boat I own is let, an’ they’ll all put in here before goin’ back to the hotel. This ’ere wreck is goin’ to be a mint of money so long as the summer boarders are in town, an’ the Spurwinkers are mightily stirred up, ’cause you had wit enough to turn the hulk to good account.”

“Have you heard the news from the village?”

“Yes; everybody there is by the ears, an’ since they can’t claim a share of the wreck themselves, they’re takin’ sides with Admiral J.”

“Joey told us Mr. Hewey was mad, ’cause he said we was takin’ trade away from him.”

“Let him stew. I guess you’ve got them on your side as will see this thing through in great shape, so there’s no call for you to worry.”

“Have you heard Mr. Atwood say anything about it since he left here?”

“Yes, he an’ the city lawyer was allowin,’ jest before I come away, that the Spurwinkers might back up the Admiral in his foolish claim.”

“An’ if they do I’m ’fraid our trade’ll be spoiled.”

“Don’t cry before the milk is spilled. If I had your chance an’ your backin,’ I wouldn’t let anything trouble me.”

The conversation was interrupted by the arrival of a second boat filled with pleasure seekers, and the evening’s business had begun in earnest.

Already Spence and Joey had quite as much as they could do to attend to the wants of their customers, and, when he was not needed at the rail to collect the price of admission, Matt aided them in serving out the wares.

One party brought three hammocks, and when these were slung they added greatly to the attractiveness of the scene.

Dan Fernald, acting upon Mr. Atwood’s orders, had taken from the hotel four lanterns with powerful reflectors, and after they had been hung at the

corners of the awning with their rays directed inboard, the illumination was, to Matt at least, almost dazzling.

Two of the visitors had guitars, and soon the strains of music were stealing out over the waters, enticing on board all in the immediate vicinity.

Matt had thought the scene of the afternoon could not be equaled, but now he believed it was as nothing compared with this, and wished most heartily that Aunt Hannah would venture on board once more.

Half an hour later he heard a hum of conversation from the shore, and stole out on the gangway in alarm, fearing Admiral J. had come to assert his alleged claims to the wreck again; but he soon ascertained that a group of the villagers had gathered on the beach just in front of Aunt Hannah's cottage, to listen to the music.

"If what we did this afternoon stirred Mr. Hewey up, he'll be crazy when he finds out that we've got another crowd here," Matt whispered to Spence, who had come forward to learn why his partner was peering thus intently over the rail. "There's a lot of Spurwinkers out on the sands."

"Why don't they pay their money like sensible people, and come on board?"

"You wouldn't ketch them spendin' ten cents

to do anything of that kind. I wonder if Admiral J. is there?"

"I hope so, for I'd like to have the bow-legged little wretch see what we can do when we try. He won't show his nose near us, though, because he's afraid we'd have him arrested for 'most killing you."

"He knows by this time that I wasn't hurt very bad."

"We ought to have given him a good scare."

"How?"

"By keeping those bandages on your head. If he'd got one glimpse of you as you were when Aunt Hannah got through dressing the wounds, he'd left this village mighty quick. We should have kept you looking 'most used up.

"I'm 'fraid we'd scared even the summer boarders off, if I'd shinneyed 'round with all that cloth tied on me."

The music ceased while the partners were talking, and it became necessary for Spence to wait upon his customers once more.

A few moments after he went back to the booth, four half-grown boys came on the gangway, and Matt made ready to receive their admission fee, but was disappointed.

They remained within a few feet of the rail,

looking inboard with mingled curiosity and impudence.

“It only costs ten cents to come in an’ have a seat,” Matt said politely.

“If we wanted to come we shouldn’t pay anything,” one of the number cried jeeringly. “This ’ere wreck don’t belong to you any more’n it does to the rest of the folks ’round here, an’ you can’t cheat us out of our money.”

“She belongs to me ’cause she’s on our land, an’ the rest of the Spurwinkers couldn’t get at her ’less Aunt Hannah was willin’ they should come across her lot.”

“She only owns to high-water mark, and I’d like to see her stop us from comin’ up on the beach.”

Even though the speaker had not used a threatening tone, Matt would have understood that these visitors came with the intention of making mischief, and he believed they were incited to such a course by Admiral J.

He understood that he and his partner could not hope to resist them successfully, whatever they should attempt to do, and there now appeared to be more danger than ever that it might become necessary to abandon the enterprise.

It seemed to the anxious “showman” that here

was a case where he could test the efficacy of a "soft answer," and he said in a conciliatory tone:—

"I don't count on havin' trouble, boys, for I know you wouldn't make any, 'specially while city ladies was here."

"What do we care for your city ladies? You're gettin' too big for your clothes, Matt Turner, jest 'cause the summer boarders are shovelin' money into your pockets. Come on, fellers; let's see what this crowd looks like!"

The would-be "tough" leaped on the rail as he spoke; but Matt was not to be cowed by the implied threats.

"I want ten cents from each one if you come aboard," he said firmly, standing directly in front of the leader, and this demand had just been made when the fellow slapped him on the side of the face with a force that sent him reeling toward the booth.

Spence sprang forward to assist his partner, while Joey, recognizing the new-comers as the most quarrelsome boys in Spurwink, prudently retreated toward the cabin.

The partners would have been no match for the unwelcome visitors, yet both went forward boldly to uphold their rights, and it is probable they

would have received a severe flogging but for the interference of Dan Fernald.

“I counted on somethin’ of this kind,” the boatman said in a low, angry tone, as he suddenly appeared, “an’ kept out of sight to see how far you fellers would go. I don’t want to kick up a row here if it can be helped, but unless you’re over that rail in less than ten seconds, I’ll take a hand in the business.”

The Spurwinkers had not counted on such a show of force; they evidently believed no one but the partners would oppose them, and were brave because of superior numbers and strength.

Two of the fellows obeyed Dan Fernald’s command very quickly, but the leader seemed bent on making a disturbance, and cried loudly:—

“I’ve got a right to come aboard this wreck, an’ I count on stayin’!”

“That’s where you make a big mistake, Bart Denny. You’re nothin’ more’n a bully, and never’d come down here to take up the bow-legged Admiral’s quarrel if you’d supposed these boys had anyone to help ’em.”

As he spoke the boatman seized Denny by the coat-collar, gave him a sudden jerk which brought him to his knees, and then literally flung him over the rail into the water.

This done, Dan went back to his seat forward of the main hatchway, where he could see all that was being done without being himself seen, moving as quietly as if nothing out of the ordinary course of events had occurred.

As a matter of fact, only a few of the visitors knew what had happened until the splash was heard, and then, after watching until the discomfited bully crawled out of the water, they resumed their pleasures.

Matt and Spence were greatly disturbed in mind, however, and the happiness which filled their hearts a few moments previous had suddenly been changed to fear.

They had good reason to believe the bullies would not remain peaceable after this check to their plans, and if a second attempt should be made when the boatman was not there to assist in the defense of the wreck, but little could be done to prevent such mischief as they proposed to work.

And the "toughs" of Spurwink were not yet silenced.

Five minutes after Bart reached the shore they began a series of cat-calls and yells intended to annoy the singers, and making such an uproar that more than one of the ladies looked thoroughly alarmed.

“I’ll soon put a stop to that,” Dan Fernald said sharply to the partners, as he went quickly toward the gangway.

“But you mustn’t go down there alone,” Matt whispered, as he grasped the sleeve of the boatman’s coat. “There are four, and you will get the worst of it.”

“Don’t worry about me,” Dan replied grimly. “I’ve lived on this shore long enough to know that crowd from root to branch, an’ I allow six of ’em wouldn’t be any too many for a decent man to tackle at one time.”

“Spence an’ I’ll go with you if you’re bound to meet ’em.”

“Don’t you dare do anything of the kind. Stay where you are, an’ act as if nothing had happened. If these summer boarders get the idee there’s likely to be fightin’ done ’round the wreck nights, it’s good-by to your evenin’ trade, an’ that would hurt me, ’cause I count on lettin’ a good many boats while this ’ere show is runnin’.”

One of the visitors, a young gentleman with a mandolin, evidently understood what the boatman was about to do, and with rare good sense he began to play a lively tune, insisting that his companions join in singing; therefore the music drowned all noise of the combat, if indeed there was one in progress.

Spence and Matt had obeyed Dan by standing near the booth as if ready to serve their patrons, and although both listened intently, but little could be heard.

Once they thought they distinguished the boatman's voice, and again what seemed like a cry of pain came faintly up amid the strains of music, but that was all.

Ten minutes after he had descended, Dan Fernald returned in a leisurely manner, with a look of satisfaction on his face, and sauntering to the obscurity of his former position, disappeared from view.

Such of the ladies as had exhibited signs of alarm now seemed to be reassured, and the visitors gave themselves wholly up to the enjoyment of the hour.

Matt was eager to learn the result of Dan's descent to the beach, and ten minutes later, when no one was observing him, he crept cautiously to the boatman's side.

"Did you have any row?" he asked in a whisper.

"Nothin' to speak of; a couple of that crowd know what a headache means by this time, I reckon. See here, Matt, I allow more trouble may grow out of this, an' as soon as I land the party I

brought over here I'll come back an' stay all night."

"Then you think Bart Denny's gang may show up again?"

"I shouldn't be surprised if they tried it once more, pickin' their time when they think I ain't here."

"But you can't afford to keep runnin' back an' forth to look after us."

"Yes I can, Matt. It will pay me well to have this show kept up, for I shall do a big business with my boats. Then again, Lawyer Richmond agrees to square all I do for you boys, an' he's a man I like to have for a boss."

"Do you s'pose he'd really pay for your sleepin' here.

"See here, Matt, that lawyer's got more money than he knows what to do with, an' he's bound this 'ere show shall be kept goin'. I'll be back agin in less'n half an hour after I leave, an' between you and me I wouldn't be sorry if the gang should come when I wasn't 'fraid of makin' a noise."

Not until two hours later were the visitors ready to depart, and Dan whispered to the "showmen," as he ran down the gangway to see that the boats were in order:—

"Keep all the lanterns lighted as if you had company aboard, an' I'll soon be back."

The guests took their departure with assurances that they should come very often on pleasant evenings, and the partners and their clerk were left alone, all three feeling decidedly uneasy in mind, for it was quite possible some of Bart Denny's party were on watch in the vicinity, waiting for an opportunity to come on board when the showmen had no one to protect them.

"We must keep our eyes open mighty wide," Joey said in a tremulous tone. "What would you fellers do if that gang came back now?"

"The best plan would be to say nothing, for we couldn't fight them off, and we'd let father attend to them to-morrow. I'll answer for it they didn't make but one visit this season."

"If Admiral J. ain't at the bottom of all this I'm mistaken," Matt said emphatically. "He don't dare come himself, but will egg on sich bullies as Bart."

"Now don't borrow trouble," Spence interrupted impatiently. "It will be time enough to fret after the roughs show themselves. Let's count up our cash and then put the goods in the cabin, for it won't be safe to leave all this stuff on deck."

Matt was forced to spend many moments reckoning up the silver taken at the "door" that evening, but he finally succeeded, and announced that he had two dollars and thirty cents.

“Then we had twenty-three visitors, without counting Dan Fernald, and they spent for nuts and such stuff, four dollars and five cents. Now I don’t call it a bad beginning,” he continued after adding up the several amounts in his book. “We’ve taken in one dime more than thirty dollars!”

“I’ll bet Mr. Hewey don’t get much more’n that in a week!” Joey exclaimed in delight.

“We shan’t do so well again,” Spence replied with an air of exceeding wisdom. “Everybody came to-day, and when the wreck begins to be an old story, our receipts will dwindle away till we’ll think a dollar a day is good business.”

When Dan Fernald returned, the boys had made everything snug for the night. The hammocks which the guests had left behind were unslung and stowed in the cabin. The settees were piled upon the deck aft, and it only remained to take down the lanterns.

“No, I allow there’s no call for standin’ watch,” the boatman said decidedly when Matt suggested that some one should remain on guard. “The Spurwinkers can’t do very much mischief before I’ll hear ’em, an’ we’d best get all the sleep we can.”

Now that they had a man with them, the odd noises which could be heard gave the boys no uneasiness, and in a remarkably short time after

taking possession of the berths, all were sleeping soundly, not to awaken until the rays of the rising sun streamed in through the companion-way.

“It’s mornin’, my hearties, an’ we’re as much alive as we were last night!” Dan cried as he sprang to his feet. “I must get over to the hotel in short order; but you can look for me this evenin’. There’s no fear of your havin’ trouble in the daylight.”

Five minutes later the boatman was pulling vigorously toward the Surf House, and the partners went to Aunt Hannah’s for breakfast, leaving Joey to stand watch until their return.

It was agreed during the short walk up the beach that nothing should be said regarding the disturbance of the previous evening, and, therefore, they told Aunt Hannah only of their patrons.

“I heard the music, an’ allowed you was makin’ money hand over fist. I declare it does seem strange sich good fortune should come to us! Do you know, Matt, this is the first time in many a year that I haven’t had to worry about how we’re goin’ to get through the winter; but now you’ve begun to earn money at the rate of thirty dollars a day, it seems as if I might take a little rest, don’t it?”

“Indeed it does, Aunt Hannah,” Spence replied

cheerily as he helped himself to a generous supply of broiled fish. "You're all right for next season, and perhaps a good while longer, for Matt and I won't stop being partners while we've got such a property as this on our hands."

Then Spence suddenly exhibited a strong desire to learn the early history of Spurwink, and so plied Aunt Hannah with questions that she had no opportunity to speak further regarding the wreck.

"I had to set her talking about something else," Spence said when, breakfast having come to an end, he and his partner were walking down the beach, "for I was afraid I should let out what might make her feel badly. Of course she'd worry if she knew the villagers are beginning to take sides with Admiral J."

Matt made no reply to this remark, for just at that moment he saw some one standing on the gangway.

"Hello, there's Squire Kelley!" he exclaimed. "Do you s'pose he's come down to see the show?"

"It isn't reasonable to think he'd come so early, if he had no other errand than that," Spence replied as a troubled look came over his face. "I'm afraid it means mischief for us!"

Matt could not speak just then because of a big lump which had suddenly come into his throat,

and he hurried forward at full speed, closely followed by Spence.

“I was beginnin’ to think I should have to go to the house after you, although I didn’t want to do that, for it would stir your Aunt Hannah all up.”

“Then there *is* something wrong?” Matt cried, more alarmed because it was the Squire who had come, than he would have been at seeing the Admiral escorted by all of Bart Denny’s friends.

“Yes, lad, I reckon you’ll call it bad, though there’s a way out of it, as that city lawyer can explain. I’m here to serve an injunction against your continuing in business on this wreck.”

Matt looked both alarmed and perplexed, and Spence asked as he took the paper the Squire held toward him: —

“What do you mean by that, sir? Who can prevent us from doing as we please while the wreck is on Mrs. Gordon’s land?”

“That is a question which can only be settled by due process of law, and in the meantime an injunction has been granted by the court against your making a private exhibition of the hulk.”

“Who’s got the right to stop us?”

“Admiral — I mean Mr. Johnson applied for the injunction, which will be dissolved if it is ascertained that he has no rights in the premises.”

“Does it mean that we’ve got to give her up to Admiral J.?” Matt asked.

“No; you can continue to hold possession, but you must not take a fee for allowing people to come on board. I’m sorry to interfere with your business, boys, but at present Admiral — Mr. Johnson is my client, and I am bound to protect his interests.”

Then, after warning the partners against acting contrary to his instructions, the Squire walked away in the direction of the village, and the three boys stood gazing at each other in dismay.

CHAPTER X.

A QUESTION OF LAW.

SPENCE was the first to break the painful silence, and he cried suddenly, as a remark of Squire Kelley's came to his mind:—

“We must see father right away.”

“But if the court says we can't run the show, I don't see how he'd help us.”

“That Squire of yours said there was a way out of it, as the ‘city lawyer could explain,’ and we want to get at that way as quickly as possible, for it'll never do to shut up shop while the people are willing to patronize us.”

“Then we'll go right down to the Surf House”; and Matt started at once.

“Hold on!” Spence cried peremptorily. “You an' I must stick right by the wreck. There was nothing said about our keeping people off of her, and I'm going to take precious good care Admiral J. don't set his foot on the deck.”

“But you said we must see your father?”

“And I meant it; but we'll ask him to come to

us. Joey shall go to the Surf House immediately, give father this paper, and tell him why we're hanging on here."

"I ain't had my breakfast yet," Master Pendleton objected.

"It's too late to think of eating now. Get three or four bananas, and start at once. Don't stop a single minute on the way, for there's no telling how valuable a few moments may be to us."

"Can I have some peanuts too?" Joey asked, thinking this a good opportunity to gratify his desires.

"Take as much as you can eat, and be quick about it!"

When, five minutes later, Master Pendleton emerged from the cabin, both his pockets bulged suspiciously, but the partners were in too much trouble to note the fact. The one and only thought in the mind of either was that Mr. Richmond should be informed of what had happened with the least possible delay.

When Joey set out at what he would have called a rapid walk, although to his employers it seemed the slowest pace a boy could move, both hands and his mouth were full, and there was an expression on his face which told that he was now a firm believer in the old adage, "It's an ill wind that blows no good."

“Let’s go on board,” Spence suggested, after they had watched Master Pendleton a few moments. “That fellow is moving, and it’s about all you can say for him. He won’t arrive too late, though, for most likely father hasn’t been to breakfast yet.”

“It looks as if our money-makin’ wasn’t goin’ to last a great while,” Matt said disconsolately, as he seated himself on the rail with his face turned in the direction of the Surf House. “If that sneak of an Admiral ever shows his head ’round here agin he’ll know what I think of him.”

“And I reckon you cubs think that’ll hurt him, eh?” a shrill, disagreeable-sounding voice cried, and looking around quickly, the partners saw their enemy approaching.

He was not more than a couple of yards from the foot of the gangway, and appeared to be bent on boarding the wreck.

Spence ran quickly across the deck while Matt was gazing at the Admiral in speechless astonishment, and wrenching loose one of the smaller timbers used in the construction of the booth, raised it threateningly as he leaped on the rail.

“Don’t dare step your foot on those planks, you bow-legged little villain!” he cried, angrily. “We’ve got possession of this wreck for a spell yet, and count on holding it.”

“Do you intend to brave the law?” the Admiral squeaked, stepping back a few paces. “It has been decided that this hulk is common property, and I shall —”

“Nothing has been decided yet, and you know it! A fine sort of party you are to come here with lies on your lips in the hope of getting the better of us. If you’ll stay right where you are till father arrives, I promise that you shall be arrested for trying to kill Matt and burn the wreck.”

“You seem to think your father is mighty powerful jest because he happens to be a New York lawyer, an’ is rich. But that’s where you are makin’ a big mistake, you impudent little cur! I know as much law as he does, an’ we’ll —”

“Then you know Matt can have you arrested, and it’s what he shall do before you’re a day older!”

“If your father had thought anything of the kind could be done, he’d had a warrant out before this. But the fact of his not havin’ applied for one shows what he thinks of my claim to this ’ere hulk.”

“So that makes you so bold, does it? Well, I can explain why no move has been made to punish you; it’s because everyone believed you was sorry for what you’d done, and that you might possibly behave yourself after knocking a boy senseless and

leaving him where he'd have burned to death if we hadn't come just as we did."

The Admiral winced under this remark, and Spence would have pressed his advantage but that Matt, clutching him by the coat to attract attention, whispered:—

"Don't talk with the little wretch, else Aunt Hannah will hear, an' we don't want to make her feel bad any sooner than we can help."

He spoke louder than he intended, and the Admiral heard the concluding words.

"So you're tryin' to keep it a secret from her, are you?" he screamed. "Well, she shall know the whole story, an' learn that she's brought herself into a law-suit that'll strip her of this place, even if worse trouble don't come of it."

Matt sprang toward the gangway as the vindictive little man advanced in the direction of the cottage, but Spence seized him around the waist.

"What are you going to do?"

"Have it out with that villain rather than let him scare Aunt Hannah!"

"That's exactly what he'd like to have you do, and you shall stay here if I have to tie your legs."

"What do you mean?" Matt asked in surprise as he faced his partner.

"I don't claim to be posted in the law as that

bow-legged little fool does ; but I know you've got no right to lay your hands on him. *Now* you've got the advantage, because you can have him arrested for the assault the other night ; but once bodily harm was done him, he'd be on even footing, an' it would be a question of which could get a warrant first. I'll guarantee he wouldn't wait as long as you have."

Matt no longer tried to resist the friendly detention, and, as a matter of fact, it was too late to prevent the Admiral from entering the cottage.

The angry man had walked swiftly, and was now on the veranda.

"He'll jest about set her crazy!" Matt cried, his eyes filling with tears.

"Don't be so certain of that. I ain't willing to believe he'll have any the best of the visit, for she'll forget all about 'he that ruleth the spirit' when she sees him."

While Spence was speaking the Admiral entered the house, and it seemed to the boys as if he had but just disappeared from view when the door was flung violently open, and they heard Aunt Hannah say in a sharp, firm voice:—

"I have warned you off my land once before, Joseph J. Johnson, and if I have reason to do it again there'll be considerable trouble. Don't ever

let me see you step foot on what belongs to me, or I'll take legal steps to punish you. I do hope an' pray I shan't let my temper get the best of me this mornin'; but it's mighty hard work to remember all I've been told to do, when I see you an' know you tried to kill Matthew."

Aunt Hannah advanced as she spoke, and the Admiral was backing away step by step as if believing she intended to strike him.

"I've brought a law-suit agin you, an' I'll take every dollar's worth of property you own!" he screamed viciously when Aunt Hannah was forced to cease speaking for an instant from lack of breath, and he thus had an opportunity. "You shall suffer for what that villain of a Matt, and his city friend, have done in violation of my rights!"

"Joseph J. Johnson, I warn you once more to take yourself off my land!"

"I'll go when I get ready, an' not a minute before. You shall hear what I've got to say."

"Now's our chance," Spence cried, speaking hurriedly as he seized the fragment of timber once more. "She has warned him off as a trespasser, and we've got a right to see that her orders are enforced. I know that much law, if no more."

Even before he had ceased speaking Spence was running down the gangway at full speed, Matt fol-

lowing close at his heels although he did not quite understand what his partner had said.

“If Mrs. Gordon has warned you away, why don’t you go?” Master Richmond cried as he advanced threateningly at the little man so learned in the law.

The Admiral soon realized that he had placed himself in a disagreeable position, and was in great fear of bodily injury, knowing as he did that the boy could lawfully eject him from the place.

This time he stopped neither to threaten nor scold, but took to his heels in alarm, running, as Matt afterward said, “for all he was worth” until he had passed the boundary line, when he halted.

“You shall see what I can do, you thievin’ scoundrel!” he yelled, shaking his fist in impotent wrath.

“I know already what you’ll do — you’ll go to jail for trying to kill Matt, that’s what’ll happen before you’re many hours older!”

Admiral J. made no further remark, but toddled away in the direction of his own home without so much as turning his head, and Spence congratulated himself upon having frightened the bow-legged little man.

Aunt Hannah had not spent any time in watching the chase, but, seizing Matt by the arm, demanded to know what new move the Admiral had made.

It was necessary Matt should explain all that had occurred, or refuse to say a word, and as the last course was not to be even thought of, he related the unpleasant incidents of the previous evening, as well as the purport of Squire Kelley's visit.

Much to his surprise Aunt Hannah received the information as calmly as if he had been telling her some unimportant bit of news.

“I was afraid last night, while I listened to the music, that your good fortune would make the folks in the village envious, an' so I'm not so much surprised as I might be. We'll hear what Spence's father says before makin' up our minds that the circus can't be run any longer, an' no matter what happens, Matt, we'll keep a firm hold on our temper. ‘A soft answer — ’”

“Was that what you gave the Admiral, Aunt Hannah?” Spence asked with a ringing laugh.

“I didn't count on givin' him a chance to say anything that needed an answer,” the old lady replied grimly. “I was 'fraid I'd say somethin' I'd be sorry for if he stayed many minutes, so ordered him off the place, as I had a right to do, 'cordin' to his very words, repeated over an' over agin when he's set in the house eatin' my doughnuts an' layin' down the law. Who's that comin' up the beach?”

“Hurrah! It’s father!” Spence cried, throwing his hat high in the air as a means of expressing his joy. “He didn’t waste any time, but has hired a horse so he could get here quicker.”

Aunt Hannah’s face clouded as she remarked quietly: —

“He must think you boys are in desperate straits, else he wouldn’t have spent good money hirin’ a team when it’s almost as easy to walk.”

“Perhaps he wanted a ride, and wasn’t in the mood for walking; but we needn’t trouble our heads trying to guess why he’s coming in a carriage, for he’ll soon be here to explain.”

Even Spence was beginning to grow nervous regarding the possible outcome of the injunction, and the suggestion made by Aunt Hannah seemed plausible.

Not a word was spoken by the sad-visaged little party during the interval which elapsed before Mr. Richmond’s arrival.

In silence they watched as he drew nearer and nearer, not even seeing anything comical in Joey’s assumption of dignity while he sat bolt upright by the side of the lawyer, munching peanuts as if something important depended upon his being able to swallow a certain number in a given time.

“You are evidently not in a cheerful mood, good

people," Mr. Richmond said cheerily as he brought the horse to a standstill and descended from the vehicle. "I dare say there was something very terrifying in the injunction served upon you by Mr. Kelley."

"He told us we couldn't carry on the show till the question was settled as to who owned the wreck," Spence replied mournfully, "and it's pretty hard to shut down when customers are so plenty."

"I do not think he meant exactly that, my boy. It is possible for us to give bail pending the settlement of the case, and Mr. Atwood will not be averse to doing so for us when I secure him against possible loss."

"What do you mean by giving bail, father? We're not arrested."

"In a certain sense the wreck is. Mr. Johnson pleads that you have no more claim than others who own the property on the shore. Now we give bail that we will pay all reasonable penalties which may be assessed for the detention of the property, in event of the case being decided against us. That done, you can continue your business as before."

"Are you going to fix it?"

"I shall try, although I may not be able to do so as quickly as you wish. I want first to get Mrs. Gordon's information as to her holdings on the shore,

when the wreck drifted in, and how long she has lain here unclaimed.”

“The Admiral came a few minutes ago, and we wouldn’t let him step on board.”

“So he has shown himself, has he? I rather thought the gentleman would keep out of sight.”

“Why shouldn’t Matt have him arrested?”

“I do not think it a wise move now, since it would appear as if done in retaliation. Hold possession of what you claim as yours, but do not demand payment for allowing anyone to come on board. If you admit people free, there is nothing to prevent you from disposing of your wares. In case one comes, however, all must be allowed the same privilege, and the villagers have equal rights with others. The injunction simply restrains you from charging an admission fee to the derelict. Now, Mrs. Gordon, if you will invite me to your house for a few moments, I shall soon know all that is necessary.”

Aunt Hannah led the way to the cottage, and the boys were left alone, feeling decidedly more easy in mind, but uncertain as to whether it would be best to allow the people to flock on board if an admission fee could not be charged.

“We’d better take everything ashore, and leave her as she was a week ago,” Matt said gloomily.

“Then we’d be giving up possession, and I think father’s idea is that we should hold on to her as long as we can. Did you see Mr. Atwood at the hotel, Joey?”

“He went into Portland this mornin’,” Master Pendleton replied, speaking indistinctly because of the many peanuts in his mouth.

“Where is Dan Fernald?”

“He went with the boss.”

“How many nuts did you take, Joey?”

“Only as much as would stay my stomach till I could get breakfast,” and Master Pendleton looked both injured and surprised that such a question should have been asked.

“Well, if you can eat any breakfast now I wouldn’t like the job of staying your stomach when you had missed a couple of meals.”

“You said I was to have all I needed.”

“That’s right, Joey, an’ I meant it. Keep on eating, and enjoy yourself.”

Then Spence continued the discussion with his partner regarding their future course of action, and before the question had been decided Mr. Richmond had come out of the cottage.

“I am going to Portland now, and hope to meet Mr. Atwood on the road; but in case I should miss him, and he comes here, say I will consider it

a favor if he returns to town at once. He can hear of my whereabouts by asking at the Falmouth."

"Shall we give a free show, father?" Spence asked.

"I would so advise, and in case you decide to, be careful not to do anything which might be construed as a yielding on your part of Matt's claim. I heard from Fernald of what occurred last evening, and have arranged for him to stay on board every night while you continue in business."

Then Mr. Richmond drove away and the boys set about putting the wreck to rights, for there was no longer any question in their minds as to the proper course to be pursued.

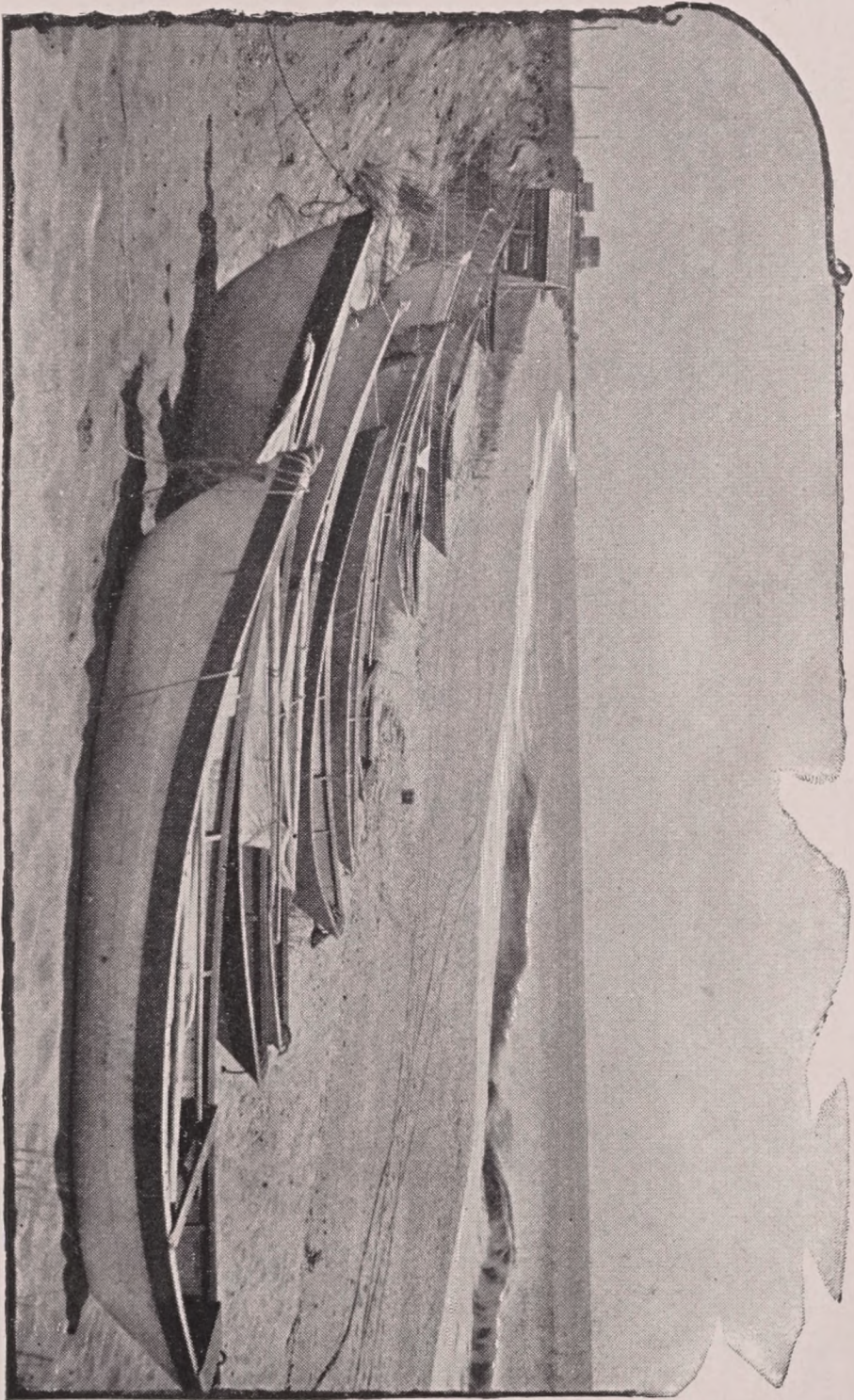
They were yet intent on this task when Dan Fernald drove up with the goods which had been purchased for the showmen by the landlord.

"Where is Mr. Atwood?" Spence asked.

"The lawyer met us on the road, an' took him into town agin. It looks like every Spurwinker in the village was jumpin' down on you, eh?"

"A good many of 'em are surely sidin' with the Admiral," Matt replied.

"Well, I don't know as that will do much harm, seein's how Atwood an' the city lawyer are on your side. Hewey is jest fool enough to think the summer boarders would patronize his shop if this show



was shut up; but that's where he's makin' the mistake of his life. All Jim Jordan's folks are with you, cause they reckon on sellin' their milk, while Squire Kelley is more'n willin' the Admiral should raise a row, for it'll put a few dollars in his pocket. It's a question of money all the way 'round, an' 'cordin to my way of thinkin' you'll come out ahead. I wish you hadn't got to shut down so soon, 'cause all my boats are engaged for this evenin', and I was countin' on makin' a fair day's work."

"We are going to keep the show open, Dan, but we shan't charge anything for coming aboard."

"Is that a fact?" and the boatman appeared delighted. "Good for your spunk, boys! I don't believe you'll lose a cent, 'cause jest as soon as the folks know why it's a free show they'll buy more stuff to make things square. Help me unload what belongs to you, an' that's more'n half of all I've got here. The boss says to me, says he, 'I allow them lads will do a big business 'twixt this an' Saturday night, an' we'll bring all they may need, at one load.' Here it is, an' I'm guessin' it cost a pretty penny; but you can stand that."

"What have you got there?" Matt asked, as Dan took from the wagon a huge painted tin vessel.

"It's to keep your lemonade in, an' there's a box

of lemons goes with it. If you have sich drinks, and milk as well, I wouldn't wonder if it would be a good idea to invest in Jamaica ginger while you're about it."

The partners began to think, before all their goods had been unloaded, that Mr. Atwood had made his purchases recklessly, so large was the quantity.

"I reckon you'll have to put out about as much as you put in yesterday, if you pay for all this," Dan Fernald exclaimed when the last package had been laid on the sand.

"There's more here than we could sell in a week, even if nobody bothered us," Matt said mournfully. "I wish he hadn't bought anything, 'cause if the Admiral or Bart Denny's crowd should make mischief on board while it's all there, we'd fail up for certain."

"There won't be any rows on that 'ere wreck, Matt," Dan replied, confidently, "though it may be we'll see a few scimmages outside, before some of these Spurwinkers know enough to 'tend to their own business. The lawyer has hired me to sleep here nights, and you can put it down for a fact that there won't be much funny business done by either the bow-legged Admiral or Bart Denny. I'll bring over a load of boarders 'bout eight o'clock, so be ready for us."

Then Dan drove away, and a hard hour's work did the partners have in stowing away their goods and making ready for the day's trade.

They had but just gotten the deck to rights when Aunt Hannah came from the cottage with a huge bundle in her arms.

"Here's your cake, Matt. I baked two loaves extra, in case you should need 'em."

"It looks as if you thought we'd hold out here quite a spell, Aunt Hannah," Spence said laughingly, as he took the burden from her arms.

"You'll stay every hour it is possible, no matter what happens to my property. The Admiral claims he's drawed me into a law-suit, an' he'll find I'm willin' to face him as long as he can hold out. I guess when it comes to the question of which is to be trod on, the Turners or the Johnsons, he'll find we're master hands at stickin' up for our rights."

CHAPTER XI.

A PROPOSITION.

I TELL you what it is, Matt," Spence said, when Aunt Hannah had returned home, "there ain't any signs of weakening about her! I was afraid she'd be terribly frightened at learning that the Admiral had really sued to obtain his fancied rights."

"Oh, Aunt Hannah is clear grit when she's stirred up," Matt replied, with a smile. "So long as there's a chance of keepin' out of a row she's soft as silk, but when it comes right down to hard knocks, same's it is now, her back's stiffer'n a ramrod."

"Let's make some excuse to send Joey up to the village, in order to learn what the people say. I'm not afraid that the bow-legged Admiral will get the best of us; but at the same time it won't do any harm to know what is being done."

Master Pendleton was more than willing to act as scout, for he knew the Spurwinkers would be eager to learn what the partners proposed to do

now they had been served with an injunction, and, therefore, during such time as there remained any information to be imparted, he would be treated with the utmost consideration.

It was not probable patrons would visit the wreck before afternoon, therefore Joey would not be needed on board, and the partners preferred to be alone for a while, since neither believed it wise to allow Master Pendleton to know more of their business plans than was absolutely necessary.

Joey set off in high glee because of the unexpected vacation, and his employers made themselves as comfortable as possible while they discussed again and again the situation of affairs in all its bearings.

At twelve o'clock Master Pendleton had not returned.

Mrs. Gordon summoned the boys to the noon-day meal, and Spence went first, leaving Matt on guard, although there was but little fear anyone would attempt to do them an injury now the question of ownership had been submitted to the court.

“Well, Aunt Hannah has got a bang-up good dinner to-day,” Master Richmond said in a tone of satisfaction when he rejoined his partner. “She didn’t so much as speak of the Admiral, or what he’s done, so I guess she isn’t losing any flesh over the matter.”

“It’s a bad sign when she don’t talk about what’s in her mind,” Matt replied, with a shake of his head.

“Why?”

“’Cause she’s certain to be doin’ a power of thinkin’; but so long as she don’t say a word we won’t,” and Matt hurried down the gangway that he might not keep his aunt waiting for him any longer than was necessary.

“How was she?” Spence asked when his partner finally returned.

“Chipper as a sparrer, so far as you could tell by her face. She’s goin’ to bake more cake, ’cause she allows we’ll do a big business, an’ is fussin’ ’bout our not sendin’ Joey for the milk before he went to the village. There ain’t much chance visitors will come for quite a spell, so I reckon I’ll run over to Miss Jim Jordan’s.”

“All right, and while you’re gone I’ll make the lemonade.”

Not until fully an hour had elapsed did Matt return, staggering under the weight of the heavy can, and he said in a tone of relief as he wiped the perspiration from his face:—

“I guess it’s just as well I went after the milk, for I don’t believe Joey could have brought it down alone. Here’s eight quarts, an’ I paid

Miss Jordan forty cents out of the change I had." Spence made note of the transaction in his book, and then handed his partner a sample glass of lemonade.

"That's what I call good!" Matt replied after he had drained the glass. "Did you get Aunt Hannah to help you?"

"No; but of course I had to go to the house for water. Did you hear anything?"

"Not much; of course the Jordans knew what the Admiral had done, an' claim that he won't make anything by the way he's actin'. Here comes Joey, an' we shall find out what's goin' on in the village."

That Master Pendleton had walked rapidly could readily be told by his flushed cheeks and heavy breathing, and from the expression on his face the partners knew he had considerable information to impart.

"I've been layin' 'round Hewey's store 'most of the time," he said as soon as it was possible to speak, "an' of course heard all that the loafers knew. They say the Admiral is bound to beat us in the law-suit, though some of 'em don't think he'll make much by it, 'cause the wreck can't be used as a show unless Aunt Hannah's willin' to let folks come across her land. Mr. Hewey

allows he don't care what becomes of the old hulk so long as you can't sell things on her; he says it's hurt him more'n ten dollars already."

"Did you see Squire Kelley?"

"He's gone into town, an' the folks say he started as soon as he saw Spence's father on the road."

"Do you know if the Admiral is payin' for all this?" Matt asked a moment later.

"Mr. Hewey's puttin' out some of the money, an' they've got a paper up to his store for folks to sign, tellin' how much each one is willin' to pay."

"Has any names been put down yet?"

"I don't know; but 'Siah Fernald said he guessed there'd be enough raised to see the thing through."

"What do your folks think about it?"

"Mother says she's 'fraid to have me stop here, 'cause she's most certain Bart Denny an' his crowd will raise a row before the thing is ended."

"Then you don't want to stay with us any longer?" and Spence drew a handful of silver from his pocket as if to pay Joey his wages.

"Indeed I do! I ain't scared of Bart Denny while Dan is with us, an' I coaxed so hard that mother gave in; I'll hang out as long as you fel-

lers will keep me. You see — hello! here comes a crowd, an' now, I reckon, business has begun."

The partners were on their feet instantly, fearing lest the new-comers might be evil-disposed persons from the village; but one glance was sufficient to show that it was a party of Mr. Atwood's boarders.

"It seems too bad to let all of them in for nothin'," Matt said, with a sigh, and Spence responded cheerily: —

"Now don't cry for spilled milk. It's a good deal better to have them on board buying things than to turn everybody away. I only hope the Admiral is sneaking around where he can see that we haven't shut up shop entirely."

There was no necessity of explaining to the visitors that an admission fee could not be charged. Dan Fernald had taken good care all the boarders should know of the trouble which had come upon the young showmen, and many were the expressions of sympathy and encouragement which greeted Matt as he assisted the guests over the rail.

Although it was not necessary anyone should be at the gangway, because no money could be received, Master Turner remained at his post as party after party arrived, and the kindly words which were spoken went very far toward reconciling him for the pecuniary loss.

At about four o'clock, when the decks were literally thronged with visitors, Matt was forced to assist in waiting upon the customers, for the demands for wares of all kinds, and particularly sea-shells, were many and often repeated.

Spence's mother and sister were among the patrons, and they reported that neither Mr. Richmond nor Mr. Atwood had returned from the city.

"Your father told me not to be uneasy if he failed to come back to-night, and from that I fancy he believed the task might be prolonged, if not difficult," Mrs. Richmond said in reply to her son's question.

"Did he seem to think everything could be fixed?"

"He said you need not be alarmed, because Admiral Johnson has no claim upon the wreck."

It was nearly six o'clock when the last of the visitors departed, and the partners made up the cash account at once, so impatient were they to learn how the afternoon's work compared with that of the previous day.

"I know we've done a rushin' trade," Joey said while Spence was counting the money, "for I've had to bring stuff out'er the cabin more'n a dozen times, an' we had a big pile up here in the first place."

“We’ve taken twenty-one dollars and fifteen cents,” Spence finally announced, and added, as he referred to his book, “Yesterday afternoon the admissions and what was sold came to twenty-two dollars and eighty-five cents. I can’t see but that we’ve made almost as much as if we’d been paid a dime by each one who came. If Mr. Hewey hears of this he’ll be willing to add to his subscription, for so far it seems as if his money had been the same as thrown away.”

“I heard a good many say they were coming this evenin’, an’ we’d better begin to get ready for ’em. The milk is gone, an’ Joey must go for another gallon. He can carry that much, I reckon.”

“The folks seemed to like Aunt Hannah’s cake, didn’t they?” Master Pendleton asked in delight, as he took the money handed him by Spence to pay for the milk. “There’s only one whole loaf left, an’ if she didn’t bake more this afternoon we’ll be kind’er short on that sort of grub before the evenin’s over.”

“Hurry to Miss Jordan’s as fast as you can,” Matt interrupted, an’ there’s no need for you to tell her how big a business we’ve done.”

“What shall I say if she asks me?”

“Tell her there were a good many people here, but we couldn’t charge ’em anything for coming

on board," and Matt began to sweep the decks, while Spence rearranged the booths.

While they were thus employed, too busy to indulge in conversation, the partners were surprised almost to the verge of bewilderment by seeing Aunt Hannah, escorted by Squire Kelley, coming up the gangway.

"Somethin' has gone wrong now, for a fact," Matt muttered, as he ran forward to assist his aunt, and an expression of deepest anxiety came over Spence's face.

"I declare, you boys have fixed the old hulk up in great shape," the Squire said, in what he intended should be a friendly tone, as he gazed around in astonishment. "I don't wonder the summer boarders want to come here; but I'm positive they would curb their desires if they knew how it was tempting you young folks."

"What's the matter, Aunt Hannah?" Matt whispered, paying no attention to the words of praise. "How did you happen to come over?"

"Squire Kelley called to make what he calls a proposition," Aunt Hannah replied, raising her voice in order that Spence might hear all she said. "I told him that if he wanted to talk business it must be done before you boys, an' when he saw I wouldn't listen to him in the house he brought me here."

Matt turned toward the visitor inquiringly, and after clearing his throat with much unnecessary noise, and seating himself on the rail where he could see his audience plainly, Squire Kelley began:—

“I came over here as a neighbor to talk with Mrs. Gordon about this unhappy affair. It distresses me, as it must every inhabitant of Spurwink, to have harsh feelings between friends, and more particularly when they have arisen over such a worthless object as this wreck.”

The Squire paused as if expecting a reply, and Spence said gravely:—

“It strikes me it’s a little too late to make such talk. You’ve gotten out an injunction against us, and that is about the length of your rope until the matter is settled by law.”

“Yes,” Aunt Hannah added almost sharply; “no one had a kind word until after everything had been done an’ it was too late to mend matters.”

“But it isn’t too late, Mrs. Gordon, and I have come over here to act the part of peacemaker. There is no reason why these unpleasant and unneighborly proceedings shouldn’t be stopped at once.”

“Are you willing to take back the injunction?” Matt asked eagerly.

“That is something over which I have no control; but I hope to convince Admiral—Mr. Johnson, that it should be done.”

“Then why don’t you begin on him? Aunt Hannah can’t do anything towards stoppin’ the row.”

“That is where you are mistaken, Matthew. She can do very much, and I hope to get her agreement to the plan which I have to propose. When that has been done I believe the — Mr. Johnson will listen to reason. It is very improbable that she has any claim to the wreck simply because it chances to have come ashore at this particular spot. If the court decides she has no rights in the matter, as the people of Spurwink now believe will be the case, she must pay a large bill of costs, and perhaps lay herself liable to damages because of what she has permitted you boys to do. Now it would distress me deeply to see Mrs. Gordon stripped of her property in her old age, for —”

“Never mind tellin’ us ’bout what might happen, for you’re only guessin’ at it,” Matt said sharply, and his aunt nodded emphatically to show he had spoken wisely. “If you’ve got a proposition to make we can hear it; but I don’t think it’ll do much good till after we’ve seen Mr. Richmond an’ Mr. Atwood.”

“I met them both in the city to-day. Now I am not questioning Mr. Richmond’s ability; but it stands to reason that he is not familiar with the laws of this state, and, while he means well by Mrs. Gordon, may be making a serious mistake —”

“That’s his lookout,” Spence cried, “and you don’t have any reason to weep about it.”

“Now we are allowing personal feelings to bias our judgment, as I feared would be the case if you boys were allowed to participate in the consultation.”

• “Tell me what you wanted to say at the house,” Aunt Hannah interrupted, “I’m gettin’ so old an’ pokey that I can’t keep track of what’s bein’ said if you fly from one thing to another so fast.”

Squire Kelly gazed reprovingly at Spence an instant, and then said slowly, as if uncertain whether he was warranted in offering such generous terms:—

“The citizens of Spurwink, hoping this feeling of harshness which has arisen among us may be allayed, have advised me to make an offer of settlement to Mrs. Gordon while there is yet time to arrange the matter, and promising on their part that the Ad—Mr. Johnson shall be brought to agree to the terms. If Mrs. Gordon will promise that you boys do not make a show of the wreck, and that those who want to view her as a curiosity be allowed to cross her land for that purpose, the complaint which has resulted in the injunction will be withdrawn. The costs can be paid by popular subscription, and she saved the fear of being made homeless in her old age—”

“Do you mean that I shall forbid Matt from keepin’ store here, an’ let whoever wants to come, traipse over my place?” Aunt Hannah interrupted.

“If the case is decided against you, as the best people of the village believe will be the result, Matt cannot be allowed to keep a store on the wreck, and you must pay the legal costs in addition —”

“Look at me, Squire Kelley,” Aunt Hannah said sternly as she rose to her feet. “I’m an old woman, an’ have lived in this town ever since I was born, doin’ my duty to my neighbors ’cordin’ to the best of my ability. The past ten years it has been weary work to earn enough for the taxes, an’ to buy the little we’ve had to eat. Now, when Matt, who hasn’t been able to go to school more’n two months out of the year because he’s obleeged to do somethin’ in the way of bringin’ in money, gets a chance to turn an honest penny, the Spurwinkers are up in arms about it. They can take the land I own, if the law says so, an’ they can send me to the poorhouse, perhaps, but they can’t make me veer this way or that to their whims. You’ve begun the law-suit, an’ it would be a deal more manly in you to go on with it, than to come here tryin’ to frighten an’ old woman an’ two children. That’s what I’ve got to say to your proposition, Squire Kelley.”

“Don’t be hasty in arriving at a decision, Mrs. Gordon. You may be sorry afterward, an’ I hope you’ll think the matter over calmly, and at your leisure.”

“I’m as calm now as I’ve been any minute since Admiral J. begun cuttin’ up sich shines, an’ no matter how sorry I *may* be, I can never feel as bad as you should for comin’ here on this errand.”

Then, waiting neither for a reply nor to be assisted over the rail, Aunt Hannah went down the gangway more nimbly than Matt had seen her move in many years, and the Squire stood gazing after her as if doubting whether he had not really received a lecture based on homely truth.

“I guess you’ve heard all there is to be said, sir,” and Spence changed his position in order to face the visitor. “Aunt Hannah don’t scare very easy, and it is just possible the case may not be decided as the ‘best people’ of this town seem to believe.”

“You’re an impudent boy!” Squire Kelley said angrily as he literally glared at Spence an instant, and then went over the rail with a very poor show of dignity.

“We’ll keep our eyes on him,” Matt cried as he ran out on the gangway. “He shan’t go up an’ badger Aunt Hannah, not if I have to throw him out of the house! The idea of his the same as sayin’ Admiral J. didn’t know he was comin’ here!”

“I wouldn’t wonder if that part of it was really true, Matt. I believe Mr. Hewey sent him; the storekeeper wants to make us shut up shop, and, finding that we couldn’t be prevented from selling goods, is trying another plan.”

“Then how could they promise Admiral J. should agree to their scheme?”

“Of course I don’t know; but most likely he would do whatever they said if all hands came down on him. If he — Hurrah! Here comes father and Mr. Atwood! Now we shall know whether we can run the show or not.”

Squire Kelley did not venture to pay Aunt Hannah a second visit, although what he might have done but for the appearance of the two gentlemen is quite another matter.

He evidently did not wish to meet them, for he suddenly turned to the left, although by such a course it became necessary to wade through the loose sand, and was soon lost to view among the scrub oaks that bordered the shore.

“Can we open the show?” Spence cried before his father had time to alight.

“Not to-night. There is little doubt but that you may do so to-morrow, for we have been very successful in arranging the question of bail. Who is that gentleman going across the sands?”

“Squire Kelley; he’s been trying to frighten Aunt Hannah into promising we shouldn’t be allowed to run the show.”

“Did he threaten?” Mr. Richmond asked sharply.

“Not exactly; but he had a good deal to say about her losing all she owned if the case went against her.”

“Rather sharp practice, eh, Atwood?”

The landlord nodded.

“Kelley knows the decision will be against him, and is doing this in behalf of Hewey.”

“Ain’t you coming on board?” Spence interrupted.

“Not to-night. I shall be obliged to go to the city early to-morrow, and am in need of rest. Have you done any business?”

“Sold over twenty-one dollars’ worth of stuff.”

“You did not charge an admission?”

“No, sir.”

“See to it that you don’t until I give you permission. I think it is safe to promise, however, that there will be nothing to interfere with your plans after twenty-four hours have elapsed.”

Then the two gentlemen drove away, and the partners, clasping hands, danced to and fro over the deck in the excess of their joy at the good tidings.

They were thus engaged when Master Pendleton came on board with the milk, and he stood looking at them in speechless astonishment until the demonstrations of joy were concluded, when he said in a tone of surprise : —

“ I allowed I’d find you all doubled up, after I saw Squire Kelley goin’ up the beach. Ain’t he been here ? ”

“ Yes ; but he didn’t do any very great amount of harm, and father says most likely we can open the show in regular shape after to-morrow.”

It was only natural Joey should be eager to hear the news, and his employers soon gave him a general idea of all that had occurred during his absence.

“ Well, I hope it’ll turn out as your father says ! ” Master Pendleton exclaimed as he dragged the tin can into the cabin. “ An’ so does Miss Jim Jordan. She says she’d rather sell her milk at home, than cartin’ it all over the country huntin’ for a creamery, an’ the next time she meets Admiral J. he’ll get a piece of her mind.”

CHAPTER XII.

AN EXPLOSION.

MATT did not have an opportunity to get supper on this evening; before the work of making ready for the expected visitors was finished, Dan Fernald rowed up with a party of eight, explaining, as he moored the craft where she would not be in the way of the others which would arrive at a later hour:—

“The people I brought have been to a clam-bake on the Neck, an’ so, of course, didn’t want supper at the hotel. They thought it would be high fun to get a lunch here before goin’ home, an’ I didn’t say anythin’ agin the plan.”

“Have you seen father or Mr. Atwood yet?”

“Yes, we stopped at the hotel for the women folks to get shawls an’ sich like, an’ the boss came down to the shore for a minute.”

“Then you know we’ll most likely be able to go on with the show?”

“I allowed as much as that when I knew who was workin’ in your interests. Men like Jethro

Atwood an' your father don't generally figger on gettin' beaten. It seems to me, though, as if they was growin' kinder scarey when there ain't any need of it."

"What makes you think so?"

"Mr. Atwood told me I was to stick by you fellows mighty close to-night, even if I had to hire someone in my place to pull the boat back."

"Does he think there may be mischief on foot?" and Matt looked disturbed.

"That's what I allowed, though I can't for the life of me make out why he should get sich an idee in his mind. Admiral J. will take good care not to come foolin' 'round, 'cause he knows you wouldn't be any too tender with him if he tried to be funny. As for Bart Denny, why, he don't want the least little bit of truck with me; I told him this mornin' jest what I'd do if he got too free."

"Didn't Mr. Atwood explain what he meant?"

"There wasn't any chance, for by the time he'd said that much the party was ready to leave, an' it wouldn't have been sound sense for him to let your customers have an inklin' there might be trouble here. But don't allow what I have said to make you turn a hair, my boy. We'll keep our eyes open mighty sharp to-night, an' if Bart or his gang get the best of us it'll be our fault."

Matt went on board the wreck ill at ease, for there was now in his mind the thought that, even though the law-suit should be decided in his favor, it was possible Admiral J. or his alleged friends could destroy the wreck.

Boat-load after boat-load of pleasure seekers arrived, and in less than an hour after the first came on board the last slice of Aunt Hannah's cake had been sold, and the guests were calling for more.

"Perhaps she baked some this afternoon when she saw what a crowd we had here," Spence suggested. "Why not run over to the house and see?"

Matt started off at full speed, and when he reached the cottage it was to find his aunt waiting patiently at the supper-table.

"I meant to have sent Joey over to tell you we couldn't come for anything to eat; but business was so good that I forgot all about it," he cried, apologetically.

"Do you mean that you won't be here for the least little bite?"

"We can't, Aunt Hannah. The folks began to come before dark, an' they've kept on till the wreck is reg'larly crowded. All the cake is gone, an' we thought perhaps you might have a little more."

“So I have, Matthew, four loaves.”

“That’s lucky! Where are they? I can’t wait here many minutes, else we might lose some trade.”

It was in vain the old lady pleaded with him to eat “jest a morsel” while she wrapped the loaves in “somethin’ clean.” He was so eager to return to his place of business that she finally ceased trying to persuade him, and instantly the cake had been made ready he ran away at full speed.

The evening was a repetition of the afternoon. The guests appeared determined to buy enough to atone for not having paid an admission fee, and the stock of goods which had seemed so large when it was unloaded from the wagon dwindled rapidly.

Dan Fernald remained on the bow of the wreck, or on the sands just outside, during the entire evening, and when the customers were ready to depart he called Matt aside for a consultation.

“I’m as certain as a man can be that there hasn’t been a Spurwinker anywhere near here since I come, an’ even if there should be mischief afoot, it ain’t no ways likely any would be tried for quite a spell after the last summer boarder leaves.”

“You mean that you want to row your party home?”

“That’s the size of it, Matt. It looks better that way, an’ then agin I don’t know who I could hire to take my place.”

“There’s no reason why you shouldn’t go, Dan. Instead of cleanin’ up to-night all hands of us will stand watch till you get back, an’ it don’t seem to me that we’re in any danger.”

“The only chance is that Bart Denny might show up, an’ if I wasn’t here, would come aboard.”

“He’ll have a hard time of it, for a spell anyway,” and a look of determination spread over Matt’s face.

“That’s right, my boy; I ain’t afraid but that you three could stand him off quite a while, an’ I won’t be gone more’n half an hour.”

By this time Dan’s patrons were waiting for him, and he whispered, before he took his station in the boat:—

“It’ll take quite a spell before the others get off, an’ I’ll see that my men don’t hurry any too much, so you won’t be alone all the time I’m gone.”

“Don’t worry about us; we can take care of ourselves for half an hour, and if not, we deserve to get the worst of it.”

Fifteen minutes later the last visitor had departed, and when Matt was alone with his partner and clerk he repeated what the boatman had said.

“We must keep our eyes open till Dan gets back, ’cause we can’t afford to take any chances; but I don’t believe we’ve got much call to be afraid.”

“Let’s go down on the beach where we can see better,” Spence suggested, but Joey did not favor the plan.

He insisted it was best to remain on board, for there they would be able to defend themselves with greater chance of success if Bart Denny and his friends should come.

It was evident Master Pendleton was afraid to go down on the beach, and Spence said petulantly: —

“If you won’t follow us, stay on the bow and watch the shore as sharp as you know how. Come on, Matt; we’ll get a couple of clubs, and I’ll answer for it there won’t be any mischief done while Dan is away, unless the whole village of Spurwink jumps down on us.”

When the sound of the oars told that the boatman was returning, nothing had been heard to betoken the presence of an enemy, and Matt said, with a sigh of relief: —

“I guess I was more scared than hurt, for if Bart’s crowd counted on doin’ mischief, some of ’em should be down here before this. But what puzzles me is, why Mr. Atwood got it into his head anything was wrong?”

“Perhaps Dan has talked with him again,” Spence suggested, and when the bow of the dory

grated on the sand, he asked, "Did you see the landlord when you were at the hotel?"

"Jest long enough to find out why he was anxious about you, an' I allow he had good reason. Of course we didn't have much time for talk, 'cause I allowed it was necessary to get back here; but—"

"What did he tell you?" Spence asked impatiently.

"That's what I'm comin' to if you give me a chance. When he drove through the village he stopped at Hewey's store, an' saw the shop-keeper talkin' as chummy as you please with Bart. The two looked kinder mixed up when he come in, an' Denny went out precious quick."

"But I don't see what there is in that bit of news to give us a scare."

"Neither did the boss till after he heard that Squire Kelley had been down tryin' to frighten your Aunt Hannah. Then it struck him that Hewey might be layin' plans to make sure the wreck shouldn't bother him in case the Squire didn't manage to scare Mrs. Gordon into doin' as he wanted. Have you heard anything since I've been gone?"

"Not the least suspicious sound," Spence replied. "Matt and I have been on the beach where we

could see plainly, and I'm almost certain there isn't a Spurwinker nearer than the village."

"I'll have a look around, and then we'll plan what's to be done for the night. Mr. Atwood's orders were for me to keep my weather eye liftin' all the time, an' I shall do it even though I don't believe there's any cause for such caution."

"I'm goin' with you," Spence said, as the boatman moved away. "The others can attend to cleaning up, and when we get back I'll lend a hand."

Dan would have objected to having company but that Master Richmond was so decided, and when the two were lost to view amid the scrub oaks, Matt went on board the wreck, where he found Joey generously sampling the milk he had brought from "Miss Jim Jordan's."

"It would sour before mornin', an' I thought it was a pity to let so much go to waste," he explained in an apologetic tone as his employer appeared.

"That's all right, Joey; but when anything like that is done we ought all to come in for a share."

"Dan Fernald wouldn't want milk, an' there's much as a pint left for you an' Spence."

Matt had too much on his mind to spend a great deal of time on the subject of milk, and set about

sweeping the decks and carrying the remnants of their stock into the cabin, a work in which he was assisted, after some delay, by Master Pendleton.

Dan and Spence were absent considerably more than half an hour, and when they came on board again the boatman said in a decided tone:—

“It’s dead sure there’s nobody skulkin’ ’round anywhere near us, an’ I reckon the boss was more scared than hurt; but all the same we’ll stand watch like little men. We’ll draw lots to see who shall begin the work, an’ when the rest can turn in.”

By this means it was decided Matt should remain awake the first hour, and then Joey, Dan and Spence would follow in the order mentioned.

“Better leave your work of fixin’ up the shop till mornin,’ ’cause it’s nigh on to midnight,” Dan said, motioning for the boys to go below. “I’ll hang my watch on one of the beams, an’ we’ll keep a lantern burnin’ so the fellow on duty can see the time. In an hour Matt is to call Joey, an’ when the second trick comes ’round, Spence must do his share.”

Then the boatman laid himself down in one of the berths, Spence and Master Pendleton quickly following his example, and ten minutes later Matt was pacing the deck forward and aft on the alert for the slightest suspicious sound.

Once he thought he saw a dark form upon the beach, and stole cautiously out on the gangway, where he could have a better view; but after a close scrutiny he decided it was nothing more than the shadow of a cloud, and returned to the deck.

He remained on duty ten minutes longer than had been agreed upon, and then proceeded to rouse Joey, which was no slight task, since that young gentleman proved to be a remarkably heavy sleeper, allowing himself to be pulled out on the floor before opening his eyes.

“Come, Joey, look alive!” Matt whispered. “It ain’t fair to wake the other fellers, an’ that’s what I’ve come near doin’ tryin’ to get some sense into you.”

“I was awful sleepy,” Master Pendleton replied, with a yawn. “It don’t seem as if I’ve been in bed more’n five minutes.”

“I’ve let you lay full ten minutes over the hour. Come on deck so’s I can be certain you are awake, an’ then I’ll turn in.”

“I don’t believe there’s any need of all this fuss,” Joey grumbled as he ascended the companion-way stairs. “If Bart’s crowd counted on makin’ trouble they’d been here long before this.”

“We’d better be sure than sorry, an’ you’re only to do as much as the rest of us.”

“Where shall I stay?”

“Walk 'round, an' then you'll be certain to keep awake.”

“Do you mean that I've got to travel back an' forth a whole hour.”

“Of course, else how can you stand watch as it should be done? If you keep movin' there's no chance anybody can slip up on us.”

Then Matt turned to go below, stopped an instant as if reconsidering his determination, and finally disappeared from view.

He was doubtful as to whether Joey would act the part of a sentinel faithfully, and almost persuaded it would be better for him to do double duty than entrust the work to a cowardly boy who had shown himself inclined to indolence.

The desire for slumber was weighing upon his eyelids, however, and he compromised with himself by promising that he would sleep only a few moments at a time, going on deck now and then to make certain the clerk was doing his full duty.

Then his eyes closed in unconsciousness, and all thoughts of protecting his property were drowned by the dream-elves, who wove entrancing pictures for his benefit.

Meanwhile Joey was struggling against the desire to return to the cabin. The night wind was

chilling; the silence, save for the beating of the surf against the shore, so profound as to be almost terrifying, and such labor seemed useless.

He paced slowly the length of the deck half a dozen times, and then decided it was absolutely necessary he should sit down under the lee of the deck-house a short time.

“There’s no sense in walkin’ ’round this old wreck all the time, an’ I can keep watch jest as well if I’m where it’s warm.”

The sobbing of the waters, the gentle sighing of the night wind, and the comparative warmth, soon caused Master Pendleton to forget all else save the pleasure of closing his heavy eyelids an instant, and once that was done his usefulness as a sentinel had vanished.

He slept as only a tired boy can sleep, unconscious of the fact, that, half an hour later, two figures crept cautiously out from among the scrub oaks, listened intently a brief time, and then advanced stealthily toward the wreck.

If Master Pendleton had been awake he would have seen the newcomers continue on until lost to view under the bow of the hulk, where a certain scratching, grating noise could be heard for several minutes, after which the intruders ran swiftly back to the shelter of the scrub oaks.

Then, had the sentinel's eyes been open, he would have seen a dim glow, heard a slight crackling noise, and the odor of burning powder might have warned him of danger which menaced.

As it was, however, Joey heard nothing; was conscious of nothing until a deafening report rang out—the bow of the wreck seemed to be literally lifted up, and the hulk settled back on the sands with a crash that was mingled with the rending and splintering of timbers.

Joey was on his feet in an instant, all vestiges of slumber frightened from his eyelids, and in the gloom of the night he saw a dense cloud of smoke enveloping the forward portion of the wreck.

“Fire! Fire! Fire!” he shouted at the full strength of his lungs, and then he ran in the extremity of his terror to the cabin.

He reached the companion-way just as Dan Fernald was ascending, and the collision could not be avoided.

Joey was launched against the boatman like an arrow from a bow, and the two rolled over and over to the floor beneath, increasing, if that could be possible, the bewilderment of the partners.

“What has happened?” Matt cried as he leaped from his bunk, alighting squarely on Master Pendleton, and causing him to scream loudly in mingled pain and terror.

“This fool Joey has knocked me down,” Dan cried angrily as, after some difficulty, he rose to his feet and darted up the companion-way.

“What was that noise?” Matt asked of the screaming clerk, as he in turn regained his footing.

Joey was unable to reply, and even though words had come at his command, he could have given no explanation of what had occurred.

Matt was on deck, with Spence close at his heels, just as Dan came back at full speed, crying as he saw the partners:—

“Light the lanterns. There’s been a worse attempt made than ever the boss dreamed of! Who was on watch?”

“Joey,” Matt replied as he disappeared within the cabin once more, and Dan muttered:—

“Most likely he went to sleep as soon as he was left alone.”

“What has happened?” Spence demanded.

“I can’t tell for certain; but it looks as if someone had been tryin’ to blow up the wreck. I can smell powder, an’ went forward far enough to see that the bow is badly stove.”

Matt soon had two lanterns lighted, and with these the partners and the boatman went forward, leaving Master Pendleton lying prone upon the floor in an agony of terror.

When Dan would have stepped out on to the gangway he saw that the structure had disappeared, and stood on the rail an instant holding the lantern low, in order to make certain there was nothing there which might inflict an injury, after which he leaped to the beach.

“Some of them sneakin’ Spurwinkers have done jest what I thought. The bow is splintered from the keel up, an’ there’s a hole in the sand big enough to bury a house. Be careful where you jump!” he added, and a few seconds later the partners were by his side.

“That’s enough to tell the whole story,” Dan said, as he swung the lantern around to illuminate the scene. “They’ve done their best to blow the hulk to pieces, an’ if that had been done we’d gone up with her. I’d like to have my hands on Bart Denny for about three minutes!”

“It looks as if they’d tried to blow out sand instead of destroyin’ the hulk,” Spence said, as he leaned over to examine more closely the effect of the explosive.

“That’s because the idiots didn’t know enough about sich things to last ’em over night. They’ve used dynamite, an’ most of the force has gone downward, for that’s the way the stuff works. The sand didn’t offer much resistance, an’ the hulk

got the smallest end of the blow. If they'd had sense enough to do it with powder, most likely we wouldn't be standin' here so comfortable."

A slight noise as of some one approaching caused the little party to start back, in fear of an attack, but instead of an enemy they saw Aunt Hannah, her head enveloped in a blanket.

"What made that terrible noise?" she asked, in a quavering voice. "I thought you boys had been killed."

"It ain't the fault of Admiral J.'s friends that we wasn't blowed higher'n a kite, Mrs. Gordon," Dan replied hotly. "Some of the Spurwink beauties have been tryin' their luck with dynamite."

"Is that what made sich a terrible noise?" and Aunt Hannah advanced to Matt's side that she might see more clearly.

"Nothin' else, an' it's been a narrow squeak for all hands."

Matt fully expected to see his aunt display signs of terror, as he had known of her doing at some trifling accident; but in this he was mistaken. It was as if the knowledge of deadly danger gave the old lady courage, for her voice suddenly grew steady as she asked: —

"How did they get so near without your knowin' it, Matthew?"

“Joey was on watch, an’ he must have gone to sleep.”

“Why don’t you try to find out who did the mischief? They can’t be very far away.”

“It wouldn’t be any use to hunt for ’em now, Mrs. Gordon,” Dan replied. “They most likely put a long fuse to the cartridge, an’ were well off before the explosion.”

“I’m not goin’ to lose my temper,” she said, as if it was necessary to reassure herself; “but if we can get proof against the rascals who did sich a murderous deed, I will see to it that they are punished.”

“I’m goin’ to take a hand in somethin’ like that myself, Mrs. Gordon, as soon as I come across Bart Denny.”

“Do you know he did it?” Aunt Hannah asked, sharply.

“I’ve got reasons enough for thinkin’ so to make me pretty certain a sound floggin’ won’t be wasted, though I couldn’t swear to anything.”

“You must rule your spirit, Daniel Fernald, an’ beware of judgin’ wrongfully. It would be wicked to lift your hand against Bartholomew with no other reason than your suspicions. Are any of you hurt?”

“I guess Joey is bruised a little, for he an’ Dan

tumbled downstairs, and then Matt jumped on them," Spence replied, with a laugh.

Aunt Hannah would have insisted Master Pendleton be examined, in order to ascertain if he was in need of nursing, but that Dan dismissed the subject unceremoniously.

"Don't bother your head about him, Mrs. Gordon, for he's come to no great harm, that I'll guarantee. You had better go home, for this night wind won't help your rheumatism, an' we'll take care of matters 'round here a good deal better, from this out, than we have done."

Suddenly remembering the penalty she might be called upon to pay for thus venturing forth insufficiently clad, Aunt Hannah went swiftly up the beach to her home, and the boys examined at their leisure the injury done the wreck.

CHAPTER XIII.

REPAIRING DAMAGES.

BEFORE the partners concluded their examination of the damage done the wreck, Joey made his appearance, leaning over the rail carelessly as he asked curiously:—

“Do you s’pose it was Bart’s crowd what blowed us up?”

“I don’t think we have been blown very far,” Spence replied, with a laugh, and then the expression of mirth left his face suddenly as he said sternly, “It seems certain you went to sleep, although knowing how important it was for the safety of all that you should keep careful watch.”

“I didn’t shut my eyes for more’n a minute before the thing went off.”

“Where were you?”

“I’d gone under the lee of the deck-house jest a second to get warm.”

“I warned you to keep on walking,” Matt said quickly.

“That’s so; but how was a feller to do it when

he was tired most to death? I'd been runnin' 'round since mornin,' without even a chance to get anything to eat, an' I had to rest some time, didn't I?"

"There's no use raisin' a row now when the trouble's over," Dan said philosophically. "I'm the one to blame, for I should have stood watch alone."

"It would be strange if three boys of our size couldn't help out long enough to let you have a nap. I'm the most at fault, for when I left Joey I was most certain he'd go to sleep."

"What's the use of blaming ourselves, or each other?" Spence interrupted. "The danger is over, and the most important question to be settled, so far as we're concerned, is whether the wreck has been injured very much."

"When it comes to that, she's in better condition for a show than before, an' after the hole in the sand has been filled up, I allow the hulk is worth a good bit more."

"How do you make that out?" Matt asked curiously.

"It's easy enough. Yesterday all you could show was a wreck what had drifted ashore; now you've got the same craft after she's been blown up by a dynamite cartridge. Ain't she more of a curiosity than ever?"

"It may be possible; but I doubt it," Spence re-

plied thoughtfully. "I'm afraid customers won't dare to come here now, for fear the Spurwinkers may try the same game when there's a crowd on board."

"The ones what did this mischief will keep shady for a spell, that you may depend upon."

"The same was said about Admiral J. after he'd nearly murdered Matt; but yet he bobbed up serenely, ready again for mischief, within twenty-four hours. Whoever exploded the cartridge was backed by some of the villagers, and will be bold, even though a serious offense has been committed, because of those behind them."

"You're arguin' 'bout as well as your father could, I reckon; but at the same time I don't believe there's reason to fear another move right away," Dan said with an air of wisdom. "If I'm any judge of human nature, Mrs. Gordon is well primed to make trouble for somebody."

"What can Aunt Hannah do?"

"That's a question I can't answer, seein's I don't know what kind of a plan she's got in her head; but I'll give big odds she stirs up a hornet's nest in Spurwink before this time to-morrow."

Neither Matt nor Spence believed it would be possible for the old lady to effect very much where Lawyer Richmond and Mr. Atwood had failed,

but Dan was so positive that they finally allowed the subject to drop, and turned their attention to estimating the amount of damage done.

“The gangway must be rebuilt,” Spence said, after a careful examination, “and it will take some time to fill up that hole.”

“I’ll agree to have it done before daylight if you’ll get me a shovel,” Dan interrupted.

“But you need more sleep,” Spence objected.

“You had only about an hour in your watch below.”

“An’ I shouldn’t have had any, so I’m jest that much ahead. I couldn’t go to sleep now if I tried, an’ it’ll do me a power of good to shovel sand a spell, while I’m thinkin’ what a fool I’ve made of myself.”

“If you work we shall do the same.”

“I don’t know of any good reason why you shouldn’t. This ’ere gangway must be up before noon, ’cause I’m allowin’ you’ll have a crowd over here by that time to see how the wreck looks after the explosion.”

“I’ll die if I don’t sleep *some* to-night,” Joey wailed, and Spence cried cheerily: —

“Then go into the cabin and finish your nap; it would have been better for us if we hadn’t insisted on trying to keep you awake.”

Joey disappeared instantly. He had expected a severe scolding from each of his companions in turn, and was even prepared to receive his discharge; but now he had been let off so easily, it was wisest, according to his ideas, to remain out of sight of his employers as long as possible.

Matt procured the necessary tools at the cottage, and in less than half an hour after the mischief had been wrought, Dan Fernald and the partners were doing their best to repair it.

When day dawned the boatman's task was completed; a deep depression on the beach alone remained to show the force of the dynamite.

The gangway was not yet replaced, but the work was so far advanced that it could readily be finished before noon, and Dan said cheerily as he threw down the shovel:—

“I reckon it's time for me to light out an' do my chores at the hotel. I can't say when I'll be back, 'cause the boss may think after what's happened that I'm not to be trusted; but I've got a suspicion I shan't be away many hours.”

“When I see father he shall know you are not to be blamed for this night's work,” Spence cried as the boatman pushed off from the shore.

Then the partners continued their labor as carpenters until Aunt Hannah summoned them to breakfast.

Joey had not shown himself since going into the cabin to resume his nap, and Matt said as he dropped the tools : —

“I reckon it’ll be safe to leave him an’ the wreck here ; we can keep our eyes on this part of the beach by leavin’ the kitchen door open, an’ we both need our breakfast about as soon as it can be got.”

“Do you believe Dan was right when he said Aunt Hannah would make a stir in the village?”

“Of course I don’t. She’s frightened by this time, now she’s had a chance to think the matter over, an’ I wouldn’t be surprised if she kept the doors locked every hour of the day an’ night for fear the Admiral may take it into his head to blow up the cottage.”

When the boys entered the combined kitchen and dining-room, Aunt Hannah greeted them with a pleasant “good morning,” exhibiting no signs of nervousness.

She served breakfast as if there was nothing more important on her mind, and never referred to the explosion other than to say she had seen them at work.

“How long will it take you to get the show ready agin?” she asked, and Spence replied : —

“We’ll have things in shape before there’s time for customers to come.”

“Where’s Joey?”

“In the cabin asleep.”

“When you go back tell him to come right up for breakfast, if he expects to get any. I can’t keep the table in the floor all day.”

Matt gazed in surprise at his aunt; he had never heard her speak in such a tone before, and began to be afraid the events of the previous night had affected her brain in some way.

“I s’pose you’ll want more cake?” the old lady said interrogatively, after helping the boys to a bountiful supply of food.

“There’s no hurry ’bout it, Aunt Hannah. I’m kinder ’fraid the summer boarders won’t dare to come after what’s happened, an’ Spence thinks the same.”

“Then they’ll be foolish. Howsomever, if you *should* do any business, you’ll find four loaves in the pantry.”

“I thought you gave me all you had, last night,” and Matt’s face was expressive of bewilderment.

“So I did; but after the explosion I couldn’t get to sleep again, ’specially since I could see by the lanterns that you were workin’, so I passed the time cookin’. When you want dinner you’ll find plenty in the cupboard, if I ain’t here.”

“Where are you goin’, Aunt Hannah?” Matt asked with no slight show of anxiety.

“It may be I shall make some calls, an’ I don’t want to feel obleeged to hurry back. I haven’t been over to Jim Jordan’s in an age, an’ it’s time I went neighborin’.”

The partners glanced at each other meaningly, but remained silent, and Aunt Hannah made no further remark.

“Dan was right!” Spence said emphatically when the two were walking down the beach. “She is up in arms for a fact, an’ I wouldn’t be surprised if the village was stirred up in good earnest before night.”

“But what can she do?”

“I don’t know, though I’m as certain as Dan was, that there’s going to be considerable excitement around here.”

“Do you s’pose Aunt Hannah can change things, if your father an’ Mr. Atwood couldn’t?”

“We shall know all about it before night, so instead of standing here talking, we’d better finish the gangway. We ought to have it in good shape before noon. Hello! there’s Joey, and I hope he’s had all the sleep he needs. See here!” Spence cried to the clerk, “If you don’t move lively you won’t get any breakfast, and after you’ve filled up, there’s work enough for all hands.”

Master Pendleton did not require a second in-

vation, but ran with all possible speed across the sands, and half an hour later was busily engaged doing his share of the building.

It was not yet eight o'clock when Aunt Hannah, dressed in her best, came to the shore and handed Matt the key of the house, saying as she did so:—

“If the Spurwinkers have taken to explodin' folks, it ain't safe to leave the house open a single minute. Be sure to lock the door in case you run up after the cake, an' wipe your feet before you go in. I saw a power of sand on my best rag carpet this mornin', an' it must have been brought in by some of you boys.”

“Where are you goin', Aunt Hannah?”

“Neighborin', Matthew, jest neighborin', with a little business mixed in. Remember what I've said, in case I ain't here 'twixt now an' noon.”

Then she walked away quickly, as if afraid of being questioned, and Spence gazed at his partner triumphantly, but did not speak because Joey was where he could have overheard the conversation.

Half an hour later Dan Fernald's boat appeared off shore, and the partners saw a passenger in the stern-sheets.

“It's father!” Spence cried in delight after gazing at the incoming craft several seconds. “Of course Dan has told him what happened last night, and he's coming up to see if we need anything.”

“He’s been mighty good to us, Spence, an’ we haven’t settled with him yet for the awnin’.”

“What of that? He knows we’re able to pay when he gets ready to make out the bill, and I believe our show amuses him; he’s got nothing else to do except look out for us.”

“He worked hard all day yesterday when he might have laid ’round takin’ his ease.”

“He’d rather be doing something than lying still,” Master Richmond replied carelessly; but Matt persisted in recognizing the full value of the services performed, and giving due heed to the generosity which prompted such deeds.

“If I had a father like that I’d think I was the luckiest boy in all this world,” he said emphatically; “an’ so would you, if you’d never had one.”

“That’s a fact,” Master Pendleton added. “*My* father wouldn’t have bothered *his* head ’bout what I was doin’, even if I’d owned the whole of this wreck.”

“That ain’t the right kind of talk, Joey. Your father has always given you a good home, with a chance to go to school, which is the most he can do; but you don’t seem to count it. It’s fellers like me, who don’t have fathers, that know how much they help along.”

By this time Dan's dory was aground on the beach just astern of the wreck, for the tide was low, and Mr. Richmond cried cheerily as he leaped ashore:—

“So you boys have been getting yourselves into more trouble, eh? Has there been much damage done the show?”

“She's as good as ever, sir, except that the water will come in at the bow more'n it did before,” Matt replied.

“So long as it doesn't rise over the deck I can't see that you have any cause to complain. Well! Well! Well! There was considerable power in the explosives your friends used,” he added as he surveyed the shattered bow. “You have had a narrow escape, and I understand that Master Joey slept at his post of duty?”

“I didn't shut my eyes more'n a minute, sir.”

“And if you hadn't shut them at all your enemies might not have found an opportunity to do this. Never mind what you are set to do, Joey, it's worth doing well, and should never be neglected. In this world we can't afford to slight the most unimportant duties, lest disaster follow. The carelessness of a moment is always attended with danger to one's self, since it tempts one to offend in the same way a second time, and in due course of events such traits must be paid for dearly.”

Master Pendleton did not venture to excuse himself, but looked as if he repented heartily having yielded to the desire for slumber when his eyes should have remained open.

Mr. Richmond called upon Dan for an explanation of the condition of affairs as he had seen them immediately after the explosion, and as his questions were answered he made copious notes, but for what purpose the boys did not understand.

“Fernald will remain with you during the next twenty-four hours, and perhaps longer, if it should seem necessary,” Mr. Richmond finally said. “I do not expect him to assist you in any way, save in case of actual danger, and in such an event you will follow his instructions implicitly. He is to be treated as a guest who represents me, and I venture to say all will go well if his advice is acted upon.”

“You talk as if you were going away,” Spence said with just a shade of disappointment perceptible in his tones, for he had hoped his father would at least remain in the vicinity during this day.

“So I am, and it is wholly on your account. Here comes Mr. Atwood; he and I are to settle the matter of giving bail so that you may resume business on the old basis.”

The boys had not noticed the approach of the landlord until Mr. Richmond spoke, and then Mr.

Atwood was in the act of bringing his horse to a standstill within a few yards of the wreck.

As if simply to gratify his curiosity, he examined the damage done by the explosion, Mr. Richmond pointing out the splintered timbers, and then the two gentlemen drove away.

“So you’re our guest, and we are to entertain you,” Spence said with a laugh as he turned toward Dan. “I was hoping you had come to lend a hand, for we’re getting along precious slow.”

“Your father was only in sport when he said that. Of course I’ll take hold, an’ the work is so far ahead that it shouldn’t need half an hour to finish it. I reckon it won’t be done any too soon, either, for some of the women folks are comin’ up after the bathin,’ an’ everything must be in apple-pie order when they get here. How’s your Aunt Hannah carried sail since the shindy?”

“She’s dressed up an’ gone out,” Matt replied, with a smile, and Dan said as he brought his hand down on his knee with a resounding slap:—

“What did I tell you? I allow Hewey an’ his crowd will get it heavy before she gets back!”

“Aunt Hannah won’t say anything to Mr. Hewey,” Matt replied confidently.

“Don’t be so sure of that, my boy. She’s in proper trim for most anything, or I’m no judge of Spurwinkers.”

“What did father say when you told him of the explosion?” Spence asked curiously.

“Not very much; he appeared to be taken a good deal as Mrs. Gordon was — too mad to speak. I’m allowin’ all this scrimmage with Admiral J. is goin’ to turn to your advantage, for it makes folks want to give you a lift.”

Having thus given free vent to his predictions, Dan set about assisting the amateur carpenters, and with such good effect that in less than twenty minutes the gangway was as serviceable as ever, thus giving the partners ample time in which to make ready for the coming of visitors.

Joey worked as he had never done before. What Mr. Richmond had said gave him food for thought, and he was careful not to slight any task he was called upon to perform, however simple it appeared.

It was he who suggested that “somebody oughter go over to Miss Jim Jordan’s for milk,” and, what was more to the purpose, he insisted on doing the errand unaided.

“If you lugged the can over here when it was full, I can do as much,” he said decidedly; but Matt insisted on dividing the labor, and the two started off across the fields, leaving Spence and Dan to finish the task of arranging the goods in the booth.

Before the clerk and his employer were well among the scrub oaks, they saw a short, ungainly figure through the stunted trees just in advance, moving to and fro quickly, as if wishing to remain hidden from view, and Matt was so indiscreet as to shout:—

“There’s no need of skulkin’ like that, Admiral J., for we can see you. Why not go down to the wreck like a man, if you want to find out how much your friends did last night?”

During several seconds no reply was made to this speech, and then, as if he had been considering the proper course to pursue, the bow-legged enemy came into full view.

“What do you mean by talkin’ to me like that?” he cried, angrily. “Do you insinuate I had anything whatever to do with the mischief last night?”

“I’m willin’ to come right out plump an’ plain, an’ say it was you, or your crowd, what did it. Look here, Admiral J., how long do you allow it’ll be safe to carry on this kind of a game? How many times do you reckon I’ll let you try to kill me before I get out a warrant to have you arrested?”

“Can you swear I had anything to do with the attempt which was made last night to destroy the wreck?” and the little man advanced until he stood within a dozen feet of Matt.

“Of course I can’t; you was too sharp to give me sich a chance, which is more’n can be said ’bout the other night, when you knocked me down.”

Admiral J. was trembling in every limb, through fear, so Matt believed, and it was only after considerable difficulty he could control his voice sufficiently to say:—

“What I did when I was very angry I can answer for; but you and every person in this village shall be made to understand that I don’t countenance the work of last night.”

As he ceased speaking the Admiral turned suddenly and ran into the bushes, as if fearing bodily injury, leaving the boys gazing after him in speechless astonishment.

“Well, that beats me!” Joey finally cried. “What do you s’pose has come over the sneak? I allowed, when he came out so fierce, that he was goin’ to pitch right in for a fight.”

Matt made no reply.

He did not understand why the Admiral had spoken in such a manner, unless he had suddenly grown alarmed lest he should be arrested.

“He’s scared, there’s no question about that, an’ I reckon he knows the jig is about done.”

“That may be, but at the same time I wouldn’t want to trust him too far. He’s made up his mind

we shan't run the show, an' by this time to-morrow will be ready for more mischief."

Then the two continued on to the Jordan farm, where they were greeted in the most friendly fashion by "Miss Jim."

She was eager to learn what injury had been done the wreck, and when her curiosity on this point had been satisfied, assured Matt that he had her deepest sympathy.

"It's a shame grown men should pick on you because you're makin' somethin' through that old hulk, when there ain't one of 'em as would have figgered out sich a plan. I'm sure the show is a perfect godsend to me, for I hadn't sold two quarts of milk this month till you begun to take it, an' what you get this mornin' will make five gallons since yesterday. The money must come in to you like it was rainin' gold."

"Not quite so easy as that, Miss Jordan," Matt replied, with a laugh; "but I shall make enough to keep Aunt Hannah an' me next winter, if Admiral J. an' his crowd don't drive me out of the business."

Having received and paid for the milk by the time this conversation was concluded, Matt began the return journey, his mind in a whirl as he tried in vain to find a plausible explanation for the sudden change in Admiral J.

CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. HANNAH GORDON.

WHEN Matt and Joey returned to the wreck they found Spence and Dan seated under the awning enjoying their leisure, for the work of preparing for visitors was finished.

As a matter of course a detailed account of the meeting with Admiral J. was given, and Dan Fernald said when the story had been concluded:—

“ I shouldn’t be surprised if the little man was gettin’ frightened, an’ he’s got good cause. Everything Bart Denny, or any other evil disposed person, does in the way of mischief ’round this ’ere wreck, will be laid to the Admiral’s door on account of his bein’ the first to start the trouble. Folks in this world are judged by what they’ve done in the past, an’ it stands us in hand to be mighty careful how we act toward our neighbors. If the Admiral hadn’t let his temper run away with him, he wouldn’t be the scape-goat in this matter, an’ that’s the part he’ll play in the end.”

“He deserves to be punished!” Spence cried hotly.

“I’m not sayin’ anything agin that, my boy; but ’twixt you an’ me, I allow he’ll think the punishment has begun when this day is ended.”

“Do you believe Aunt Hannah will have him arrested?”

“There’s no tellin’ what kind of a bee Mrs. Gordon has got in her bonnet; but when these ’ere quiet people are roused, they’re generally apt to do things up brown.”

Dan might have continued to speculate upon Aunt Hannah’s probable course of action indefinitely, for it was a subject that appeared to interest him greatly, but just at that moment a party of ladies appeared on the beach, and the partners made ready to wait on their guests.

“Business is beginnin’ early to-day,” Matt said in a tone of satisfaction as he took up his station at the gangway.

“An’ I predict it’ll be rushin,’ for the summer boarders will all want to see what was done last night,” Dan added as he went into the extreme forward portion of the hulk, where he would not be in the way of either the showmen or the visitors.

These early guests did not go on board immediately, but stood at the foot of the gangway as they

asked Matt to describe the occurrences of the previous night.

To do this it was necessary Master Turner should go down on the beach, and there he remained until the afternoon was considerably more than half spent, for the summer boarders came in what Joey described as "a reg'lar stream," each party insisting on being given all the details of the explosion.

Thus it was that Matt had no idea of how much business was being done on board, save when Spence passed him hurriedly on his way to get the cake, and stopped for an instant to receive the key and whisper: —

"I guess Dan was right when he said we'd have a rushing trade. It seems as if everybody was starved, and things are selling like hot cakes."

At three o'clock the deck of the wreck was thronged as it never had been since the "show" was opened, and it appeared as if the last of the afternoon's guests had arrived.

"It don't seem as if you could expect any more here till evenin'," Dan said as he clambered over the rail, allowing himself to drop on the sands beside Matt. "There can't be many left at the Surf House, except Spence's mother an' sister, an' most likely they're waitin' to hear the news from the city."

“Spence must be pretty busy.”

“That’s no name for it; he’s flyin’ ’round like a bee in a skillet. I heard him tell one of the women that the cake was gone, an’ now the folks are pitchin’ into bananas an’ oranges in great shape. You’ll need a fresh supply all ’round by Monday mornin,” or else have to shut up shop.”

“Perhaps I’d better go on board, an’ help him.”

“There’s no need of that, ’cause the heft of the rush is over, an’ he an’ Joey can pull through. I want you to wait till ’Siah Fernald gets here, for I allow he’s bringin’ some news,” and Dan pointed up the road where could be seen the gentleman referred to, coming toward the wreck at a rapid pace. “I s’pose ’Siah’s a sort of a second cousin to me; but I never took much stock in him, ’cause he’s too much of a loafer to suit me. I don’t believe I ever went into Hewey’s shop more’n once or twice in my life but what I found him settin’ there easy as old Tilly, never mind how much work he oughter been doin’.”

“I guess he’s only come down to find out what kind of a business we’re doin’,” Matt replied carelessly.

“There’s more’n that in his head, or he’d never walk so fast. ’Siah don’t believe in exertin’ himself any too much, but now he’s comin’ full tilt, which shows there’s somethin’ heavy on his mind.”

Dan's relative was moving at such a rapid pace that he was within hailing distance by the time the boatman concluded his remarks.

He nodded carelessly to Dan, and said in a particularly friendly tone to Matt:—

“I'm glad to see you doin' sich a big thing with this 'ere wreck, my boy. I reckon she'll bring in quite a tidy lot of money 'twixt now an' fall.”

Matt was thoroughly surprised at the friendly interest in his affairs as displayed by the newcomer. Josiah Fernald had never before thought it necessary to enter into conversation with the boy; had seldom ever greeted him even with a nod when they met.

“I don't allow you've come all the way down from the village jest to say that, 'Siah,” Dan cried, with a laugh.

“Why not? Don't you s'pose I take any interest in what's goin' on 'round this 'ere town?”

“Yes, I'll admit you do, so far as talkin' it over in Hewey's store goes; but I never heard before that you was so powerful anxious to see Matt get ahead in the world. How much did you put your name down for on that paper what's been goin' the rounds?”

“What paper do you mean?” and Mr. Fernald showed signs of irritation.

“The one Hewey started to raise money so’s Admiral J. could push his suit agin Mrs. Gordon.”

“Not a red cent.”

“I heard as how you agreed to give two dollars.”

“You can hear a good many things in Spurwink that ain’t got much truth in ’em.”

“There’s where you’re right, ’Siah, an’ I reckon folks lied when they said you’d put it out as your opinion that Matt oughter be drove away from this ’ere wreck?”

“I didn’t go as far as that; but I did allow he hadn’t any more of a claim to her than Admiral J., or anybody what owns land on the shore, an’ that I stick to. I say now he’s entitled to stay because he was the first to turn her to account, an’ I’m ready to do him a friendly turn whenever I can.”

“Thank you, Mr. Fernald,” Matt said with no very great show of heartiness, for he was not disposed to believe the statement implicitly. “I won’t need any help, though, if the Spurwinkers will stop tryin’ to kill me.”

“Now Matt, what put sich foolish idees as that in your head? Nobody’s tryin’ to kill you.”

“It looked like it last night, when somebody did their best to blow up the wreck, an’ we inside of her, same’s it did when Admiral J. knocked me senseless an’ set fire to the hulk.”

“But you mustn’t blame all that on the Spurwinkers, Matt. I don’t believe any of our folks had a hand in last night’s work.”

“Look here, ’Siah,” Dan interrupted. “Do you allow that folks from out of town come here to do sich a dirty piece of work?”

“It was most likely boys’ fun, an’ there wasn’t any harm reckoned on.”

“So you’d call it only fun if I should touch off a lot of dynamite under the place where you might be sleepin’?”

“I don’t s’pose them as did it knew there was anybody on the hulk.”

“Do you reckon they didn’t see the lighted lantern that hung over the bow within five feet of where the mischief was done?”

“Look here, Daniel, I didn’t come down here to argue with you ’bout what ain’t any of my bread an’ butter. *I* didn’t have a hand in the business —”

“You an’ every man in Spurwink should have a hand in it till the guilty one is brought up with a round turn.”

“Now I can see who’s been settin’ Mrs. Gordon up to her notions,” Josiah cried angrily.

“What’s she been doin’? I haven’t laid eyes on her since last night, when she come out to see how

many of us was left alive, so I couldn't have started her very strong."

"She's made a complaint before Squire Kelley, an' what's more, claims she'll come on the town for damages. There's a good many in the village who believe she'd win the case, 'cause perhaps it can be proved that folks have been talkin' openly 'bout what oughter be done to prevent Matt from drivin' trade away from Mr. Hewey's. The old lady don't stop at the law but she's travelin' from one house to another tellin' her story, till she's stirred up the women in great shape."

The speaker was interrupted by loud peals of laughter from Dan, who appeared to think the news very comical.

"Any fool can laugh!" Josiah said angrily, and Dan replied quickly: —

"Not *any* one, 'Siah, for this is a time when *you* can't, seein's how you're in a bad scrape. Now I know what you come 'round here for, dealin' out soft soap. You've been makin' considerable talk in Hewey's store 'bout drivin' Matt out of business, an' are afraid Mrs. Gordon will make big trouble for you."

"I haven't said more'n other folks."

"That may be; but you wanted to get here before anybody else could, an' try to make friends

with Matt, thinkin' he'd keep his aunt from botherin' you," and again Dan gave away to his mirth.

"See here, Matt," and Josiah turned to the boy; "I didn't come down here to make idjuts grin, but to have a fair talk with you. I'm willin' to 'low I've spoke 'bout your not havin' any claim on this wreck more'n what other folks have got; but I never did anything to hurt you."

"I haven't accused you, Mr. Fernald."

"I know that, my boy; but now that your aunt has started out so strong, it's only right you should know who your friends are. I hope you'll tell her I've stuck right by you through thick an' thin."

"I'll repeat what you've said, Mr. Fernald."

"An' make her understand that 'Siah Fernald is your friend, even though it may be he has talked a little brash now an' then."

Matt made no reply, because he could not promise, and, evidently believing the silence signified consent, the visitor added:—

"I hope you'll keep on doin' a big business, my boy, an' if you ever get into a tight place where you need a little help, come to me. Don't forget to talk to your aunt as soon as she comes back."

Then Mr. Fernald took his departure, and Dan who had restrained his mirth sufficiently to hear all that was said, indulged once more in hearty laughter.

Matt did not think the situation so extremely comical. He was disturbed lest Aunt Hannah should say or do something that would cause her grief after she gave the matter due reflection.

“What makes you look so glum?” Dan asked at length, when it was possible for him to speak. “Can’t you see what a big joke this is? Here’s Mrs. Gordon, one of the most peaceable an’ neighborly women in Spurwink, who never says a sharp word no matter how bad she’s trod on, starts in an’ frightens the whole settlement! Funny? Why it’s enough to keep a man laughin’ for a week! I allow ‘Siah ain’t the only one who will discover he’s your best friend; you’ll have the whole village huggin’ you in the hope of squarin’ matters with Mrs. Gordon.”

Dan was interrupted by the arrival of Spence’s father and Mr. Atwood, who had driven down to the wreck on their way from Portland.

“No, I won’t get out,” the lawyer said when Matt asked if he would go on board. “We stopped to say that everything is arranged, and you can sell tickets of admission once more. Do you know what has happened in the village since we left?”

“No sir; has anything gone wrong?”

“I should say matters had suddenly begun to go right. Mr. Hewey stopped us to say he hoped we never believed he would do anything against your

making a show of the wreck, and several of Mr. Atwood's acquaintances, who have been bitterly opposed to the enterprise, seem now, through some unexplained cause, to be convinced of their error. I do not understand it."

"I reckon I can give you a clue, sir," Dan cried, and he told them of the report Josiah Fernald had made regarding Aunt Hannah's doings.

Both the lawyer and the landlord laughed as heartily as the boatman had done, and the former said as he drove away:—

"I must come back this evening to congratulate Mrs. Gordon on her ability in settling the matter so readily."

"I'm afraid Aunt Hannah hasn't settled it, though," Matt said doubtfully. "She's frightened some of 'em; but what will Bart Denny an' that crowd care if a law-suit is brought against the town?"

"Not very much, I allow; but when they find that sich men as Hewey ain't willin' to back 'em, they'll carry sail in a different fashion. Let's go on board, an' tell Spence; the news is too good to keep."

It was not possible to hold any extended conversation with Master Richmond, so deeply occupied was he in serving the guests; but Matt contrived

to repeat the good news brought by the former's father, and to hint at what Aunt Hannah was doing.

Spence was instantly plunged into a state of the greatest excitement.

"Look out for the customers a while, and let me have a chance to talk about it with Dan. I could hear him laughing so heartily that I knew there was something comical going on."

Matt took his station at the booth, and on looking over the stock of goods understood that quite a large amount of money must have been received by his partner.

"That's the last of the bananas," Joey whispered, "an' there's less than half a box of oranges in the cabin. The cake was sold an hour ago; the lemonade is all used up, an' there ain't more'n a pint of milk left. You'll be cleaned out of everything if anybody comes to-night, an' I allow there'll be a crowd here, 'cause summer boarders allers go it stronger Saturday than any other day."

The press of business was over for the afternoon, however, and the showmen would soon have an opportunity to prepare for the evening.

Already were the ladies making ready to return to the hotel, and Matt believed the time had come when he should announce that in the future an admission fee of ten cents would be charged.

There could be no question as to the sincerity of the congratulations which were showered upon him when this fact was made known; it was as if each visitor had a personal interest in the matter, and the lady who had bought the first lot of shells, when he had displayed his ignorance of the multiplication table, said in a low tone:—

“Now I hope you will earn so much money that you can go to school this winter, my little man.”

“I’m most certain I will, marm, an’ if the folks what are comin’ here could know how much good it’ll do Aunt Hannah, they wouldn’t begrudge it a bit.”

“I am positive there isn’t one who doesn’t rejoice because of your good fortune; but you must not look upon our patronage in the light of a charity. We come because it is a very pleasant place in which to spend an idle hour, although it adds decidedly to the pleasure to know the money you make will be put to a wise use.”

Matt was at a loss to know just what he should say in reply, and finally stammered:—

“Thank you, marm; all you summer boarders are mighty good.”

“I wish I could think the same,” was the laughing reply, and as the lady moved away from the booth others came to congratulate the boy, until

he was literally abashed by their kindly words. It was a positive relief to him when the last visitor descended the gangway, and he said to himself as he set about sweeping the decks:—

“Spence must be mighty smart if he can talk to so many folks all the afternoon. It’s ’bout as much as I can manage to say ‘thank you,’ an’ I know I look like a fool while doin’ even that.”

Spence and Dan interrupted his reverie by coming on board and insisting on doing their share of the work, and when everything was in proper condition once more the boatman said with an air of seriousness:—

“I’m to be paid by Spence’s father for stayin’ here to look out for you boys; but I don’t think it’ll be square for me to hang on to the job any longer. After what Mrs. Gordon has done there ain’t any need of me, for the Spurwinkers will be tumblin’ over each other tryin’ to see who can do the biggest favors.”

“And you want to go back to the hotel?” Spence said inquiringly.

“It ain’t that I *want* to so very bad, but because there ain’t any more need of me here, an’ I haven’t the heart to take a man’s money for doin’ nothin’. I’d better go, an’ if your father ain’t satisfied to have me throw up the job, I can come back.”

The partners could not well object to this proposition, for there did not appear to be any good reason why Dan should remain to guard them, and he made ready to depart, saying as he paused before pushing the dory off from the shore: —

“Seein’s to-morrow’s Sunday, you’d better carry all your truck up to the house, an’ then you won’t need to sleep aboard.”

“Do you mean that the settees and the awning should be taken away?” Spence asked.

“No; you can leave them, I reckon. You only need to take care of the stuff that could be lugged off easy. Be chipper, lads, an’ look out for a rush to-night.”

Then Dan pulled from the shore, the boys watching him in silence until he was half a mile away, when Spence said emphatically: —

“Dan’s a mighty good fellow!”

“Indeed he is; but if it wasn’t for your father he wouldn’t be here, ’cause he’d have to tend to his work.”

“All father does is to pay him.”

“An’ that’s the biggest part of it, for —”

“Say fellers,” Joey cried from his seat on the rail forward, “here comes Bill Hunt. Do you s’pose he’ll try to pick a row?”

“He won’t if he knows what’s best for himself,”

Matt replied as he rose to his feet. "Of course he don't count on anything of that kind, else he'd brought a crowd with him."

Bill came toward the wreck with a swaggering air, as if convinced no one had authority to stop him, and without so much as answering Matt's friendly hail, handed him a piece of dirty paper.

Then he turned stiffly on his heel and walked away.

"What's this for?" Matt cried.

"Open it an' you'll see. Can't you read writin'?"

Matt was about to make an angry reply, but remembered in time that it was better to rule his spirit than to take a city, and unfolded the paper.

Written on it with a lead-pencil was the following line: —

"You fellers needn't think Hannah Gordon can scare us, & the sooner you shet up shop the better it'll be."

"Do you s'pose that's some of Bill Hunt's funny business, or was he sent with it?" Matt asked sharply, as, after reading it, he looked around expecting to see Bill yet within hail.

Master Hunt had taken good care to gain a safe distance before the message could be deciphered, and was now lost to view amid the scrub oaks.

“Bill wouldn’t dared do anything like this all hisself,” Joey said confidently. “He’s been ’round with Bart Denny a good bit lately, an’ I reckon that’s the fellow what sent it.”

The partners were decidedly alarmed by the warning, and at once understood that if the bully who had probably caused the explosion was so disposed, he could work them even greater mischief than was in the power of Admiral J.

“I don’t see why Bart Denny should try so hard to jump on me,” Matt said thoughtfully. “I never did anything to hurt him.”

“The way I figure it is this,” Spence replied after a brief pause: “Admiral J. started the trouble, and most likely got Denny to take a hand. Now he’s keeping it up just to show what he can do. It’s easy to start a fire, as father says, but precious hard to stop it.”

“I wish Dan had stayed half an hour longer.”

“He’ll come back this evening; but if we’re not to keep our goods on the wreck, there’s no need of him till Monday night. Bart won’t do any mischief while the summer boarders are here, so we needn’t bother our heads about it yet a while.”

“There comes Aunt Hannah!” Joey cried, and the partners went forward quickly, eager to learn what she had been doing.

CHAPTER XV.

THE HAND OF FRIENDSHIP.

AUNT Hannah looked weary when she entered the cottage, and literally sank into the nearest chair. She was pale, her lips quivered, and one would have said she had been through some trying ordeal.

“You’re pretty nigh used up,” Matt said, as, sitting on the arm of the chair, he patted Aunt Hannah’s withered cheek. “Spence an’ Joey can run the show if any customers come, an’ I’ll get the supper. There ain’t any need of your doin’ the least little bit of a thing, for I can ’tend to it all.”

“But there’s no reason why I should sit still and let you do the work, Matt dear.”

“Yes, there is; you’re tired, an’ there’s nothin’ to prevent my stayin’ right here to take care of you.”

“You must stay at the circus, Matt, an’ I shall be as well as ever after I’ve had a little rest. I have worked hard to-day, that I’m willin’ to admit,

though I haven't done much of anything except neighbor with nearly everybody I know in Spurwink."

"Yes, we heard of you," Spence said, with a smile, "and it looks as if you'd succeeded in doing what was beyond father and Mr. Atwood, for you have given some of the people a pretty good scare."

"What do you mean?" and Aunt Hannah looked positively alarmed. "Surely I haven't said anything harsh, or made any threats."

"Didn't you say you should sue the town for damages because of what has been done?"

"Yes; but that wasn't a threat, for I expect to do it. Of course I don't know anything about the law; but it ain't more'n a year ago since I read of a widow woman who was pestered as we've been. She sued the town because the authorities didn't do anything towards protectin' her, an' what's more, won the case. I'm going to talk about it to Spence's father jest as soon as I can see him."

"Didn't you make a complaint to Squire Kelley about Admiral J.?" Matt asked.

"Yes, for I think my bounden duty is to see that he isn't allowed to do any more mischief. He has forced me into the law, an' there's no reason why I shouldn't keep in it long enough to make him behave himself."

“Where else did you go, Aunt Hannah?”

“I neighbored, as I told you, with most every one I know, an’ of course I was called on to tell what happened down this way. The women folks sympathize with us, thank goodness, an’ will do all they can to help keep things straight. I didn’t see one but what thought it was a burnin’ shame we should be pestered in this way the very first time we’ve had a chance to make a few dollars without workin’ our fingers to the bone to get it.”

“Well, you’ve given some of the men a good scare,” Spence said, with a laugh, and then he gave Aunt Hannah the particulars of Josiah Fernald’s visit.

“’Siah has got an uneasy conscience,” the old lady said solemnly. “I’ve had it plain from a good many that he’s been egg’in’ Bart Denny on to mischief, an’ it was him what conjured up the idee of startin’ a subscription paper to get money so’s Admiral J. could sue me. I’ve done ’Siah Fernald many a good turn, an’ it don’t look well in him to do all he can agin me, more ’specially when he doesn’t own an inch of land on this shore, an’, consequently, wouldn’t be any better off if the Admiral won his case. I’ve only done what I thought was my duty, Matt, an’ I’m thankful to be able to say I haven’t lost my temper once.”

Spence left the room very suddenly at this juncture, and Matt hurried after him, fearing he had seen or heard something to betoken that fresh mischief was being done.

Master Richmond was found lying on the sand a short distance from the cottage, rolling over and over as he stifled his laughter lest Aunt Hannah should hear him.

“What is the matter, Spence?” Matt asked anxiously, fancying his friend was ill.

“I couldn’t hold back any longer!” Spence cried as soon as it was possible to speak. “The most comical sight I ever saw was Aunt Hannah talking so innocently about not losing her temper, or not making any threats, and that within a few moments of having frightened nearly every man in town,” and Spence buried his face in the sand that he might laugh without fear of being overheard. “The dear old creature don’t seem to think she has done anything, except to ‘neighbor’, when in reality she has begun one law-suit, is making arrangements for another, and been collecting evidence from the entire village.”

“It *is* funny,” Matt replied as the matter was thus presented and he could appreciate all the details; “but if Aunt Hannah should see you she’d think you was makin’ sport of her. Go down to

the wreck, where you can laugh as loud as you please, an' I'll get supper."

Then Matt turned back to the cottage, but his aunt would not listen to his proposition to do the housework. She declared she felt as strong as ever, now she was at home, and the most Master Turner could gain her permission to do was to act as assistant cook.

While the meal was being prepared Aunt Hannah insisted on hearing as to the business done during the afternoon, and when the story was concluded she said in quite her usual tone:—

"It does beat all how you manage to sell things on board that old wreck! I never believed summer boarders would throw their money away so recklessly. I'll be up bright an' early Monday mornin' to bake more cake, an' then will see to it you have enough to last a week. Now, Matthew, sit right down an' get your share of the supper, an' then send Spence an' Joey up for theirs. I'm so tired I want to get to bed as soon as the dishes are washed, an' that work can't be done any too soon to please me."

Matt did as he was bidden. A few moments later his partner and clerk were eating ravenously, for neither had had food since morning, and the fruit they had taken from the stock simply served to accentuate their hunger.

The remainder of the last lot of goods purchased by Mr. Atwood, and which had appeared to be of such quantity that it would be impossible to dispose of it, was placed on the booth in what was supposed to be a tempting manner, and everything was ready for the coming of the patrons.

The air was warm, the stars so bright that surrounding objects could be seen almost as plainly as in the moonlight, and not a breath of wind was stirring. If the guests at the Surf House were fond of boat rides, this certainly was the evening when they should be out in full force, and as he paced to and fro on the deck, waiting for his partner to return, Matt felt certain the show would be patronized on this night as it never had been before.

Just at that moment the young showman was in a most confident mood. He did not believe Bart Denny, however much he may have threatened, would dare do anything until late in the night, and the fact that the injunction had been so far dissolved that they were once more at liberty to charge a fee for admission, removed from his mind all fear of legal complications, for a time at least. Therefore it was that his surprise amounted almost to bewilderment when in the dim light he saw two figures coming across the beach, and

recognized them as Squire Kelley and Mr. Hewey.

“There’s more trouble now, for a fact,” he muttered. “I thought, from the way ’Siah Fernald acted, that Aunt Hannah had scared the Spurwinkers pretty bad; but it seems I was mistaken.”

The two men advanced directly toward the wreck, and on arriving at the foot of the gangway Mr. Hewey cried, in a particularly amiable tone:—

“Good evening, Matthew. I see you are waiting for customers, eh?”

“Yes, sir. I believe there are some comin’ over from the Surf House.”

“Done much to-day?” and the merchant ascended the gangway.

“We had lots of folks over this afternoon.”

“Well, now, you are fixed up in proper shape,” Mr. Hewey said, as he stepped on the rail with the evident intention of visiting the show.

Just for an instant Matt thought that it might be unwise to demand an admission fee from these representatives of the townspeople, and then came the remembrance of what the Spurwinkers had done to prevent him from continuing the business.

“It’ll cost ten cents apiece if you come on board,” he said firmly, as he stepped directly in front of the merchant.

“What’s that? Ten cents?” and Mr. Hewey

looked down angrily at the boy. "Don't you know there has been an injunction granted forbidding you to take money for allowing people to come on board?"

"I know something like that was done, sir; but Spence's father has been in town with Mr. Atwood for the last two days, an' when he came out this afternoon he told us we could go ahead."

"Eh? How's that? Did you hear, Squire?"

"Yes, and I believed the city lawyer would take such a course; but have received no official notification of such disposition of the case."

"Then these boys have no right to prevent the public from going on board?"

"I do not say that," was the Squire's cautious reply; "but it is strange I was not notified."

"I allow this city lawyer may have made a mistake, an' these boys are committin' a serious offence — nothin' less than contempt of court, eh?"

"That is what it will amount to if the proper formalities have not been complied with," the Squire replied, speaking as if he was repeating something which he had committed to memory.

"It would be better, Matthew," Mr. Hewey said in a pompous tone as he stepped down on the deck, but without paying the admission fee, "if you had come to your neighbors for advice, rather than

dependin' on a summer boarder, who'll forget all about you the minute he leaves. Now, 'cordin' to my way of thinkin', an' the Squire is here to back me up, you're layin' yourself liable to imprisonment by goin' on with the show before the case has been decided. However, that is as may be, an' we'll speak of another matter which will bring us around to this agin in reg'lar order. We, that is the Squire, me, an' the most influential of the citizens, want to see you do well; the idees you've got in your head are a credit to us all. We don't want hard feelin's an' bickerin's; there's been enough of that kind of thing. Now we've come here to offer you our hands in friendship, an' to say if there's anything we can do to help you along, we're ready an' willin' to do it."

"I'm much obliged to you, sir," Matt replied, hesitatingly, feeling quite confident there was more in this sudden show of kindness than had yet been expressed in words.

"As I said before, we're ready to help you along, an' we shan't be like these summer boarders, here to-day an' gone to-morrow, with never a care as to what becomes of you. In other words, we extend the hand of friendship," and Mr. Hewey stretched out his not over-clean hand, which Matt grasped freely, not knowing what else to do under the circumstances.

“Now that we are friends once more,” the merchant continued in a grandiloquent tone, “or perhaps I should say, now that there is no cloud upon our friendship, we want to settle a little matter with you an’ your aunt, Matthew. Admiral J. has been rash in threatening an’ actually bringing suit against Mrs. Gordon, while we are opposed to anything of the kind; in fact we stand ready to do all we can to prevent him from continuin’ that suit, an’ in return we ask you to sign this ’ere paper.”

“What is it?” Matt asked, refusing to take the document which Mr. Hewey held toward him.

“It’s a statement that you consider us your friends, and that you know we wouldn’t do anything to injure —”

The merchant did not continue the little speech, which had probably been previously rehearsed, for at that instant an egg struck him on the back of the head, and this attack was followed by a perfect shower of decaying vegetables, balls of sand, and eggs, until the decks “ran yellow,” as Spence afterward expressed it.

Mr. Hewey turned in a rage, but only to be met by more unsavory missiles, while Squire Kelley cowered behind the rail in fear, and Matt was at a loss to understand the meaning of the unexpected attack, until Spence ran on board, breathless and excited.

“ I sneaked 'round on the other side of the hulk, and they didn't see me when I come over the rail. Joey ran back to the house, frightened nearly out of his wits.”

“ Who are they ? ” Matt asked.

“ Joey recognized Bart Denny and Bill Hunt. There are six or seven, and they think, most likely, that the summer boarders have come.”

Then for the first time Spence seemed to be aware there were visitors on board, and he asked in a whisper : —

“ Who are they ? ”

“ Mr. Hewey an' Squire Kelley,” Matt replied in a tone sufficiently loud to be heard by the gentlemen. “ They've come to bring the hand of friendship, or somethin' like that.”

“ They made a big mistake in not telling Bart about it, because of course he wouldn't do anything like this if he'd known his friends were on board.”

“ Do you mean to say that this is being done by our orders ? ” Mr. Hewey asked angrily as he failed to dodge a second egg, and was struck full in the face.

“ I don't believe you wanted them to do anything of the kind, for you're surely getting the worst of it; but the fellows who are on the beach were encouraged by you in the first place. Speak to them, and I'll guarantee they'll stop quickly.”

If Mr. Hewey had been wise he would have held his peace, and sought safety behind the rail as the Squire was doing; but without stopping for reflection he shouted loudly:—

“What do you rascals mean by assaultin’ citizens of the town? I’ll have the law on you before another sun rises.”

“Why, it’s old Hewey!” one of the attacking party cried as if in surprise, and an instant later the sound of retreating footsteps told that Bart’s friends had taken a hurried departure.

“I knew they wouldn’t do any mischief to their friends,” Spence cried. “I don’t say you incited them to come here this evening; but you most likely encouraged them to use the dynamite, and it’s fortunate they didn’t bring another supply, otherwise you’d be worse off than you are now.”

Mr. Hewey gasped for breath, so angry was he, and, now that the danger seemed to be over, Squire Kelley came out from his place of refuge, saying as he straightened himself up:—

“You are a wicked boy to make such insinuations against those who would aid your friend.”

“He wants to steer clear of your aid if he counts on keeping alive, as can be seen by the bow of this wreck where the dynamite was exploded.”

Neither of the gentlemen made any reply to this

remark, but, satisfying themselves there was no longer any danger to be apprehended from another attack by Bart and his friends, clambered over on the rail and stalked down the gangway.

“They’re goin’ up to the cottage for Aunt Hannah to sign a paper sayin’ both of ’em are our friends —”

“You boys appear to be excited,” a familiar voice cried, and Mr. Richmond appeared on the rail. “I didn’t think Fernald and I were coming in any very stealthy fashion, and yet we have contrived to creep up on you unawares. What is the meaning of all this litter?”

Hurriedly Matt told the story, and the lawyer was decidedly amused by the recital.

“The gentlemen must begin to realize they have been playing with edged tools. They started this Bart Denny on his work, and have received a sample of his labors. It is rather amusing.”

“But now they’re up to the house tryin’ to make Aunt Hannah sign a paper sayin’ they’re her best friends.”

“I don’t fancy they will succeed,” Mr. Richmond replied grimly. “A woman who can do what Mrs. Gordon has done this day, is not likely to be forced into anything of the kind. However, I will go up to the house in case I may be needed to make an explanation.”

“I allow we got here at about the right time, eh?” and Dan Fernald leaped over the rail.

“It would have been a big pity if you had come before Bart Denny’s crowd showed the Squire and the storekeeper what they could do,” Spence cried gleefully, and then he described the scene to Dan.

The latter was more amused than Mr. Richmond had been; but he realized that there was no time to be lost if the partners expected to be ready for their patrons.

“I’ve got four boats let to-night, an’ all of ’em will come over here before they go back to the hotel. I’d had one of the parties myself if Spence’s father hadn’t engaged me to pull him across. Now it stands you boys in hand to clean these ’ere decks, for they’re in bad shape. Where’s Joey?”

“He went up to the house rather than take the chances of coming aboard with me while that crowd was here.”

“Joey! Joey! L-o-o-k a-l-i-v-e!” Dan shouted at the full strength of his lungs, and repeated the cry until he received a reply.

“I reckon he’ll be here in time to see the last of the work done, and now it’s a question of washing down the decks.”

Under the boatman’s directions the boys drew water, plied the brooms, and otherwise did their

best to remove all evidences of the unsavory missiles, Joey arriving, as Dan had predicted, just as the task was finished.

“It would have been a mighty bad job if the summer boarders had been here, for I don’t allow they’d run the risk of gettin’ a second dose. I didn’t think Bart Denny would dare to come when any one was around.”

“They counted on breaking up our business,” Matt said angrily, “an’ it isn’t certain they won’t try the same game after the people get here.”

“I’ll answer for that part of it. If they so much as show their noses on the beach again this night, I shan’t be careful about not makin’ a noise.”

“But see here,” Matt cried gloomily, “we can’t keep on the watch for them all the time, and one of these days they’ll succeed in gettin’ the best of us, unless somethin’ decided is done.”

“We’ll pull through this evenin’ without an accident, I reckon, an’ if I don’t put a flea in Bart’s ear ’twixt this an’ Monday night, you may call me a Dutchman.”

Dan spoke in a confident tone; but Matt was beginning to grow weary of the struggle.

It seemed as if one element or series of events was no sooner successfully met than another sprang up, and he realized that the time must come when they would be worsted.

Before he had wholly given way to despair, however, a boat-load of visitors arrived, and he was soon engaged in the pleasing occupation of collecting a dime from each of the guests.

When the business began Dan did not remain on board, but paced to and fro on the beach, and seeing him thus acting the sentinel, Matt was positive his troubles were over for the time being.

Half an hour later Mr. Richmond came up the gangway, and halted at the rail to say to the collector of admission fees:—

“There was no need of my going there to warn your aunt, for she is too wary to be caught in such a trap as those gentlemen had prepared. However, I am glad I went, for after getting my views on the subject I do not think they will trouble her again.”

“What was the paper they wanted me to sign, sir?”

“Virtually an agreement not to proceed against them, as your aunt has proposed to do. If both you and she had signed it they would have no fear of an action at law.”

“I hope Aunt Hannah won't sue the Spurwinkers.”

“I do not think she will. My advice to her is that the matter be dropped until the suit on which

the injunction was granted be brought to a close.'

"But I thought that was all ended, sir."

"On the contrary, it has not yet been heard. I have no doubt but that Admiral Johnson will lose the case, yet no one can say what may be the result of a trial by jury."

"An' if he should win would you have to pay a lot of money?"

"That would cause yet another suit to decide how much the other claimants had been injured financially by your continuing the exhibition. It is worse than useless to speculate upon that at present. One trouble at a time, my boy, and see to it that you take each lightly. The only matter to be thought of now is how to make money out of the wreck, and I believe you are answering the question satisfactorily to all interested, with the exception of the citizens of Spurwink."

Having said this, Mr. Richmond joined the merry-makers on the main deck, and Matt muttered to himself, as he watched Joey make his way awkwardly to and fro among the guests:—

"If Spence didn't have his father for a spell he'd find out what a mighty nice man he is."

CHAPTER XVI.

A PENITENT.

IT was eleven o'clock before the guests left the wreck and the partners were at liberty to make ready for closing the show.

Dan came aboard when the last boat-load had pushed off from the shore, and surveyed the almost empty booth with an air of satisfaction.

“You can't complain about business, an' if the summer boarders had stayed much longer you'd been obleeged to shut up shop on account of not havin' anything to sell. I've been thinkin', boys, that we was a leetle rash in agreein' to carry everything up to Mrs. Gordon's, for it's goin' to be a big job, even though the goods are so nearly sold out. If Bart an' his gang should pay the wreck a visit, they could do considerable damage to the awnin' an' the settees.”

“I'm so sleepy it doesn't seem as if I could keep my eyes open, and it would be nearly morning before all that stuff was carried up to Aunt Hannah's,” Spence said, with a yawn. “Why not sleep on board?”

“It’s what I told your father I allowed we’d better do, an’ he went home in the first boat, so that part of it is straight enough.”

“Do you think there is any danger Bart will come again to-night?” Matt asked, and Dan replied, with a laugh:—

“I don’t reckon he feels very much like doin’ a great deal of mischief after pepperin’ Mr. Hewey. The storekeeper knows who did it, an’ it ain’t likely he’ll keep quiet as you boys have done, so I allow Bart will lay low for this night at least. I have moved ’round hereabouts mighty lively since the show opened, an’ am certain there’s nobody near.”

“Then let’s go below,” Spence said as he led the way to the cabin, each member of the party filling his arms with goods from the booth.

There was but little conversation indulged in after the weary ones were stowed away in the berths.

Matt suggested that they should have cleaned the decks before coming below, and Spence declared he did not care how badly they looked, because just at that moment sleep was the one thing he particularly needed.

After that remark and answer, the occupants of the cabin turned their attention to the journey in-

to dreamland, and in a remarkably short space of time all had crossed the border.

It was nearly seven o'clock next morning when Dan was aroused by hearing Aunt Hannah's voice from the shore, and he answered it by going on deck at once.

"I'm glad to raise some of you," the old lady said as the boatman appeared; "I'd begun to be afraid something wrong had happened. Breakfast has been ready this half hour."

"It seems too bad to rouse the boys yet a while, Mrs. Gordon. I believe they'd rather sleep than eat, so s'pose we let 'em go without breakfast this mornin'? It was nigh on to twelve o'clock when they turned in."

"You'll come?"

"If I shan't be makin' trouble for you."

"It never puts me out to have a neighbor drop in for a bite to eat, pervidin' they're willin' to take sich as I've got. Come as soon as you're ready, an' I'll put the beans on the table now."

Dan Fernald thoroughly enjoyed that meal with Aunt Hannah.

By skillful questioning he drew from her a detailed account of her labors during the previous day, and what occurred in the evening when Mr. Hewey and Squire Kelley extended the "hand of friendship."

“I wasn’t sich a fool as to sign the paper they brought with ’em, an’ as much as told them so. Mr. Hewey hung on, an’ declared he’d always been my friend, when it ain’t two months since he refused to trust me for half a pound of green tea. Now that he’s got a taste of what Bart Denny is up to, I guess they won’t be hand in glove as they have been since Admiral J. began the trouble.”

“I have an idee the boys will run the show from this out, with no fear of the Spurwinkers,” Dan replied as he rose from the table. “If you’ll lend me a bottle of ink I’ll rig up a sign to keep folks off the wreck to-day.”

He was soon in possession of such materials for sign-painting as Aunt Hannah could produce, and shortly afterward the following legend was hung in a conspicuous position at the foot of the gangway:—

“NO FoLKs AdMiTTd aBOARd oN SUNDAY.”

This done Dan lay down on the beach where he could keep well in view the approaches to the wreck, and alternately watched and slept until nearly noon, when the partners made their appearance on deck.

“Have you had breakfast, Dan?” Spence shouted.

“Mrs. Gordon an’ me pitched into a pot of beans

this mornin', an' it's gettin' well along towards dinner time."

"Why didn't you call us?"

"Thought I'd give you a chance to sleep, seein's you ain't had any too much since this show was opened."

"Where's Aunt Hannah?" Matt asked.

"She toddled off to meetin' two hours ago, an' I ain't sure but I'd gone with her if I'd thought it safe to leave you fellers alone."

"You surely don't think there is any danger of a row to-day?"

"There'll likely to be a lot of Spurwinkers 'round after meetin', an' so I stuck that 'ere sign up for 'em to read."

"You're an artist, Dan," Spence replied, with a hearty laugh. "When the business of boat-letting is dull, you should turn sign-painter."

"That's what I've thought of doin', if there wasn't any wrecks 'round for me to fix over into a show," Dan replied without so much as the ghost of a smile, as he turned over on the hot sand for the evident purpose of taking another nap.

Joey did not long remain in the cabin alone, and when he came out on the beach it was to make the proposition that he be allowed to go home a few hours.

“There’s no reason why you shouldn’t stay till morning,” Spence replied. “Be here bright and early, for there will be plenty of work clearing up, and now the boarders have begun to come after the bathing, we must be ready for business earlier than usual.”

Master Pendleton was not positive he would remain away over night, for while Dan remained on board as a protector he preferred a narrow berth on the wreck to his own bed.

Aunt Hannah came home looking unusually thoughtful, and insisted on repeating to the partners and the boatman a synopsis of the sermon she had just heard.

The afternoon passed without incident until four o’clock, and then a party of young people came from the village to look at the wreck.

They paused to read the placard, and would have disregarded the injunction had they not been stopped by Dan, who took upon himself the duty of preventing visitors from boarding the hulk.

The fact that they could not do as they pleased, after so great a dispute had been raised by the leading men of the village regarding the ownership of the wreck, caused no little dissatisfaction, but Dan was to be neither intimidated nor cajoled.

“You can see the rule on that paper, an’ it’s to

be kept," he replied to all those who expostulated, and it is quite possible Spence and Matt had more enemies on the close of this Sabbath day than when it dawned.

"I don't see why we shouldn't let some of them go on board," Spence said at length. "If we keep the cabin doors closed our goods will be safe."

"I agreed with your father last night that none of us should spend this day aboard, an' count on keepin' my promise. This 'ere sign is for you as well as other people."

"I'm not anxious to hang 'round the wreck," Spence replied, with a laugh, and those of the visitors who heard this remark were less inclined to be angry than when it was believed the partners could lounge on the decks if they wished.

When there was not less than half a hundred on the beach Spence and Matt went up to the cottage, remaining there until the lengthening shadows proclaimed that the day of rest was rapidly drawing to a close.

Not until the last of the villagers had returned home would Dan allow the partners to board the wreck, and even then insisted they should remain in the cabin, out of sight.

"I'm supposed to be here in charge, an' there can't be any kickin' if I show myself, but you fellers must keep under cover."

It was nine o'clock when Master Pendleton returned, and his heavy breathing told that he had run at full speed through the pines.

"It wasn't cause I was scared of ghosts, or anything like that," Joey said, when Dan accused him of being afraid to loiter in the grove; how'd I know but Admiral J. might be waitin' for a chance to nab me?"

"I don't reckon the Admiral has any bone to pick with you, Joey."

"I ain't so certain 'bout that. If he ain't sneak-in' 'round here, where is he?"

"At home, I reckon."

"But he ain't. Two or three of the fellers went over there twice to-day, an' couldn't find hide nor hair of him."

"Most likely he's visitin' somewhere," Matt suggested.

"Then he's gone out of the village to do his neighborin', for nobody in Spurwink knows where he is. Mother said he was in Squire Kelley's office two full hours yesterday afternoon, an' then he went straight home without so much as lookin' at the folks."

"He'll turn up to-morrow mornin', ready for mischief, I reckon," Dan replied carelessly. "There's no sich good luck as losin' him. Hello! What's that?"

A faint cry could be heard from the vicinity of the beach, and, listening intently, it was possible for the occupants to distinguish the words:—

“Ahoy on the wreck! Wreck ahoy!”

“More Spurwinkers who want to come aboard,” Dan said petulantly, as he rose to his feet. “This hulk laid here nigh on to a year, an’ after two or three days not a soul so much as thought of looking at her; but now it seems as if they couldn’t be kept away.”

“Be careful what you do,” Spence said warningly. “That cry may be some trap to catch you, so be certain who it is before going on to the gangway.”

“If Bart Denny or any of his gang of loafers can get the best of me they’re welcome to do so,” and Dan unhooked the lantern from the beam.

“Ahoy on the wreck!”

Matt started in surprise as he heard this second hail, and said as he followed Dan out of the cabin:—

“It can’t do any harm if we go with you.”

“There’s nothin’ to stop you from doin’ as you like; but I ain’t needin’ any backers.”

Spence and Joey joined the leaders, and when the little party stood at the head of the gangway peering down into the circle of light cast by the lantern-rays, low cries of surprise burst from the lips of all.

Standing at the foot of the platform confronting the warning placard, and looking so meek and penitent as to be almost pitiful despite the vindictiveness he had displayed, was no less a person than Admiral J.

“Was it you who hailed us?” Dan asked.

“Yes; I want to come on board an’ have a talk with Matt.”

“Got a paper for him to sign, or are you playin’ a different kind of a trick?” the boatman asked sternly.

“I don’t come fawnin’ ’round as some have done, neither am I here as an enemy,” was the reply in a low tone so unlike any Matt had ever heard the Admiral use that he was thoroughly surprised. “I want to ask his pardon for what I’ve done, an’ get him to give me a chance of seein’ Hannah Gordon.”

Dan looked alternately at his companions and the penitent little man, as if at a loss to decide whether this was some trick for the purpose of working further mischief, or downright sorrow because of the part he had played.

“Surely you can’t be afraid to let me come on board? I’m alone, an,’ what’s worse, it seems as if every man’s hand was against me.”

“Of course we’re not afraid, Admiral. Come right up, an’ we’ll do our talkin’ in the cabin, if

you ain't scared you'll catch the rheumatism," Matt cried in a friendly tone, wondering even as he spoke that he could feel so much pity for one who had done everything possible to injure him.

There was none of the customary swagger when the Admiral came slowly up the gangway, and in silence followed the boys and Dan into the cuddy.

"If there's anything you want to say private to Matt, the rest of us will go out," and Dan hung the lantern on the beam.

"What I have to say is for all, although it's with Matt Turner I want to make a settlement, an' afterwards, if she'll allow it, I'm goin' to make my peace with Hannah Gordon."

"What's come over you, Admiral?" and Dan asked the question more for the purpose of putting the little man at his ease, than to gain information.

"I've been findin' out since yesterday noon what a fool I've made of myself by allowin' others to use me as a tool. I don't want to shift any blame to other shoulders, for I'll try to square the wrong I've done Matt and his aunt; but you oughter know what started me on this track. I was ugly clear through, when I knew this wreck was to be turned into a show, for I allowed I had as good a right to her as the next one. Ugly as I was, I'd have come to see that an old hulk like this shouldn't make bad

blood 'twixt neighbors, if I hadn't been egged on by others. Now Hannah Gordon has been kinder to me, an' done more for me, than all the folks in Spurwink put together, an' that should have been in my mind when I first kicked up the row. I'd been certain to figger it all out if I hadn't gone down to Hewey's store, an' listened to what he said 'bout holdin' on to my rights. He an' Squire Kelley was at me every minute till I tried to burn the hulk, jest out of clear ugliness, an' after I'd done that much, runnin' the risk of killin' Matt into the bargain, they said they'd see me through in law if I'd begin a suit."

"It looks as if that was about what they had done," Dan said, when the Admiral had paused as if for a reply.

"Yes, till yesterday, when Mrs. Gordon come down to the village an' said she'd sue the town for damages. Then Hewey, 'Siah Fernald, an' even Squire Kelley himself, abused me dreadfully. They claimed none of 'em had advised me to sue Hannah Gordon; that I'd begged for money to put the case through, an' that they wouldn't have promised if they'd believed it was me what tried to set the wreck on fire. Matt, as true as God hears me, I didn't know anything about the plan to blow up this hulk, nor could I do more'n guess who did it."

“So Hewey an’ his crowd dropped you when they found there was a chance of gettin’ their own heads into trouble, eh?” Dan said, thinking it best to keep the little man to his story rather than allow him to wander off at random.

“Yes, they dropped me, an’ that didn’t satisfy ’em. Hewey — him as told me over an’ over agin that he’d back me in whatever I did, ’cause it was for the good of the village generally — Hewey ordered me never to come into his store agin; said he’d kick me out if I so much as showed my nose there. Squire Kelley, who was certain I could win the suit, says I didn’t tell him the whole truth when I started the matter — why he knew as much about the wreck as I did — an’ that he won’t go on with it unless I raise a hundred dollars — says I owe him fifty for what he’s already done, an’ if I don’t pay up within a week, he’ll sue, an’ attach my house. I’m ruined! ruined! ruined! for last night there wasn’t a man in the village who’d so much as speak to me!”

The Admiral buried his face in his hands to hide the tears which overflowed his eyes, and Matt, pitying him heartily, would have said something consoling, but that Dan interrupted him.

“I ain’t sayin’ but repentance is the right thing for a man when he’s gone wrong; but it looks to

me as if you didn't get to see how much you'd hurt Mrs. Gordon an' Matt till everybody in Spurwink turned agin you. It's a 'leventh hour awakenin', 'cordin' to the way I look at it."

"I know it! I know it!" the Admiral wailed, "an' it'll serve me right if everybody throws me over; but Hannah Gordon is sich a good woman—"

"That's jest it," Dan interrupted. "She's so good that the minute you begin the yarn you've given us, she'll allow everything is all right. Now I ain't so sure as we oughter let you see her."

"Why not?" and the other occupants of the cabin, as well as the Admiral, looked up in surprise.

"Because it may do a power of good if you don't get forgiveness from them you've wronged till you've had a good chance to think the matter over."

"What else do you s'pose I've been doin'?" the little man wailed. "I haven't slept since I was at Hewey's store, an' if Matt hadn't jumped at me so when I saw him up by Mrs. Jim Jordan's, I'd have told him then how sorry I was."

"Do you reckon you'd want forgiveness so powerful bad if there wasn't a show Squire Kelley would sue you?"

"Don't, Dan," Matt whispered. "He's feelin' tough enough without your roughin' in on him so hard."

“You’re jest like your aunt, Matt. A man can kick you till he gets tired, an’ then you’ll think it’s all right if he asks to be forgiven.”

“I know Aunt Hannah will be glad to tell the Admiral she hasn’t any hard feelin’s agin him, an’ it’ll make her mighty glad, besides.”

“That’s a fact, an’ it’s exactly why I’m thinkin’ he better not get the chance to smooth things over so easy.”

“Look here, Fernald,” the Admiral cried earnestly, “I want you to believe that twenty-four hours after I first started in on this ugliness I was sorry for havin’ said what I did to Hannah Gordon.”

“Then why didn’t you stop?”

“I let other folks persuade me I oughter keep on as I’d begun, an’ if it was possible to make Hewey tell the truth, he’d have to say I wanted to back down after the law-suit was begun.”

“That brings somethin’ to my mind, Admiral, that I’d lost sight of,” and Dan spoke more sternly than before. “You’ve begun a suit agin Mrs. Gordon, an’ she’s got to twist an’ scrape to pay a lawyer to defend it — ”

“She won’t have to do anything of the kind!” the little man cried as he sprang to his feet. “Before daylight to-morrow mornin’ I’m goin’ to start on foot for Portland, an’ there tell the judge jest

how sorry I am. He'll dismiss the case without costs, I'm certain ; but if he won't, I shall sell my home to pay Hannah Gordon back every cent she'll be obliged to spend."

"Is that the truth, Admiral J.?"

"I'll swear to it if you like. I shall do that whether I get to see her or not, for the sake of easin' my own conscience."

Matt was not willing to keep the little man in suspense any longer.

"I'll go up to the house with you, Admiral J., an' I'm most certain Aunt Hannah will let you in."

"I guess there ain't any danger of her refusin'," Dan said grimly as the two went up the companion-way, one assisting the other as if there had never been other than the most friendly relations between them.

"Well, that beats anything I ever heard!" Spence exclaimed when the sound of retreating footsteps told that the suitor for Aunt Hannah's forgiveness, and the boy he had wronged, were leaving the wreck. "That little bow-legged fellow has stirred up the whole town; made enemies of old neighbors, and caused no end of unpleasant feelings, but now he's ready to say he's sorry!"

"That's about all he can do," Joey suggested sagely.

“Yes, because the mischief has been done,” Dan replied impatiently. “A man, or a boy either, for that matter, who’ll jump ahead, followin’ his own ugly temper for a leader without stoppin’ to think where he may bring up, is bound to come to grief himself, even if it should happen he didn’t bring plenty of trouble on others. If the Admiral had done his thinkin’ first, he’d understood what he remembers now, that he was doin’ a wrong to his best friend, an’ all this bobbery might been saved. But he went on pig-headed, an’ before his part is straightened out, Bart Denny will be keepin’ up the fuss. If Mrs. Gordon only’d give him a reg’lar lecture it wouldn’t go agin my grain so much; but instead of that, she’ll be tickled almost to death ’cause he’s repented, an’ do all she can to make him feel good!”

Then Dan scrambled into his bunk, thoroughly out of temper at a time when he should have been rejoicing because the Admiral had at last realized the error of his ways.

“I’d like to be up to Aunt Hannah’s when the Admiral gets there,” Joey cried gleefully. “It would be a pile of fun!”

“You don’t know what you’re talkin’ ’bout, Joe Pendleton,” Dan growled. “If you think there’s anything funny in seein’ a man admit he’s been a

fool, an' in hearin' a poor innocent body like Mrs. Gordon slobberin' over the little wretch, you oughter be flogged into knowin' the difference," and Dan pulled the blanket over his head as if to intimate that, so far as he was concerned, the conversation had come to an end.

CHAPTER XVII.

SAVING A LIFE.

SPENCE believed his partner would be absent a long while, for it was reasonable to suppose Matt might think it necessary to remain until the Admiral's visit was concluded, and now that Dan so positively refused to take part in the conversation, the only course left Master Richmond was to make his preparations for the night.

Joey seemed to have been suddenly stricken dumb by the unexpected change which had come over Admiral J., and instead of chattering on such subjects as came uppermost in his mind, as was customary with him, he remained without sign of life save when he gave vent to a deep sigh.

"Have you got a pain?" Spence asked after a long time of silence, when a particularly lugubrious sound was heard from the clerk's bunk.

"Course I ain't. What made you ask that question?"

“You’re sighing like a frog, and have been ever since Dan went to bed. What’s the matter?”

“I was only thinkin’ ’bout the Admiral.”

“Well, what of him? Aren’t you glad he has come to his senses at last?”

“Yes, I s’pose I am; but I wish he’d waited till later in the season.”

“Why?” Spence asked in surprise.

“’Cause then I’d be more sure of my job.”

“Look here, Joey Pendleton, what’s the matter with you? How can the reformation of Admiral J. affect your working on this wreck?”

“Well, when I was hired you thought somebody’d have to stay on board all the time, so’s to see there wasn’t any mischief done, eh?”

“Yes; but what has that to do with the Admiral?”

“Well, if he’s reformed you won’t be so ’fraid ’bout leavin the show to take care of itself once in a while, an’ so don’t need a clerk. While the Admiral was rampagin’ ’round I could do some good; but if things straighten down smooth I won’t be wanted.”

“But the Admiral’s penitence doesn’t smooth matters for us to any very great extent. He hasn’t done much mischief since he tried to set the wreck on fire. Bart Denny has been the one we’ve had

to guard against, and it isn't likely his conscience will trouble him for quite a spell yet."

"I reckon he'll straighten out when there's no one to egg him on," Master Pendleton replied sorrowfully.

"See here, Joey, you needn't be sighing about such a possibility as that, for I promise you shall stay with us as long as business is good enough to warrant our keeping a clerk."

"Is that honest true?"

"If my word isn't enough, Matt shall add his. We'll need a clerk if we continue to sell goods half as well as we've been doing for the past three days, and so long as you play fair by us you shall hold the job."

"Then I reckon I'm kinder glad the Admiral has reformed, for it's been mighty wearin' to stay on watch all the time against that crowd."

"You must have been wore out with watchin', the night of the explosion," Dan cried from beneath the blanket, and Master Pendleton was immediately reduced to silence.

Five minutes later the sound of hurried footsteps on the deck told that Matt was returning, and as he literally burst into the cabin Spence asked:—

"How did Aunt Hannah receive him?"

“You know she wouldn’t hang back when he wanted to make up; she’s too good to do anything like that. When we got there she’d gone to bed; but her head came out of the window mighty quick when I pounded on the door. I told her Admiral J. was with me wantin’ to say he was sorry, an’ that settled it. Before I thought she’d had half time enough to dress she was downstairs rigged up in great style — I mean, you know, that she had her best clothes on —”

“Treatin’ him like the prodigal calf, I s’pose,” Dan suggested gruffly.

“You mean the prodigal son!” Spence cried, with a roar of laughter. “It was the calf that got the worst of that meeting.”

“Admiral J. has so much luck that he’ll never get the worst of anything in this world. I reckon Mrs. Gordon asked him right in, as chummy as if he’d never said a word agin her in his life?”

“Oh yes, she did that before he could speak, an’ what’s more, took him into the fore-room. The Admiral didn’t offer to set down, though Aunt Hannah pulled out the chair that’s got the best tidy on it. He jest began to cry, an’ that broke her all up. She wiped her eyes hard, an’ I couldn’t help snuffin’ a little myself.”

“Real touchin’ time,” Dan suggested, sarcastically.

“It did make a feller feel solemn, for a fact. After the Admiral got through so’s he could speak, he told Aunt Hannah how sorry he was, an’ did it in great style. I was ’fraid he’d try to throw pretty much all the blame on Squire Kelley an’ Mr. Hewey, but he didn’t; he owned right up like a man, an’ said as how she was the only real friend he had in Spurwink. When he talked ’bout sellin’ his place so’s to give back the money she’d have to pay on account of the law-suit she was broke all up again—wouldn’t listen to a word—asked him if he’d been to supper, an’ told me to build a fire an’ put the beans on to warm.”

“So she fed him after he’d tried to turn her out of house an’ home?” and Dan sat bolt upright as he asked the question.

“I s’pose she has by this time; but they hadn’t got so far as that when I come away. After I’d built the fire an’ fixed things same as she’d said, I went back to the fore-room; but when I pushed the door open a crack I heard Aunt Hannah prayin’, so thought I’d best leave.”

Dan lay down again, turning his face away from his companions as if desirous of keeping it hidden from view.

“Is he comin’ back here?” Joey asked as a sudden thought came to him.

“He didn’t say, an’ I don’t s’pose it makes any difference to us whether he comes or not.”

“It does to me,” Joey replied emphatically. “There’s jest blankets enough to go ’round, an’ the Admiral can’t have mine, no matter how sorry he is for what’s been done.”

“I guess he won’t expect to stay with us all night,” Matt replied as he made ready to retire. “There’s nothin’ to keep him from goin’ home.”

“If he’s countin’ on walkin’ into Portland, he’ll save a good mile an’ a half by stoppin’ here.”

“It’s a fact; I never thought of that.

“But the Admiral has, you may be certain,” Dan whispered. “I hear him comin’ now.”

Joey immediately rolled himself yet more tightly in his blanket, as if to prove there wasn’t an inch to spare, and Matt, understanding the reason for such movement, said quietly:—

“I’ll see to it you fellers ain’t any the worse off for his stoppin’ here, ’cause I’d jest as soon lay on the floor as not.”

“You’re as big a fool, Matt Turner, about some things, as your aunt is!” Dan cried angrily. “If there’s any sleepin’ on the floor to be done, let the Admiral try it. Folks has been so soft with him this evenin’ that it’ll do him good to strike somethin’ hard.”

“Are you cross because he’s grown sorry for what he’s done, Dan?” Matt asked in surprise.

“Of course not; it stood to reason that he’d see, sooner or later, what a hog he was makin’ of himself, an’ haul ’round on the other tack if there was any sense left in his thick head. I’m a good bit riled, though, ’cause you folks are makin’ it so smooth for him. Mrs. Gordon will coddle him up within an inch of his life from now out, an’ even you are willin’ to give him your bed.”

“I wonder what he’s doing?” Spence interrupted. “If it was him Dan heard a minute ago, he should have been down here before this, unless he counts on sleeping on deck.”

“I’ll go an’ see,” Matt said as he ascended the companion-way with all speed lest Dan should get ahead of him, for he feared the boatman might make unpleasant remarks to the penitent Admiral.

As he gained the open air he was startled by seeing a dark figure dart across the deck and disappear over the rail, while at the same instant a second shadowy form came toward him from the aftermost part of the hulk.

“What’s goin’ on here?” he cried sharply, and the words had but just been uttered when a heavy thud in the cabin told that Dan had leaped to his feet.

Matt had already turned to face the possible danger from the stern, and at the same time moved quickly to one side, crouching low that he might the better see who was on the deck.

In this position objects within his range of vision were outlined against the star-lit sky, and with the quickness of thought he realized that some person was rapidly coming toward him.

He raised his arms to ward off a threatened blow, and as he did so Dan's head could be seen above the companion-way.

With a cry of anger the boatman leaped forward; Matt saw the intruder turn as if to flee; heard a scuffling noise such as might have been caused by a boot-heel slipping on the deck, and a moment later the figure disappeared over the rail aft.

A scream of mingled pain and terror, a resounding splash of water, and during a moment all was still, save for the excited voices in the cabin.

"What was it?" Matt cried, running to the rail and peering over.

"Bart Denny," Dan replied angrily. "It was lucky his foot slipped, or he'd have got a clip from me that he wouldn't forget in a hurry."

"But he has gone overboard!"

"So much the better; he'll have a chance to cool off before tryin' to play his comical games on us again."

Matt could distinguish nothing in the water.

The tide was at its full height, and near the stern of the wreck it could not have been less than ten feet deep.

“He must have hurt himself when he fell, an’ now he’s drownin’!” the boy cried in terror, glancing quickly toward the white sands, but failing to see any one. “He’d be out by this time if he was all right!”

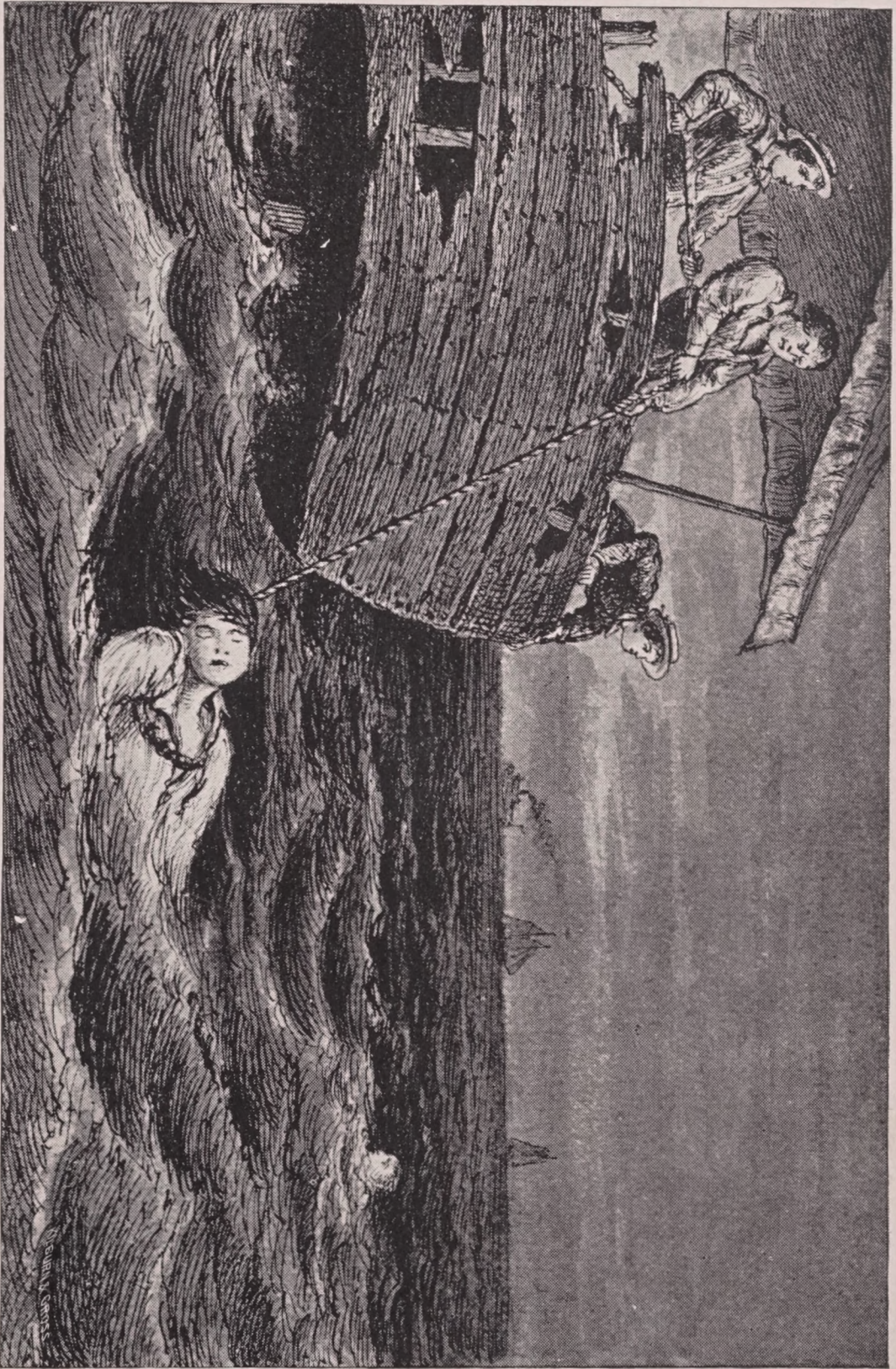
Dan looked fore and aft; then walked leisurely to the starboard rail, thinking, perhaps, the would-be mischief maker had scrambled out on that side, and before his survey was completed Matt became convinced that the man who would have done them an injury was lying helpless beneath the waves.

Before one could have counted ten he had thrown off a portion of his clothing, clambered upon the rail, and was on the point of leaping over when Dan cried sternly:—

“Keep back, Matt! You shan’t take such chances here in the under-tow!”

Even while he was speaking Matt jumped far out from the side of the hulk, and disappeared beneath the surface just as Spence came on deck in alarm.

“Pull down that booth, an’ throw the boards over!” the boatman cried sharply as he began to



undress. "Be careful not to hit him, an' when that's done, unreeve one of these awnin' ropes. There ain't a worse bit of water on the coast, an' the chances are against him!"

He was on the rail before the words were fully spoken, and made ready to leap over as soon as it should be possible to ascertain exactly where Matt would come to the surface.

Spence was sufficiently cool-headed to obey the commands without waiting to learn what had occurred, and the boatman was yet awaiting his opportunity, when the boy ran aft with one of the timbers.

"Don't drop it till you're certain not to hit him!"

"Stay on deck, Dan!" Spence cried imploringly. "I won't be able to help very much if both of you go over, an' you can do more good here!"

Matt's head appeared above the surface, and the boatman began to understand there might be wisdom in Spence's suggestion.

"I've got him!" the swimmer cried, as he dashed the water from his face with one hand. "He's no better than a dead man; but if you can pass me a rope —"

The sentence was not finished, for at that moment the boy disappeared from sight, dragged

down by the inert body he had tried to raise to the surface.

Dan sprang to the fastenings of the awning, and when he had unloosened one of the ropes, Matt's head could be seen; but this time he was much further out to sea.

“The under-tow has got him!” Dan groaned, coiling up the rope, and flinging it toward the swimmer.

It was not long enough by several feet, and the boatman was on the point of darting back to get more, when Spence came up with a second length.

It could now be seen that Matt had raised the insensible man until his head was above the surface, and both were drifting seaward with great rapidity.

“Let him go, an' take care of yourself!” Dan shouted in an agony of terror, as he hastily tied the ropes together.

“I can hold on quite a spell longer; throw out somethin' that'll float!”

“He'll go under tryin' to save what ain't worth one of his fingers!” Dan cried bitterly, and then as he coiled up the rope, “Look out for it, lad!”

Breathlessly Spence watched the snake-like thread of black as it was unwreathed out over the inky waves, and the blood bounded through his veins as he heard the cheery cry:—

“All right! I’ve got it! Stand by to haul in!”

“Thank God! Dan shouted, bracing himself against the rail that he might be ready instantly the word was given.

“Haul in!”

Spence seized the rope, standing in the rear of the boatman, and the two pulled in the line, hand over hand, knowing full well that a human life depended upon the rapidity with which they worked.

Coil after coil was taken inboard, and the dark mass attached to the end was close under the wreck, when Joey, who had been standing where he could look over the stern, but without appearing to think it possible for him to render any assistance cried:—

“Matt ain’t there! I can see his head a good bit outside! He’s hitched Bart on, an’ is swimmin’ for it!”

A smothered exclamation of anger burst from Dan’s lips, and for a single instant he relaxed his efforts, but only to renew them immediately—a human life was at stake, even though it was that of an enemy.

Two minutes later, the apparently lifeless body of Bart was lying on the deck, and Dan shouted wildly:—

“Where are you, Matt?”

“Close by,” came the reply in a faint tone.
“Can you pass out the rope agin?”

Once more the coils widened over the waters; again the aim was true, and Spence gave vent to a deep sigh of relief as Matt cried:—

“All right! Haul in!”

“Run up to the house, Joe, an’ tell Mrs. Gordon what has happened,” Dan cried, as he bent all his energies to coiling in the rope once more, and Master Pendleton was, fortunately, master of himself sufficiently to be able to obey the command without loss of time.

When finally pulled over the rail, Matt was so far exhausted that it was impossible for him to speak, and as Dan would have raised him to his feet, he sank down by the side of Bart, well-nigh insensible.

Joey had not yet gained the gangway when Admiral J. came on board.

“What’s goin’ wrong here?” he asked, in his old, imperious tone.

“Don’t stop to chatter, Joe!” Dan cried sharply. “Get Mrs. Gordon down here as quick as you know how!”

But the Admiral’s knowledge of the methods to be employed in such cases was not to be de-

spised, and, after a single glance at the lifeless ones, understanding as well what had happened as if the whole matter had been explained in detail, the little man set about calling back the spirits which seemed on the point of taking their departure forever from this world.

Under his direction the proper treatment was at once applied, and by the time Aunt Hannah arrived, Matt had fully recovered consciousness.

“Is Bart all right?” he asked eagerly, as he opened his eyes and saw his aunt bending over him.

“He soon will be I hope, Matt, dear,” the old lady replied, as she kissed him tenderly. “It was a brave thing to do, an’ I am prouder of you than I ever was before.”

“I didn’t do very much. Dan an’ Spence pulled us out, an’ if it hadn’t been for them we’d been carried down by the under-tow. They did all the work.”

Dan turned quickly as if to speak, but checked himself suddenly, and continued his work upon Bart as directed by Admiral J.

“How did it happen?” Aunt Hannah asked, as she held a brimming bowl of composition tea to Matt’s lips, forcing him to swallow the entire contents.

“I don’t know,” the boy replied, when it was possible for him to speak. “I saw somebody on board, an’ the next I knew he was in the water. I reckon he hit his head as he went over.”

“Here is a bruise,” Dan said, ceasing his labors to point at a discoloration on Bart’s temple. “He slipped jest as I was aimin’ a blow at him, an’ went over like a stone. If it hadn’t been for Matt he’d drowned before I’d got it through my head that he was on the bottom; I had the idee he was skulkin’ up shore under the bend of the hull, where we couldn’t see him.”

“Will he come ’round all right?” Matt asked again.

“There is no question about it now,” and Admiral J. motioned for Dan to cease his labors. “Unless I’m very much mistaken he is already conscious, for he opened his eyes a moment ago.”

If the little man was correct in his surmise the patient did not acknowledge the fact, but remained passive, and after a time Admiral J. said, in a positive tone:—

“There is no longer any question, Bart, but that you have recovered; your pulse is as steady as ever. It would be the more manly part to thank the boy who has saved you, instead of shamming like this. If he hadn’t risked his life in the at-

tempt, you would now be lying at the bottom of the sea."

Bart gave no sign of consciousness, and the Admiral turned away impatiently.

"Let him go his own gait," Dan said gruffly. "There's been so many queer things happening this night that one or two more don't cut any great figger. I allow Matt better be taken home, an' I'll lug —"

"I am as well as ever, an' can stay here."

"Please come with me, Matt dear; your poor old aunt wouldn't sleep a wink this night if she left you here."

"Then I'll come, Aunt Hannah. You toddle on up to the house — the Admiral will give you a lift over the rail, an' I'll come in a minute."

Mrs. Gordon went out of the cabin satisfied that Matt would keep his promise without loss of time, and the boy who had proven himself a hero was soon ready to follow.

To his great surprise he experienced no slight difficulty in attempting to walk, and it became necessary for Dan to assist him.

"I am as weak as a rat," he said in surprise. "I don't understand why I should feel this way."

"It does seem queer," the boatman replied grimly. "When a fellow goes down into Davy

Jones's locker as far as you've been, an' had a lively tussle for life, it's odd he ain't the same as before the trouble began!"

"Now you're makin' sport of me."

"Well, perhaps I was, lad; but you had no call to be surprised because you wasn't feelin' chipper, when it's the biggest kind of a wonder that you can even hold up your head. Now be half-way decent, an' let me lug you over the rail."

Matt made no protest when the boatman lifted him in his arms, and, ten minutes later, when he was tucked snugly between the lavender-scented sheets in Aunt Hannah's "best room," for she would insist on having him carried there, a soothing sense of restfulness came over him.

"I'm all right now," he said in a tone of content, "though it does seem too bad for me to muss up your best sheets, Aunt Hannah."

"There's nothin' too good for you, Matt. You're the dearest an' bravest boy that ever lived, an' God has been better to me than I deserve, in allowin' you to live."

Then the old lady knelt down by the side of the bed, to give thanks for the mercy vouchsafed her, and Dan, Spence and Joey, who had followed their friend and companion, could do no less than listen to the words of thanksgiving and praise which fell

in full measure from Aunt Hannah's quivering lips.

"It mixes me all up to hear a good woman like Mrs. Gordon prayin' as if she was the biggest kind of a sinner," Dan said to Spence, when he and the boys were returning to the wreck. "If there's sich a thing as salt of the earth, I reckon Matt's aunt is made of it. Where did the Admiral go so quick?"

"I haven't seen him since we went into the house; most likely he thought it best to go home, and I'm satisfied he should be there."

"I wish he'd taken Bart with him; I don't like the idee of sleepin' in the same cuddy with that beauty," and Dan lowered his voice as he clambered over the rail.

Spence was about to reply, when Joey, who, being in advance, had gained the cabin, cried:—

"Bart ain't here! He's skipped out slick as a whistle, an' it'll be a long day before he comes 'round this way agin, I'm thinkin'."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SURPRISE.

MUCH to Spence's surprise Dan was not in a talkative mood when they were once more alone in the cabin.

After the stirring events of the night it seemed as if there were many matters which should be discussed; but the boatman positively refused to do more than answer curtly such questions as were asked by his companions.

Finally Master Richmond abandoned the attempt to interest Dan, and all hands again turned their attention to thoughts of slumber.

It is not possible to say when the last member of the party went over into dreamland; but it is certain all were sleeping soundly at the moment Admiral J. came on board.

The sun had not yet risen, although the day was dawning, and the little man appeared dressed for a journey.

"I'm sorry to disturb you," he said in an apologetic tone, as he came half-way down the cabin stairs, and it was necessary to repeat the words at

least four times before he really did disturb anyone, so soundly were all sleeping.

“Eh? What’s that you say?” and Dan sprang to his feet as if in alarm. On understanding who the visitor was, he added sleepily, “So it’s you, Admiral? We’ve had so much to startle us since yesterday mornin’ that I was afraid something else had gone wrong.”

“I hope matters are more nearly right than they were twenty-four hours ago — those in which I am concerned certainly are. As I said before, I’m sorry to disturb you, but it seems really necessary, because I’m on my way to Portland, an’ may not be back until to-morrow.”

“We shall try to get along without you,” Dan replied grimly.

“I am sorry, Fernald, that you can’t find it in your heart to forgive me for havin’ been sich a villain; but you may succeed after a while, when I’ve done all I can to repair the wrong.”

“Was that what you wakened me for?”

“No; but I couldn’t help sayin’ it. When I left Mrs. Gordon’s house last night I met Bart Denny on his way to the village — he was runnin’ off before you could get back.”

“Perhaps it was jest as well for him he didn’t wait.”

The Admiral hesitated an instant as Dan spoke thus harshly, and then continued meekly: —

“I know if it hadn’t been for what I’ve done, Bart would never have taken it into his head to do the boys an injury, therefore I’m really the one who is responsible for his actions. I knew, or thought I did, that he might find bad advisers in the village, an’ persuaded him to go to my house. He has promised to stay till I get back, an’ I hope, Fernald, you won’t disturb him there.”

“I don’t count on chasin’ him ’round; but he mustn’t show his head near here.”

“I know he won’t. I wanted you to understand how it was, in case anybody reported that he was there. Bart, like me, wants to turn over a new leaf, an’ I hope he’ll have the chance.”

“If you straighten him up, Admiral, I’ll give in that you’ve come pretty nigh squarin’ matters,” Dan replied with more friendliness in his tones than he had displayed before.

“Thank you,” the little man said meekly, and he went down the gangway, walking at a rapid pace along the shore in the direction of the city.

The boatman, now thoroughly awake, went on deck, and was watching Admiral J. as his figure grew fainter and fainter in the distance, when Spence joined him.

“Didn’t I hear you talking with someone?” Master Richmond asked.

“Yes; it was the bow-legged Admiral, an’ there

he goes," Dan replied, as he pointed to the tiny form on the sands. "He's started in to reform the Spurwinkers, an' maybe he'll succeed, though I have my doubts," and the boatman repeated the conversation he had had with the penitent.

"How odd it is matters have turned out this way," Spence said musingly. "It begins to look as if we wouldn't have much more trouble in running the show."

"That's exactly what I was allowin' when you came out. So long as neither the Admiral nor Bart is likely to do mischief, I don't see why I shouldn't go back to the hotel. The boss will be wantin' me to drive into town for a supply of provisions, an' you need to send for goods, if the show is to be open for business this noon."

"I don't see any reason — there comes Mr. Atwood! Perhaps he is after you," and Spence pointed to a team which had just appeared above the sand-dunes.

Dan was on the beach by the time his employer reined in the horse, and before the latter could speak the boatman had given him a brief account of all that had occurred during the past twenty-four hours.

Mr. Atwood listened to the story in silence, and when it was concluded said, as if he was not very greatly surprised by the information: —

“Then there is no reason why you should not go into town; here is a list of what we want, and on it you’ll find a memorandum of the goods to be purchased for the showmen. Spence, I fancy you can afford to go back to the hotel with me; your father will want to learn all the particulars of last night’s work, and you won’t be any the worse for clean clothing.”

Master Richmond was quite willing to act upon this suggestion, and, forgetting that it might be necessary to notify his clerk, who was yet asleep in the cabin, went down the beach with the landlord.

Joey slept soundly an hour longer, and, opening his eyes lazily, was alarmed at finding himself alone.

Leaping out of the bunk more quickly than he had ever done before, the clerk went on deck with the utmost speed, but only to find it deserted.

He did not attempt to reason as to why his employer and Dan had disappeared, but ran wildly down the gangway, and thence to Aunt Hannah’s home, screaming loudly in alarm.

“Mercy on us! What *is* the matter now?” the old lady asked tremulously, as she appeared at the door.

“Spence an’ Dan! They’re gone! Somebody’s got away with ’em!”

“Somebody’s got ’em?” Aunt Hannah repeated

in amazement. "Stop your screeching, Joey Pendleton, an' tell me what you mean by makin' sich an outcry."

The old lady grasped the clerk's arm firmly, as if fearing he would attempt to escape, and tried in vain to get from him a coherent story.

It was not until Matt, awakened by the noise, came hurriedly down stairs to learn the cause of the disturbance, that Joey could be induced to explain what had occurred.

"And you are makin' all this noise jest because Daniel and Spence were not by your side when you wakened?" Aunt Hannah asked sternly, after Master Pendleton's story had been told.

"There's been so many funny things done 'round here, this last week, that it's enough to scare anybody when fellers ain't where they oughter be."

"I don't believe they've been lugged off," Matt said, with a laugh. "It isn't very early in the mornin', an' most likely they've gone down to the Surf House. I'm ashamed of myself for stayin' in bed so late."

"It would have done you solid good if you'd stayed till noon," Aunt Hannah said, as she patted the boy affectionately on the shoulder.

"You're not goin' to say I must be coddled jest 'cause I went overboard last night? I've got to do a good deal of work between now an' noon."

“I’m not thinkin’ of sayin’ a word against it, Matt, dear, though I’d be better pleased if you stayed in the house till I knew there wasn’t any danger of gettin’ cold. Breakfast has been ready half an hour, an’ there’s no reason why you should wait for your partner an’ Dan.”

Matt’s appetite had not suffered because of his exertions on the previous evening, and he and Joey had concluded a particularly hearty meal when Spence entered.

He explained why he was not on the wreck when Master Pendleton awakened; made merry over the clerk’s fears as described by Aunt Hannah, and then said, in a business-like tone:—

“We can’t afford to fool away much time here, ’cause trade will just hum to-day. What you did for Bart last night has set the folks almost wild, and they’re going to give you the surprise of your life between now and night.”

As a matter of course, Matt’s curiosity was aroused by the concluding portion of his partner’s remarks, but Spence refused to make any explanation.

“Father said you was to be ready to go aboard the wreck some time this afternoon, Aunt Hannah, and you mustn’t make any objection, for I’ve already promised in your name.”

“Sakes alive! I can’t go where all the summer boarders are agin, Spence. That one visit will last me for this season.”

“But you really mustn’t disappoint us. Father and mother will come for you some time after dinner, and I’m counting on your being ready.”

Then Spence hurried his partner down to the wreck, and during the remainder of the forenoon all the boys worked industriously, making ready for the arrival of their patrons.

Spence was unusually particular regarding the appearance of the “show,” and insisted on scrubbing this place or brushing that, until Joey declared he “was all wore up doin’ so much useless work.”

Dan Fernald drove down to the wreck at about eleven o’clock, and delivered a large supply of goods, declaring he had purchased only such articles as were specified on the memoranda given him by Mr. Atwood.

“It’s all right,” he said confidently. “You’ll sell twice as much ’twixt now an’ next Saturday night. Say, I overtook Admiral J. on the road, an’ gave him a lift as far as the city. Do you know I wouldn’t wonder if he’d turn out to be quite a decent chap, now he’s had sich a lesson. He talked a good deal like a man, an’ perhaps Mrs.

Gordon was right when she cuddled him last night."

Then Dan drove away, and, when noon came, Matt expressed his surprise that some of the boarders had not visited the wreck after the hour for bathing.

"I guess we shan't have sich a terrible rush, after all," he said, surveying ruefully the large and varied assortment of goods purchased by Dan.

Spence appeared to have no such fear. He was in the best of spirits, and did not cease his efforts to make the wreck look attractive until Aunt Hannah summoned them to dinner.

Master Richmond and Joey ate first, leaving Matt on guard, although no one believed there was any danger the property would be disturbed.

While he was at the house, Spence must have given Aunt Hannah an intimation as to why he was so eager she should visit the wreck that afternoon, for, when Matt came to dinner, the old lady had the air of one who is in possession of an important and extremely pleasing secret.

"There's somethin' goin' on that I don't understand, Aunt Hannah."

"You'll soon know what it is, Matt, dear, an' I do wish you'd fix yourself up as well as you can this afternoon."

“What’s the matter with me now?” he asked in surprise.

“You might comb your hair a little slicker, an’ be sure your face an’ hands are clean. How I wish you had a new jacket!”

Matt was instantly plunged into a maze of bewilderment; but it was in vain he questioned his aunt. She positively refused to answer, lest she should betray that which was to be kept a profound secret, and the boy went back to the wreck feeling almost uncomfortable in mind.

Not until nearly two o’clock did the first of the guests arrive, and then it seemed to Matt as if there was a constant stream of visitors up to the gangway, until once more the decks were thronged.

Among the last to arrive were Mr. and Mrs. Richmond, and with them came Aunt Hannah, wearing her “Sunday dress,” looking more happy than Matt had ever seen her before.

Dan Fernald stopped at the gangway, instead of going on board, explaining that it wouldn’t look well if he “crowded himself in with them as had hired him,” and talked with Matt regarding the business outlook until Mr. Richmond gave a certain signal.

Then, linking his arm in that of the “showman’s,” the boatman marched straight forward, regardless of

the fact that he might be intruding upon those who "had hired him," until he was in the very midst of the throng.

Exactly what happened during the quarter of an hour which followed, Matt had no very clear idea, because of his confusion.

When thus literally forced to face the guests he understood that Mr. Richmond was making a speech, and he heard, as if in a dream, his name mentioned many times. Then he realized that the story of what he had done the night previous was being told, and his face grew crimson with blushes when he was praised as if the saving of Bart's life was an heroic deed, rather than, as he viewed it, an ordinary affair of every-day life.

Finally the lawyer handed him a well-filled pocketbook, explaining that the contents, contributed by the guests of the Surf House, were to be used by him in gaining an education, adding in conclusion:

"The money will enable you to remain at school at least two years, if you practice such economy as your Aunt Hannah must have taught, and it remains with you to prove if it has been a good investment for us."

After the speech everyone crowded around Matt, congratulating him upon having saved the life of his enemy at the risk of his own, and praising him

so warmly that he was heartily glad of an opportunity to slip over the rail on to the beach where, half an hour later, Dan found him crying heartily.

“Why, Matt! The idea of a boy who has jest had a present of four hundred dollars cryin’ like this!”

“Is there really so much money in it?” and Matt pointed to the pocketbook by his side.

“That’s the way it figgered up. What made you cry?”

“Because I felt sorry I wasn’t good enough to deserve it, Dan. I can understand why the people would do anything like that for Aunt Hannah, but they’ve got no reason to be so good to me.”

“I’ll take the chances the boarders haven’t gone wrong this time, my boy. Now let’s go back to the wreck, for you’re bound to show yourself before the folks go home.”

From that moment —

As to what finally became of Bart; how long the “show” was kept open; how much money the boys made, or how Matt succeeded at school, cannot properly be told here. It is only proper the story should close at this point, for it was begun simply in order to relate certain events in the life of Admiral J. of Spurwink.

THE END.



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