

THE CRUISE *of the* PHOEBE



PHOEBE

JAMES OTIS



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THE CRUISE OF THE PHOEBE



“THE SERIOUS WORK OF THE DAY WAS BEGUN.”

THE BUSINESS VENTURE SERIES

The Cruise of the Phoebe

A Story of Lobster Buying on the
Eastern Coast

By

JAMES OTIS

Kaler

AUTHOR OF

"Minute Boys of Green Mountains," "Minute Boys of Long Island,"
"Boys of '98," "Boys of Fort Schuyler," etc.

Illustrated by

J. W. F. KENNEDY



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THE CRUISE OF THE PHŒBE

CHAPTER I

THE SCHEME

“Two hundred an’ fifty dollars is a big lot of money,” Richard Marshall said decisively, looking at Ezra Upton as if expecting that young gentleman would contradict him.

“I know it is; but this is a big scheme, big enough to call for four or five times as much money as I’m needin’.”

“What’s to hinder me from goin’ into the speculation alone, without givin’ you half of what my money will earn?” and Dick laughed, as if believing he had suggested a possibility that Ezra could not guard against.

“There are a good many reasons, an’ the first is that you don’t know anything about buyin’ lobsters for the market — couldn’t tell a joe from a count.”

“What’s a joe?”

“A lobster that has just shed his shell, or one whose new coat hasn’t grown hard. That kind ain’t worth much of anything; but there are plenty of fishermen along the coast who’d run ’em off on a green hand, an’ your two hundred an’ fifty dollars would look pretty sick by the time you’d taken in a thousand or two of such truck.”

“What’s a count?”

“A lobster ten an’ a half inches long, that hasn’t been chewed up any. You might say a count was one that would fetch the market price.”

“I could hire somebody who was posted in the business, an’ then it wouldn’t be a case of givin’ you half the profits,” and again Dick looked wise, whereat Ezra laughed heartily, as he said:

“If you’re goin’ into the business of buyin’ lobsters with only two hundred an’ fifty dollars, you couldn’t afford to hire much of a fellow, an’ would stand to lose the whole capital in a couple of trips. Then again, you haven’t got a smack.”

“You’re countin’ on hirin’ ’Squire Merrill’s Phœbe, an’ I can do the same.”

“Not much you can’t, till after I’ve made a big try at gettin’ a partner. The ’Squire has promised to hold the trade open for me four weeks, an’ I’m allowin’ I can find somebody who’ll jump at the chance before that time has gone by. I’d rather have you for a partner, Dick. We’ve always been good friends, an’ I know you’ll do a full share of the work, which is a big part of the business, for if we go into buyin’ lobsters alongshore between here an’ the St. Croix river, it’ll be a case of humpin’ all the time till we’ve made quite a bunch of money. Your father will lend us the cash, if we show a business plan, an’ even if you don’t stay in the trade, it’ll be the jolliest kind of a vacation.”

Dick ceased trying to appear wise. He began to understand that Ezra had not only mapped out his scheme thoroughly well, but had guarded against the

possibility that any one to whom he imparted the secret could take advantage of it without his sharing in the enterprise.

Never before could Dick remember that a lobster smack had been lying idle in Westbay. Those men who were in the business of buying lobsters from the fishermen living alongshore, and selling them to the wholesale dealers, had bought or built their own craft; but here there was an opportunity to hire at a reasonable figure a seaworthy boat equipped with a 13-horse-power gasoline engine, and in fairly good repair. Ezra had secured an option on the vessel; he was a good fisherman, and for the three years since his father died, had supported his mother by lobster catching, therefore it was safe to assume he knew the tricks of the trade fairly well.

“S’pose we put up the scheme to father, an’ find out what he thinks about it?” Dick suggested after a brief time of thought. “You know I haven’t got two hundred an’ fifty cents, an’ if we make the venture he’s the one who must lend us the money.”

“That’s what I counted on; but it was a case of findin’ out if you wanted to go into the scheme.”

“I’m ready for it if father thinks there’s a chance for him to get his money back, at the same time that we make a profit.”

“Profit! Of course we can make money out of it, unless we are fools who don’t know a joe from a lump of coal. If two boys like us, both about fifteen years old, haven’t got sense enough to buy lobsters at a price that will bring in a profit when we sell ’em to the wholesale dealers, it’s time you

gave up all idea of goin' to college, an' I went back to the Westbay school. Come on, we'll explain the whole thing to your father, an' if he thinks it won't pay you to put up the money, I'll hunt 'round for another partner."

Fortunately for the success of Ezra's scheme, or so it seemed at the time, Dick's father, senior partner of the firm of Marshall & Jordan, dealers in marine hardware and equipment, was at leisure when the boys entered his office, and quite willing to listen as his son requested.

"Ezra has got a scheme that he believes a good one, an' we want to know what you think about it, sir?"

Mr. Marshall swung around in his chair and looked questioningly at the young lobster catcher, who said in a business-like tone:

"'Squire Merrill has given an agreement that he'll let the Phœbe to me, if I use her in lobster buyin' along the coast, for one-quarter of the profits, an' here is the writin' he made."

"So you are thinking of going into the whole-sale business, eh?" Mr. Marshall said with a smile as he took the paper Ezra handed him, but did not look at it.

"That's what I want to do, sir; but first I've got to find a partner who can put in two hundred an' fifty dollars."

"A small amount for the kind of business, I should say."

"So it is, sir; but that's what I counted we could get along with as a starter, an' if we're careful it

ought'er grow big mighty fast. I've asked Dick to go in with me, if you'll lend us the cash, an' you shan't lose a cent of it, for I'll find the money in my traps, if the business goes wrong."

"You have been taking care of the family since your father died, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"And if you find a chance to start in as a dealer it will be necessary for you to draw from the concern, providing you succeed in forming one, as much money as will pay the expenses of your family."

"I won't draw a cent for three months. I've saved fifty dollars, an', with what mother earns, that'll keep the house goin' twelve weeks," Ezra said stoutly, and Mr. Marshall added with a laugh:

"So you have been getting ready for your scheme quite a while, eh?"

"I've had it in mind since last fall, when Cap'en Hatch died, an' the Phœbe was laid up."

"The smack is for sale, isn't she?"

"Yes sir; the 'Squire asks eleven hundred dollars, an' my biggest fear is that he'll find some one to buy her before I can get started."

"If he can get a hard-working lad like you to run her, giving him one-quarter of the profits, he would be foolish to part with the boat. Now let me have a better understanding of your scheme. Tell me just what you propose, and explain how I shall be the gainer by advancing the money you need."

"I hadn't figgered out the last part of it, sir, except that you'd be givin' Dick a chance to make

quite a lot of money before he goes to college. I want him to go into partnership with me, doin' his share of the work, an' the two of us to borrow the money of you. 'Squire Merrill says if he lets me the boat I must have her insured, so in case we get on the rocks he won't lose anything. Dick an' I will share an' share alike, with the agreement that we won't draw out any money for our own use, until three months have gone by. When we sell a cargo of lobsters, we will turn over to you all the profits, keepin' on hand only as much as we started in with, an'— Well, that's all I think of, sir."

"Suppose we go over and have a look at the Phœbe; it may be that she isn't in shape for such a voyage as you propose to make," and Mr. Marshall started toward the door, Ezra saying as he followed by the side of Dick:

"I've overhauled her, sir, an' can't find anything wrong."

Ten minutes later the three were on board the smack, giving more attention to the engine and hull than to the cabin fittings.

A seaworthy craft was the Phœbe; forty feet in length, with a beam of twelve feet. A wheel-house rose from the bow much like a watch-tower, giving her an odd appearance as compared with a pleasure yacht, and aft of that, running a full fifteen feet in the very middle of the craft, was the lobster well — a compartment water-tight on the sides and ends, but with many perforations in the bottom so that the sea water might find free entrance. This place, which would answer as the hold in other vessels, was,

as a matter of course, awash to the water-line of the smack, and in it lobsters could be kept alive an indefinite time.

Aft of this well was the cabin, in which were also the engine and the cook's quarters, with two bunks on either side, and a small folding-table at which three persons might sit without being very badly cramped for elbow-room. It was not an inviting looking place, this small cuddy; but as Ezra explained when, by the expression on Mr. Marshall's face, he fancied that gentleman was not pleased with the general appearance, "We ain't goin' into this business for fun, an' so we have a bed an' enough to eat, there's no need of fancy fittin's."

"You're right, Ezra. I wasn't thinking of the looks; but figuring whether the engine couldn't be enclosed in some way, so that you wouldn't be forced to inhale the fumes of gasoline all the time. The boat appears to be in fair condition; but it wouldn't do any harm to haul her out on the dry dock and make certain her bottom is sound."

"Then you're willin' to lend us the money, father?" Dick asked anxiously, for since the inspection of the smack he had grown quite eager to have a share in Ezra's scheme.

"Because of the fact that Ezra has shown himself willing and capable of taking care of his family these past three years, I believe he will make a success of the business, providing you do not meet with misfortune at the outset. Therefore I am willing to loan the firm of Upton & Marshall the money needed, requiring from them interest at the rate of

six per cent. Perhaps it will be better for me to conclude the bargain with the owner of the Phœbe, and you may set about making ready for the first cruise at once. Get the boat out where you can look at the hull carefully, and, after that has been done, take in your stores, for the sooner you make the acquaintance of the lobster catchers alongshore, the better able you will be to get a cargo."

Having said this, Mr. Marshall left the boys, going in the direction of 'Squire Merrill's home, and Dick would have given himself up to a time of rejoicing because of the ease with which the financial portion of the business had been accomplished; but Ezra reminded him that much in the way of work remained to be done, by saying:

"I reckon your father will feel more certain of gettin' his money back, if we go to work instead of dancin' 'round pattin' ourselves on the head. The Phœbe is to be hauled out, an' there's no reason why we shouldn't have it done 'twixt now an' night. We'll run her over to the railway with her own power, which will be quicker than towin'."

Then Ezra set about putting the engine in order, after Dick had hurried away to buy a small supply of gasoline, and Mr. Marshall had not yet returned from his visit to 'Squire Merrill's when the smack was high and dry on the marine railway.

Ezra had many friends in Westbay, having won them by the manly way in which he took his father's place as head of the family, and one of them, Josiah Fernald, who was an able ship-carpenter, volunteered to make a critical examination of the Phœbe's hull.

"A little calkin' around the stern-post, an' a coat of copper paint will fix her up shipshape, I reckon," Mr. Fernald said after his task was finished, and when Mr. Marshall came to see what the boys were doing, Ezra was driving oakum into the seams with a fairly skilful hand.

"You're not losing any time, eh?" he cried cheerily. "Copper paint, eh? That's a good idea, and while she's hauled out I'll have the cabin put in a little better shape, for by my agreement with 'Squire Merrill I'm at liberty to make any repairs. I'll send a carpenter at once."

"We can't afford to *hire* much work done," Ezra said warningly. "Two hundred an' fifty will be about as little as we can get along with, if we find a chance to buy a cargo."

"I'll attend to that part of the business, and charge the expense against the boat," Mr. Marshall replied laughingly as he walked away.

During the next five working days Messrs. Upton & Marshall were very busy lads; but at the end of that time the Phœbe was lying at Marshall & Jordan's dock, not only in prime condition as regards the hull and engine, but outfitted in much better shape than Ezra had believed really necessary.

Dick's father had insisted on putting the stores and the gasoline on board, and the senior member of the lobster-buying firm feared he had been far too extravagant in the way of eatables.

"While we owe so much money we ought'er skin along with flour, pork and potatoes," Ezra had said when the provisions were sent on board; but Mr.

Marshall laughingly declared that since the owner of the boat had an interest in the venture to the extent of one-quarter of the profits, those who sailed her need not complain if 'Squire Merrill was satisfied.

On the evening when the Phœbe was ready for sea, and Ezra had said good-bye to his mother, for the lads were to sleep on board in order to make an early start next morning, Mr. Marshall sent for them to come to his office.

"Here is the money I agreed to lend you," he said, pointing to a fat canvas bag on the desk in front of him. "I have made it up of silver and small bills, that you may have no difficulty in paying out the exact amount. Do you know what lobsters are worth in the wholesale market?"

"They were payin' fourteen cents a pound in Portland yesterday, an' Charley Jordan, who came from there this mornin', says they are likely to go higher," Ezra replied promptly.

"Remember that in buying the expense of provisions and gasoline must be added to the cost of the lobsters, and govern yourselves accordingly. Do not be discouraged if you fail to get a cargo in any very short time, for you must first make the acquaintance of the fishermen before you can expect them to hold their catch until the Phœbe gets around. Perhaps, though," he added with a smile as he looked at Ezra, "you already know more about the business than I can tell you?"

"Indeed I don't, sir," was the quick reply. "I know what good lobsters are, an' that's about all.

The buyin' part of the business I've got to learn, an' so has Dick."

"I'm glad, because of the money I've got invested in the scheme, that you don't know too much, lad. Now go aboard and get a long night's rest, for with only two to run the Phœbe I'm allowing that you'll find it necessary to work very hard before the cruise comes to an end. Be a good boy, Dick, and don't do anything which would cause your mother to grieve."

Then, handing Ezra the bag of money, Mr. Marshall walked with the boys to the dock, there leaving the partners to spend the evening as best they might, so far as their creditor was concerned.

"It's a case of cookin' supper, or turnin' in without it," Ezra said with a cheery laugh, for now that his scheme was so far progressed he believed he and his mother were certain of gaining enough of this world's goods to provide them with all the comforts, if not the luxuries, of life.

"If you'd done as I advised, we'd had somebody on board to get the supper for us, an' that's the way things ought to have been fixed."

"Now see here, Dick," and Ezra spoke very earnestly. "With you the whole scheme amounts to a season's pleasin', an' you wouldn't shed many tears if this firm went into bankruptcy, because your father can well afford to forgive you your part of the debt. I'm a fellow who can't have anythin' in this world that he don't earn for himself, an', besides, I've got to support mother. What I'm

wantin' is to see the time when I can say that there's no need of her goin' from house to house sewin', because I've made enough to take care of her, an' in order to do that I've got to look sharp after every cent. If we hired a cook it would cost us at least twenty dollars a month, an' we'd have to feed him. This firm can't afford any such luxury as that when they owe for the whole outfit."

"Father says I must let you manage the business, for you've got what he calls a 'long head,' so I s'pose it's a case of humpin' over a cook-stove an' washin' greasy dishes, from now out, so let's have the job over for this night as soon as possible."

The cabin of the Phœbe had almost a home-like appearance when the partners entered, thanks to Mr. Marshall's orders. The engine had been partially enclosed, the table was enlarged, two new lockers had been put in, and everything was as bright as fresh paint could make it. Already had the boys stowed their belongings in place, the table was spread for supper, and although there was nothing really beautiful in the two suits of oil-skins which hung on the forward bulkhead, they actually adorned the snug little cuddy.

A small, stout drawer had been fitted beneath one end of the table, on which was a lock with two keys, and in this Ezra placed the bag of money, saying as he fastened the place of deposit securely and gave one of the keys to his partner:

"If a thief got in here he'd have to hunt quite a spell before findin' our bank; but it ain't likely

anybody will try to rob us, though we must keep a sharp look-out all the while, for if that money got away from us it would be good-bye to the lobster business."

"I guess we can look after it all right, an' so long as we don't allow any one to come below, it can't be stolen. Are you goin' to cook supper?"

"Sure. Light the swingin' lamp, so's to make things look all the more cosy, an' I'll get to work."

Thanks to Ezra's skill as a cook, the first meal aboard the Phœbe was a decided success, and although it was not pleasant to be forced to wash dishes, Dick did his share of the work without grumbling. Then the partners discussed their plans for the future until slumber weighed heavily on their eyelids, and it was not yet eight o'clock in the evening when both were sleeping soundly and noisily.

There was only the faintest gleam of light in the eastern sky when Ezra rolled out of his bunk, peeped through the half-opened hatch, and awakened his partner by saying:

"I reckon you'd better turn out, Dick. By the time we've made coffee an' boiled some eggs it'll be light enough to get under way."

Now as a matter of fact Dick and work were not particularly good friends, but he obeyed this summons as promptly as if his one desire was to be doing something in the way of labor, and the sun had not yet shown his face over the water when, with Ezra at the engine and Dick at the wheel, the Phœbe glided out of the harbor, headed for Monhegan

island, it being a portion of Ezra's scheme to make the first stop there, after which a visit would be paid to Matinicus.

The real business of buying lobsters, so the boys argued, could not be begun until they were to the eastward of Matinicus, for they did not expect to drive a very flourishing trade in those localities visited by passenger steamers.

Ezra found plenty with which to busy himself for an hour or more after leaving port. It had been agreed that he who acted as engineer, for the boys were to make a change of work each day, should wash the dishes, and the senior member of the firm was deeply engaged in this not overly agreeable task, when from the wheel-house came the signal to "slow down," followed almost immediately by the bell to stop her.

Hurriedly Ezra obeyed the command, and when the motor was motionless he ran out of the cabin to learn the reason for this sudden interruption of the voyage. Much to his surprise he learned that Dick had stopped in obedience to the signals of a not very reputable looking old man in a dory, who was by this time pulling alongside.

"What's the matter?" Ezra asked sharply, and Dick replied with a laugh:

"That's for you to find out. He signaled as if he was a health officer come to have a squint at our passenger list, an' I thought we might as well hear what he had to say for himself."

"Hello there!" the stranger cried as he came over the rail with the painter of the boat in his

hand. "I reckon this 'ere craft is a lobster smack, eh?"

"That's what she is," and Ezra spoke curtly, for it vexed him to have the Phœbe held up by one who was evidently bent on making himself "at home" without waiting for an invitation.

"Wa'al, I'm glad to hear that, for I was jest wonderin' how long it would take me to pull from here to Swans island. I reckon you're goin' that far, an' won't begrudge me a passage."

"Swans island!" Ezra cried in surprise. "Why, that's quite a bit to the eastward of Isle au Haut!"

"You've got it down fine, lad, for that's jest about where it lays, an' it's a wicked long pull for one man in a dory."

"Did you count on rowin' that far? It must be more than a hundred miles!"

"Wa'al, I kind'er allowed I'd pick up some craft bound that way afore I'd got very far on the road, an' it seems I did," the stranger replied as he made the dory fast astern and calmly proceeded to fill a black pipe quite as disreputable looking as himself. "Where are you bound?"

"Where did you start from?" Ezra asked, giving no heed to the question.

"I came out of Portland last night."

"Have you been in the dory since then?" Dick cried in surprise.

"Sure enough; what else could I do? I'm near about tuckered out too, an' it's a big piece of luck that I ran across you. Bless my stars, you're nothin' but boys! Ain't there any men aboard?"

“ We’re alone, an’ didn’t count on takin’ any passengers,” Ezra said even more curtly than before; but the stranger was not disturbed by the inhospitable tone.

“ No, I reckon you didn’t; but you see folks will turn up when you ain’t expectin’ ’em. I don’t allow you boys own this ’ere smack all by yourselves? ”

“ There’s no reason why we should hold on here, Dick,” Ezra said as he turned to enter the cuddy. “ We’re bound to keep movin’ if we count on makin’ port to-night, an’ we shan’t go any faster with that dory trailin’ on astern.”

“ Start her up, partner, an’ the next time I see anybody in a dory wavin’ his arms as if havin’ a fit, I won’t make the mistake of stoppin’,” Master Marshall cried with a laugh.

Ezra was not in a particularly good humor as he started the motor, nor did he feel any better in mind when the visitor followed him into the cuddy without waiting for an invitation.

“ Ain’t it kind’er lonesome down here all alone? ” the old fellow asked as he seated himself at the table and looked around hungrily.

“ I haven’t had a chance to find out,” was Ezra’s not very gracious reply as he turned his attention once more to washing the dishes.

“ So you boys are runnin’ the machine all alone — not a man aboard, eh? ”

“ We two make up the crew.”

“ Out for lobsters? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Wa’al, it’s kind’er lucky you struck me, if so

be you're goin' down Swans island way, for I'm pretty well known thereabouts."

Ezra began to wish he had not been quite so curt in his speech, for possibly here was one who could give them no inconsiderable aid, and as atonement he set before the old fellow half a pan of corn-bread and some cold fried bacon.

"Now that's what I call prime!" and the visitor made a vigorous attack on the food. "I don't reckon you've got a drop of coffee anywhere about, eh?"

"Will you take it cold, or wait till I warm some?"

"Give me a mug jest as it is, an' the rest will be heatin' while I'm gettin' away with the first dose."

Only with difficulty could Ezra repress an impatient word, for the old man was assuming an air of authority which did not please the lad; but, remembering that if he was to get a cargo for the Phœbe in anything like a reasonable length of time it would be necessary to cultivate the acquaintance of those who lived on the coast, he filled a mug with coffee, asking as he placed it before the passenger:

"Have you been in Portland very long?"

"A good bit longer than I wanted to stay," the old man replied angrily. "Six months, that's what it was."

"An' you haven't been on Swans island in all that time?"

"Course not; how could I, seein's the sheriff's men took mighty good care that I didn't have a chance even to stick my nose out 'er doors. Say,

but this is fine coffee, an' I'm hopin' you've got plenty of it in that 'ere pot."

"I reckon there's as much as you can drink. What had the sheriff's men to do with you?"

"They was the whole thing, seein's I was in jail," the passenger said as if it was quite a matter of course that he should have been in prison.

"In jail!" Ezra repeated in dismay. "Why did they put you there?"

"Nothin', son, jest nothin' at all, so to speak. I'd been runnin' a little spirits over the line when they nabbed me —"

"Runnin' spirits?" Ezra repeated in bewilderment. "What do you mean by that?"

"Smugglin', they called it, an' if you'll believe me, them pesky fools allowed it was somethin' mighty wicked, or you'd thought they did, 'cordin' to the talk that was made at the trial. Don't you forget that I was glad when yesterday mornin' came, an' my time was done. Didn't it feel good to get out'er doors once more!"

"An' you had the dory at Portland all that time?"

"Wa'al, say, do you allow she'd staid there six months while I was locked in an' couldn't 'tend to her? No siree, that 'ere dory astern is one I picked up last night, an' she ain't any great of a boat for a fact."

"Picked her up?" and Ezra took the coffee pot from the stove. "Do you mean that you stole her?"

"Wa'al, I wanted to get to Swans island, an'

didn't have any other way of strikin' the place 'less I hitched on to somethin' that would float. As luck would have it, I lighted on a craft that ain't worth a shillin' to the dozen."

The old man stopped talking long enough to stuff his mouth full of corn-bread, and Ezra stood staring at him in dismay, saying to himself that here indeed was a good beginning for an honest cruise — a smuggler and thief making himself at home in the cuddy without heed as to the wishes of his hosts.

Ezra was at a loss to know just what should be done under the circumstances. He was not willing to keep the man on board, and even though it had been possible to set him ashore, it was by no means certain the fellow would go voluntarily.

Assuring himself that the motor was running smoothly, and with a glance at that part of the table beneath which was the bag of money, the lad ran hastily out of the cuddy to the wheel-house, saying as he entered:

"Do you know what we've got in the cabin, Dick? A smuggler an' a thief! He stole the dory last night, an' who knows but that we'll be arrested at the first port we make, for helpin' him off with the boat?"

"How do you know all that?" Dick asked sharply, and looking almost frightened.

"He just told me, an' now he's in the cabin eatin' an' drinkin' as if he owned the whole outfit!"

"You must put him ashore, that's all there is to it! We can't start out on our first tradin' cruise

with such a thing as that! Put him ashore, I tell you!"

"When? How? It'll take us a good two hours to make the nearest settlement, an' even then we'd be somewhere around Bald Head! If we put back it'll cost a full day of time, an' nobody knows how much in the way of gasoline!"

"Then turn him adrift! I won't have him on this craft another minute, an' that's the cold fact!"

"Then s'pose you go below an' do the job? I've got an idea that he won't leave willingly, an' we stand the chance of havin' a big row."

"All right, let's have it, an' the sooner the better. Take the wheel, an' I'll show the old reprobate whether he's got a free footin' on this boat!"

Then Dick ran at full speed to the cuddy, and Ezra stood at the helm wondering whether his partner would succeed in the effort to rid the Pheobe of the unwelcome passenger.

CHAPTER II

THE PASSENGER

When Dick leaped into the cuddy, being too impatient and angry to admit of using the stairs in the ordinary manner, the passenger was seated comfortably at the table drinking coffee, and from the friendly greeting he bestowed upon the irritated lad, one would have supposed he really believed himself to be an honored guest.

“Glad to see yer, my boy! Have a mug of this 'ere coffee; it's prime. When a man like me has been without a hot an' refreshin' drink in the mornin' for six long months, it's like meetin' an old friend to run up agin somethin' like this 'ere, an' I ain't countin' on shettin' down while there's a drop left in the pot.”

“Look here,” Dick cried angrily, taking advantage of the first opportunity to speak, “we didn't ask you to come aboard this boat, an' we're —”

“Didn't ask me?” and the visitor looked up as if in surprise. “What did you mean by stoppin', if it wasn't the same as an invitation for me to take passage?”

“I stopped because you waved your arms so frantically that I thought you must be in distress.”

“So I was, an' so you'd been if it was a case of pullin' from Portland to Swans island, unless friends

turned up same's you did," and the disreputable guest turned his attention to the coffee once more, as if there was no further need for argument.

"My partner tells me you've just come out of jail after servin' a six-months sentence, an' what's more, that you stole the dory which is towin' astern," and Dick advanced a couple of paces toward the table as if it was his intention to take possession of the coffee pot, whereupon the stranger seized it with both hands, as he replied:

"Course I've been in jail; but what does that amount to, seein's I wasn't sent there for anythin' worse'n bringin' a drop of spirits across the line? Then agin, how could I have got a boat to go to Swans island, if I hadn't taken the first one I run across?"

"You could have waited until you found some vessel goin' that way, instead of stealin'—"

"I'd been likely to have hung 'round Portland till my hair was grayer than it is now, an' then agin, who'd fed me all the time I was waitin'?"

Dick understood that by thus arguing with the smuggler he was losing sight of his original purpose, which was to send the unwelcome guest adrift, and without giving heed to the question, he said in a tone of command:

"I want you to get into your boat this very minute, for we've had enough of you aboard the Phœbe!"

"Why should I get inter the dory?" the fellow asked as if in bewilderment.

"Because we don't count on takin' the chances

of carryin' you any further. Suppose the owner finds his boat towin' astern of this craft; we'd be held as havin' helped steal her!"

"I don't reckon any one would find her, if you kept on movin' ahead same's you're doin' now," and the smuggler poured for himself another mug of coffee, sweetening it with a liberal amount of sugar.

"But I tell you that we won't have you aboard any longer, so get into your dory without further talk. We're honest traders, an' can't afford to take the chances of bein' found in the company of such as you!"

"Does that mean you'd be willin' for me to pull that hulk of a boat all the way from here to Swans island?" and the passenger drank his coffee deliberately.

"We don't care where you go, providin' you don't stay on board this smack any longer," Dick cried impatiently, and the man replied as if speaking to an importunate child:

"Look here, my son, it don't stand to reason that I'm strong enough, after havin' laid still six months in jail, to do very much work with a pair of oars, an' seein's how it's a case of gettin' to Swans island right soon, I reckon it would be foolish for me to leave snug quarters like these. Besides, knowin' folks on the coast, I can help you along a good bit in the way of gettin' a cargo. No, no, my son, Eliphalet Barnes ain't any sich fool as to take to a leaky dory when he's got the chance of livin' easy on this 'ere smack."

“ But I’m sayin’ that you can’t stay here another minute, so get into the craft you’ve stolen, an’ be quick about it! ” Dick cried, now losing his temper entirely.

“ An’ I’m sayin’ that I’ll stay where I am, ” Mr. Barnes replied in a threatening tone as he rose to his feet after drinking the last drop of coffee. “ Me an’ you fellers will get along right smooth, if I ain’t riled; but in case you rough inter me there’s like to be considerable trouble. See? ”

“ Do you mean that you refuse to leave this smack? ” Dick cried, speaking indistinctly because of his anger.

“ You’ve come mighty nigh the size of it, my son, an’ the sooner you calm down the pleasanter things will be all around. ”

Dick ran up the cuddy stairs, crying as he gained the deck:

“ Hello, Ezra! We’ll have to put about, for this fellow refuses to leave. Better head straight for Portland. It’s wiser to lose a couple of days’ time, than take our chances of bein’ overhauled for stealin’.”

“ It’s too bad to turn back after startin’ on the first cruise, ” Ezra cried, showing his face at the after window of the wheel-house. “ Can’t you *make* him obey orders? ”

“ We’d better put about than have a regular row, same as he threatens; but we’ll save him the trouble of pullin’ all the way to Swans island, by givin’ him a chance to serve another term in jail for stealin’ the dory! ”

“ I’m allowin’ you won’t do any sich fool trick! ” a sharp voice cried, and, turning, Dick saw that Mr. Barnes had come on deck with a heavy iron wrench in his hand, which he swung to and fro threateningly.

Dick looked around hurriedly for a weapon, believing the smuggler was about to make an attack upon him; but could find nothing that might serve his purpose. Beneath the dory, which was lashed amidships over the well, were oars and boat-hooks, but these he could not come at without spending considerable time, and the indications were that he had very few seconds at his disposal, for Mr. Barnes was brandishing the wrench in a most disagreeable manner.

Ezra, who had a full view of what was taking place on deck, now swung the steering-wheel hard down, and the Phœbe’s bow was describing a half-circle against the horizon when the smuggler ran to the door of the pilot-house, pulling it open viciously as he cried:

“ Drop that wheel an’ get aft, or I’ll smash your head to a jelly! ”

“ Get out of here, or we’ll have you arrested as a pirate! ” and Ezra kept a firm hold of the wheel-spokes as he cried loudly, “ Come here, Dick, an’ be quick about it! ”

The words were no more than spoken when Mr. Barnes dealt him a savage blow with his bare fist, and the wonder of it was that he did not go overboard.

“ I’ll take charge of this ’ere craft till we get

to Swans island, since you lads ain't willin' to do a poor man a good turn, an' seein's how you're ready to make a rough house of your boat, I'm goin' to help things along. If you don't obey orders right up to the handle from this out, there'll be trouble good an' plenty, for I ain't countin' on rowin' any leaky boat when there's a show for makin' the pasage easy an' comfortable like!"

Almost unconsciously Ezra staggered aft to where Dick was standing, and there the two remained staring in open-mouthed astonishment at the back of Mr. Barnes' head, which could be seen through the window of the wheel-house, as he stood at the helm bringing the Phœbe around to her course again.

They had actually lost control of their craft, and that through a man whom they had taken on board in charity!

While one might have counted twenty they stood there silent and motionless, and then Ezra said with a laugh that had in it little of mirth:

"We've shown ourselves to be fit for the business, an' that's a fact! In less than four hours after settin' out we've lost the whole concern, an' found a master!"

"It'll take more than one like that pirate to do us out of our property!" Dick cried, shaking his clenched fist in the direction of the wheel-house. "That old villain shall know what it is to serve twice six months in jail, for we'll make complaint to the officers!"

"How are we to come across any?" Ezra asked with a grimace. "It strikes me that he has the up-

per hands just now, an' we'll go wherever he steers."

As a matter of course the Phœbe had been running at full speed all this while, and the gentleman at the wheel, evidently believing he had solved the problem of getting to Swans island without very much labor on his part, was whistling cheerily, giving no apparent heed to the rightful masters of the smack.

Dick was literally beside himself with rage as he realized how powerless they were so long as Mr. Barnes held possession of the pilot-house, and it seemed much as if his partner's anger served to bring Ezra to his normal senses, for he said in a low tone:

"Come below; we're doin' no good by ravin', an' unless we're willin' to stand idly by while that old pirate works his will, it's time we cooked up some plan to get the best of him."

"But what can we do?" Dick asked helplessly as he followed his partner into the cuddy. "What fools we were not to have brought a revolver, an' with all that money where he can get at it!"

"I'm allowin' that the money won't do him much good," Ezra cried quickly, as if a happy thought had come to him. "Let's hunt around for somethin' that will offset his wrench, an' then come to an understandin'."

"How can we do anythin' while he's at the wheel?" Dick asked helplessly.

"What good will it do him to be there if the screw isn't turnin'? There's no real need of our runnin' the motor for his benefit."

"Well, I am a stupid! I never thought that we

could bring the Phœbe to a standstill!" and Dick made as if to stop the craft, but Ezra prevented him by saying in a whisper:

"We mustn't do that till we're ready to take care of the pirate. It stands us in hand to get somethin' that will serve as weapons, an' then, after stoppin' the motor, make a dash for the pilot-house, because there's no question but that we've got to have a fight unless we're willin' to lose the whole outfit. He has succeeded so well up to this point, that he'll begin to press his luck a little later."

While speaking Ezra was overhauling the goods in the cuddy, and in a few seconds lighted upon a lobster gaff of stout ash, which had inadvertently, but fortunately, been stowed in the cabin instead of in the dory where it belonged.

"I reckon this will serve a bit better than his wrench, an' you shall take that table leg — pull it off, for we can repair damages later. Now I'll throw the sparker out of gear," he added as Dick wrecked the table according to his partner's suggestion, "an' the minute the motor is put out of commission we're to make a rush for the wheel. Of course there's a chance he may get in a clip or two on us, but we've got to take the risk. Are you ready?"

"Fire away!" and Dick stood in the companion-way ready to leap on deck.

He had no more than ceased speaking when Ezra did his portion of the work, and as the screw ceased to revolve both lads made a dash forward, expecting to be severely handled before the task was finished;

but determined on overpowering their pirate, who was whistling merrily as he stood at the wheel.

Not until the lads were forward, one at either door of the pilot-house, did Mr. Barnes suspect that any plan was on foot to deprive him of his power, and then he would have been dull-witted indeed had he not realized that, as he afterward expressed it, "the jig was up." If he made an attack on either of the boys, the other might knock him out of time in short order, and with one enemy in front and another in the rear there was no possibility he could hold his own, while it seemed absolutely certain he would be seriously injured.

"I'm allowin' you lads have got the best of me," he said with a friendly smile as he glanced from one to the other. "I declare for it, I didn't think you'd take advantage of an old man in any sich way as this! I was only playin' a joke, when I took possession of the helm, an' if you didn't want to stand a little foolin', you might'er said so, without actin' as if you had it in mind to fight a reg'lar battle."

"Drop that wrench!" Ezra said sharply, and the iron tool clattered on the floor as the smuggler released his hold of it.

"Now come out of that an' go aft!"

"Look here, are you countin' on settin' me adrift in a leaky boat?" Mr. Barnes asked in tremulous tones as he stepped gingerly out of the wheel-house, Ezra slowly giving way in front of him, and Dick urging him forward with the table leg from behind.

"Of course we're goin' to set you adrift," Ezra replied angrily. "The one question in my mind is

whether we ought not take you back to Portland as a thief, an' we'd do it if we could afford to spend the time!"

"An' you're willin' I should pull that heavy, leaky boat all the way from here to Swans island?" the fellow whined, whereupon Dick cried impatiently, as he prodded yet more vigorously with the table leg:

"We don't care where you go, so that we get you out of this boat! An' there's no sense in your whinin', for after what you've tried to do it wouldn't make me feel bad a little bit if you had to walk every step of the way, so move on faster!"

Mr. Barnes looked sharply at the boys as if trying to decide whether it would be worth his while to make any attempt at softening their hearts, and, seeing in their faces an expression of anger and enmity, he evidently concluded that it would be a waste of both time and breath. Instead of making any further effort at treating as a joke all that had occurred, he went meekly over the rail into the dory which Dick pulled alongside, and once there, with the painter cast off, gave way to the wildest wrath.

"You miserable little puppies!" he shrieked, backing the dory away at a respectful distance lest the lads in their anger throw something at him. "If you think you've seen the last of Eliphalet Barnes, you're makin' the biggest mistake of your lives! It may be I'll have to row all the way to Swans island, an' then agin I may get there as soon as you do; but whichever way it turns, we'll come

together soon, remember that! If you don't rue the day you turned me adrift, it'll be because I've clean forgot how to get even!"

Ezra, while not particularly alarmed by the threats, had no desire to hear them, and, running into the cuddy, he had the screw turning so quickly that Dick was obliged to move at his best pace forward in order to take the helm.

The smuggler was soon left so far behind that the crew of the Phœbe could not hear him however loudly he might have shrieked, and then, after making certain the motor was working smoothly, Ezra joined his partner in the wheel-house, saying as he entered:

"If your father could know just what has happened he'd begin to think it was a bad investment when he lent us two hundred an' fifty dollars. It makes me feel mighty foolish when I realize what easy marks we were! A couple of babies couldn't have been any softer!"

"I've got money enough of my own to buy a revolver, an' you can make up your mind that I'll have one within five minutes after we strike a town where such things are kept for sale," Dick cried irritably.

"It shouldn't be necessary for us to go around armed like a couple of toughs; but I suppose we'd best be on the safe side in case we're taken in so easily again. That old fellow can't do us very much harm with his tongue, an' yet it ain't certain that he won't be able to shut us off from makin' a

good trade now an' then, 'specially if he claims that we set him adrift in a leaky boat rather than give him a passage."

"There's no need to bother your head about what he may be able to do, for we'll be back at Westbay long before he can reach Swans island," Dick replied petulantly. "Can't you jump it to the motor a bit? We've wasted so much time that we may not be able to make Monhegan before dark."

"I reckon she's doin' her best now," Ezra said carelessly. "I don't feel like settlin' down so soon after havin' been attacked by a pirate, but want to talk it over a bit."

"All right, I'll leave you to talk it over alone, an' I'll see what can be done in the way of speed," Dick replied curtly as he went below, and Ezra, looking aft, smiled contentedly as he saw Mr. Barnes lying idly on his oars, evidently counting on hailing a craft which was just coming into view astern.

Not until noon did Dick recover from the fit of sulks into which he had been plunged by the "joking" of Mr. Barnes, and then he came into the wheel-house to say that he would take his trick at the helm again if Ezra was willing to get dinner.

"Got smoothed down, eh?" his partner asked with a laugh, and Dick replied good-naturedly:

"Yes, after a fashion; but even now I can't think of our foolishness without feelin' mighty sore. We'll try to believe that the cruise begins from this moment, an' if anybody else gets the best of us, I'll bag my head, for somethin' of the kind will be needed."

Then it was as if, for the time being, both the boys put from their minds all thoughts of the misadventure, and the Phœbe dashed ahead over the lazy swell as if understanding that she carried two lads who, on this first cruise, were to prove whether they were able to conduct a business venture.

The sun had but just slipped down behind the waters when the smack rounded to at her anchor in the tiny cove on Monhegan shore, where Ezra knew lived several fishermen who devoted the greater portion of their time to trapping lobsters, and within half an hour after her arrival every one of the lobster catchers was on board to learn the news, as well as the latest quotations in the fish market.

“So you two boys are goin’ inter the business, eh?” one of the men asked curiously. “I never allowed that Marshall of Marshall & Jordan would let a son of his take up with sich a callin’.”

“Isn’t it fair an’ honorable?” Dick asked, his face flushing suddenly.

“Of course it is, lad, else I wouldn’t be in it; but I kind’er reckoned it wasn’t high-toned enough to suit your father.”

“He couldn’t have had any very bad grudge against it, else he wouldn’t have lent us the money to start with,” Ezra said quickly. “The main question is whether you’re goin’ to let us have your catch if we pay a fair price?”

“Wa’al, we’re kind’er bound to the Trefethens, though I’m free to say that they’ve never put themselves out very much to call ’round reg’lar. I reckon, if you don’t try to shut my eye as to the

price, you can have your share of what I take."

"We're payin' eight cents a pound, an' allowin' that they'll average a pound an' a half. The Boston wholesale price is fourteen, so there you have the whole thing," Ezra replied in a business-like tone. "You know very well that the Trefethens won't handle your catch unless they can make six cents profit, to account for all the expense an' loss."

"An' you'll take 'em as they run?" one of the visitors asked eagerly.

"Indeed we won't," Ezra said decidedly. "They must all be counts, with no joes, an' in good condition. You know that I've been lobsterin' these three years, an' it stands to reason I know what dealers are willin' to take. We're startin' in to make a reg'lar business of this, an' are bound to give you as good a show as any one else would, but at the same time, we don't allow to let you run in any bad stock on us just because it looks as though we might be green at the business."

"All right for you, lad," the eldest of the fishermen said laughingly. "I'm willin' to let you have a couple of hundred, an' if I find that you're doin' the square thing, will save you all I can, pervidin' you come often enough."

This was sufficient to influence the others, and soon the new firm had the promise of five or six hundred lobsters to be put on board next morning.

When this bargain had been made Ezra poured out a mug of coffee for each of his guests, and while they were drinking it, asked with an assumption of carelessness:

“Did any of you ever hear of Eliphalet Barnes, who hails from Swans island?”

“I reckon we have,” the eldest visitor replied; “but I’m allowin’ that he hails from ’most anywhere, ’cordin’ as suits his plans. He’s up in Portland jail now, though, an’ won’t be likely to trouble anybody for quite a spell.”

“He has served his sentence, an’ is now headin’ this way in a dory he stole last night,” Dick said promptly, and in such a tone as caused his guests to believe he could tell more concerning this Mr. Barnes, therefore they set about questioning him with such skill that almost before being aware of the fact, he had told of the Phoëbe’s capture.

“That’s jest like Eliphalet Barnes!” the old man said with a laugh. “There’s no kind of deviltry he wouldn’t tackle an’ take the chances of pullin’ through with it; but he ain’t a comfortable kind of a creeter to have a grudge agin one. I don’t allow to be anybody’s coward; but at the same time I’d rather keep on the right side of Eliphalet if it didn’t cost too much.”

“He swore vengeance against us; but yet I don’t see how he could do any harm, unless the lobster catchers alongshore are so afraid of him that they wouldn’t sell us their catch if he said it shouldn’t be done,” Ezra said with just a suggestion of nervousness in his tones, and one of the visitors replied with a laugh:

“I reckon we ain’t so much afraid of him as all that comes to. What Uncle ’Siah meant was that we’d steer clear of a row with the skunk. You’ll

pick up a cargo, an' be back long before he can get anywhere near Swans island, unless he comes across somebody what don't know him. I wouldn't give the miserable creeter a passage if by goin' ten or twelve miles out'er my way I could slip past him."

Then ensued quite a lengthy discussion as to the general reputation of Eliphalet Barnes, at the close of which the fishermen went ashore with the agreement that they would be ready to deliver the lobsters by sun-rise next morning, and the partners were so tired and sleepy that they tumbled into their bunks immediately the visitors had departed, without a word of comment on what had been said.

It was hardly more than daybreak when Dick and Ezra were aroused from a dreamless sleep by the arrival of the first fisherman who was ready to put on board his catch, and the Phœbe was warped down to the floating car, where the work could be done expeditiously.

Until nine o'clock that morning Messrs. Upton & Marshall were very busy, and then they had on board six hundred marketable lobsters, paying in cash twelve cents for each and every one. What was even better, from a business point of view, the fisherman promised that they would hold their catch a reasonable length of time for the coming of the Phœbe, and Ezra announced confidently that after this first cruise it would be possible for them to say when and how often he and his partner would put in at Monhegan.

There was no loitering once the lobsters were in the Phœbe's well and the price paid. Within ten

minutes from the time the last transaction had come to an end the little steamer was under way headed for Matinicus, and Dick, whose turn it was to take charge of the motor, said as he entered the wheel-house after making certain that everything below was as it should be:

“I’m allowin’ that we haven’t made such a bad beginnin’, even though we did have the hard luck to meet Eliphalet Barnes on the first day. If the market price holds up, an’ we get home all that we’ve bought, in fair condition, it’s a case of havin’ made thirty dollars or more on this one trade. Of course there’s the cost of gasoline an’ food to come out of that; but the expenses can’t be so very much.”

“’Squire Merrill told me he’d known Cap’en Hatch to make more’n a thousand dollars in one season, an’ I’m allowin’ that if we’re careful, an’ don’t meet with any accident, we ought to be able to pay what we owe, an’ buy the Phœbe outright, before fall,” Ezra said cheerily. “If we can do as well at Matinicus as we did at Monhegan, we shan’t need to go below Isle au Haut this trip.”

Then the boys discussed the business prospects until it was necessary for Dick to look after the motor, and both were feeling remarkably cheery in mind when, at an unusually late hour, dinner had been made ready.

Because of having no third hand, only one could eat at a time while the smack was under way, and Dick said when he went on deck to announce that Ezra’s dinner was on the table:

“It seems foolish for us to try to get along with

no one to lend a hand. Surely we can afford to hire a cook, or, if you don't want to do that, take on a fellow who will steer an' do odd jobs, so we can get some little comfort while workin' so hard."

"Wait till we've paid your father the money we borrowed, an' settled with 'Squire Merrill for this first cruise. After that, if the business turns out as we hope, I'll agree to hirin' one hand; but till then I think we'd better go slow, an' so does your father."

Then Ezra went below to eat his dinner alone, and when he came on deck the Phœbe was so near Matinicus that it was necessary Dick make all speed with his portion of the dinner in order to finish before they had come to anchor again.

If Messrs. Upton & Marshall had been bent only on pleasuring, then the stop at Matinicus would have been delightful, for the fishermen welcomed them warmly, but had no lobsters to sell. They had just sent all their catch to the Portland market, in a power boat owned on the island, and did not feel at liberty to make any promises as to the future, because of being able to dispose of their wares at the highest prices.

They gave the lads no little encouragement, however, advising them where to call on the eastward trip, and recommending that they buy nothing until after having gone as far east as was intended, thus doing away with the necessity of keeping the lobsters so long in the Phœbe's well, where they were like to eat each other in event of getting hungry.

At four o'clock the Phœbe was under way once

more, heading for Vinalhaven; but there was little hope of adding to the cargo at that place. It was only to be an anchorage for the night, and on the following morning a short run would take them to Isle au Haut.

“Well, we haven’t done so badly to-day, even though we can’t buy any more,” Ezra said when Dick came into the pilot-house for a chat. “To-morrow I’m reckonin’ on doin’ considerable business in the way of makin’ arrangements for the next cruise. I did think the Phœbe was quite a smart sailer, but that tug astern don’t seem to have any trouble in overhaulin’ us. She wasn’t in sight when we left Matinicus.

Dick looked with mild curiosity at a small tug which was coming up hand over hand as if in chase, until, when the little craft sheered a trifle, owing most likely to carelessness on the part of the helmsman, it was possible to see a dory trailing on behind.

“Look there, Ezra!” he cried excitedly. “If I ain’t way out of my reckonin’ we’ve seen that boat before! Take a good squint at it, an’ tell me what you think?”

Ezra did as he was bidden, and after gazing earnestly astern of the tug several seconds, he replied with a laugh:

“You’ve been turnin’ over what the fishermen at Monhegan told us of Barnes, an’ believe every dory you see must be his.”

“I haven’t been taken that way before, for the very good reason that this is the first craft of the kind we’ve seen at sea since he left us. I tell you

he's on board that steamer, an' if she is bound for Vinalhaven, as a fellow might guess by the course she's steerin', I'm thinkin' we shall see our smuggler again sooner than we counted on."

Ezra laughed incredulously, and had begun to point out certain peculiarities about the dory in question which differed from what could have been seen on the stolen craft, when a man walked into the very bow of the tug, waving his hand as if in friendly salute.

"There, what have you got to say now?" Dick asked triumphantly, and Ezra replied almost mournfully:

"Not a word. That is Barnes, for a fact, an' if he is all the Monhegan fishermen claimed, we're like to have trouble to-night in case we make Vinalhaven!"

CHAPTER III

THE NEW "HAND"

Although neither of the boys would have admitted as much, both were decidedly uncomfortable in mind regarding the possibility that Eliphalet Barnes might attempt to work mischief in some way, as he had threatened, and if one-half of all that had been told about the man was true, then there could be no question but that the smuggler would make trouble for the firm of Upton & Marshall.

When ten minutes had passed after the lads were convinced that Barnes was on board the tug-boat, it could be seen beyond a doubt that the steamer was bound for Vinalhaven, and Dick said with a mirthless laugh:

"Yesterday it seemed as if that smuggler would be a precious long while gettin' to Swans island, an' yet he's much the same as there already, for it can't be such a terribly long pull from Vinalhaven."

"I don't believe it makes any particular difference to him where he brings up," Ezra said slowly, as if turning over some question in his mind. "In case he comes anywhere near livin' up to his reputation, he'll be at his smugglin' tricks again as soon as he gets a show. Say, Dick, why shouldn't we make Isle au Haut to-night? There's no hope we can do any business in Vinalhaven, an' we only

headed that way for a harbor. It won't be very dark this evenin', an' even if it should be, we ought to be able to run in all right."

"I'm agreed, an' if we can't do a trick like that after sunset, it's time we looked around for some one else to run the Phœbe. In case we stay in this business very long, it stands to reason there'll be many a time when we'll have to make a night-run, an' the sooner we break in the better," and Dick looked decidedly relieved in mind at thus settling the question of anchorage.

While one might have counted twenty Ezra remained silent, and then he said, as if ashamed to broach the subject:

"Since there's nobody to hear us, we may as well admit that we've changed the course on account of Eliphalet Barnes, an' it seems like a chicken-hearted trick for two lads of our size to run away from one man."

"Better do that than have a row which may break up our business. The fishermen on Monhegan told us he was ready for any kind of mischief, an', as I look at it, we're bound to keep out of trouble, even if we do run away from one man."

"So we are, Dick, an' the fact that we owe your father so much money is reason enough for our playin' what others might call a cowardly part. Better have an eye out on the motor, for it wouldn't be pleasant to have that refuse to work while we're dodgin' 'round here among the islands."

Dick went below, where he remained until a long jingle of the bell told that he was needed on deck.

By this time night had fully shut in, and when he came from the cuddy it was to find the Phœbe close under the land.

“Do you know anything about the harbor here?” he asked of his partner as he went to the wheel-house door.

“No, an’ that’s why I called you. Shut down to half speed, an’ come up to keep a look-out. We’ve got to run in here by the sense of touch, as ‘Squire Merrill says. I’m —”

“Ahoy on the steamer!” came a cry from out the deeper shadow cast by the land, startling the boys for the instant because they had failed to see anything in the way of a craft.

“Ahoy!” Dick replied, when he had recovered from the surprise.

“Where are you bound?”

“Tryin’ to make harbor for the night.”

“Then it stands you in hand to swing ‘round to port; there’s no anchorage anywhere here.”

“Who are you?” Ezra asked as he brought the Phœbe’s bow around until she was parallel with the shore line.

“Tom Downing. If you’ll give me a tow I’ll put your craft into a snug harbor, in case she don’t draw more’n six feet.”

“All we’re wantin’ is four feet; but I don’t care to take the chances of runnin’ too close to the bottom. Where are you?”

“Just astern; stop your screw an’ I’ll come aboard.”

“If this is another case of pickin’ up a smuggler

we'd best take our chances at findin' anchorage," Dick said in a whisper, and Ezra replied confidently:

"It's a boy, I reckon. Better stop, an' stand by to look him over before he gets aboard."

Dick went below at once, and in a few seconds the Phœbe was rising and falling idly on the swell, while both Ezra and his partner stood near the star-board rail to get a glimpse of the stranger before taking him on board.

Then from out the darkness came what seemed to be an unusually large dory whose gunwale rose above the water nearly as high as the Phœbe's rail, and over the edge of which could be seen the head of a boy, so small that Ezra cried in astonishment:

"Have you gone adrift, kid?"

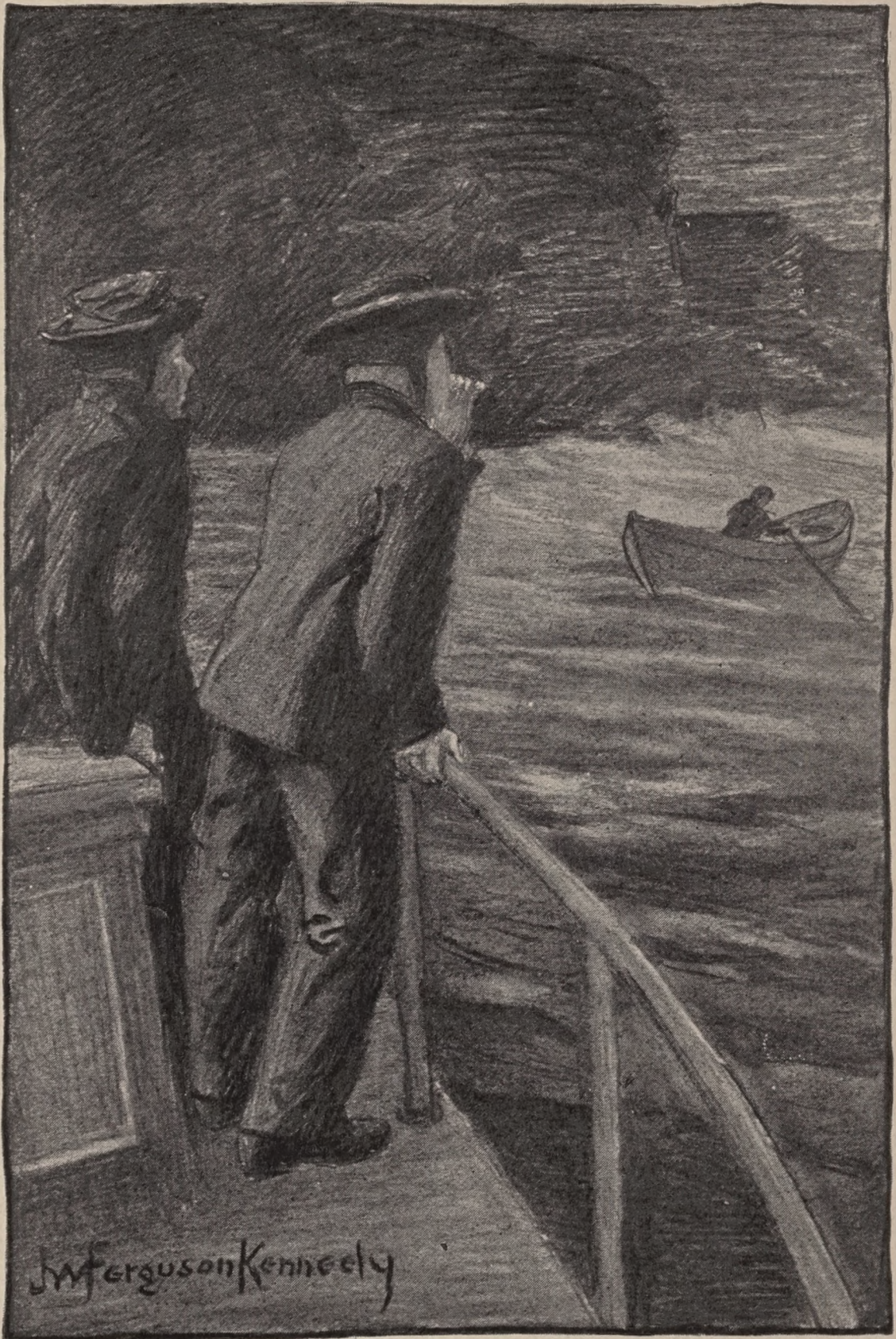
"Adrift nothin'; I'm out haulin' traps, that's what's the matter, an' a nice time of night it is to be 'tendin' to sich work alone!"

"Why don't you get a bigger dory?" Dick asked laughingly, and the small boy replied in a tone of mingled disgust and anger:

"Wouldn't it make you tired to see sich an ark of a craft as this? Abel Saunders had the idee of gettin' all he could for his money, when he bought her, I reckon! It makes a man's back ache to pull the lumpin' thing!"

"An' what does it do to a boy of your size?" and now Dick gave way to mirth, for it surely was comical to see so small a lad in such a huge boat.

"Me? Oh, I can handle her; but don't hanker



““ HAVE YOU GONE ADRIFT, KID? ””

very much after the job," Thomas Downing replied as he came alongside and threw out his painter. "Say, ain't this a lobster smack?"

"That's what she is," Ezra replied as he made the painter fast to the rail.

"An' are you fellers runnin' her all by your lonesomes?"

"We're tryin' to, though I wouldn't like to say what kind of a job we're makin' of it. If you can put us into a good harbor, an' won't run the boat aground, come into the wheel-house."

Master Downing leaped over the rail like a cricket; Dick, still laughing, went into the engine-room, and a few seconds later the Phœbe was under way once more, running at half-speed.

"Don't be afraid I'll scrape the bottom," Tommy Downing said as Ezra cautioned him about taking chances. "I could put her in with my eyes shut, an' not half try."

Then the small pilot took the wheel, and while the Phœbe was running slowly over the black waters, with never a light to guide the helmsman, Ezra asked:

"Do you tend many traps?"

"Abel Saunders has got more'n a hundred right around here, an' I look out for 'em. He pulls the ones that are on the other side of the point."

"Is he your father?"

"Not much he ain't, 'cause his name's Saunders an' mine's Downing. I'm workin' my board with him, an' a mighty poor job it is. Say, you fellers

don't want a new hand aboard this craft, eh? It strikes me you must have a pretty stiff bit of work runnin' sich a boat with only two in the crew."

"We haven't been out very long, an' I reckon the job will be stiff enough before we're through with it. You see we've just started, an' can't afford to hire a third hand."

Master Downing did not reply immediately, but stood at the wheel as if conning the steamer a full three minutes, when he said abruptly:

"Look here, I'm only gettin' my board with Abel Saunders, an' it's mighty thin sometimes. S'posen I wanted to work with you on the same lay? I'd be willin' to do most anythin' for the sake of gettin' away from this blessed island."

"How do you know that we'd hitch up together?" Ezra asked with a laugh. "You might find there was more work aboard this boat than where you are now, though I'm willin' to admit that when a boy of your size is called on to pull a hundred traps every tide, he's humpin' himself considerable."

"I couldn't get it worse than it's comin' now, an' besides, what I'm after is to get near a big town where a boy will have a chance to show what he's made of. Say, better get your anchor ready, for here's where you'll haul up for the night."

Ezra tried in vain to make out something that looked like a harbor; but so dense was the blackness that if the Phœbe had run into a fog-bank the surroundings could not have been more thoroughly shut out from view.

However, Tommy Downing appeared to know ex-

actly where he was, and the partners had really committed the smack to his charge, therefore nothing remained save to obey such orders as he might give.

“Slow down!” he called in a tone of command, and added half apologetically, “I don’t know where your signal bells are, so you’ll have to pass the word.”

This Ezra did by shouting to Dick, and a moment later came the commands:

“Stop her! Let go your anchor!”

“Where are we?” Dick asked as he came out of the cuddy, striving in vain to distinguish objects in the inky darkness.

“You’re in the thoroughfare right enough, an’ unless we get a wind dead to the suth’ard, you can lay here, no matter how much of a storm comes up,” Tommy Downing said as he came out of the wheelhouse. “A single anchor will be enough to hold, an’ when your ridin’ lights are up there’ll be no need of standin’ watch.”

It was the work of but a few moments to hoist the lanterns, and then Ezra led the way into the cuddy, saying as he did so:

“I reckon if we’re countin’ on supper to-night it will be a good idea to get about it, for the better part of the evenin’ is gone.”

Master Downing followed his new acquaintance into the cabin without waiting for an invitation, and after having made a leisurely survey of the place, he turned to Ezra with the question:

“Well, what do you think about takin’ on a new hand, meanin’ me?”

"What's that?" Dick asked quickly, and Tommy Downing immediately repeated the proposition he had made to Ezra, adding in conclusion:

"I'm willin' to do the square thing by you fellers if you'll give me a show. Don't think I'm whinin' 'round, comin' the beggin' act over you, 'cause if it turns out that I can't pay my way, I'll go over the rail without waitin' for you to ask me."

"Haven't you got any folks down here?" and Ezra began to believe that Tommy might prove a valuable assistant.

"Not a hooter! Abel Saunders allowed he was workin' the charity gag when he took me in, an' I've told him every day for three months that as soon as I could strike anythin' better I'd leave."

"If you're askin' my opinion, I'd say take him an' be glad of the chance to get a third hand," Dick said decidedly, and, without waiting for a reply from his partner, asked Tommy, "You know the islands 'round here pretty well, don't you?"

"I should say I did, seein's how I've never been away from 'em."

"How long have you been lobsterin'?"

"Three years. Why I wasn't bigger'n nothin' when Abel Saunders set me to work pullin' that big lump of a dory."

"An' you ain't much larger now," Ezra said with a laugh. "If my partner is willin' we'll make this agreement, Tommy, providin' you're of any help to us in the business: In case we make money you shall get a fair kind of wages, an' if we don't, you

work for your board, accordin' to your own proposition."

"It's a go!" Master Downing cried eagerly and joyously. "When may I come aboard?"

"To-night, if so be that will give Mr. Saunders a chance to hire another boy in your place."

"He hire one!" Tommy cried contemptuously. "There ain't anybody 'round here who'd work for him, an' it's a sure thing *I* wouldn't, only till I could get another job. If one of you will help me launch your dory, I'll tow her ashore, so's to have some-thin' to come back in, an' you'll see me here in less than three shakes."

"Go ahead with the supper, Ezra, an' I'll help launch the boat," Dick said quickly, so overjoyed at the prospect of having a third hand aboard as to be willing to do almost anything to expedite matters.

Five minutes later, when Tommy Downing pulled shoreward in the big dory, towing the Phœbe's boat astern, his voice could be heard on the night air in triumphant tones, as he sang:

"I'se bound to run all day,
I'se bound to run all night;
I've bet my money on a bob-tailed nag,
Somebody's bettin' on the bay."

"Well, what do you think of that?" Dick asked laughingly as he entered the cuddy. "He isn't very big, but he acts as if he might know his business."

"We've let him go off with our boat when it's so

dark that we couldn't swear there was any land within five miles," Ezra said doubtfully, whereupon Dick asked in surprise:

"Surely you're not thinkin' a little duffer like him would try to play any such dirty trick as stealin' a boat?"

"It wouldn't have come into my mind if we hadn't had the experience with Barnes; but since then I'm distrustin' everybody," Ezra said ruefully. "However, there's no fear in my mind but that he'll flash up again all right, an' I believe we've made a good trade in takin' him on."

"Surely we can't lose much, because he doesn't set a high price on his services, an' should be able to help us out in great shape, for he must know all the fishermen hereabout."

"Our runnin' across him is a bit of good luck, I believe, for it's certain that only two of us couldn't run the Phœbe very many weeks alone, an' he has already shown that he can stand his trick at the wheel, if nothin' more."

"I'm satisfied to have him," Ezra replied, "an' am hopin' that we can afford to pay the little fellow something in the way of wages, for it seems pretty tough to ask a boy to work as hard as he must aboard this craft, for nothin' more'n what he can eat."

"If you will peel those potatoes an' get a lobster from the well, I'll make a chowder."

The partners were yet busily engaged in the task of cooking supper when they heard from the direction of the shore Tommy's voice raised loud and shrill

with but little music in it, as he sang that which appeared to be his favorite ditty:

“ I’se bound to run all day,
I’se bound to run all night;
I’ve bet my money on a bob-tailed nag,
Somebody’s bettin’ on the bay.”

“ Wasn’t long, eh? ” he said as he came over the rail with a bound, and deftly made the Phœbe’s dory fast. “ I only stopped to gather up what little dunnage I owned, without makin’ overly much talk to Abel Saunders. He allowed I was foolin’, in the hope of makin’ him pay me wages, ’cause he hadn’t seen any craft put in here, but he’ll find out in the mornin’.”

“ What did you do with your things? ” Dick asked.

“ Left ’em in the dory. They don’t amount to much; jest some old oil skins an’ a couple pair of boots without a great deal to ’em except legs.”

“ Are those all the clothes you’ve got? ” Dick asked sharply.

“ Why, yes; what’s the matter with them? They don’t look so terrible fine, I’ll agree; but Miss Saunders kept ’em darned up pretty well. Makin’ a chowder, eh? Well, now, you know, I’m a master hand at that kind of work, an’ I’d jest like to show what I can do. Of course I don’t allow I’m any swell cook; but when it comes to chowders, fryin’ fish, or anythin’ like that, it’s pretty hard to beat me, if I do say it.”

“Go ahead then, an’ try your hand; I’m willin’ to quit the job,” Ezra said laughingly, and Tommy set about the task of showing his new employers how valuable an assistant he could be.

That the small boy was accustomed to such work could readily be seen once he had gotten the materials together, and while he was thus engaged Ezra asked carelessly, never thinking it might be possible to learn something which would not be particularly agreeable:

“I suppose you know all the fishermen roundabout here?”

“That’s what I do,” Tommy replied as he began to fry pork for the chowder.

“Do you suppose we’ll have a chance to pick up a thousand or more lobsters within a day or two?”

“What are you payin’?”

“Eight cents a pound cash.”

“What do they fetch in the market?”

“Fourteen.”

“Well, I allow you ought’er. There’s quite a good many of ’em here. When the Trefethens’ smack was in last week they was givin’ six. Now Abel Saunders must have two or three hundred; but he’s a terrible snug man to deal with! He wants an extra cent, an’ then one more. It won’t do any harm for you to try. Then there’s the old man Barker over the other side; he ought’er have pretty nigh a car full by this time. How many did you say you wanted?”

“Well, we could pay for about eighteen hundred. You see we’re just startin’ in the business, an’ haven’t

a very big capital. There are six hundred in the well now."

"I allow you could get what you want without stoppin' 'round here more'n a couple of days. Abel Saunders, he'll go by here, seein's he's got to pull his own traps, by daybreak to-morrow, an' if you hail him you'll get nigh to half as many as you want. Say, where do your folks live?"

"Westbay."

"Is that anywhere near Portland?"

"About ten miles from there along the coast."

"Don't reckon you ever heard tell of a man by the name of 'Liphalet Barnes, did you? He's up in the county jail now, they tell me."

The partners looked at each other in surprise, and because neither replied, Tommy said shrewdly:

"I reckon you've heard of him all right. Powerful tough man, is 'Liphalet, an' there are a good many folks alongshore here who'll be sorry when he gets out."

"Why?" Dick asked. "Does he try to make trouble?"

"I don't know as he tries very hard; but somehow or other there's always a row on wherever he is. You see he ain't willin' to earn an honest livin', so he runs liquor up here from the Provinces. I don't reckon he pays very much for it down there, an' he gets a good price from the fishermen that are foolish enough to deal with him. It must be pretty hard stuff, 'cause there's always a mixup of some kind after the folks get hold of it."

"Well, your friend Eliphalet Barnes is probably

over in Vinalhaven now," Ezra said, and then he told Tommy of the adventure which he and Dick had had with this same smuggler.

"Well, I declare for it! You fellers have had what I call luck, if you ever had 'Liphalet Barnes aboard here an' got rid of him without the tallest kind of a row. So he frightened you, eh? Well, he's jest mean enough to do anythin' sneakin'. However, it seems to me two fellers like you ought'er keep your eyes open wide enough to choke him off. If this was my craft, he never'd step his foot over the rail without gettin' his nose broken, an' I shouldn't stop to ask many questions before I pitched in, either."

"I reckon the three of us can keep him at a distance, unless he's got a lot of cronies 'round here who will lend a hand."

"You needn't be afraid of anythin' like that, an' here's where the funny part of the whole business comes in, 'cordin' to my way of thinkin'," Tommy said as he alternately stirred the chowder with a large iron spoon, and made appropriate gestures with it, "You couldn't find a man from here to the Gut of Canso who'd be willin' to chum with him, an' yet it seems like as if all hands was afraid to go contrary to anythin' he said. That ain't the first time he's been in jail, an' it won't be the last, unless he turns over a new leaf mighty sudden. Say, this 'ere chowder is what you might call done."

"Let's have it right away, for I'm hungry enough to eat a good deal more'n half of what you've got

there," Dick said laughingly, and Ezra added, with no little concern in his tones:

"I vote that we don't think or talk of Eliphalet Barnes any more, for I'm tired of him. Knowin' what to expect, we ought to keep him at a distance, an' I reckon we can. Now let's get down to the table, an' see what Tommy has done."

That Master Downing was an expert, at least so far as chowder-making goes, was soon proven a fact to the satisfaction of the partners, and when he had eaten at least twice as much as a lad of his size should have indulged in, Dick said in a tone of content as he began to help clear away the things from the table:

"I'm thinkin' we were mighty lucky in runnin' across you, Tommy, for if you know how to cook other things as well as you have this chowder, we shall get along famously."

"You fellers can turn in, an' I'll wash the dishes myself," Tommy said, with a smile of pleasure, because of the praise bestowed, overspreading his face. "I reckon you're tired enough, an' I haven't had it so terrible hard to-day."

"You've pulled a hundred pots, haven't you?" Ezra asked, hesitating as to whether he would be warranted in leaving to this willing little worker all the labor of clearing up the cuddy.

"Yes, but that don't count, you see, 'cause it ain't a day's work. If I hadn't shipped aboard this 'ere steamer, I'd be milkin' three cows an' takin' care of a yoke of oxen, before I got the least little thing

to put into my tooth. Abel Saunders says he don't count on keepin' cats that don't catch mice, an' I began to believe he meant it before I'd been with him a week. You two turn in, an' I'll tend to this little triflin' job."

Whether or no Tommy was skillful in the art of washing dishes, neither Ezra nor Dick knew on this first night, for before he had well begun the task they were sleeping soundly, never rousing to consciousness even for a moment, until the shrill voice of the new "hand" announced:

"It's mighty nigh daybreak, an' if you want to catch Abel Saunders it's time you was stirrin' your stumps, 'cause I'm allowin' he'll be gettin' that lump of a dory under way about as soon as it grows light."

When the partners leaped out of their bunks, not a little confused by their sudden awakening, it was to find that Tommy Downing had a really plentiful breakfast already prepared, and Ezra asked in amazement:

"Did you sit up all night in order to have things ready so early?"

"Not a bit of it," Tommy replied with a little gurgling laugh of content. "I turned in when the dishes were washed, an' didn't get up any sooner than if I'd been at Abel Saunders'. He don't allow that folks need sich a terrible sight of sleep, an' I've kind'er got into the habit of movin' 'round so's to get the small chores done up before daylight. How about eatin' breakfast now, so's to be ready to get under way as soon as we see him? If you hump

yourselves you ought'er take in what lobsters you're needin', 'twixt now an' night."

"An' I reckon we shall do that all right, if we have you to stir us around," Dick said laughingly, as he seated himself at the table, and again the partners congratulated themselves on their good fortune in having secured so valuable an assistant without binding themselves to pay more in the way of wages than the business would safely admit.

The meal had hardly more than come to an end, when Tommy, pricking up his ears as it were, said excitedly:

"Here comes Abel Saunders, an' you'd better nail him now, else it'll be a case of waitin' till nigh to noon."

Having said this, Master Downing went on deck followed by his employers, and an instant later he was hailing in shrill tones the captain of the ark-like dory which was coming out from the gloom, heading directly toward the Phœbe.

"Say, Mr. Saunders, these 'ere fellers are buyin' lobsters, an' are willin' to give eight cents in cash for 'em, allowin' they'll average a pound an' a half. Do you want to sell?"

"Hello, Tommy! Is this where you've gone to work?"

"Do you want to sell your lobsters, Mr. Saunders?"

"It strikes me eight cents a pound is a leetle low at this time of year," the fisherman replied with a drawl, and shipping his oars as if to give himself an opportunity to consider thoroughly the proposition.

“It’s two cents more’n you got from the Trefethens last week, an’ these fellers are ready to pay spot cash.”

“Well, I’ll think about it, Tommy. It strikes me, though, that lobsters are goin’ up, an’ I’d better hold on a spell.”

“All right, Mr. Saunders; jest as you say. These fellers don’t want sich a terrible slat any how, an’ I reckon they’ll pick ’em up alongshore ’twixt now an’ noon. Be kind’er tender with that starboard oar, ’cause it’s cracked.” Then Tommy turned as if believing the interview was at an end, and asked in a whisper of Ezra, “Do you want to say anything to the old curmudgeon? He thinks his lobsters are always worth a little more’n anybody’s else.”

“I reckon you can beat us at tradin’, Tommy, so we’ll leave the matter in your hands so far as Mr. Saunders is concerned,” Ezra replied with a laugh, and then, as if to aid Master Downing’s method of bargaining, he turned to go into the cuddy, when Mr. Saunders hailed:

“If you’re willin’ to give nine cents, I ain’t so certain but I could let you have three or four hundred.”

“Eight is all we’re payin’,” Ezra said, curtly, and Tommy, with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes, asked:

“Shall I weigh anchor now?”

“You may as well,” Dick replied. “It’s Ezra’s turn below to-day, an’ I’ll take the wheel.”

“Don’t be in sich a pesky hurry,” Mr. Saunders cried, believing the lobster buyers were about to take

their departure. "I ain't sure but I'll let you have some of mine."

"It's a case of humpin' yourself then," Tommy replied with a comical air of authority. "These fellers want to fill up to-night, an' I've agreed to show them where it can be done, so there ain't much time for foolin' 'round here."

"Say eight an' a half cents, an' they're yours," Mr. Saunders cried, as if he was offering a rare bargain.

"It's eight or nothin'," Tommy said decidedly, going forward as if to weigh anchor, and the fisherman, sorely disappointed in not having more of an opportunity to haggle over the price, replied in a tone that was very like one of despair:

"All right, you can take 'em, though it's jest about the same as a free gift. Warp in alongside the car there, an' we'll put 'em aboard."

"It don't pay to waste any too much time on Abel Saunders," Tommy said with a gurgle of satisfaction. "He's mighty glad to get eight cents, 'cause he hasn't had as much as that this year, but he'd like to keep you here two or three hours dickerin'."

Within ten minutes the Phœbe was alongside Mr. Saunders' car, and Master Downing was examining critically each lobster as it was passed on board.

"I'll guarantee that we don't get anythin' but good fair counts in this lot," Dick said laughingly to Ezra, and the latter replied:

"He knows the business all right, an' if we make anythin' on this trip, Dick, he's to be paid fair wages."

Two hundred and fifty lobsters did Mr. Saunders transfer from his car to the Phœbe's well, and Ezra counted out from the canvas bag thirty dollars in good and lawful money, saying as he handed it to the fisherman:

"We'll be around here once in every week or ten days, an' if you care to hold your catch for us, we'll pay as high as any smack can afford."

"I ain't agreein' right out to anythin' like that; but if your price is as good as the others, I'd as soon let 'em go to you, that's all. Just gone inter the business, ain't you?"

"Yes, this is our first trip."

"Where do you hail from?"

"Westbay. My name is Upton, an' my partner is Dick Marshall. Perhaps you know his father — firm of Marshall & Jordan?"

"Yes, I've hearn tell of him. Quite a decent kind of a man, they say. How many more lobsters do you want?"

"A little over a thousand."

"Well, I reckon you can pick 'em up along the shore here this forenoon. Tommy will show you where to go, an' all I can say is I hope you'll get along with that boy better'n I have. He ain't overly fond of work, an' that's a fact; but perhaps you can make somethin' out'er him. He's gettin' altogether too flighty for this part of the country."

With this parting shot Mr. Saunders rowed away to attend to the task of hauling traps, and Master Downing relieved his feelings by saying in a tone sufficiently loud for his late employer to hear:

“ I’d like to see the boy, or man either, for that matter, who could do enough work to please Abel Saunders. What he calls bein’ flighty is when a feller wants to earn a little somethin’ so’s to buy clothes, or give himself a chance of goin’ to school, an’ I might’er worked my fingers down to the bone before he’d allowed I was worth more’n my keepin’.”

CHAPTER IV

“ EASY MONEY ”

Even though Messrs. Upton & Marshall had been disposed to waste time, the “ new hand ” would not have permitted anything of the kind. No sooner had the transaction with Mr. Saunders been completed than, without waiting for the word of command, he weighed anchor, hurried into the wheel-house before either of the partners could get there, and shouted in a tone which had in it none of that respect such as is supposed should be shown by an employee to his employer:

“ Get at that motor now, an’ be lively about it! We can’t run the lobster business an’ do much of any foolin’ ’round.”

Ezra was laughing heartily when he obeyed this peremptory command; but Dick felt just a trifle disgruntled as, following his partner below, he said in a tone of complaint:

“ It strikes me we have taken on a captain instead of a third hand.”

“ Now don’t let a little thing like that chafe you,” Ezra said soothingly, as he started the motor. “ Tommy is eager to show us what can be done, an’ surely we shouldn’t grumble when it’s all for the benefit of the concern. It isn’t to be supposed that a boy who has lived a good portion of his life

with such a man as Abel Saunders, would have any very great notions of respect for his elders — in fact, I ain't quite certain but that he's as old as either you or me."

"I'm not countin' in the age," Dick said, still just a trifle irritable; "but the fact is that we're the ones who are hirin' him, an' he should understand that his place is to obey rather than order us about."

"Now you are makin' a mountain out of a mole hill. So far as our hirin' him is concerned, we had best say very little about it, seein's he's workin' for his board, an' if we, who are in the lobster business to make a few dollars rather than for fun, need proddin' now an' then, I hope Tommy will have sense enough to do it."

Meanwhile Master Downing, all unconscious that he had given any cause for offense, was dancing about in the wheel-house, as he held the Phœbe true to her course, in a most fantastic manner. The idea of having under his control a real steamer was something so fascinating that he was unable to behave himself exactly as should a lad who was bent only on business, and he gave vent to his one song:

"I'se bound to run all day,
I'se bound to run all night;
I've bet my money on a bob-tailed nag,
Somebody's bettin' on the bay."

"What do you say to stoppin' at the old man Barker's first?" he shouted, putting his head out of the wheel-house door instead of using the speaking

tube. "I don't allow he's got any very great of a catch; but every little helps, you know."

"Haul up wherever you think we can make a trade," Ezra replied as he in turn thrust his head through the companion-way that he might see this amateur captain. "If you look sharp you'll find a speakin' tube in the wheel-house, when you want to talk with us below here."

"A speakin' tube, eh?" Master Downing replied. "What kind of a thing is that?"

"As you stand facin' the wheel, look down at your right hand, an' you'll see a tin tube about as big around as your thumb, with what looks to be a wire crank on top of it. Turn that crank, an' then do your talkin'."

This was something so novel to the "new hand" that he must needs make immediate trial of it, although he had nothing in particular to say, and during five minutes or more the partners were kept busy answering his needless questions, asked, as he said in reply to an impatient remark of Ezra's, only to "see how the bloomin' thing worked."

It was all so comical, this enthusiasm displayed by Abel Saunders' late employee, that Dick lost every vestige of fretfulness, and said with a hearty laugh as he turned toward the companion-way:

"I reckon I had best go up an' look after that fellow, or he'll burst with the importance of havin' charge of the Phœbe. It's as you say, Ezra, we can afford to put up with his bein' a little fresh, because I doubt if there's any other person roundabout here

who could have served us so well. He's a diamond all right; but needs a deal of polishin'."

With Dick in the pilot-house there was no further idle conversation through the speaking tube — no shouting fore and aft; but when the Phœbe came up to where the "old man Barker" was hauling traps, the proper signals were given to stop her.

Then it was that once more Tommy took full charge of the business, shouting to the fisherman who looked up with mild curiosity from his work as the little steamer lay close by:

"Say, here's a couple of fellers what have gone inter the lobster business, an' count on gettin' 'round here about once every week. They ain't tryin' to cut out the Trefethens, or anythin' like that; but are willin' to give a good price in spot cash if you've got anythin' to sell 'em. What's the matter with your lettin' 'em have what you've got in the cars?"

"Have you left Abel Saunders?" Mr. Barker asked, apparently giving no heed to the proposition.

"Yes, I've gone inter the business with these fellers, an' seein's you folks 'round here always said you'd do me a good turn whenever the signs came right, now is the chance to keep your word, for unless I can pick up a load for 'em in decently short time, they'll be likely to give me the bounce. What do you say? Shall we take your lobsters?"

"What wages are you gettin', Tommy?"

"Well, you see that part of it ain't exactly fixed yet. I've come in on what looks to me like a pretty good lay; but have got to show how much I'm worth

before the rest of it is settled. What about the lobsters?"

"What are you payin'?"

"Eight cents, an' Abel Saunders must have thought that was a decent price, else he wouldn't have let us have his."

"Did he sell to you?"

"We cleaned out his car."

"Are lobsters goin' up?"

"Not as I know of; but you see these fellers are makin' quicker trips than the rest of the smacks, an' can afford to pay jest a bit more. I ain't allowin' you've got so many that we can afford to hang 'round very long, an' so you've got to talk quick, Mr. Barker. Shall we have 'em?"

"I reckon I may as well clean up; that is, if you pay in cash."

"That's what we're doin', an' if you'll get a move on we'll take 'em aboard right lively."

Then, without further parley, Master Downing said sharply to Dick, as he swung the wheel hard down:

"Send her ahead at half-speed. There's the old man's car. He's slower'n cold molasses, an' if we don't kind'er rush things it will take all day to get through with a little teeny trade like his."

Mr. Barker had no other choice than to follow the steamer, and thanks to Tommy's "hustling" qualities, Messrs Upton & Marshall added two hundred good lobsters to the number already in the Phœbe's well.

Ezra counted out twenty-four dollars which he

paid Mr. Barker after getting a promise from that gentleman to hold his catch a reasonable length of time for the new concern, and once more the Phœbe was on her way.

Surely Tommy earned his board on this first day, for before nightfall he had piloted the boys from one fisherman to another with such saving of time that they took on board eight hundred more, making the number in the well nearly two thousand.

The Phœbe was anchored in a snug harbor on the easterly side of Isle au Haut when night came, and while Master Downing, who seemed insensible to fatigue, was cooking supper, the partners in the wheel-house discussed the business of the day.

“That boy Tommy is worth more aboard this craft than you an’ I put together,” Ezra said emphatically. “I’m not allowin’ that we shan’t break in properly after a while; but until we know the fishermen, an’ are thoroughly well acquainted with the coast, he’s the one who’s runnin’ things.”

“An’ he shall be paid whether we make any money or not,” Dick replied decidedly. “The question is whether we had better hang ’round here any longer on this cruise? If the market price holds as when we left, we have already made what I call a big profit.”

“Tommy said he could pick up five hundred more close at hand, an’ if he hasn’t made any mistake, we had better take them, allowin’ to head the Phœbe for home by to-morrow noon at the latest.”

In addition to doing all the bargaining, acting as captain of the smack, and playing the part of

cook, Master Downing had begged a couple of fresh codfish, and these he fried to a turn for the supper which also served as dinner, for business had been driving so hard since morning that the young merchants did not deem it advisable to spend time in preparing a noon-day meal.

Ashamed to remain idle while the small boy was doing so much work, Ezra and Dick took upon themselves the task of washing the dishes and generally setting the deck and cuddy to rights, therefore it was yet early in the evening when all the work had been performed in a most satisfactory manner.

Then it was that Master Downing gave new proof of his ability, for he entertained his employers most acceptably by telling amusing stories of this fisherman or that with whom he was acquainted, until the boys, tired though they were, really felt unwilling to roll into the bunks so long as the new hand was in the mood to unfold his budget of stories.

It was Tommy who awakened them next morning, as soon as his own eyes were opened, and laid out the program for the morning's work by saying:

"If one of you fellers will get breakfast I'll run the steamer down to Sam Bassett's, where we ought'er find two or three hundred, an' have 'em aboard before you've finished the cookin'."

As a matter of course the partners agreed to this proposition, and Ezra, who acted as cook, had not yet concluded his labors when he was called upon to pay twenty-four dollars to Mr. Bassett for lobsters which had already been put into the well.

Then it seemed as if luck had deserted Master

Downing, for he called upon three other fishermen without succeeding in making a trade, and when the Phœbe was under way after the last unsuccessful attempt at adding to the cargo, Ezra joined Dick and Tommy in the wheel-house.

“We have only got money enough for a few lobsters more, an’ it begins to look as if we had gathered up all there are nearabout. Now I believe it would pay us better to start for home this minute, rather than hang around any longer, for there’s no knowin’ how soon the prices may drop.”

“The quicker you get there now, the less chance there will be of losin’ the whole lot, though I don’t allow you’ve got any in the well what’ll get very ravenous yet a while; but when lobsters do take to eatin’ each other they make mighty short work of it,” Master Downing said with an air of wisdom, and thus was the matter decided.

The Phœbe was at that moment on the westerly side of Isle au Haut, and unless the young merchants were willing to go considerably out of their course by putting straight to sea, it would be necessary to pass between Hurricane island and Vinalhaven.

There was no thought in their minds regarding Eliphalet Barnes when the smack was sent on her way at full speed, with Ezra and Dick both in the cuddy counting their money to make certain no mistakes had been made while paying for their purchases.

After it was learned that the cash balance was correct, the partners set about figuring how much of

a profit would come to them providing the market price remained the same as when they left port, and were yet engaged in this pleasing occupation when the new hand whistled through the speaking tube:

“ Say, there’s a boat puttin’ out from Vinalhaven, an’, ’cordin’ to the looks of things, she wants to stop us.”

“ Well, why not give them the chance? ” Dick asked carelessly, paying but little attention to the announcement, so fascinating was the task of making an estimate of their prospective profits.

Five minutes later came the signal to slow down, for by this time Tommy had made himself acquainted with the system of signals, and Ezra ran up the companion-way stairs to see who might be near at hand.

“ I believe it’s that miserable smuggler of a Barnes! ” he exclaimed in a tone very like that of fear, and Dick, no less agitated than his partner, shouted as he leaped to set the motor in motion once more:

“ Don’t let him come within hailin’ distance, for surely we have had enough of that man already! ”

“ But he’s close alongside, an’ got somebody in the dory wrapped up in blankets — looks as if it might be a sick man. Better slow down again till we hear what he’s got to say, for with three of us here I allow he won’t come aboard unless we’re willin’.”

It did seem a bit cowardly to run from one man, even though he had sworn vengeance against them, and Dick not only acted upon his partner’s sugges-

tion, but stopped the screw entirely, after which he ran on deck to make certain their very undesirable acquaintance did not come alongside.

There was no question as to the identity of the man when the Phœbe was within an hundred feet of the dory, and then it could also be seen that in the stern-sheets was a human being, so thoroughly well bundled in wrappings that only one gloved hand could be distinguished.

That Mr. Barnes understood he might be an object of suspicion to those who had once set him adrift, could be seen when he made no effort to come nearer the smack, but lay on his oars a good eighty feet away, as he cried in what was evidently intended should be a friendly tone:

“Look here, lads, I’m allowin’ that you’ve got good reason to feel as if I wasn’t your friend; but that’s where you’re makin’ a mistake.”

“So it seemed day before yesterday, when you threatened what you would do to us,” Dick retorted.

“Now, now, lads, ain’t you men enough to understand how another feller might let his tongue run loose when he was a bit aroused? I’m willin’ to admit that I talked brash; but bless you, I didn’t mean anythin’. It was only a foolish way I’ve got of allowin’ my temper to get the best of me. Of course I ain’t expectin’ you’ll believe it; but at the same time I’m blamin’ you a little bit. I’m as good a friend as you’ve got on this ’ere coast, an’ don’t kick a little bit because you set me adrift after what had been done. I reckon you wouldn’t have found any fault if I hadn’t put aboard two or three drinks, an’

you know no man under the influence of liquor is accountable for what he says an' does."

"Did you come out here only to say that?" Dick asked impatiently.

"Well, I allowed to let you know how I stood in the matter at the first chance; but didn't count on gettin' to have speech with you so soon. The amount of the story is that I'm tryin' to do a favor for this poor feller here who's pretty nigh dead with the asthma."

"I should suppose the proper place for him was ashore," and Ezra started toward the companion-way with the intention of sending the Phœbe ahead once more.

Mr. Barnes evidently understood what the boy would do, for he cried pleadingly, as he pointed toward the bundle of blankets in the stern-sheets:

"Now don't be rash, lads; don't do a thing that you'll be sorry for! Here's this poor man who wants to get to his folks in Portland before he dies, an' there's no knowin' when another steamer bound for that place will pass this way. I knowed you fellers would be likely to go back pretty soon, seein's how lobsters were plenty down here, an' you ought'er have a cargo in by this time. Now remember, I ain't talkin' for myself; but for this poor feller that's so bad off he can't even speak. I don't allow to be so very good myself; but am thankful to be able to say I ain't wicked enough to turn a cold shoulder on them as are dyin'."

"Well, what is it you mean?" Dick asked, touched

by the appeal despite his enmity against the man who made it.

“All I’m after is for you to take this poor dyin’ creeter aboard your smack, an’ land him in Portland. He’s got strength enough to walk, even if he can’t talk, an’ all you’re to do is to run him alongside the pier nearest Portland bridge, givin’ him a chance to crawl ashore. Now this is only an act of Christian charity; but he ain’t askin’ you to do it for nothin’. He’s got the cash — twenty dollars to pay for the trouble, an’ if that ain’t easy money, I don’t know what it is.”

As he spoke, Mr. Barnes held in his hand where the boys might see them, two bank notes which fluttered temptingly in the air.

“But we’ve got no accommodations here for a man as sick as he is,” Ezra said hesitatingly, and one who was watching Mr. Barnes intently might have fancied that a smile of triumph came over his face, as he understood by the tone in which the lad spoke that his appeal had made an impression.

“All you’ve got to do is let him crawl inter a bunk. He couldn’t eat if he wanted to, because he’s so far gone, an’ he can’t speak. He’s only askin’ for a chance to die comfortably among his folks, an’ the people here in Vinalhaven have raised this twenty dollars for them as shall carry him to Portland.”

“We wouldn’t take money from a dyin’ man,” Dick cried emphatically.

“But this wouldn’t be takin’ it from him,” Mr. Barnes insisted. “I tell you the folks here on the

island have raised the money, an' it's them as are payin' to give him the privilege he wants of dyin' comfortably. S'posin' you was so far away from everybody you knowed, an' wanted to die? Wouldn't you like to be among your own kin? I'm tellin' you, lads, it don't make any difference how long you may live, you'll never run across a chance to do such a deed of charity, an' at the same time get so much easy money for it, as now. I'll agree not to step my foot on your smack; but sit right here in the boat an' give this poor fellow a boost over the rail. Then I'll pull off, if so be you're minded to hold agin me the words I spoke the other day when I wasn't really myself."

"I don't see how we can get out of it," Ezra said in a low tone to his partner. "It isn't askin' a great deal for us to let that sick fellow lay in one of the bunks from now until we get to Portland, an' if he can take care of himself after we've got to the pier, we wouldn't be delayed more'n an hour by runnin' in. Besides, if we keep on now, it's a case of gettin' there in the night, an' we couldn't do any business in West-bay until mornin' anyhow. Twenty dollars will be a good bit toward addin' to the profits of the cruise."

"If it had been anybody but that miserable Barnes, I would say that the man should come aboard without a cent; but somehow or other it goes against the grain to do anythin' for him after all his threats."

"It isn't for him; but for that poor fellow in the stern-sheets."

Seeing the partners in close conversation, Master

Downing left the wheel-house, and came aft with no idea in his mind but that it was perfectly proper for him to break in upon the discussion, even though it might be private.

“What are you goin’ to do about it?” he asked, and Ezra replied:

“I don’t see how we can get out of takin’ him. Of course the man wants to get home, if he’s dyin’, an’ it won’t put us out any. What do you say?”

“How was it Barnes got mixed up in this thing?” Tommy asked sternly.

“Of course we can’t answer that question. Perhaps he claimed to know us, an’ the people of Vinalhaven thought he was the only one who could do the business.”

“Well, unless ’Liphalet Barnes could make a dollar out of it, I’ll never believe he’d do a favor for anybody, not even his own father,” Tommy said decidedly, and Dick added:

“I can’t see that we need try to find out why Barnes is doin’ this thing. There’s the man in the boat, an’ it’s sure he must be mighty sick. The only trouble is whether he won’t die on our hands, an’ then we *would* be in a scrape.”

“It isn’t likely he’s so badly off as that, or the folks at Vinalhaven wouldn’t have tried to put him aboard a lobster smack,” Ezra said reflectively. “The question for us to decide is whether we’ll take him or not, for if we count on gettin’ to Westbay between now and mornin’ we can’t lose a great deal more time here. Remember, it’s twenty dollars to be added to our profits, an’ if the people of Vinal-

haven have raised the money there's no reason why we shouldn't take it."

"All right; I'm willin'. He shall come," Dick interrupted, and without waiting to hear anything more from his partner or Tommy, he turned toward where Mr. Barnes sat patiently awaiting the result of the discussion.

"You may put him aboard; but it is with the understandin' that he can take care of himself when we run alongside the pier in Portland."

"I'm answerin' for that part of it. He's mighty bad off; but his legs ain't the worst of him. You see the asthma kind of gets hold of the upper part of a feller, an' while he can't talk, an' is jest about ready to die, he can walk as good as you or me. Shall I pull alongside?"

"You say he doesn't need anythin' to eat?"

"Bless you, lad, he couldn't swallow a mouthful even if you was to give him the best in the land, an' he can't talk."

"All right; come alongside, but after what happened day before yesterday we're not willin' you should step your foot aboard."

"I don't want to come, lads, I don't want to come!" Mr. Barnes said, as he began pulling toward the Phœbe. "Though I'm allowin' we'll see the day when you'll be willin' to admit that while I talked wrong when I was under the influence of rum, I meant all right, an' if ever the time comes when you're needin' a favor, Eliphalet Barnes is the man that will dish it out to you on a silver plate."

Then the dory pulled gently alongside, Mr. Barnes

evidently exercising the greatest caution lest he should inflict pain upon the invalid by too rough movement, and to the surprise of the boys the sick man in the stern-sheets arose to his feet with agility, stepping over the dory's thwarts and clambering onto the Phœbe's deck in a manner which was truly astonishing for one who claimed to be so near the grave.

However, at the moment the boys gave but little heed to this fact. They had been told that the invalid could use his legs without difficulty, and, therefore, it did not seem surprising that he should come over the rail unaided.

Ezra, whose heart had really been touched by the story, even though he had allowed the "easy money" to influence him somewhat in his decision, put his arm around the blanket-enveloped figure, leading him into the cuddy. Once there he aided the poor man to get into one of the bunks, and would have taken the blankets from his face but that the invalid gripped them so firmly, which made the effort impossible.

"It's mighty warm down here, what with the motor an' the cook-stove, an' you don't need to cover yourself up like that," the boy said soothingly, but without making any further attempt to remove the wrappings.

Then, bethinking himself that possibly Mr. Barnes might give them the slip before paying over the money, he ran on deck just in time to see Dick take the bank-notes from the smuggler's outstretched hand.

"I wouldn't bother the poor chap by tryin' to talk to him," Mr. Barnes said as he took up the oars pre-

paratory to pulling away. "Jest let him lay where he is, without your interferin' in any way, an' when it comes time to set him ashore, take him by the shoulder. He'll know what to do after that. It won't be the least little bit of use to speak, 'cause he can't understand — I mean that he's got sich a dose of the asthma that he can't move his tongue. I reckon you're countin' to push straight on for Portland?"

"We shan't stop until we get there," Dick replied in quite a friendly tone, for he was beginning to think that perhaps they had wronged Mr. Barnes in believing him to be a thorough scoundrel.

"All right, Tommy, we'll let her go now!" Ezra cried as he ran into the cuddy again, and a moment later the Phœbe was under way once more with a big bone in her teeth.

Ezra went toward the bunk where the supposed sick man lay, and, without expecting a reply, said in a kindly tone:

"I'm goin' on deck for a while — the motor will take care of itself quite a spell. If there's anythin' you want, pound on the deck, an' one of us will come below in a jiffy. It seems to me you'd be more comfortable by takin' off some of them blankets, but of course you know best."

The invalid made no reply, and the lad ran up the companion-way stairs feeling remarkably happy, for surely they had made thus far a most successful cruise, and the twenty dollars Mr. Barnes had given for the passage of the dying man would more than pay all the expenses.

"Tommy shall have five dollars a week so long as

business holds out like this," he said to himself, "an' if we can get two or three more passengers who'll pay as much money as he has, it'll help out on the season in great shape."

Then he had come to the wheel-house where his partner and Tommy Downing were having quite an animated discussion, the new hand saying just as Ezra entered:

"I never heard before that Eliphalet Barnes was willin' to do even his own father a favor, 'less he could make a dollar by it, an' it puzzles me to know what kind of a game he's playin' this time!"

"There's no need of turnin' it over in your mind very long," Ezra replied with a laugh. "Barnes told the people at Vinalhaven that we would likely go up Portland way within a short time, an' because he's seen us, they sent him out with the sick man. I'd never forgiven myself if we'd refused to take the poor fellow aboard simply on account of not likin' the smuggler. Say, Tom, if Dick is willin', I'm allowin' that we can afford to pay you five dollars for the first week's work, an' if things keep on as they've been goin', you'll have the same amount every seven days."

"That's no more than fair," the junior partner replied, "an' accordin' to my thinkin' you've already earned every cent of the money. If it hadn't been for you we'd be cruisin' 'round Isle au Haut this very minute with no more than half a cargo aboard."

"Do you really mean all that?" Master Downing asked incredulously, his eyes sparkling with delight. "Five dollars is a big pile of money — more'n I ever

had in all my life, an' if you fellers can afford to pay so much you may jest set it down that I'll have some decent clothes for once. What I've been wantin' more'n anythin' else is a pair of stockin's, same's I used to have; but Abel Saunders, he was allers preachin' 'bout it bein' healthy for boys to go without stockin's, an' wouldn't give me any even in the winter. It was mighty tough on the feet to be pullin' pots when your boots would be reg'larly caked up with ice."

"You'll have the stockin's all right, Tommy, whether we make a dollar or not. The people up Westbay way don't have the same ideas as does Mr. Saunders, an' you shall have decent clothes if I pay for them out of my own money," Dick said emphatically. "Do you know the coast any further east than where we found you?"

"I'll agree to put this craft inter every cove from here to Passamaquoddy bay without ever lettin' her touch bottom, an' that whether it's in the day-time or night. Abel Saunders has sent me out fishin' with the old man Barker two or three times every summer, and I know the coast same's I do Abel's pasture."

"Then we'll make a longer cruise next time," Ezra said thoughtfully. "If nothin' happens we ought to be at anchor off Westbay before daybreak to-morrow, an' by nightfall our lobsters will be packed an' shipped, for I'm allowin' Dick's father will help us out on the sellin'. We haven't to put any stores aboard, except it may be a barrel of gasoline, an'

should be able to start on the second cruise within twenty-four hours after makin' port."

"I don't see why it couldn't be done," Master Downing replied, wrinkling his brows as if struggling to think whether anything more would be needed in the way of additional outfit. "You fellers are to understand that I'm mighty glad you run across me, an' if the time ever comes when I forget what you're doin' for me, I hope somebody will soak my head till there's a little sense in it. After what I had at Abel Saunders', work aboard a craft like this ain't much more'n play, an' I can do the whole of the cookin', besides takin' my trick at the wheel an' handlin' lobsters, without turnin' a hair."

CHAPTER V

MR. BARNES' TRICK

The boys discussed the business of buying lobsters in all its bearings, even going so far into the future as to suggest that when it was time for Dick to begin his collegiate course, there was a possibility Tommy might be allowed to take his place in the firm.

And during all this while but little thought was bestowed upon the invalid, save when Ezra ran below now and then to attend to the motor, and on returning to the wheel-house he had ever the same report:

"I don't wonder that fellow's sick, if he keeps himself wrapped up all the time same's he is now. The cuddy is boilin' hot, yet there he lays with a thick blanket over his face, an' wearin' gloves. He ought'er be roasted to death by this time!"

"Perhaps he *is* dead," Dick suggested in a whisper; but Ezra had no such fear.

"I staggered against him the last time I was in the cabin, makin' believe that the heavin' of the smack was the cause of it, an' he rolled way over in the bunk, at the same time takin' mighty good care that the blanket shouldn't slip off his face."

"Some day we'll find out what kind of a trick Eliphalet Barnes had up his sleeve when he put that case of asthma aboard this craft," Tommy said with

a significant shrug of the shoulders. "If every man in Vinalhaven should swear himself black in the face tryin' to make me believe Barnes was doin' the sick man a favor, without countin' on gettin' anything for himself, I wouldn't swallow it. What about cookin' dinner while he's there jest ready to die? It'll be wicked hot in the cuddy after a fire has been built in the stove."

"We'll have to get along with cold grub to-day, an' it won't hurt us a little bit," Ezra replied promptly. "Of course we wouldn't be mean enough to start a fire while he's there dyin'."

"It stands to reason we wouldn't, especially since the poor fellow has paid good big money for a passage," Dick added. "I'd be willin' to eat a cold dinner every day in the week, if by so doin' we could scoop in twenty dollars."

Therefore it was that the boys ate their noon-day meal in the wheel-house, Ezra going into the cuddy at intervals of ten minutes or more to make certain the motor was running properly, and at such times taking every precaution lest he should disturb the sick passenger who was so careful to screen his face.

The Phœbe made her way to port, as Dick expressed it, like a lady, and when night came it seemed certain she would arrive at her destination before daylight. The crew made no effort to gain any sleep; but remained on duty until about an hour before sunrise, when the smack ran alongside Union pier in the city of Portland, Ezra going below to notify his passenger, while Tommy made fast a single hawser.

“Here we are at your home,” Ezra said in a low tone, leaning over the supposedly sick man to learn if he was awake. “Will you come out now?”

The only sign of life shown was when the invalid clutched the blankets yet more tightly lest a breath of fresh air should reach his face, and Ezra repeated the question a trifle impatiently with no better result.

“Barnes said you was to take him by the arm an’ walk him ashore,” Dick cried from the companion-way as his partner stood by the side of the bunk uncertain what course to pursue while the man thus remained motionless.

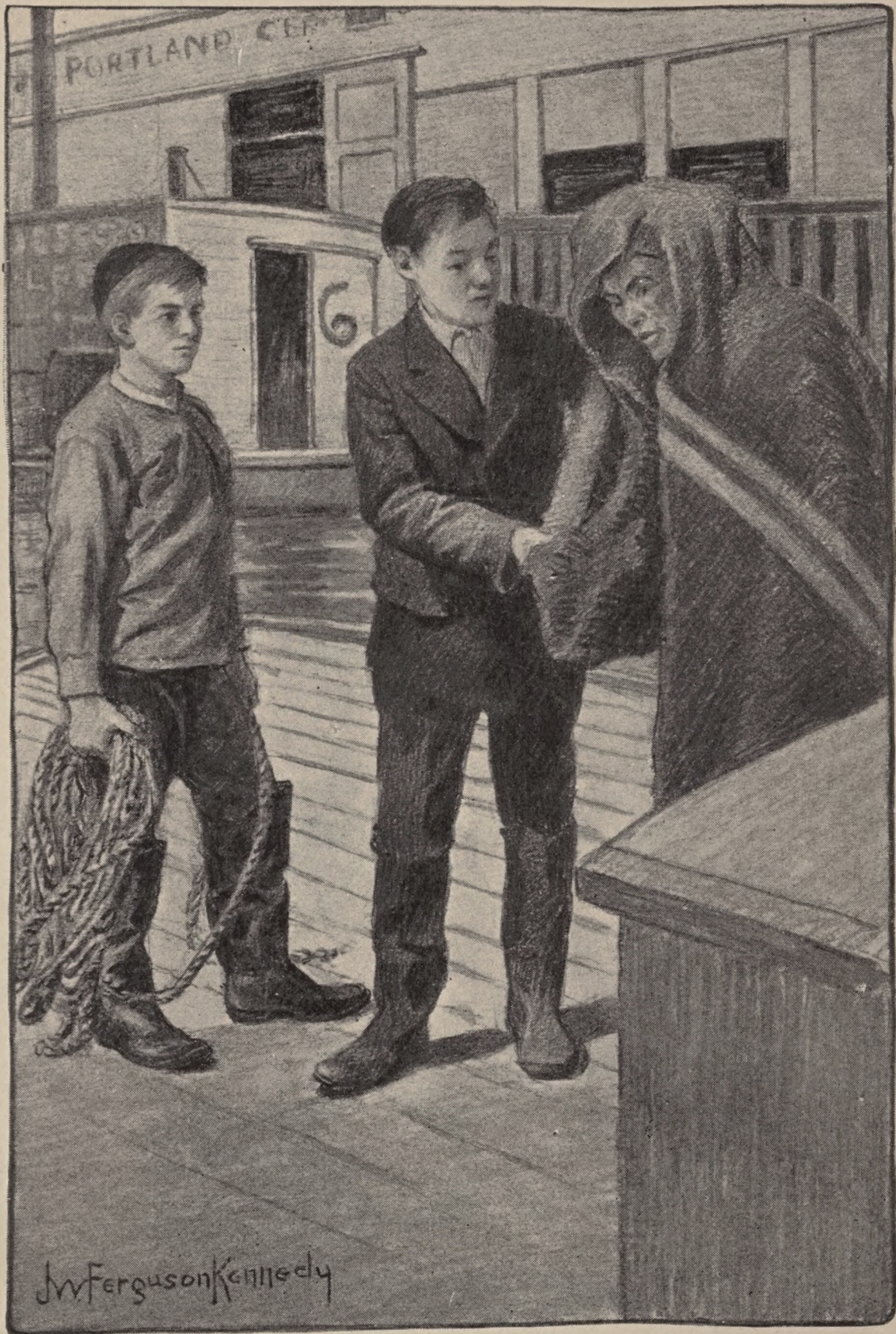
“We’ve got to get him ashore if we count on makin’ Westbay in time to ship our cargo,” Ezra muttered as he seized the asthmatic passenger firmly by the arm, and to his surprise the sick man rose obediently, but without uncovering his face.

It was a simple matter to urge him up the companion-way stairs, where Dick assisted in the disembarkation by leading the invalid across the deck to the pier, which, owing to the fact that the tide was at its height, rose above the Phœbe’s rail no more than six inches.

Here the passenger groped about with one hand, as if feeling his way, but still holding the blanket around his head, and Dick asked impatiently:

“Why don’t you at least uncover one eye so’s to see where you’re goin’? I’m allowin’ there wouldn’t be any risk of takin’ cold while the weather is so warm.”

No reply was made to this remark; but, after much searching with one hand, the invalid evidently



“DICK . . . LED THE INVALID ACROSS THE DECK TO THE PIER.”

succeeding in understanding the situation, for he clambered onto the pier with remarkable agility for one so near death, and in a twinkling was lost to view within the shadows of the buildings.

“Well, if everybody who has the asthma acts as queerly as that, it must be a high old disease,” Dick exclaimed when the passenger disappeared so suddenly. “It almost seemed as if he was afraid we’d see his face!”

“I’m mighty glad we’ve got rid of him,” Ezra added with a long-drawn sigh of relief. “He’s the funniest sick man I ever saw, an’ I’m beginnin’ to think there’s more’n asthma that’s troublin’ him.”

“No matter how funny he is, that twenty dollars was easy money,” Dick replied gleefully. “Now that it’s earned, let’s get over home as soon as possible. It’s mighty near daybreak, an’ we’ve got a long job before us if we count on disposin’ of our cargo before night.”

The citizens of Westbay were already astir when the Phœbe came alongside the pier in front of Marshall & Jordan’s shop, and Dick’s father was the first to greet them.

“You tired of the business quickly,” he said questioningly, and his son replied triumphantly:

“We only lack forty of having as many as our money would buy. We thought it wouldn’t pay to lay over another day just for the sake of those few.”

“You have done very well indeed,” Mr. Marshall said in a tone of mingled approbation and surprise, “and perhaps it is as well that you came back,

for I had a telegram from Boston yesterday, offering fifteen cents for lobsters delivered there."

"How did the dealers know you had any to sell?" Dick asked in astonishment.

"I wrote to two or three firms the day you started out, thinking it might aid you. Where did you pick up the new hand?" and Mr. Marshall looked inquiringly at Tommy.

"We found him at Isle au Haut; he knows all the fishermen roundabout there, an' if it hadn't been for him the Phœbe would be still huntin' a cargo. Say, father, we made twenty dollars easy money last night."

"How was that?" Mr. Marshall asked with mild curiosity, and in as few words as possible, for he was in a hurry to begin packing lobsters for shipment, Dick told the story of their adventures with Mr. Barnes and his proposition that they bring the sick man to Portland.

"You say you didn't see his face?" Mr. Marshall asked with more of earnestness in his tone than the boys thought was warranted by the facts.

"No, sir; he kept himself done up in the blankets mighty well, bein' so sick that he was afraid of gettin' cold, I reckon."

"And now tell me once more what you did with him?"

Dick repeated the story of their setting the invalid ashore, and there was an expression of deep anxiety on Mr. Marshall's face as he said curtly:

"Come to the office with me."

"Do you suppose he's cross because we brought

that poor man with us?" Ezra asked in perplexity as he and his partner followed Mr. Marshall, Tommy having been left to care for the Phœbe.

"Perhaps he thinks we haven't any right to lug 'round passengers when we're out to get a cargo," Dick replied carelessly. "It won't pay to stay with him very long if we're goin' to ship those lobsters to-day."

But the boys did remain in Mr. Marshall's office a much longer time than they had fancied might be required, for when they were inside with the door closed so that no one might hear the conversation, Dick's father took up a newspaper which had been lying on his desk, and read the following article:

"SMUGGLING CHINESE.

"The customs officers have for some time been on the trail of a number of men whom it is believed have been engaged in the smuggling of Chinese across the border. Last Tuesday a lone son of the Flowery Kingdom was picked up on the road near Sullivan, and, failing to show a certificate, was taken in charge to be carried to Ellworth. He appeared so mild and inoffensive that the officers sent but one man in a light carriage with him, and on the way the wily Chinese succeeded in making his escape. Later it was learned that he had been seen in Vinalhaven with a number of men who are well known as smugglers, and it is believed that the officers are hot on the trail of those who have made a business of thus adding illegally to the population of the United States. Every effort will be made to round up this

heathen Chinese, and once again in custody it is not likely he will be able to give his captors the slip as easily as before. That those who are engaged in the lucrative business of smuggling Chinese will soon come to grief, is the opinion of the officers interested in the case."

Mr. Marshall read this news item slowly, and with emphasis, saying when he had come to an end:

"If I am not mistaken, boys, your passenger with the asthma who was afraid to uncover his face, and who gave no heed when you spoke to him, was this same Chinaman referred to in the article I have read. Your friend Mr. Barnes has played a fine trick on you, and one that is likely to cost all the profit you can make on this cargo of lobsters, if not more, for it is a most serious business."

"But what can we do, father?" Dick asked in a tearful tone. "We didn't know that the fellow was a Chinaman, an' even if we had, I'm thinkin' it wouldn't have made very much difference, so far as I'm concerned, for this is the first time I ever heard it was a crime to take a laundryman from one place to another."

"It is a crime to aid in bringing into the United States a Chinese emigrant, who had not previously lived in this country," Mr. Marshall explained. "Those who resided here prior to the passage of the act which forbids all emigration from that country, are provided with a certain document to show that they came here legitimately, and those not so safeguarded are sent by the proper authorities back

to China. Now, I don't claim to be a lawyer, but this axiom I have heard very often, that the law takes no account of ignorance regarding crimes and misdemeanors. Every person is supposed to know what may be done legally, and if, as in your case, any one offends, the punishment is the same as for those who know what they are doing."

"Will we be arrested, sir?" Ezra said in a tremulous tone.

"That is not improbable, if the passenger whom you brought was the man referred to in the newspaper article, and the fact that you landed him at night in what was seemingly a stealthy manner, would go far toward showing that you were aware the act committed was contrary to the law."

"But what shall we do?" Dick asked pleadingly.

"That is what I cannot say immediately; but we must take some steps toward safeguarding you, and as I now look at the matter, it seems that the first thing to be done is to give information regarding what has happened."

Mr. Marshall ceased speaking as if having given himself up to deep thought; but, observing the look of distress upon the faces of the two boys, he said in a more cheery tone:

"It isn't well to take the matter so much at heart until we learn how serious it really is. You had better go on board the smack, eat your breakfast, if you haven't already had it, and then set about making your cargo ready for shipment. I'll have a talk with my attorney, and possibly it may be necessary for us to go to Portland as soon as you

have finished your work. If that is not deemed advisable, the proper course would be to continue with your business, and set off for another load as soon as practicable. You can't afford to wait until getting the returns from the lobsters you have just brought in, therefore I shall be obliged to advance you more capital, repaying myself when the Boston dealers send their check. Now go down to the smack, and see to it that neither you nor that new hand of yours speaks to any one whatsoever regarding your passenger with the asthma."

The partners were in an unenviable frame of mind when they boarded the Phœbe, and so plainly was this written on their faces that Tommy Downing asked anxiously:

"What's gone wrong? Has the price of lobsters dropped way out of sight?"

"I wish that was the only trouble," Dick said with a groan as he went into the cuddy, and Tommy turned to Ezra, saying pleadingly:

"Tell me what it is? Do your folks think you hadn't any right to take me on?"

"Oh, Tommy, Tommy, it's nothin' so triflin' as that," Ezra cried bitterly. "Do you know anythin' about smugglin' Chinamen?"

"Of course I do," Master Downing replied promptly. "There's lots of it done, so Abel Saunders says, an' the men what are in the business make a pile of money. But you jest let the United States government get hold of 'em once, an' they'll wish they'd never seen a heathen Chineese, 'cause it's a case of goin' to jail for a good long spell."

“Then all three of us are likely to know what it is to go to jail, for we’ve been smugglin’ a Chinaman, Tommy.”

“Smugglin’—Oh come off! What are you givin’ me?”

“That’s what we’ve been doin’, or at least Dick’s father thinks so, for he read a piece out of a newspaper tellin’ about a Chinaman what had been found in the town of Sullivan without a certificate, or whatever they call it, to show that he had a right to stay in this country, an’ while they was tryin’ to carry him somewhere, he ran away. The paper says he was seen in Vinalhaven afterwards, an’ the officers are lookin’ for him. Now Dick’s father believes our passenger, which Mr. Barnes said was dyin’ with the asthma, was nothin’ more nor less than that same Chineese, an’ I think he’s right, because the fellow wouldn’t let us get a sight of his face, an’ didn’t seem to understand what we were talkin’ about. Then again, when he went ashore he didn’t walk like a sick man.”

Tommy was absolutely unable to speak during several seconds, and then, shaking his clenched fist in the supposed direction where Mr. Barnes might be found, he cried vindictively:

“That’s jest like one of ‘Liphalet Barnes’ tricks! I allowed all along that he wasn’t helpin’ any sick man without there was a dollar in it for him. But say, he’s got the crowd of us into a pile of trouble, eh? I never hankered after workin’ for Abel Saunders; but I’ll tell you that would be a soft snap alongside of gettin’ inter jail because I helped bring

a bloomin' Chinee up here. What are you going to do?"

"That's what we don't know, Tommy," Ezra wailed. "Mr. Marshall is goin' to see a lawyer right away, an' perhaps we'll have to go to Portland to give ourselves up as prisoners. An' I was thinking that we were in a way to make a lot of money! Why, it's terrible, terrible!"

"If you are goin' to Portland, what about the lobsters in the well?"

"Mr. Marshall says we must get right to work packin' 'em up ready to ship by express to-night, for he's had a chance to sell 'em at fifteen cents."

"Then why ain't we humpin' ourselves?" Master Downing asked sharply. "I reckon you won't make things any different by standin' here lookin' as if you'd lost your last friend. The Boston dealers count on gettin' their lobsters mighty nigh fresh, an' you can't leave 'em in the smack's well many days."

"That's right, Tommy, an' I know it; but how can we go to work when there's a chance of bein' sent to jail?"

"I can't see as that makes any difference. There's no use of goin' to jail, an' losin' your whole cargo too. Besides, you ain't locked up yet, an' if I was runnin' this 'ere business I would be tacklin' the job that's got to be done first."

Again did Master Tommy Downing show himself of great assistance to his employers, for he absolutely drove them to their work, and by the time they had gathered a dory-load of sea-weed in which

to pack the lobsters, both lads were feeling decidedly relieved in mind, for labor is a great assuager of sorrow.

Dick and Ezra, if left to themselves, would have fasted on that morning; but Tommy insisted that "things should go shipshape," even if they were to be put in jail afterward, and late in the forenoon he had prepared a most appetizing meal, which served as both breakfast and dinner.

The afternoon was nearly half spent before the lads again saw Mr. Marshall, and then the work of making the cargo ready for shipment had been finished, thanks to the assistance rendered by Marshall & Jordan's employees.

Dick's father came on board as if nothing save the ordinary perplexities of business was on his mind, and Ezra asked hopefully:

"Have you fixed things, sir?"

"No, lad, for that can't be done in a hurry. The attorney advises that you boys give immediate information to the customs officers in Portland, regarding what has been done, and as soon as you have sent the last piece of freight ashore, we will run over there. I count on going with you, because it may be necessary that you give bail for appearance in court."

"Then we are not goin' on another cruise right away, sir?" Dick asked, and from the tone of his voice one could well have believed that the tears stood very near his eyelids.

"That is as may be, my son. I have brought with me the money which you will need for the purchase

of another cargo, and if the officers look at the matter as I hope they will, you can set off from there without troubling your heads about bringing me back."

"But what about shippin' the lobsters?" Tommy asked, his first thought being of business rather than a possible imprisonment.

"I have already attended to that matter," Mr. Marshall replied, "so finish your work in a hurry, and let's be off."

Half an hour later the Phœbe was headed for Portland, going at her best speed, and when she arrived at Franklin Wharf Mr. Marshall went ashore alone, saying as he stepped over the rail:

"I count on engaging the services of an attorney in order that you may have your full rights in the matter, and the twenty dollars of 'easy money' is like to cost you all the profits of your cruise, for I'm counting that the firm of Upton & Marshall shall pay the bills which I incur in their behalf. Remain here until I get back, and if any person questions you regarding what may have been done, refuse absolutely to answer."

There is little need of saying that the crew of the Phœbe spent a most mournful three hours during Mr. Marshall's absence. Each lad had come to believe that the prison doors were already open to receive him, and instead of setting off on another cruise he would be speedily confined in a horrible jail.

Even Tommy seemed to lose courage as the mo-

ments passed, making no effort to enter into conversation with his employers; but breaking out now and then in the most vehement invectives against Eliphalet Barnes, who had plunged them into so much trouble at the very time when the business prospects appeared to be brightest.

“There’s no use scoldin’ about that villain,” Dick said impatiently when Master Downing had expressed his opinion of the smuggler for at least the tenth time. “Scoldin’ won’t help us any.”

“But it makes me feel a heap better to say what I think about the pirate! I ain’t so very big, nor don’t claim to be a terrible fighter; but if ever I get where that bloomin’ rummy of a smuggler is, he’ll find out that I can do somethin’.”

“An’ get yourself into even worse trouble than you are now, Tommy,” Ezra said reproachfully. “We have no one to blame but ourselves, for when he offered us twenty dollars simply to bring a sick man from Vinalhaven to Portland, we should have had sense enough to know there was somethin’ wrong about the transaction. Five dollars would have been a big price, but the moment he got above that, we ought’er told him to sneak off mighty quick.”

“He said he would get even with us for settin’ him adrift, an’ he’s done it,” Dick wailed, while Tommy cried angrily:

“He thinks he’s terrible smart, does ’Liphalet Barnes; but some day he’s goin’ to come to grief, an’ I’ll be the one what’ll help him get there. It’s a

mighty bad scrape we're in; but it would be a good deal worse if there didn't seem to be any show of squarin' things with that pirate."

As the time wore on, and Mr. Marshall did not make his appearance, the boys relapsed into moody silence, heeding not when night came; but sitting in the cuddy silent and motionless, believing that already were their business prospects ruined, and they the same as prisoners.

It was nearly nine o'clock in the evening when the Phœbe reeled beneath a sudden blow, and then as footsteps could be heard on the deck, Dick started up with a cry of greatest relief:

"It's father! An' now we'll know the worst of it! I don't believe I could have staid here an hour longer thinkin' of what's comin' to us."

"You are not looking very jolly in here," Mr. Marshall said in a cheery tone as he peered down the companion-way. "No matter how much trouble you're in, lads, mourning doesn't help you out. Light your lamp, and let's see each other."

"What have you done, father? Have we got to go to jail?" Dick asked, while Tommy proceeded to obey the order given.

"We'll hope not, my son. In fact, I'm inclined to think matters won't be carried quite so far as that. I have bound myself, however, that you shall appear as witnesses whenever needed, and until notification comes that evidence is required, you may go on about your business."

"Then there is to be a regular trial, an' all that kind of thing!" Dick wailed.

“That is as may be. It is first necessary that the officers find the man you put ashore last night, and even then there’s a question in the minds of all with whom I have talked, as to whether your evidence would be of any avail, since you could not identify the passenger, not having seen any portion of his body. It is believed, however, that by your being able to swear as to what that fellow Barnes said and did, the offense against the law can be fastened upon some member of the gang, for there is really a regular scheme for smuggling Chinamen.”

“And are we allowed now, sir, to keep on buyin’ lobsters?” Ezra asked in a tone of relief.

“Yes, lad, there is nothing to prevent, save that you may be summoned at any time. Of course you will not think of leaving port until morning, inasmuch as you had no sleep last night. Therefore I am advising that you go to bed at once, and, unless you are needing additional stores, set off at day-break.”

“It is possible we may need a barrel of gasoline, sir,” Ezra suggested.

“Then you will be forced to delay your departure, for it would not be advisable to go off with a partial supply of fuel. Here are two hundred and fifty dollars more, and after what has already happened I fancy there is no need for me to caution you against having anything to do with strangers, particularly with that Mr. Barnes who has already served you such a trick. But for what has occurred I should not give you any business advice, believing it best for you to paddle your own canoe at the out-

set, that it might be shown whether you are capable of carrying on the enterprise. Now, however, I am proposing that instead of making any stop this side of Isle au Haut, you run a considerable distance down the coast before attempting to make purchases, and this I suggest because there is a possibility that you might find, in the vicinity of Vinalhaven, officers who, not knowing of what has been done here, would cause your arrest. In case there should be such trouble, you will, as a matter of course, wire me without delay."

Then, without further words, Mr. Marshall went on shore, as if there was nothing more to be done in behalf of the new firm, and when he had gone Tommy Downing said with the air of one who has just been relieved from a heavy burden:

"Well, that's what I call skinnin' out of it pretty easy. Half an hour ago I believed we would be in jail before mornin'."

"But we're not free from it now," Dick said moodily, "an' had best wait to do our crowin' until the thing has been settled."

"Now see here," Tommy began, much as if he was the employer talking to the employee. "There's no kind of sense in huntin' 'round for trouble. We're out of the scrape for a while any how, an' that ought'er make all hands feel pretty chipper — it does me. As I look at it, this 'ere lobster business ain't the easiest thing in the world to run, an' if you're goin' to spend your time cryin' over what can't be helped, an' thinkin' every minute you're goin' to jail, why the next cruise will be a

losin' one sure as you live. Now here is what I've got in my mind, an' you can take up with it or not, jest as you please. One of you go on shore, an' buy the nicest piece of beefsteak you can find. I'll fry some potatoes in a way that'll make your mouth water, an' we'll have a high old dinner. After that it'll be a case of goin' to bed, an' lettin' the Chinese smugglin' take care of itself."

"I don't care what you do," Dick replied disconsolately, and Ezra added with a laugh:

"I believe you're right, Tommy. You have given us good advice ever since you came on board, an' we'd be foolish not to follow this. If there are any shops open I'll get what you want for a feast, an' we'll try to enjoy ourselves, even if it does seem as though lobster tradin' was about done up."

"That's the way to talk," Master Downing said cheerily. "You hump yourself, an' I'll begin to fry the potatoes. Say, what's the matter with Dick's turnin' to an' lendin' a hand? It will be a good deal better'n settin' there thinkin' of the trick Eliphalet Barnes played on us."

This was not a respectful tone for Tommy to use when speaking of his employer; but because of what he had already done, it seemed as if he had a right to direct affairs, and almost without intending to do so, Dick began to busy himself with the culinary operations.

Ezra was successful in his quest, as could be seen when he brought back materials for such a feast as perhaps had never been served in the cabin of the Phœbe, and before it was prepared to Master Down-

ing's liking, the crew of the smack were in remarkably good spirits considering the gravity of the situation.

Then, when each fellow had eaten to repletion, and the cuddy was set to rights once more, came the question of purchasing gasoline, whereupon Tommy ventured more of his valuable advice.

"I am allowin' it'll be six or seven o'clock before the shops here are open, eh?"

"Yes; we can't hope to get a barrel of gasoline on board much before eight or nine o'clock," Ezra replied.

"Well, what's the use of wastin' all that time? Now if I was runnin' this 'ere smack, here's what I'd do: You've got gasoline enough for two or three days, accordin' to what you said yesterday. So what's to hinder startin' off at daybreak, with a clean savin' of four or five hours, an' puttin' into Boothbay for what you're needin'? There's a raft of power boats owned there, an' you can bet great big good dollars that they'll have gasoline there to sell till you can't rest!"

"But we'll be runnin' out of our course by going in there," Ezra objected, and Tommy said promptly:

"Not more'n an hour. 'Cordin' to your own talk we'd have to stay here till nine o'clock, so it'll be a clean savin' of time, an' that's what we need to do in the lobster business if I've got any idee of it."

"It strikes me, Tommy, you've got a better idea of it than either Dick or I," Ezra replied laughingly, "an' I'm willin' to follow your advice."

Master Downing looked toward Dick, and seeing that he was not disposed to make any objection, said cheerily:

“Then it’s a case of all hands turnin’ in now, for I’m countin’ on routin’ you fellows out mighty early in the morning. We’ll run down the coast as far as Quoddy Head, an’ I’m hopin’ before we get there to have a whack at Eliphalet Barnes.”

CHAPTER VI

DISABLED

When Master Downing aroused his employers next morning, Dick stoutly refused to turn out, declaring that it was yet night, and, in fact, there were no signs of the coming day so far as the occupants of the cuddy could see.

"Of course it's dark down here," Tommy explained as he set about building a fire in the cook stove; "but just poke your nose up the companion-way for a minute, an' you'll see that it's mighty near daybreak. I'm allowin' this 'ere craft ought'er be got under way as soon as light, 'cause it's a case of humpin ourselves if we count on earnin' enough to pay for the lawyers your father's been hirin' to straighten up that trick Eliphalet Barnes played on us."

"We may as well get out, even though it is in the night, as to stay here an' be roasted," Ezra said laughingly, as he leaped to his feet, and when the partners had made a leisurely toilet it could be seen that the new hand had not aroused them any too early.

Already were tokens of the new day to be seen in the eastern sky, and before breakfast could be gotten well under way it would be time to leave the dock.

"You fellers needn't pay any attention to me," Master Downing said in reply to Ezra's question as to when the morning meal would be ready. "I'll keep right to work at it, an' when the things are cooked you can eat 'em while I take my trick at the wheel. I reckon you'll leave as soon as it's anywhere near light?"

"We'll get off in less than thirty minutes," Ezra said as he went on deck, and no more than half that time had elapsed when Dick came below to start the motor.

"Goin' to take your chances of runnin' down the harbor so early?" the cook asked, much as if it pleased him because his employers were hastening the time of sailing.

"It's light enough for us to make out the vessels at anchor, an' seein's how we've got quite a cruise ahead of us, the Phœbe can't be started any too soon," Dick replied as he set the machinery in motion.

"That's where you're right. It ain't as if things were goin' real smooth an' you could take your time; but it's a case of payin' for lawyers out of the profits of the business, an' I'm thinkin' they'll want a good deal of money. Abel Saunders says that you can't ever satisfy 'em, an' I wouldn't wonder if he was right."

"I've given over worryin' about that trick Eliphalet Barnes played on us," Dick said curtly. "It's been done, an' we showed ourselves the biggest fools in this section of the country, so, accordin' to my way of thinkin', the least said about it the

better. We can promise ourselves that he won't get another whack at us, for one such dose is as good as twenty, so far as helpin' a fellow to cut his eye teeth is concerned."

"'Liphalet's pretty keen, he is," Tommy replied as he sliced the pork carefully lest it be cut too thick. "About the only way you can make sure of not gettin' inter trouble, is to keep jest as far from him as possible. Why, if that man asked me to take a drink of water when I was thirsty, I'd think he was puttin' up some kind of a game, an' look mighty sharp at whatever he dished out."

It was evident that Dick had no desire to continue the conversation which had as its subject Mr. Barnes, for after assuring himself that the motor was running smoothly, he went on deck, remaining there until the cook announced that breakfast was ready.

"Now this is somethin' like," Dick said as he and Ezra seated themselves at the table while Tommy stood at the wheel. "When we started on the first cruise each fellow had to eat alone. Now we can take it comfortable. I wish we'd had sense enough to put a barrel of gasoline aboard at Westbay, an' then we wouldn't be called on to stop at Boothbay. To tell the truth, Ezra, I'm beginnin' to be afraid to haul up anywhere around the coast between here an' Isle au Haut, for fear of meetin' with that man Barnes."

"I'm allowin' he won't get the best of us again, for it seems as though we've got our eye teeth cut by this time," Ezra replied carelessly, and then

changed the subject of the conversation by speculating upon the possibility that before they returned lobsters would have advanced yet more in price.

When Master Downing was summoned to get his breakfast the Phœbe was well down the harbor, making exceedingly good time over a smooth sea, and but for the fact of their having allowed themselves to be so easily hoodwinked in the case of the supposed invalid, the young lobster traders would have been in high spirits.

As it was, however, the thought of what they would be forced to pay for legal services already rendered, and the possibility that before the matter was ended the doors of the county prison would open for their reception, prevented anything like self-congratulation.

There was no question about their needing gasoline if the cruise was to be extended as far as Quoddy Head, and when, in due time, the Phœbe arrived at Boothbay, she was run alongside one of the piers, Dick and Ezra going ashore to make the purchase, while Tommy was left to "keep ship."

It seemed fortunate to the lads that very nearly at the head of the dock where the smack had been made fast, was a shop at which, according to the signboards, the needed supplies could be procured, and on entering the lads found the proprietor alone, business being apparently very dull with him at that time of the day.

"A barrel of gasoline, eh?" he repeated when Ezra made known their errand. "I reckon you must be runnin' a power boat?"

"That's what we are, an' we're in a hurry to get down the coast."

"Well, I've got something here that's as good as can be found in the market. All the power boats round here use it. I don't reckon you know anythin' about the lobster smack that helped Eliphalet Barnes smuggle the Chinaman through to Portland, do you?"

"What smack was that, sir?" Ezra asked in quavering tones, striving to screen his face, which he felt was growing white.

"Bless you, I don't know what smack it was; but they do say that the Chinaman what got away from the officers was hanging round Vinalhaven when Eliphalet Barnes come down from Portland, where he'd been locked up in jail. Now anythin' in the way of smugglin' is just sport for Eliphalet, an' he agreed with some of 'em as were concerned in the business, I reckon, to put the Chinaman through slick an' smooth for fifty dollars. Some of us folks here have got the idee that Eliphalet brought the smack with him from Portland so's to have it ready; but of course nobody really knows."

"We're in a hurry to get that gasoline aboard, sir," Dick interrupted, for the shop-keeper's budget of news was not overly pleasant to hear.

"All right, all right, my boy. You shall have it just as soon as I can yank it out of the cellar. I reckon you're willin' to lend a hand, eh?"

"We'll do most anything so that we don't stay here too long."

"All right, come this way," and the proprietor led the boys out on the sidewalk to the cellar door, asking as he did so:

"When did you leave Portland, eh?"

"This mornin'."

"I don't reckon you heard anythin' about that 'ere Chinaman before you left, eh?"

"We read in the paper that one got away from the officers down at Sullivan."

"Didn't see anythin' about Eliphalet's havin' a hand in it, eh?"

"The newspaper article which we saw simply spoke of the man's havin' escaped from the officers," Ezra replied curtly. "Now if you will bear a hand we'll get that barrel of gasoline up, an' pay for it. We can't afford to spend much time here."

"Goin' very far east?"

"We may go to Eastport."

"Pleasurin', I reckon."

It was evident that the shop-keeper intended to gain all the information concerning his customers that was possible, and, as if in desperation lest they be forced to prolong the visit beyond the time set, Ezra replied:

"We are buyin' lobsters. That's our smack there at the pier. She's the Phœbe, an' run by Upton & Marshall."

"Lobster buyers, eh? Been in the business long?"

"See here, we're in a hurry. If we can get that gasoline out, we're ready to pay for it, an' if not,

we'll have to find some one who is willin' to sell it without wantin' to know so much," Dick interrupted petulantly.

"Well, I allow if that's the case you'll go further and perhaps fare worse, for this 'ere is the only store in Boothbay where they keep gasoline," the proprietor replied as if nettled. "If you boys are so afraid about answerin' harmless questions, why I'll try not to ask 'em."

Ezra understood, as did his partner, that by attempting to hurry the shop-keeper they might render themselves objects of suspicion, since it was known in the vicinity that the Chinaman had been taken from Vinalhaven in a lobster smack, and he hastened to placate the owner of the gasoline, speaking in the most friendly tone that could be assumed on the moment:

"We are not afraid of answerin' questions, an' are willin' to tell you all about ourselves, if that's what you want; but we're in a hurry, an' it will be just as well to talk while we're takin' the gasoline to the dock, as to stand here on the sidewalk idle. If you will show us where it is, we'll roust it outside, an' then you shall come down to the smack, an' see for yourself what we're about."

"I ain't wantin' to pry into other folks' affairs; but it only seems kind of neighborly like, especially when there's nothin' much doin', to inquire into the business. Besides, there's no knowin' but I might help you buy a part of the cargo, if you are givin' price enough."

"Because we're goin' so far east, it wouldn't pay

us to take in very many now. When we come back, if there are any lobsters 'round here for sale, we'll be glad to buy 'em, an' are willin' to stop here every ten days or two weeks, if a business can be built up."

"Well, now, I wouldn't want to give you any encouragement, lads, for you see our people ship direct from here, an' there are two or three of us who stand ready to buy any lobsters we come across."

"Which barrel shall we take from the cellar, sir?" Dick interrupted, seeing that the shop-keeper was likely to go into a detailed history of the lobster business in the town of Boothbay.

"I reckon the first one you come to will do. There's the tackle; if you'll pass the ends up to me I'll make 'em fast, an' you can swing the bight around the cask yourselves."

The result of the matter was that in order to make a saving of time, and avoid being too closely questioned concerning the Chinaman who had given the officers the slip, Dick and Ezra were forced to do the greater portion of the work necessary to take the gasoline from the cellar.

Then five minutes more were the same as wasted in replying to a flood of questions before the price could be decided upon, and paid, after which the lads set off toward the dock, rolling the cask before them regardless of the shop-keeper's efforts to continue the conversation.

"Keep your eye out for the lobster smack what run off the Chinaman!" the man shouted after them.

"It may be you'll get to hear more about the busi-

ness, an' I'd advise you to have your ears open, for, unless I'm mistaken, there'll be a reward offered by the government for news concernin' that 'ere craft."

"We won't forget," Dick cried irritably, and Ezra said in a grim whisper:

"I reckon we're not likely to; but you mustn't show temper when these people ask too many questions, for if a man like that one gets suspicious, there's no knowin' what he'd do."

"What could he do, even if he *knew* that the Chinaman was taken away in the Phœbe?" Dick asked irritably.

"I don't know; if I did perhaps I'd think it wouldn't make any difference whether we were discovered or not; but just now it seems as if our wisest course was to avoid takin' any chances."

"It looks a good deal as if you fellers thought you had a little more time than there is in the day," Master Downing grumbled when Dick and Ezra arrived at the smack. "I thought this was to be a quick stop."

"We haven't been wastin' any time willingly," Dick said in the tone of one who has been grievously injured. "That shop-keeper wanted to know everything we could tell him about ourselves, an' a little more, an' in addition, he knew considerable already."

"Meanin' what?" Tommy asked, understanding from the tone and air of his employer that something of a disagreeable nature had occurred.

"Meanin' that these people here know the Chinaman was carried away from Vinalhaven in a lobster smack, an', thinkin' the government will offer

a reward for information, are tryin' to find out which craft it was."

"An' so you've been hangin' 'round givin' them a chance to pump you, eh? Why, we'd better have boomed ahead without the gasoline than staid a single minute, because we could have bought it in Eastport," and now Master Downing appeared to be thoroughly alarmed.

He bestirred himself so actively, exerting his strength to such purpose, that within a very short space of time after the gasoline was alongside, it had been put on board the Phœbe, and the little smack was just backing away from the dock when the shop-keeper appeared, waving his hand excitedly.

"Don't wait for him," Tommy advised. "You've paid for what we've got, so let's get out of here! How do you know but that they would take the chances of arrestin' us on their own account, an' then we would be in a muss!"

Dick was at the motor, with Ezra at the wheel, when Master Downing spoke, and because no signal was sent from the pilot-house to the cuddy, the backward motion of the smack was not slackened, much to the evident displeasure of the shop-keeper, who shouted at the full strength of his lungs:

"Look here, you boys! I want to ask a question before you leave this port?"

"We've told you everything we know already, an' can't afford to wait around here any longer," Ezra replied, and as the Phœbe, having backed out from the pier sufficiently far, was swung around with

the bell in the cuddy ringing for full speed ahead, the shop-keeper cried angrily:

“ I tell you to come back here! I’m beginning to have an idee you know more about that Chinaman business than you’re willin’ to allow. Don’t make the mistake of running agin the government, or you’ll get into a pretty serious kind of a muddle.”

“ We’ll see you when we come up this way agin, old man,” Tommy cried with a friendly wave of the hand, “ an’ perhaps then we’ll know more about what you’re so keen after. So long! ”

The gentleman on shore made some harsh reply, as could be told by the tone of his voice; but the Phœbe was so far away that it was impossible to distinguish the words, and Master Downing said with a chuckle of satisfaction, while at the same time an expression of dismay spread over his face:

“ Well, we got rid of him, an’ that’s a mighty good thing; but I’ll tell you what it is, Ezra, from this out the folks at Boothbay will swear the Phœbe was the one what carried off the Chinaman, an’ we can’t afford to buy any more gasoline around these diggings.”

“ Perhaps it would have been better if we had held up an’ answered all his questions, for then he wouldn’t have been so suspicious,” Ezra said half to himself, and Tommy cried sharply:

“ One way would have been just as bad as the other, an’ I don’t know but what it might have been a little worse if you’d stopped for the meddlin’ old idjut, ’cause there’s no knowin’ but he’d have taken it into his head to make us tie up till he got the

whole thing down fine. Anyhow, we're through with Boothbay for this cruise, I reckon, an' now what are you countin' on doin'—runnin' all night? It's a case of that, or puttin' in for harbor somewhere near about Swans island."

"We don't want to stop anywhere near there," Ezra cried in alarm, and Tommy settled the matter by saying decidedly:

"Well, we'll keep straight along, an' I don't know of any reason why it can't be done. Anyhow, it'll be safer until the folks get over being so keen after the smack what lugged off the Chinaman."

When Dick came on deck it was definitely decided that the Phœbe should be kept on her course until having arrived at that point on the coast where Tommy believed they could safely venture to begin the purchase of another cargo, and in order that this might be done the lads set hourly watches; two of the crew on duty and one below throughout the day.

The knowledge that the people of Boothbay were on the lookout for the smack which had aided in the escape of the Chinaman, caused the boys to continue their task in a more business-like, serious fashion than would have been the case had nothing occurred to cause alarm. Each spent his off-duty time in the bunk, sleeping or trying to do so, in order to be in good condition for work when he went on watch, and at her best speed the Phœbe was sent on down the coast much as if running away from enemies, instead of being engaged in lawful transactions.

Another day had come and was nearly half spent

by the time the smack arrived near to Quoddy Head light, and all hands were congratulating themselves that the long cruise was nearly at an end when the motor suddenly ceased working.

It was Dick's off-duty trick, and Ezra, after attending to the motor, had gone into the pilot-house for a chat with Tommy. Failing to understand the cause of the sudden stoppage, he cried through the speaking-tube:

"What have you hauled up here for, Dick?"

There was no reply. Running hurriedly into the cabin Ezra found his partner in the bunk asleep, and the engine motionless.

An instant later Tommy heard his employer cry in a tone of dismay:

"Turn out, Dick! We're in trouble for a fact! This blessed sparker has broken short off, an' we were such simples as never to have thought of taking a spare one. If there are two boys on the coast of Maine who have shown themselves to be such fools as you and I, it would please me to run across them."

In a twinkling Master Downing was in the cuddy gazing at Ezra, who stood staring at the motor as if he had never seen the like of such a thing before, while Dick, who was half out of the bunk, looked around in bewilderment.

"What's the matter? What made us stop?" Tommy asked sharply, and Dick replied curtly:

"The sparker has broken. See!" and he held up a fragment of brass tipped with platinum.

"How did that happen?"

“Now look here, Tommy, don’t ask foolish questions,” Ezra said irritably. “Of course no one knows how it happened, except that it’s done, an’ here we are in a mighty disagreeable fix.”

“Can’t you move her at all?”

“Of course you can’t move her! Don’t I tell you she’s broken down. There’s nothing to be done but send to Portland for a new sparker, an’ nobody knows how long that will take.”

“Well, we can’t hang ’round off here,” and Tommy spoke as if believing his employers might, if they were so disposed, remedy the fault.

“How far around that light is the harbor?” Ezra asked suddenly.

“Well, you’ll get good anchorage anywhere inside the Head; but if you counted to strike Eastport it would be quite a long stretch.”

“What we want is a telegraph office. It’s a case of sendin’ word to Dick’s father for a new sparker, an’ layin’ here, or at some decent anchorage, until we get it.”

“But see here,” and now Master Downing gave evidence of great distress of mind. “If the people at Boothbay were so keen about this Chinaman that Eliphalet Barnes shoved off onto us, it stands to reason the people at Eastport will have the same bug down their backs, an’ we can’t afford to stay in any one place a great while.”

“Can’t afford it?” Ezra cried angrily. “It ain’t a question of can’t or can; but one of *must*. Until we get a new sparker you can’t turn the screw, that’s positive.”

Tommy was silenced, but by no means convinced that it would be impossible for them to put the motor into such shape that it might be used, even without replacing the part which had been broken. However, he understood that it would be useless to argue the question while Ezra's temper was so near the surface, and contented himself by saying:

"Whether you can work the machinery or not, I'm telling you that you've got to get the smack into some kind of a harbor."

By this time Dick had collected his scattered senses, and ran on deck for a look around, returning an instant later to say in a matter-of-fact tone:

"You're right, Ezra, about not being able to turn the screw, an' I'm allowin' Tommy is just as near correct when he says we've got to get the Phœbe out of this place. Now there's only one way to do it, an' that's by towin', so the sooner we put the dory into the water the better."

"How far is it from here around the point?"

"It looks to be six or seven miles."

"An' do you think we can tow this heavy smack that far?" Ezra asked as if to his mind it was an impossibility.

"I am not thinkin' anythin' about that part of it. You know as well as I that we've *got* to do it, so let's set about the job."

It was as if the mischief had bewildered Ezra for the moment, and he stood gazing first at the broken sparker, and then at his partner, until having pulled himself together, so to speak.

"Of course you're right, Dick, an' I'm showin'

myself an idiot by makin' foolish talk. It'll be a mighty hard pull, though, to tow this smack six or seven miles."

Although not accustomed to handle power boats, Master Downing understood full well what was before them, and in his usual practical fashion he decided upon what should be done without going through the formality of consulting his employers.

"We can shift every half hour, an' that will put each feller at the oars an hour at a time," he said promptly. "Of course whoever isn't pullin' must be steerin' the smack, else she'd wobble around in such a fashion that nobody could tow her. I'm allowin' it'll take some time to get into shape for the work, so let's hustle."

It was by no means a simple task to get ready for towing; no little time was spent in fastening a brace on the inside of the dory, well aft, to which the hawser could be made fast, and then it became necessary to make a bridle of the rope that the smack might not swing too much.

All this required time, and the afternoon was nearly spent when Tommy and Ezra settled down to the tedious task, while Dick stood at the wheel of the disabled steamer.

"We mustn't count on bringin' her ahead very fast," Master Downing said as if believing his employers needed cheering. "The most we can hope to do is keep her movin', an' it won't be any very short job."

"It'll take us all night an' part of to-morrow at this rate," Dick said grimly as he gazed over the

bow where the water swept away from the Phœbe's stem in lazy wrinkles. "She isn't goin' a mile an hour."

"If we could bring her ahead as fast as a mile, we'd be playin' in big luck," Tommy cried cheerily. "Say about half that speed, an' you'll hit it nearer right, for she ain't any playthin'."

"There's no sense in tryin' to figure out the speed," Ezra interrupted irritably, "for it will make the job seem longer. The only way is to buckle down to it without lookin' ahead. But suppose the wind springs up from the east?"

"Then it'll be a case of goin' ashore in the dory, an' the Phœbe wabblin' off on her own account, 'cause we couldn't even begin to hold her against a head wind," and Tommy spoke as if such a disaster might be expected at any moment.

"I reckon we've got enough to worry over without lookin' ahead for a gale of wind," Dick cried with a not overly cheerful laugh. "The worst thing, accordin' to my way of thinkin', is that we'll have to stay in harbor three or four days waitin' for a new sparker, an' in that time the people of Eastport will come to believe we're hidin' because of bein' the craft that helped Eliphalet Barnes sneak off his Chinaman. That would put us in a worse scrape than we came near fallin' into at Boothbay."

"It seems to me we can do better than spend the time figurin' how much trouble may befall us," and now Ezra was on the verge of ill-temper, for failure in this business venture meant much more to him than to either of his companions.

He had abandoned the calling of a lobster catcher to become a buyer, selling his traps, and thus, as one might say, burning his bridges behind him. To fail now because of having allowed Mr. Barnes to use them as catspaws, would be to face absolute want before another winter had come, since, if all his small capital was spent, and he in debt to Mr. Marshall for his share of the money advanced with which to purchase lobsters, it would be virtually impossible for him to get an outfit for fishing.

"I can't see why we shouldn't look the situation in the face, an' then we'll be prepared for whatever turns up," Dick replied soberly.

"I don't dare think of what may happen, an' you'll understand as much if you reckon up how I'll be fixed if we don't make a payin' venture of this tradin' in lobsters," Ezra said gravely, and straightway his partner became as sympathetic as he could have desired.

"Now don't get into your head any idea that because of what has happened we're goin' into bankruptcy," Dick cried earnestly. "I reckon it'll cost us considerable money before we've come to an end of that Chinese business; but we must scratch all the harder to make it up, an' we can do it, Ezra!"

"Of course you can," Master Downing added emphatically. "I only wish I was one of these 'ere partners, you wouldn't find me gettin' down at the mouth jest 'cause folks along the coast have got it inter their heads that the Chinaman went away in our smack. It ain't a hangin' matter anyhow, an' in two or three trips you can make up all you've

lost through Eliphalet Barnes. People 'round here don't think it's so terrible wrong to do a little smugglin', an' as near as I can make out that's all we was doin' when we took on board the fellow what claimed to have the asthma."

Then Tommy began to tell of the fishermen in the vicinity with whom he was on at least partial terms of acquaintance, who would be glad to sell their lobsters to traders who visited them regularly, and so represented the situation that it seemed almost impossible the venture could be a failure, no matter how much money they might be forced to pay out in order to settle with the attorneys who had charge of the case.

Thus it was that two hours passed, and at the end of that time Ezra was absolutely astonished to find how rapidly they had crept up on Quoddy Head light.

"We're doin' a good mile an hour!" he cried gleefully, having apparently forgotten his dismal forebodings. "If we keep it up at this rate we should be in decent anchorage by midnight!"

"That's what," Master Downing replied emphatically. "It's stickin' at a job that counts, an' all you've got to do is keep pluggin' all the time. I don't reckon you'll try to do more than get inter a harbor to-night?"

"We'll be satisfied with that. It'll be easier to pull up to the town in a dory, than try to tow the Phœbe so far, an' by keepin' her down near the light there won't be a chance for so many people to see her."

Having thus decided the matter without reference to his partner, Ezra pulled the harder at the oars, until the lazy wrinkle around the smack's bow increased to a veritable ripple, and Tommy piped up:

“ I'se bound to run all day,
I'se bound to run all night;
I've bet my money on a bob-tailed nag,
Somebody's bettin' on the bay.”

By changing places every hour the boys were able to keep the Phœbe moving through the water without stopping, and although all three were very nearly exhausted, they were not in as bad a condition when the smack had finally been towed around Quoddy Head, as had seemed probable when the task was begun.

It was considerably past midnight when they came to anchor in a small, sheltered cove, and Tommy said as he clambered inboard from the dory:

“ Now I allow that the best thing we can do is to have supper. You fellows make things snug for the night, an' I'll tend to the cookin'.”

“ All I want is to crawl into my bunk. I don't believe I ever was so tired before,” Dick replied as he came over the rail stiffly.

“ Wait till you smell what I'm goin' to mix up, an' see how quick you'll come out of the bunk,” Tommy cried as he ran into the cuddy, and, following him, Dick asked:

“ How is it that you can do so much work an' not get played out, Tommy? It don't seem as if you ever felt tired.”

“ I’ve wintered an’ summered with Abel Saunders, an’ if you’d done the same it would be easier to tackle hard jobs. Why, this day’s work ain’t a marker ’longside of what I had to duff inter every twenty-four hours, an’ he was allers howlin’ ’bout my eatin’ the bread of idleness.”

“ You’ve earned the best supper that was ever put on a table, an’ there wouldn’t be any bread of idleness to it if you kept on eatin’ an’ loafin’ for the next two weeks,” Dick replied with a weary laugh as he rolled into his bunk without stopping even to take off his boots.

CHAPTER VII

TOMMY'S SCHEME

The weary lobster buyers and their employee slept hard and late on the night after making harbor behind Quoddy Head, and even Master Downing failed to open his eyes as he would have done at the home of Abel Saunders'.

It was nearly seven o'clock when Tommy awakened, and after looking out through the companion-way and seeing the sun high in the heavens, he stood gazing in bewilderment at his employers, as if trying to make out why it was so much precious time had been wasted.

"If you fellows haven't got anythin' to do to-day, I don't reckon it makes any very great difference how long you lay there sleepin' like pigs; but if you're countin' on pullin' up to Eastport in order to telegraph for a new sparker, then it strikes me it's high time you began to stir your stumps!"

The lobster dealers were on their feet in a twinkling after being thus aroused, and Ezra said sleepily as he gazed around the cuddy:

"Accordin' to the looks of things I'd say you hadn't been awake such a very long while."

"An' that's the fact, even if I am ashamed of it," Tommy replied with a laugh as he set about

kindling a fire in the cook-stove. "My, my, but wouldn't Abel Saunders have hopped some if I'd ever laid in his bed till the sun was two hours high!"

"A fellow can't work all night, an' then be stirrin' 'round very lively by sunrise," Dick added with a yawn as he proceeded to make a leisurely toilet. "It seemed as if I hadn't much more than swallowed my supper before I fell asleep."

"That's pretty much what you did do, an' nobody can blame you for bein' mighty nigh used up," Tommy replied as he bustled around in his task of cooking. "But now that your eyes are open, an' you're fit for work, as you ought'er be after stayin' in the bunk so long, it strikes me that we can't afford to fool away very much more time. It's a long pull from here to the town, an' you can't send word about the sparker any too soon."

Even though the young traders had been so inclined, Master Downing would not have allowed them to forget that they had business of the utmost importance to attend to before another night should come. All the while he was cooking breakfast did he continue to urge them to make haste, and even while the lads were partaking of the meal they were reminded that there was no time to be lost, unless they counted on spending the remainder of the season at Quoddy Head.

"I don't see why you need do so much frettin'," Dick finally said in a tone of irritation. "Even if we're obliged to stay here a month, you'll be gettin' your wages just the same."

“ I don’t know about that,” Master Downing replied, not a whit abashed by the remark. “ You fellows have got to pay out a big lot of money to the lawyers, an’ if you don’t rush the business I’d like to know how I’m goin’ to get a whack at any cash, ’cause I wouldn’t have the nerve to ask for five dollars a week when you wasn’t makin’ a cent.”

“ I reckon we’d better get away as soon as possible, else Tommy will wear himself all out frettin’, an’ we can’t afford to lose our crew just at this time,” Ezra said laughingly. “ It’s a good thing we’ve got somebody to keep us sharp up to work, or we might be tempted to waste a day after that long pull last night.”

Not until his employers were in the dory rowing toward the town did Tommy cease every effort to hasten their movements, and then he cried with a long-drawn sigh of relief:

“ Don’t forget to find out what lobsters are sellin’ at down this way, an’ it wouldn’t be a bad idee if you kept your ears open to learn if the folks here have heard anythin’ ’bout that Chinaman business! ”

Master Downing watched his employers until they were lost to view in the distance, and then he turned his attention to setting the smack to rights generally, beginning with the cuddy and ending with the deck, which last he scrubbed until it was as white as Mrs. Saunders’ kitchen floor.

By this time it surely seemed as if he had earned a time of repose; but instead of taking his ease in one of the bunks, he stationed himself in the wheel-

house where he could see all that occurred in the vicinity.

“It’s a great scheme, an’ I believe it would work!” he said to himself after having remained in deep study several moments. “There must be plenty of fishermen near about here, an’ I’d soon snake ’em out if we had another boat.”

Then it seemed very much as if Master Browning’s admiration for the “scheme” increased the more he turned it over in mind, for after a while he could no longer content himself with remaining in the wheel-house, but paced fore and aft on the deck as if on the lookout for somebody or something, all the while singing softly:

“I’se bound to run all day,
I’se bound to run all night;
I’ve bet my money on a bob-tailed nag,
Somebody’s bettin’ on the bay.”

When half an hour had passed, an expression of satisfaction and expectancy came over his face, for then it was that a man in a dory pulled around the Head, and on the instant Tommy had his hands to his mouth in speaking-trumpet fashion, as he shouted:

“Ahoy in the dory! Pull in this way, will yer?”

The newcomer turned leisurely to see who had hailed him, and then swung the dory around ever so slightly to head her for the smack.

“How’s the fishin’?” Master Downing asked as the stranger approached within easy hailing distance.

“Fair to middlin’. What craft is that?”



““ AHOY IN THE DORY! PULL IN THIS WAY, WILL YER? ””

“The Phœbe; we busted our sparker last night, an’ had to anchor here so’s the other fellers could telegraph for a new one.”

“What’s a sparker?” the man asked as he pulled alongside and moored the dory by laying hold of the Phœbe’s rail.

“Blest if I know; but it’s somethin’ that keeps the engine runnin’, an’ we’re bound to lay here till we can get a new one. Say, any lobsters ’round here for sale?”

“Who are you buyin’ for?”

“Oh, I ain’t in it at all, ’cept that I’m workin’ for a couple of fellers who’ve jest gone inter the business, an’ seein’s how we’re held up here it kind’er struck me that we might buy what the fishermen have got on hand, so’s not to be wastin’ time.”

“Where do you hail from?”

“Westbay; that’s up Portland way, you know.”

“What’er you payin’?”

“We gave eight cents for the last load we bought, an’ allowed that they’d run a pound an’ a half apiece. I reckon you can’t get any more’n that in Eastport, eh?”

“They was givin’ seven the last time I was in town; but the price may have gone up since then.”

“I don’t reckon it has; leastways, I haven’t heard anythin’ ’bout it, an’ we left Portland yesterday mornin’. It would be a big savin’ of work if you could sell your catch right here, without havin’ to freight it up to Eastport, an’ these fellers what runs this smack are payin’ spot cash.”

“Wa’al, yes, there’s a leetle somethin’ in that,

though a man feels like goin' to town now an' then if for nothin' else than to hear the news," the fisherman replied hesitatingly.

"There's nothin' to hinder your goin' to Eastport whenever you want'er; but it's a good deal better to run up with nothin' on your mind, an' plenty of big, round dollars in your inside pocket, don't yer know? Say, how many have you got?"

"Somewhere 'bout a hundred, an' p'rhaps one or two more."

"Where do you hang out?"

"Up shore half a mile."

"Say, why don't you bring 'em down this afternoon, after the fellers come back from telegraphin' for a sparker, an' get your good money for 'em?"

"I ain't sure but I will," and the man released his hold of the Phœbe's rail, allowing the wind to carry him slowly up the harbor. "I'll think it over, an' maybe I'll pull down this evenin'."

"Any other fishermen over your way?"

"Quite a smart lot of 'em; 'bout one to every lobster, it seems to me."

"Tell 'em what we're payin', an' see if you can't bring 'em down. We'll tell you all the news that's floatin' 'round, so that part of it will be the same as if you was in town."

"I'll think it over," the fisherman replied as he took up the oars once more, and Tommy winked gravely at the reflection of his own face in the window of the wheel-house, as he said to himself:

"I reckon it'll pay to keep my eye skinned the rest of this day, an' it ain't so certain that we can't

pick up quite a cargo even while we're layin' at anchor."

In the meanwhile, Ezra and Dick were doing their portion of the day's work, although not in a thoroughly satisfactory manner. After a long pull up to the town they made their way to the telegraph office, and there sent a message to the firm of Marshall & Jordan, asking that the sparker be sent to them at the earliest possible moment.

The telegraph operator, who did not appear to be pressed for time, asked with a smile as he read the message:

"Broke down, eh? That's the worst with them power boats, you never can tell when they're goin' back on a fellow. Down here pleasurin', I reckon?"

"We're buyin' lobsters," Ezra replied, thinking it necessary to make this explanation to the end that his message might appear of more importance.

"I don't reckon you're the ones that run off the Chinaman, eh?" and the man laughed as if believing he had said something very witty. Then, without waiting for an answer, much to the relief of the boys, he added, "I see by the paper this mornin' that Eliphalet Barnes had a hand in the business, an' he no more than barely out of jail! It beats all how that old villain likes to get the best of the customs officers."

"Do they know him down this way?" Dick asked, not realizing that he might arouse suspicion by showing that he had any acquaintance with the smuggler.

"Know him? Why he makes Eastport his

stampin' ground, except when the officers are after him too close. Talk about smugglin'! Why, he'd be in the business if there wasn't a cent to be made by it; there's nothin' pleases him better than to get the best of the law, an' I'm allowin' that that Chinaman trick pleased him way down to the ground."

"You'll send that message right off, won't you?" Ezra asked abruptly as he turned to leave the office. "We can't get away till it has been answered, an' don't want to stay any longer than is necessary."

"I'll shove it right through," the man replied, but he remained at the window as if eager to prolong the one-sided conversation, and Ezra hurriedly left the office, with Dick close at his heels.

"It begins to look as if we stood as good a chance of gettin' into trouble here as at Boothbay," Master Upton said in a whisper to his partner when they were on the street once more, and Dick replied:

"We'd better get a newspaper, an' then skin back to the Phœbe as soon as possible. I'm beginnin' to think it isn't safe to admit that we're in the lobster business."

When they arrived at a shop where newspapers were sold, however, Dick grew even more cautious than before, and said as he prevented his partner from entering:

"Buy somethin' else first, Ezra. If we go in there simply for a newspaper, somebody will think we're after it in order to find out what has been done about smugglin' the Chinaman, an' we shall be in a worse scrape than ever!"

Therefore it was that Ezra purchased half a

dozen sheets of letter paper and some envelopes, after which he picked up the newspaper as if it had just occurred to him that it might prove entertaining, and, this done, the boys hurried out of the shop lest the clerk should attempt to enter into conversation regarding that which Eliphalet Barnes had done.

Once on the sidewalk again Ezra would have scanned the printed sheets to learn if there was anything new regarding that matter in which they were so deeply interested; but Dick stopped him by saying nervously:

“Wait till we’re down the harbor! It won’t do to let all the people see us huntin’ over the paper.”

Ezra put the purchases in his pocket without a word; but he was beginning to think that his partner was growing altogether too timid, because it required quite a stretch of the imagination to suppose that two lads would be suspected of being implicated in a crime simply because of being seen reading a newspaper.

To Dick’s great relief of mind, no one made any attempt to engage them in conversation as they walked toward the dock where the dory had been left, and little time was lost in setting off for the Phœbe, both boys rowing steadily until they were a full mile from the town, when Master Marshall said eagerly:

“Now give me that paper, an’ we’ll see what’s said about the lobster smack that did Mr. Barnes’ trick for him.”

He quickly found that for which he was seeking,

and there was a look of dismay on his face as he cried:

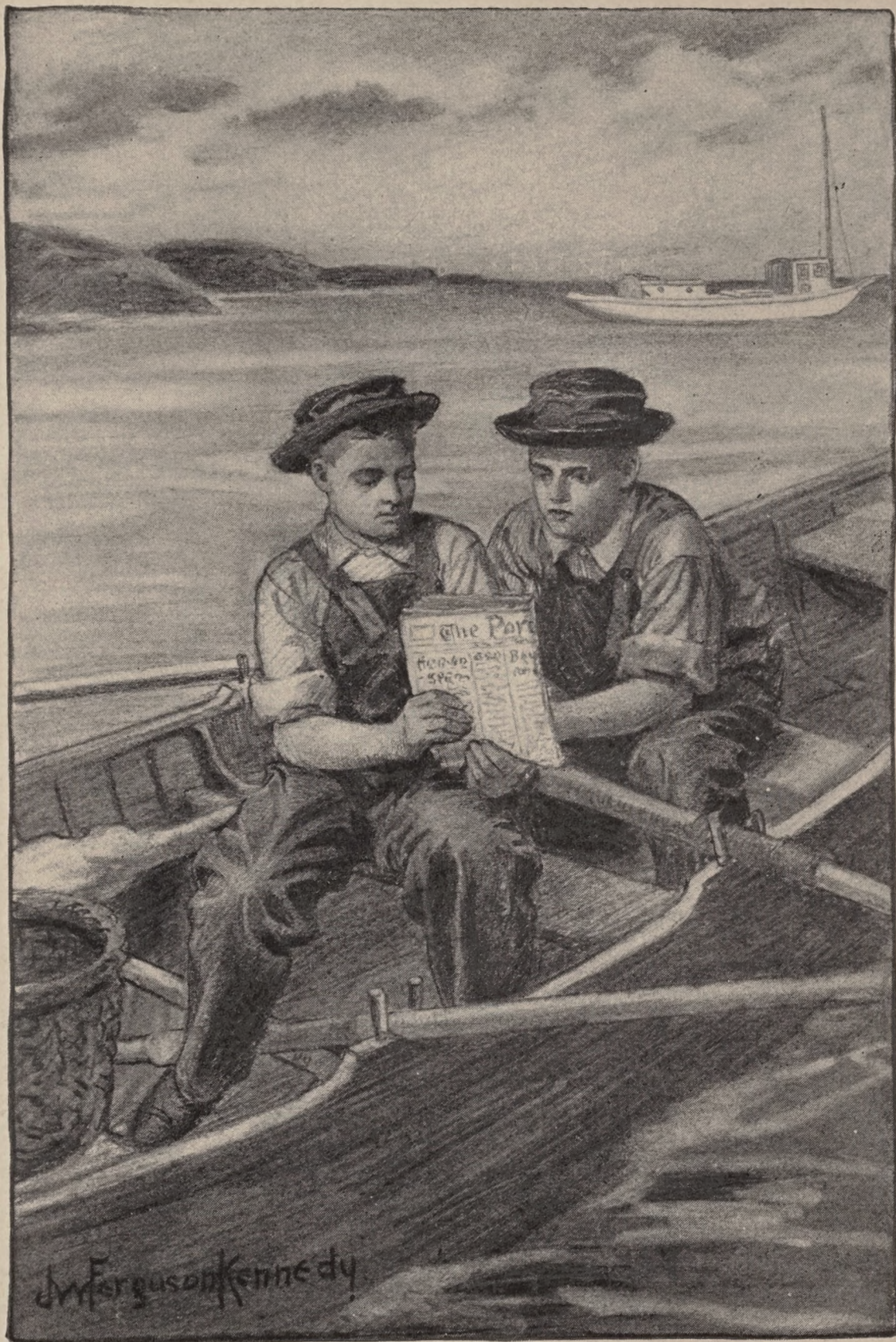
“Listen to this! I tell you that we’ll be mighty lucky if some of the folks down this way don’t take it into their heads to pull us up with a sharp turn!”

Then Dick read the following:

“THE VETERAN SMUGGLER AGAIN.

“The officers who are on the track of those who aided the Chinaman to escape from Vinalhaven, after he had probably been smuggled over the border, are not inclined to give out very much in the way of information; but our reporters have learned that there is no question but the veteran smuggler, so well known along the coast from Boothbay to Calais, had a hand in the matter. It is quite certain he learned of what was on foot before leaving the jail in Portland, where he had been serving a sentence for smuggling brandy, and brought with him a power boat, or a lobster smack, it is not certain which, to finish the job. What Eliphalet Barnes doesn’t know about running liquids or Chinese across the border isn’t worth knowing, and this time he has landed his Chinaman in good shape, for no clue to the whereabouts of the fellow has been picked up.

“Barnes defies the officers to connect him in any way with the matter, since no one has been found who can swear that he ever even saw the pig-tailed fugitive, although it is generally believed that Eliphalet carried the Chinaman away from Boothbay in a dory, transferring him to the power boat outside the harbor. The officers believe their only hope of bring-



“WE SURE DID GET INTO A SCRAPE WHEN WE TOOK THAT
TWENTY DOLLARS.”

ing Barnes to justice is to first get their hands on those who were in charge of the steamer, and to that end all their efforts will be directed."

"We sure did get ourselves into a scrape when we took that twenty dollars," Ezra said half to himself when his partner ceased reading. "I can't wonder that the people down this way are curious regarding lobster smacks, an' it'll be a big piece of luck if we don't get into a mighty tight box before it is possible to move the Phœbe!"

"Why is it printed here that the officers are huntin' for our craft? I thought the lawyers father hired told the customs officers the whole story?" Dick asked nervously, and Ezra replied in a soothing tone:

"The newspaper writers must be guessin' at a whole lot; it says in the beginnin' that the officers won't give out much information. Perhaps we're more scared than hurt."

"We're scared all right," Dick said grimly, and then the two boys relapsed into silence, neither speaking until they had arrived within sight of the Phœbe, when Ezra cried in a tone of alarm:

"They've found us out already! Look at that swarm of boats alongside the smack! Do you suppose they count on arrestin' us?"

Dick's face paled as he gazed at the scene, which certainly was not calculated to reassure boys with guilty consciences.

There were at least four dories alongside the Phœbe, and a number of men were moving about

on the smack's deck as if waiting for someone. Tommy was flitting here and there, but he also was on the lookout, and could be seen pointing toward his employers, as if calling attention to the fact that they were returning.

"Shall we keep on, or try to give them the slip by pullin' back to town?" Dick asked in a tremulous whisper, and several seconds elapsed before Ezra replied in a voice that was none too steady:

"There's nothin' for it but to keep on. What good would it do to make any attempt at runnin' away if these people have found out that we were the ones who carried the Chinaman to Portland? We've got to face the music, Dick, an' the sooner we have it over the better we'll feel. Surely the lawyer your father has hired ought to help us some little, although I reckon we've got to go to jail for a while, which means good-bye to the business."

The tears were very near Ezra's eyelids as he ceased speaking, and Dick had such a big lump in his throat that he was kept busy trying to swallow it, therefore no reply could be expected from him.

Steadily the boys pulled toward their doom, as they thought, never turning to look at the smack until they heard Tommy's voice in a triumphant tone:

"Here's where we take on a cargo even if the sparker has gone wrong! Why don't you fellers put a little more beef on the oars, for these men don't want to hang 'round all night!"

"What are they here for?" Ezra cried, finding it very difficult to prevent a tremor in his voice.

"To sell lobsters, of course. There are nigh to

four hundred alongside waitin' to be counted, an' I'm allowin' we can get more 'twixt now an' to-morrow night. What made you stay so long? I've been givin' out that you'd be back before noon."

The partners glanced at each other much as if ashamed, and Dick said in a whisper:

"There's more business in Tommy's little finger than I've got in my whole body, an' we came near runnin' away because he was workin' in our interest!"

"We've shown ourselves to be big fools; but there's no need tellin' anybody of it," Ezra replied in a low tone, and then the dory bumped against the side of the smack.

Five minutes later the work of taking the lobsters aboard was begun, and for the time being the partners forgot that they were probably being hunted down by the officers of the law.

Not until three hundred and eight marketable lobsters were put into the Phœbe's well and paid for, did the lessees of the smack have an opportunity to learn how ably Master Downing had labored in their behalf, and then it was the fishermen who declared that, in their opinion, it would be possible to take on a full cargo within three days, if the lads were ready to pay at the rate of eight cents per pound.

"You seem to be pretty decent boys, judgin' from the one we've been chinnin' with, an' we'd like to do you a good turn, 'specially when it's money in our pockets," one of the fishermen said as he got into his boat. "By mornin' we can send you three or four others who've got a week's catch on hand, an'

in the meantime we'll come 'round this way when we pull pots, instead of chuckin' the lobsters inter the car."

It was when the last visitor had departed that Ezra asked Tommy how he succeeded in letting the fishermen know they were ready to take a cargo aboard, and Master Downing very modestly explained his "scheme," saying in conclusion:

"You staid away so long that I begun to think the men would believe I was tryin' to fool 'em, an' it didn't make me feel any too good to hear 'em talkin' 'bout Eliphalet Barnes an' the lobster smack he'd hired to run off Chinamen in."

"Did they know about it too?" Dick asked in dismay.

"They sure did, an' I allow there ain't a fisherman between here an' Portland that don't know all about it by this time. I wonder if the officers have done anythin' yet?"

For reply, Ezra read to him the paragraph in the newspaper, and when he was come to the end Master Downing, instead of being thoroughly frightened as his employers had thought would be the case, said placidly:

"The only thing for us is to keep on buyin' lobsters the best we know how, an' hold our tongues. That's Campebello island yonder, an' one of the men told me I could pick up a good many there. How would it do to run over in the mornin'?"

"I reckon you'd better go ahead an' do whatever you think best, Tommy," Dick said with a laugh.

"When this firm started out Ezra thought he was

the only one who knew anythin' 'bout lobsters; but I'm allowin' you've got him beat out of sight."

"I reckon you telegraphed all right?" Master Downing said questioningly, without seemingly paying any attention to the praise bestowed upon him by his employer, and when Ezra assured him that they had performed their portion of the day's work properly, he added, "Then I'll see what can be done for dinner. We're bound to eat, even if the sparker has gone back on us, an' I'm feelin' mighty empty. What do you say to another lobster chowder?"

"That will fit in just right, now that we've got over bein' scared," Ezra said with a cheery laugh. "Take a couple of lobsters so's to have enough, an' early in the mornin' I'll see if I can't get a mess of fresh fish."

Then the partners lent their "crew" a hand in the work of cooking dinner, and when the meal was come to an end they were feeling so much better in mind that Ezra told of all that had frightened them since starting out to send the telegram.

"I'm allowin' all hands of us are likely to get it pretty rough before this 'ere business of smugglin' a Chinaman is wound up; but that's no reason why we should be scared to death more'n half the time," Master Downing replied philosophically. "Things will come along jest about so fast an' hard, whether you're watchin' out for 'em or not, an' so long as matters can't be changed by gettin' all stewed up over 'em, I believe in takin' it easy while you can."

Having thus expressed his opinion, Tommy set about washing the dishes, and his employers were

not so selfish as to remain idle while he was at work.

The boys turned in very early on this night, for there was much sleep to be made up even though they had remained in their bunks so late that morning, and when Ezra awakened another day had come.

There was no fire in the cook-stove; Tommy's bunk was empty, and never a sound came from the deck to tell that he was attending to the morning duties.

There was something so odd about this absence of the boy who was always hunting for work to perform, that Master Upton hastened on deck without waiting to dress, and was none the wiser on looking around carefully, except that he came to know the dory was also missing.

"Turn out, Dick! Tommy has gone off somewhere in the dory!"

"Well, I don't know how I can bring him back," Dick replied as he crept out of his bunk lazily. "What's he up to now?"

"That's what I wish we knew. You don't suppose he's thinkin' to give us the slip because of that Chinaman business, eh?"

"What? Tommy?" and Dick laughed boisterously. "Haven't you come to know that young fisherman well enough by this time, to understand that he wouldn't leave us even though it was a case of goin' to prison all by his lonesome if he staid? He's got some scheme in his head, an' it has to do with gettin' a cargo, or I'm further out of my reckonin' than I ever was before. Tommy comes pretty near bein' our boss, an' he knows it; you couldn't

drive him away with a club while there were lobsters to be bought."

"Well, it's a case of gettin' our own breakfast, no matter what has taken him away, so turn to an' do your share," Ezra said just a trifle discontentedly, for after having been waited upon by such a good cook as was Master Downing, it seemed almost a hardship to be thrown on his own resources.

The meal had been prepared, and was very nearly eaten, when Tommy returned, heated by the exercise of rowing, and ready for anything in the way of food that might be put before him.

"Didn't know what had become of me, eh?" he said cheerily, seating himself at the table without ceremony. "I kind'er allowed you'd be surprised; but it seemed a shame to waken you when there was no real need of it. I turned out about sunrise, an' it struck me that it would be a savin' of time if I went over to Campebello island to see the fishermen there. I've done quite a lot of business, an' reckon we'll take in a slat of lobsters between now an' night. 'Cordin' to all accounts, the folks down this way haven't been gettin' eight cents for a long spell, an' are keen to sell, thinkin' you're so green to your job that you don't really know how much ought'er be paid, so they'll get the best of us while they can. I kind'er helped 'em keep up that idee, so don't give it away."

"An' you've fixed things to your likin', eh?" Dick asked with a sly glance at Ezra, to remind him that he had suspected this hard-working lad of having

attempted to run away from the trouble which threatened.

"I did for a fact, though the job ain't finished yet, 'cause I've got to pull up shore 'bout a mile as soon as breakfast is over."

"What's that for?"

"Well, you see I came across a fisherman layin' at anchor, who said he'd put me on to where all the lobster catchers lived, if I'd bring some stuff over here for him, an' of course I jumped at the chance, seein's I'd never been on the island before."

"What was it you brought over?" Ezra asked with mild curiosity.

"I don't know; it's a big slat of somethin', an' I'll finish the job now, for I'm through eatin'."

"I'll go with you," Dick cried quickly, "an' that'll leave Ezra to wash the dishes."

Then, as if fearing that his partner might not agree to such a division of labor, Dick hurried on deck, and, on looking down into the dory that lay alongside, saw two large packages, the wrappings of which appeared to be old bags.

"I wonder what's inside?" he asked mildly, and Tommy said with a laugh:

"It don't make any difference so long as they're to be carried 'cordin' to agreement. Jump in an' we'll be off!"

The boys, each pulling a pair of oars, rowed off at their best speed, and after running along the shore for a mile or more, arrived at a small pier near where a short row of stakes, not unlike an old fish-weir, ran out into the water.

"This must be the place," Tommy said with a sigh of relief. "The fisherman told me to sing out for 'Jack,' an' somebody would come, so here goes!"

He repeated the name at the full strength of his lungs four or five times before receiving any answer, and Dick was on the point of proposing that they give it up as a bad job, believing Tommy had made some mistake as to the location, when a man suddenly appeared from behind an overturned boat.

Coming to the water's edge, he said sharply:

"Don't raise such a racket! Anybody would think you wanted the whole state to hear you!"

"I don't care who hears so long as I deliver this stuff 'cordin' to agreement," and Master Downing swung the dory inshore, running her nose on the beach directly in front of the stranger, who seized one of the packages, carrying it inland hurriedly.

"Stay where you are!" he cried in a peremptory tone, on seeing that Tommy had stepped ashore as if to assist in the unloading, and after dropping the burden he carried, hastened back to take up the remaining package.

"You tell 'em the next time they send any of this stuff over, to get somebody to handle it who's got common sense," the man said surlily as he started inland once more. "I don't allow to have dealing's with a noisy brute like you, who can't hold your tongue."

"Don't run away with the idee that I'm goin' to bring anythin' more to a sticklebat like you!" Tommy cried wrathfully as he pushed off the dory, and added in a lower tone when they were well clear

of the shore, "I got the best end of that trade, so I can afford to put up with some of his lip. If it hadn't been for the fisherman who sent the stuff over, I'd never known where to find the lobster catchers."

Half an hour later the dory was alongside the Phœbe once more, and Master Downing went into the cuddy to make certain Ezra had set it to rights in proper fashion.

CHAPTER VIII

MR. BARNES

As a matter of course the boys discussed with no little animation the reception which had been accorded Master Downing by the man for whom it was to be supposed they had done a favor.

Both Ezra and Dick were inclined to lose their tempers because of what had been said; but Tommy treated it quite in the light of a bargain in which he had had the advantage.

“If we take in five or six hundred lobsters this afternoon, I’m reckonin’ we’re gettin’ the best end of that trade, an’ I’d have been willin’ to do a good deal more’n what I did, for the sake of gettin’ at the fishermen without spendin’ a whole day huntin’ ’round. Old Sticklebat didn’t do us any harm with his tongue, an’ what’s more, he carried the stuff ashore himself, when I was countin’ on havin’ to lug it quite a bit.”

The partners were not inclined to look at the matter in as philosophical a light; to their minds that which had been done was a courtesy on the part of their employee, and instead of showing gratitude, the stranger had heaped abuse upon them through Tommy.

“If that’s all we’re goin’ to have to fret about on this cruise, I’ll be well satisfied,” Master Downing

said contentedly, and then he took up his station in the wheel-house that he might get an early glimpse of those whom he believed would come to trade.

Within an hour the young lobster buyers were busily engaged adding to their cargo. Fisherman after fisherman, whether from the island or the nearby shore it could not be said, arrived, some bringing a catch numbering no more than twelve, and others with fifty or sixty, until, before it was time to even think of dinner, they had taken on board the Phœbe, and paid for, two hundred and ten lobsters fit for the market, in addition to having half a dozen joes for their own use.

“I’m beginnin’ to think that we’re doin’ even better than if the Phœbe hadn’t broken down,” Ezra said gleefully when they were alone once more, and had time in which to take an account of stock. “It isn’t costin’ us a great deal to lay here, an’ I’m not certain but that we’re gettin’ quite as many lobsters as if we were runnin’ ’round usin’ up gasoline. But it surely seemed like a serious accident when the sparker gave way.”

“There’s nothin’ bad comes to a feller that he can’t get some good out of,” Master Downing said with the air of a philosopher, as he set about frying joes for dinner. “There’s good business to be done all along this part of the coast for buyers who are willin’ to come reg’larly, an’ pay a fair price; but some of these traders seem to think that it’s a smart trick, when they get a good ways from home, to whittle down a fisherman to the lowest inch. You can’t make anythin’ out of sich funny snaps, for

they're bound to be found out in the long run, an' then him that plays 'em has to suffer."

The three boys were in the cuddy while thus discussing the situation and at the same time preparing dinner, when the Phœbe quivered under a sharp shock on the starboard side of the hull, which was immediately followed by the sound as of some one leaping on the deck, and Master Downing cried cheerily:

"Here's more of a cargo for yer; but unless there's a big slat alongside I may as well keep on gettin' dinner."

Ezra and Dick started at the same time to go up the companion-way stairs; but both stopped very suddenly when they saw through the open hatch the face of Eliphalet Barnes, and on it was a most disagreeable grin.

"Hello, my brave lads! You're lookin' mighty snug down there, eh?"

"What do you want?" Ezra asked angrily, and Mr. Barnes replied as he came into the cuddy, literally shouldering the partners aside when they would have disputed his entrance:

"Why, to have a little bit of a talk with you, of course. It seems I came jest at the right time to get my share of the dinner."

"You'll get nothin' here," Dick said angrily, "an' what's more, you're goin' over the rail in short order! After the trick you played us off Vinalhaven, which is likely to send us to prison, it takes a good deal of nerve to show yourself where we are."

"Now, now, lad, don't get excited. In the first place there's no reason for it, an' then agin it's a

bad trait. I allow that more'n once I've let myself get mixed up in the same fashion; but never found that it paid except once. Then I must confess it did, when I had a squabble aboard this smack, for if you hadn't set me adrift just at that time, I'd never been able to turn as good a trade as came my way later. I reckon you landed the sick man all right, else I would have heard about it before this?"

Mr. Barnes, while speaking, had seated himself on one of the lockers, taken from his pocket a short, black pipe, and was lighting it as calmly and contentedly as if he had been a valued guest rather than an exceedingly disagreeable intruder.

"That sick man was a Chinaman, an' if we hadn't found it out before, we'd know it now because of readin' an' account of your exploits in the papers," Dick said, his anger increasing momentarily. "Through you we've got into a scrape that's likely to cost us all the money we can make this summer! So the sooner you get out of here the better we'll be pleased."

As he spoke, the lad seized a stout stick which Tommy had brought aboard to be whittled into kindlings, and stood brandishing it threateningly.

"Now see here, young feller," Mr. Barnes began with a certain seriousness of tone which was almost menacing. "We're goin' to have a bit of a chat before I go ashore, an' considerin' all that's happened since we last met, I'll allow it's to your interest to take part in it. We won't have any rough house unless you're determined to act like a bloomin' idjut, an' in case we get to playin' a bit tough I shall come

out of the trouble considerably ahead, seein's I'm prepared for whatever kind of a row you lads may be foolish enough to raise," and Mr. Barnes tapped his pocket as if to intimate that there he had a weapon.

"What is it you've got to say?" Ezra asked sharply, understanding that, although they were three to one, it would not be well for them to attempt to force the visitor over the rail, because the chances were many that he had friends in the immediate vicinity. Even though the crew of the Phœbe might succeed, which was doubtful, in temporarily getting the best of a fight, it could readily be turned into a costly victory. "Say what you've got in your mind, an' then go, for in addition to the fact that we have no desire to talk to you, it's dangerous, after all that has happened, for us to be seen in your company."

"I'm allowin' it might be a bit awkward if some of them as live in Eastport should see us together jest now, for then it would be said that yours was the smack that carried off my sick friend, an' the customs officers would take you in charge. But seein's how this 'ere craft is layin' where she is, with no show that anybody except friends of mine will come alongside, we've got all the show we want for a quiet little chat."

"Well, drive ahead with it then," Dick screamed, almost unable to control himself, so irritating was the sight of the smuggler smoking his pipe in the Phœbe's cuddy as if he had every right to remain there. "Get through with it, an' then go, for if it should happen that some one came alongside who

wasn't a friend of yours, I'd take the risk of what might come to us, an' give information concernin' the part you played in sendin' the Chinaman to Portland."

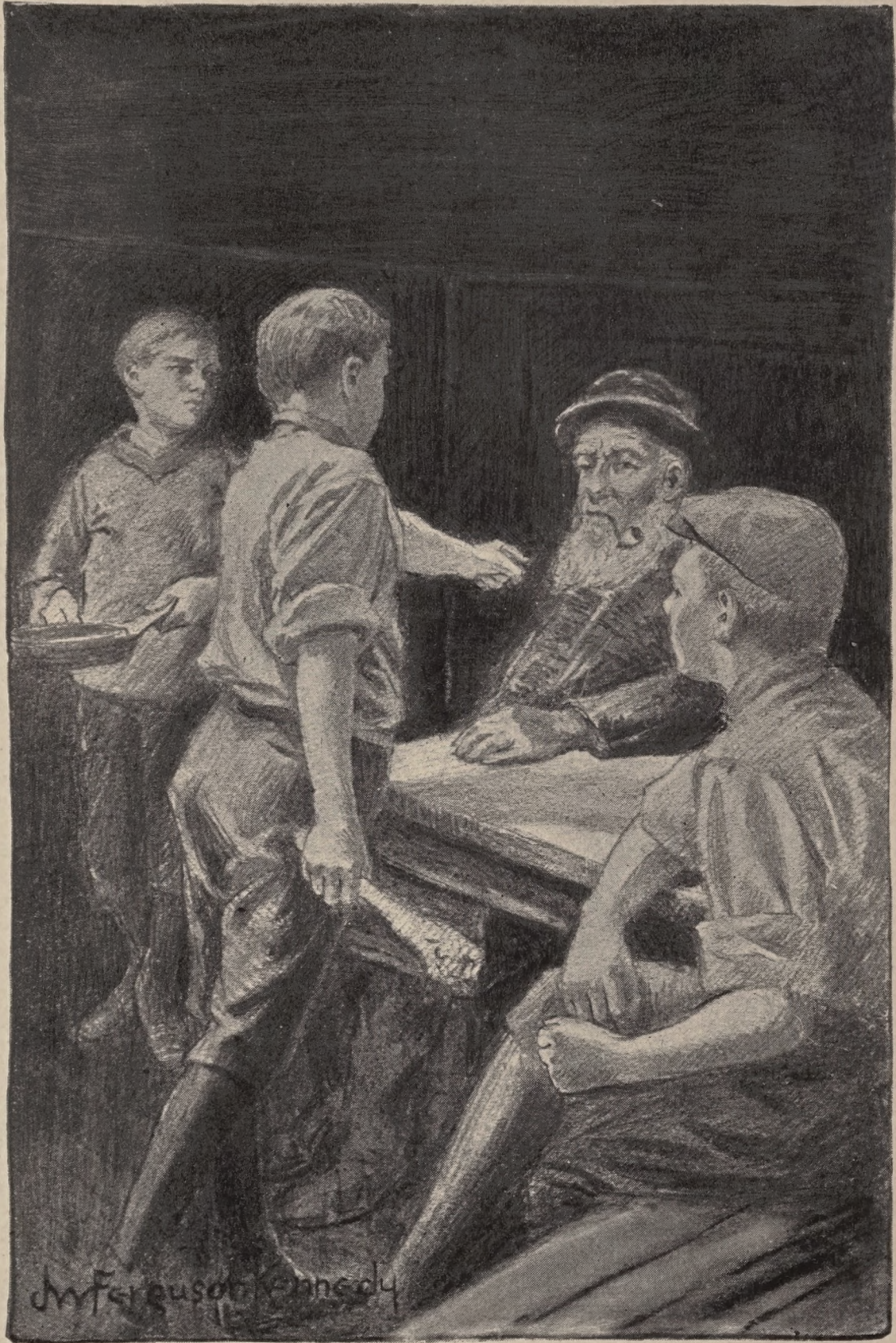
"An' there's where you'd be actin' mighty foolish, my son, because in the first place you're as deep in the mud as I am in the mire, an' a little deeper, 'cordin' to the way I look at it. It's dead certain you carried the Chinaman to Portland, an' unless I'm way off my reckonin' you've already owned up to it. Now so far as proof that I was mixed up in the matter is concerned, there's nothin' but your word, an' I'm allowin' that wouldn't go very far after all that's been said an' done, because it would look as if you was only tryin' to get out of a mighty tight place. To begin with, I want you lads to run over to Campebello an' take aboard some truck I've got there, to be put ashore anywhere roundabout Casco bay."

"Some of your smugglin' business, eh?" Master Downing asked, speaking for the first time since the visitor had entered.

"Yes, that's jest what it is, my son, an' you can make more out of the job, without takin' any risks, than you could by freightin' three cargoes of lobsters."

"You must be crazy or drunk, to think we'd do anythin' of the kind," Ezra said decidedly, and striving hard to keep his temper under control.

"How do you make that out?" Mr. Barnes asked with a certain insolence of tone and manner well calculated to arouse the anger of his hearers.



“ ‘ WE’RE NOT IN THE SMUGGLIN’ BUSINESS, NOR DON’T INTEND
TO TAKE ANY PART IN IT.’ ”

“ We’re not in the smugglin’ business, nor don’t intend to take any part in it. As a matter of fact, if you could fill our well with lobsters this minute in an honest trade, we’d refuse to have anything whatsoever to do with you, even though the whole business was legitimate.”

“ You might have talked that yesterday,” and Mr. Barnes seemed to find it difficult to check his mirth. “ Then you could have said that carryin’ the sick man was a mistake; but when it had been shown that after doin’ the job an’ takin’ big money for it — an’ you know that twenty dollars for carryin’ a passenger from Vinalhaven to Portland was so far out of reason that unless your wits had gone wool-gatherin’ entirely you’d have known there was somethin’ crooked. So I say, that after cartin’ the Chinaman off, you followed me straight here, an’ inside of twenty-four hours after comin’ to anchor smuggled a lot of brandy ashore, makin’ it appear all the while as if you were honest lobster buyers.”

“ What do you mean? ” Dick cried as he advanced threateningly toward the speaker, who replied quietly as he leaned back against the bunk, thrusting his thumbs in the arm-holes of his vest:

“ Mean? Why nothin’ more’n to remind you of a little game you’ve been workin’ since comin’ here to meet me ’cordin’ to agreement, for that’s what the customs officers will say, an’ if it isn’t true, how does it happen that you bring over from Campebello a slat of my brandy? ”

“ Campebello? ” Ezra repeated in bewilderment. “ Even if we had brought anythin’ of the kind from

there, how could it be called smugglin', or have anythin' to do with you?"

"Why, jest this, my son: Campebello is part of the Dominion of Canada, an' this 'ere is the United States. What did you do when you struck Eastport? You went ashore an' telegraphed. Then you bought a newspaper to see whether you'd been found out or not, an' learnin' that the customs officers wasn't dead sure which smack carried the Chinaman, you are feelin' perky enough to go over to Campebello, get two dozen quarts of the best brandy, an' land it here inside of Quoddy Head."

"When do you claim we did that?" Ezra cried, now almost beside himself with rage.

"Why, this mornin', of course. It ain't over three hours since you put the stuff ashore. I wouldn't dare try sich a game where I'm well known, an' likely to run across them as are not friends. But you did, an' it was worked all right. I've got plenty of proof, if it should come to a show down."

The stick dropped from Dick's fingers; it seemed as if all his strength had suddenly deserted him when he realized that Mr. Barnes had played another and even more serious trick upon them. Because of neglecting, or forgetting, his study of geography, the fact that the island of Campebello was English territory had not come into his mind until this moment.

Now, as if the matter had been called to his attention for the first time, he realized that those packages wrapped in old bags which he and Tommy had carried up the coast in the dory, might well have been made up of bottles, and there was no question in

the lad's mind but that for the second time they were guilty of an offense against the law.

"I reckon now you're comin' to see that we'd better have a little quiet chat, eh?" Mr. Barnes asked with a leer, "an' seein's a word dropped by me would bring about your arrest, it'll pay to come to my terms regardin' this last job I'm talkin' about, for the sake of keepin' my mouth shut?"

The partners were literally unable to reply because of the fear which had come upon them. Even Master Downing, who was usually ever ready with a pert reply or timely suggestion, stood looking into the frying-pan where the bits of breaded lobster were being burned to a crust, as if searching there with his eyes for some solution to this most serious and difficult problem.

The smuggler waited fully half a minute for one of his hosts to speak, and failing in getting a reply, said in a business-like tone, and one which he evidently intended should sound friendly:

"I hate to crowd lads like you when you're down, an' I'm willin' to go as far as to say that I wouldn't have done it if you'd been half way decent with me when I was lookin' for a passage to Swans island. I ain't sayin' but that I should have shoved my sick friend off on you, no matter how things had gone on that first day we met; but it was all fair an' above-board, seein's how you took about six prices for the job, consequently you can't do very much in the way of grumblin'. Of course I may as well admit that I gave you the chance to smuggle the brandy, seein's you fell right into my hands, so to speak. I was

aboard the fisherman, an' saw you pullin' that way, so had plenty of time to fix up for the game. Now the fact is that you've been reg'larly smugglin' across the line, an' I'm allowin' that if you should tell any fair-minded judge you didn't know what the stuff was you brought away from Campebello, he'd feel mighty near positive you was lyin'. I'm willin' to let up on you from this time out, if you'll carry the cargo we've been talkin' about. It won't interfere with your lobster business, because it ain't so bulky as all that, an' I'm givin' you the thing straight when I say there ain't one chance in a hundred you'll come to grief over it."

Again Mr. Barnes waited for the reply. Failing, as before, to receive any, he stepped to the stove, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, which he carefully put in his pocket, and went toward the companion-way.

"You are tied up here, as I know, until the sparker you telegraphed for shows up, consequently there's plenty of time for you to turn over in your mind what I've said. I ain't afraid you'll get the best of me in any way, because I've got my eye out, do you see, an' there are friends enough of mine in Eastport to let me know jest when the stuff comes for you by express. You can count on seein' me agin within an hour after the sparker gets here. If then you have made up your mind to stand in with me friendly like for this one job, well an' good; but if so be you put up a kick, you'll find yourself arrested for smugglin' in short order."

"You don't dare show yourself to the officers long

enough to tell what we've done," Tommy said, suddenly wheeling about from the stove and facing the enemy.

"Right you are, my son, an' I don't need to when it comes to fetchin' you up with a sharp turn, for there are enough around here whose hands are clean of smugglin', so far's anybody exceptin' me knows, who can give all the information that's needed. Why, bless you, lads, can't you see that I've got to be backed up by more'n one on this coast, to be able to keep in the business as long as I have, an' even now, when it's claimed the customs officers are lookin' for me, ain't I movin' about without much danger? Think it over, as I've told you, an' look at the thing from all sides. You'll see there's no other way except to do as I tell you; but once you've set a single lot of goods ashore for me, I'll call it quits."

Then Mr. Barnes went up the companion-way, and the half-dazed, half-frightened lads in the cuddy could hear him going over the rail into his boat, while a few seconds later the splashing of oars in the water told that he was rowing away.

Not until a full minute had elapsed from the time they ceased to hear anything betokening the whereabouts of the smuggler, did either of the lads speak, and then Dick, clenching his fist and pacing to and fro in the narrow cuddy, gave way to exclamations of anger and imprudent threats.

"You won't get out of the scrape by ravin'," Master Downing said after listening to the torrent of words a moment or two. "There's no question but that Eliphalet Barnes has got the bulge on us, as

things stand now, an' if we keep on blowin' off steam he'll still have it. What's needed is to figger how we can get the best of him."

"Now you're talkin' like a simple!" Dick cried angrily. "How is it possible for us to get the best of him with the smack layin' here helpless? Of course you may say that we could get up to town an' sneak off on the train, if there's one runnin' in this section of the country. But I'm of the opinion that he wasn't making any brags when he told about people bein' interested in his smugglin', an' we should come to grief before it was possible to get away. Besides, I'm not goin' to abandon this smack, for I'd rather let them arrest me ten times over than go home an' tell father we'd been frightened out of our wits by a jail bird."

"There's no question but that he has frightened us," Ezra said moodily, and Tommy added with a grimace:

"We needn't squabble over that part of it; but the idea of runnin' away from the smack never come into my head. It seems to me that between the three of us we ought'er be able to rig up some plan for gettin' the best of Eliphalet Barnes."

"Suppose you set about the job, an' see what kind of a fist you can make of it?" Dick cried sarcastically, and Master Downing, seeming to believe that the proposition was made in good faith, said quietly:

"All right, I'll do it; but I'm reckonin' we may as well finish what we'd begun. This 'ere lobster has gone up for a fact; but I'll get another, an' after

we've had dinner perhaps I'll get a scheme in my mind."

"Yes, *perhaps*," Dick said angrily; but Tommy gave no heed to his employer's ill temper.

While he prepared a second meal to take the place of that which had been burned, little or no conversation was indulged in.

The young traders had sufficient food for thought to keep them silent, and Master Downing was so busily engaged concocting his plan that he surely could not waste any time in talking.

The meal was eaten in silence. Dick and Ezra, thoroughly disturbed in mind, soon satisfied their appetites, for food just then was almost distasteful; but the cook ate heartily, and with apparent pleasure, until very little remained on the table.

Then, leaning back against the bunk in a comfortable position, he said slowly, as if not quite certain of being able to choose the proper words:

"I've got a plan which I am goin' to tell you about; but it don't follow that you've got to agree to it. It's only what I'd do if I was runnin' this 'ere smack, which I ain't, an' perhaps it wouldn't work. Then agin it might."

"Go on with your plan, an' don't make so much talk about it," Dick said irritably, whereupon Tommy, raising his knees until he could press them against the edge of the table, in order to render his position yet more comfortable, continued:

"As I was sayin', if this 'ere smack was mine, an' I'd started out in the business same's you have, an' Mr. Barnes turned up like he's done, I'd buckle down

to writin' a letter to Dick's father, tellin' him all the whole story. Then I'd pull up to town in the night, drop that letter in the post office when I was pretty sure nobody would see me, an' if the sparker got here I wouldn't go to the express office for it. Now supposin' Mr. Marshall gets word of what Eliphalet Barnes is countin' on makin' us do? What's goin' to be his move? Why he's goin' right to that lawyer you fellers have hired, an' that lawyer's goin' to the officers, an' biff! Before you know it down comes two or three to tackle Mr. Eliphalet, and pip! inter jail he goes! Now it ain't much of a plan —"

"It's a mighty good one," Ezra cried excitedly, as he started to his feet. "Neither Dick nor I could have thought out anythin' which would have come so near promisin' success, an' yet it's simple enough. Why we didn't think of it, I can't understand."

"It's just because you didn't have the time, that's all," Master Downing replied, his face crimsoning with pleasure because of the praise bestowed. "It would have come to you after a spell. You see, you fellers bought letter paper and envelopes just as if you was gettin' ready for this thing."

"But we haven't any postage stamps, an' how can we put a letter in the office at night when no one is around, without them?"

"I'd thought of that part of it," Tommy replied calmly, "an' had figgered out that it wouldn't do for us to pull up to Eastport an' buy any, 'cause if what Eliphalet has said is true, why the folks there would let him know what we'd been about. Now here is

Quoddy Head light, an' the keepers are bound to be honest men who wouldn't smuggle, else they couldn't keep on workin' for the United States. Whenever folks get 'round where there's a light-house they most always want to look at it. Now what's to hinder my loafin' over there careless-like this afternoon, jest to pass the time away, an' before I leave, buy a postage stamp? They'll be sure to have some."

"Tommy, you are a jewel!" Ezra cried enthusiastically, "an' your plan is first-class all the way through."

"Except that if Eliphalet Barnes sees one of us goin' over to the light-house he'll suspect we've gone to give information, an' we may find ourselves in a still worse hole," Dick objected, whereupon Tommy, still calm and serene, replied:

"I thought of that too, though it wouldn't be any more'n reasonable that a greenhorn like me would want to see the light-house; but I ain't very smart if I can't give Barnes the slip, unless some of the keepers are standin' in with him, which ain't reasonable to suppose. Any way, 'cordin' to how I look at it, it's mighty little risk we're takin', an' if we can't afford to run that much of a chance, we ought'er stay under that old pirate's thumb as long as we live."

"Go ahead, Tommy, an' run this thing to suit yourself, for I believe you're the only one of the three that's got head enough to do it!" Ezra exclaimed. "Don't stop for the work here; we'll wash the dishes, an' I'll set you ashore."

"I don't count on usin' the dory at all," Master Downing replied. "You see nobody knows how

many are watchin' along the shore, 'cause if Eliphalet Barnes has made up his mind to run this thing through, he's goin' to look after it mighty sharp. Now I kind'er allowed I'd roll up the clothes in my bunk like as if I'd turned in, in case anybody comes below, an' you could hint, if you ain't too squirmy 'bout tellin' a lie, that I was takin' my trick below. Then it would be only a case of droppin' over the rail, an' swimmin' ashore to where them rocks make out. A feller will have mighty sharp eyes that sees me sneakin' up the bank, I'm tellin' you."

"But what will the folks at the light-house think if you come there drippin' with water?"

"They won't have a chance to think anything 'bout it. On a hot day like this I'm allowin' I'll be pretty well dried out by the time I reach there. It must be two or three miles, an' if I haven't got into shape, it won't be much of a job to hang 'round till I am."

"I guess we'd better let him work this in his own way," Ezra said laughingly, "an' not attempt to have any finger in the pie, because it looks very much as if we should do nothin' more than spoil it."

"You'll have to come inter the plan far enough to give me a couple of cents for a postage stamp," Tommy added, and Dick cried, as if at last he had found a weak spot in Master Downing's plans:

"What will a stamp be good for by the time you swim out here again?"

"Yes, I kind'er turned that over in my mind, too, an' figgered I'd get a piece of paper at the light-house, so's to wrap it up, as I'd be apt to do any way.

Then I could hold it between my teeth when I come aboard; an' I'm allowin' there wouldn't be very much damage done to it, else I'm a pretty poor sort of a duck in the water."

Ezra took the bag from the table, drew out half a dozen pennies, which Tommy put in his pocket, and without any further conversation the lad went on deck.

Ezra followed as soon as he could replace the money in the drawer; but it was too late, if he counted on asking for further details, because the "crew" of the Phœbe had already started.

Three or four yards away, and inshore, was a round, red object which a close observer would have detected as Master Downing's head.

Ezra looked around carefully to assure himself there was no one in sight who might have seen Tommy when he slipped over the rail, and then, taking the precaution to go into the cuddy lest even his whisper should be overheard, he said to Dick:

"That's a great lad, is Tommy Downing, an' I'm beginnin' to believe we'd have come to grief long before this if it hadn't been for him."

"It strikes me we have come to grief already, in fact began on that course before he'd been aboard very long."

"But surely you can't lay the blame at his door of our havin' taken the Chinaman?"

"I'm not layin' the blame at any one's door," Dick replied irritably; "but it's enough to drive a fellow crazy to realize how absolutely we seem to be in the power of that man Barnes! It's more like

some improbable story than a fact, an' if he had had us by the nose, we couldn't have gone accordin' to his ideas any more directly than we have."

"I'll say as Tommy did, that there's no sense in gettin' angry over the matter. Unless you can think of some plan better than he has proposed, let's set about aidin' him in every way."

"What can we do? Surely he doesn't want us to get out an' help him ashore?"

"No, but he'll require that our letters be written between now and sunset, in order that they may be carried to the post office in the night, an' it is goin' to be no slight job, as I look at the matter, to explain to your father how it happens we have made such bloomin' idiots of ourselves for the second time. Yet it really seems to me as if the most suspicious person in the world would have fallen into the trap."

"I reckon you'll have to write the letter, for I can't," Dick said, recovering somewhat from his ill temper under the promptings of his partner.

"But I'm afraid it's a bit beyond me, so suppose both of us try our fists at it, an' then we can pick out the one which seems to explain the matter the clearest. What's more, Dick, we must get about it at once, for there is no knowin' when we shall have a lot of lobster catchers around, an' then anything of the kind will be impossible. I'll stay at the top of the companion-way stairs where I can have a look around now and then so that Barnes shan't catch us at the work, an' we'll start in right away."

Dick could not well afford to refuse this suggestion of his partner's, and in a short time the two

lads were busily engaged trying to set down in words which would be clearly understood, the story of what had happened, and the danger they were in if Barnes, as seemed more than probable, carried out the threats he had made.

Twice before this letter-writing had been finished were the partners forced to cease work in order to attend to those who had come to sell their catch, and although a full hour was thus much the same as wasted, or so it seemed to the anxious lads, they added to their cargo only forty-three lobsters.

During this time nothing had been seen of Eliphallet Barnes; but because he had made himself so thoroughly conversant with their doings in Eastport as to be able to give a detailed account of their movements, it seemed likely that he, or some others belonging to his gang, had the Phœbe under close surveillance.

They could well afford to spend two or three days in keeping watch over her, for it was an opportunity of carrying on their smuggling operations such as would seldom occur. Here was a smack that had not previously visited these waters; she was in command of lads who much the same as represented the well-known firm of Marshall & Jordan of Westbay, and could move from point to point without arousing the suspicions of the customs officers, at least during this first voyage.

It was near to sunset before the letters were finished to the satisfaction of the writers, and up to this time there had been no sign of Master Downing. That he had reached the light-house according to his

own proposition, was virtually certain, as it also was that he would succeed in returning; but whether he might be able to come on board unobserved seemed to be quite another matter, and this doubt was sufficient to keep the boys in a state of mental agitation that was almost painful.

CHAPTER IX

AN OFFICIAL VISIT

It was only natural that the young lobster buyers should exaggerate Eliphalet Barnes' ability to do them harm. Unwittingly they had played into his hands at every turn, and since there could be no question but that they had brought away from Campebello island goods which should have paid a duty, both the lads believed, and with good reason, that it was well within his power to cause their arrest, the result of which would be imprisonment for a certain length of time.

When Master Downing first explained his plan, Dick had little faith that any relief would come of it, so far as they were concerned; but as the time wore on he began to understand that it not only had very many elements of success, but was, in fact, the only step which they could take toward breaking the apparent hold Barnes had upon them.

Ezra, who was in favor of the plan from the time it was first made known, felt confident that it might be carried through without great difficulty, therefore, because it seemed to both the boys by this time that if Tommy could do as he proposed their troubles would be at an end, were their anxieties concerning Master Downing's whereabouts all the greater.

Dick, impatient and irritable because of such sus-

pense, paced to and fro in the cuddy, looking out through the companion-way nearly every moment, without seeing any token of their employee, and giving vent to words which under other circumstances would really have been childish, until Ezra, so anxious that it was as if he could not bear to hear his partner's predictions of disaster, said with no little heat:

“Look here, Dick, whinin' around in this fashion won't mend matters. What's the use of insistin' that Tommy'll run across Mr. Barnes; that he did not get ashore, or that the people at the light-house have picked him up for a smuggler? It's nonsense, an' doesn't help out in any way. I know exactly how you are feelin'; but that isn't any excuse for so much croakin'.”

“I'm not croakin'. I'm only tryin' to show you how easy it would be for him to slip up on the job, an' if he fails we'll be forced to do exactly as that miserable pirate demands.”

“Well, he hasn't failed yet, an' there's no more likelihood of Tommy's comin' to grief if we hold our tongues, an' believe he'll succeed, than if we make ourselves miserable in this fashion. Even if he fails, I'd rather believe for a little while that things are goin' right, than give up all hope at the start. Tommy's showing himself twice as much of a man in this matter as either of us.”

“I don't see how you make out that we are givin' up hope if I speak of the chances for failure?” Dick said sharply.

“Well, but why speak of them? Isn't it just as

well to wait until we find out that things *have* gone wrong? Tommy knows what he's about, an' isn't goin' to take any chances. He can't suspect that we're such babies as to get into a funk because he stays away a little longer than we expected, an' therefore is makin' certain of pullin' through without being seen. Very likely he's hangin' 'round on shore until it shall be so dark that no one can see him when he swims out here."

At this instant the Phœbe heeled ever so slightly, as if a weight had suddenly been put upon the starboard rail, and when Dick, who was standing on the companion-way stairs, looked out through the hatch, an exclamation of joy and relief burst from his lips.

Master Downing was dragging himself over the rail, very wet and uncomfortable looking outwardly; but with an expression of satisfaction on his face which told that matters were progressing much to his liking.

"Better get these postage stamps out so's the wet won't soak into 'em," he said, taking a folded paper from between his teeth. "I couldn't help gettin' a little water on the outside; but if you look after them sharp, they'll be all right."

"How is everything ashore?" Ezra asked, pushing his way past Dick as if believing it might be necessary to lend Tommy a hand.

"I guess things are all right, leastways they look so. Eliphalet Barnes hasn't been able to steal the light-house yet, an' as nigh as I can make out, he didn't see me."

“Did any one think it strange you came ashore for postage stamps?”

“I didn’t give ’em the chance to think anythin’ of that kind. What I wanted was to look at the light-house, as if I’d never seen such a thing, an’ then it was only a case of makin’ out, as if it was somethin’ what didn’t amount to much, that two or three stamps would come handy.”

“Didn’t they want to know how you happened to be there?” Dick asked, as if ready to find in the answer some token of disaster.

“Course they did, an’ I told ’em. They’d seen us towin’ the Phœbe in, an’ asked all about the break-down.”

“You ought not have let them know you came from the smack,” Dick said almost fretfully.

“Why not? They knew I didn’t fly there, an’ if I’d gone to work tryin’ to cook up any kind of a story there was a chance of gettin’ into trouble. It strikes me the best way was to keep as nigh to the truth as possible. Got your letter written?”

“Yes, Dick an’ I both wrote one, so’s to make sure of tellin’ the story correctly, an’ in a way his father could understand exactly how we’re fixed,” Ezra said cheerily. “You’re done your share of the work, Tommy, an’ now I’ll go up to town an’ mail them.”

“You won’t do any such bloomin’ thing,” Master Downing replied decidedly. “You’ve shown yourselves in Eastport before, an’ it seems that folks there knew you come from the Phœbe. I ain’t allowin’ anybody’s goin’ to see me when the letter is

mailed, an' it's just as well we don't take any more chances than's necessary. Two stamps is enough on the letter, so there won't be any question about its goin', an' I'll get away."

"You can't go until after you have had something to eat," Dick interrupted, and Master Downing asked in a tone of profound amazement:

"What's the reason I can't? You jest stand there an' watch me. Say, Ezra, get the letter, will you? What's the use of foolin' 'round? It's so dark now no one is likely to see when I put off from the smack, unless Eliphalet Barnes has got watchers out close around."

"But surely you are goin' to change your clothes, Tommy?" Ezra asked as he turned to obey.

"But surely I ain't. After I've been pullin' that dory for an hour or so, I reckon I'll be dry enough, an' supper'll taste all the better if I wait a spell for it."

It was useless for either of the partners to argue with their employee. The plan was his, and he had evidently decided in his mind how it should be carried out. He believed he could succeed in mailing the letter more secretly than either of the others, and it was useless for them to make any attempt at changing his opinion.

Instead of waiting to discuss the matter, he seized the letter immediately Ezra brought it from the cuddy; wrapped it in an oil-skin which was hanging in the companion-way close at hand, and went over the rail into the dory, saying as he did so:

"You fellers better hang out a ridin'-light, I'm

thinkin', for it's needed while we're layin' here at anchor where any craft is likely to put in, an' besides, it'll show me the way when I come back."

Then he shoved the dory off from the Phœbe, shipped the oars without noise, and pulled away into the gloom silently.

Dick and Ezra remained on deck, after Tommy was lost to view in the darkness, fully half an hour, straining their eyes in the effort to learn whether others might be in the vicinity, and then Master Upton said, speaking for the first time since their employee had left the smack.

"Unless Eliphalet Barnes has some way of hidin' himself other than seems probable, Tommy has got off without being seen, an' now instead of stayin' here eatin' our hearts out for fear this last part of his plan will go wrong, let's busy ourselves by gettin' up a regular feast. He'll be hungry by the time he gets back, an' we should try to make things as comfortable for him as possible, for he's done a power of work since noon."

Dick was not overly eager to act upon this suggestion, but he did not refuse, and the two lads spent all the time that could well be occupied in making ready this dinner which was not likely to be eaten by the lad for whom it was intended, until well toward midnight.

Thanks to such occupation the time seemed to pass much more rapidly than if they had remained in the cuddy listening for sounds betokening the coming of their enemy, Mr. Barnes, and doing nothing save giving themselves up to dismal forebodings.

Master Downing spent four hours in the task of mailing the letter, and when he came on board was quite ready to partake of the meal which had been awaiting him a long while.

As a matter of course Ezra and Dick went on deck to greet him immediately the dory gave token, by rubbing her nose alongside the Phœbe, that the journey had been performed, and both lads questioned him eagerly concerning the result of his journey.

"It's all right," he said in a low tone as he made the boat fast astern; "but we won't talk about it on deck here, for I've the idee that there's some kind of a craft not very far away, from what I heard jest before makin' out your light."

The possibility that Mr. Barnes might be keeping close watch over them during the night, and was already aware that one of the crew had visited the town, reduced the partners to silence, and so cautious was Master Downing that not until they were in the cabin and the hatch drawn over the companion-way, did he begin the story for which his employers were eagerly waiting.

"There's nothin' to be told exceptin' that I rowed up there an' back, so you fellers might as well get the grub on the table, if we're goin' to have it, 'cause I can do my talkin' jest as well while I'm eatin'," and he added as Ezra acted upon this suggestion, "I didn't hear or see anythin' more'n might have been expected on the trip up."

"And then you run into Barnes?" Dick interrupted, whereat Tommy replied with a smile:

“An’ then I didn’t run into anybody. There wasn’t a soul in the street when I went up from the dock to the post office, an’ you can guess I didn’t spend a great deal of time droppin’ the letter into the box. I reckon the people in Eastport go to bed right early, for the only thing that appeared to be awake was a dog, an’ he come mighty near takin’ a piece out of my leg — would, too, if I hadn’t happened to find a club when it was most needed. Comin’ back was about the same as goin’ up, till I got off nearabout where we landed those packages which Eliphalet Barnes says were filled with brandy, an’ then it seemed to me I could make out somebody movin’ ’round on shore. Of course I ain’t certain ’bout that, ’cause it’s pretty dark to-night, an’ perhaps I only imagined it, bein’ suspicious like on account of the trouble we’ve already had. Anyhow, it’s dead certain I heard oars in the water a short bit from there, an’ twice the sound of voices came as if people were talkin’ mighty careful not a great distance away.”

“Did you try to find out who it was?” Dick asked, impatient for the short story to be ended.

“I wasn’t such a fool as that. I didn’t start out to look for Eliphalet Barnes; but to steer clear of him, an’ it goes without sayin’ that I wasn’t makin’ overly much noise when I slipped past where I thought the boat might be. That’s all there is to the story, an’ yet I’ve got the idee that if it was light we’d find Eliphalet Barnes hustlin’ close around here.”

“Why should he keep watch on us?” Ezra

asked in perplexity. "He knows we can't get away, unless by abandonin' the smack."

"I am not allowin' he is keepin' watch on us," Tommy replied thoughtfully. "'Cordin' to the way I figger it out, that old heathen is bringin' stuff from Campebello, seein's how it's dark to-night, an' perhaps he's makin' up the cargo he allows we'll carry for him. I'm only guessin' at that part of it, though, an' guessin' don't amount to anythin', 'cause it's oftenest apt to be wrong than right."

Then Master Downing gave his undivided attention to the bountiful meal before him, and Dick, although getting his full share of the food, remained silent, as if matters were going very much to his dislike. Ezra, however, was in the cheeriest of spirits, believing that with the posting of the letter the first and greatest step had been taken toward relieving them of their troubles.

"Now it's a case of layin' right here, without goin' to the express office to look for that sparker, 'cause so long as we can't turn the screw Eliphalet Barnes may storm an' threaten as much as he likes. We should hear from Dick's father within twenty-four hours after the fittin's come by express, so it won't be such a terrible long while."

Tommy made no reply to this assertion, and since Dick continued to maintain what was very like a sulky silence, the conversation naturally dropped.

That night the boys slept as soundly as if they had never made the acquaintance of Eliphalet Barnes, and on the following morning were awakened by a hail from the outside.

“There’s Barnes!” Dick cried angrily as he sprang from the bunk; but the expression of mingled anger and fear faded from his face very quickly, when he looked out from the companion-way and saw a fisherman who had come to sell his catch of lobsters.

The day passed uneventfully, except now and then when a fisherman came alongside, and when another night closed in eighty-two lobsters had been added to the number already in the well.

It was by no means a profitable day’s work; but the young traders believed themselves to have been very fortunate inasmuch as nothing had been seen or heard from the enemy.

Tommy proposed that on the following morning he go alongshore in the dory with the hope of adding to the cargo, but neither Dick nor Ezra would listen to the proposition.

“We’ll buy what’s brought to us, an’ be glad of the chance,” the junior member of the firm said very decidedly, when Tommy claimed that it was no more than “business” to take the utmost advantage of the situation. “I’ll be satisfied if we don’t get another lobster this cruise, providin’ father fixed it in some way so that we may give Barnes the slip, but how it can be done is more than I know.”

“Now look here, Dick,” Ezra said cheerily. “It isn’t likely that a man so well known for a smuggler as Barnes is, can carry things with such a high hand. Of course it looks as if he had us in a tight place; but early to-morrow morning your father’ll know just what he threatens to do, an’ it’ll

be strange if he an' all the lawyers in Portland can't help us out of the scrape. If we are to be put in jail because of luggin' that stuff across for the fisherman, then we'll go there like men, an' not try to get out of it by runnin' our noses deeper in the mire. I don't think it's a good scheme for Tommy to go out after lobsters, because the three of us ought to stay by the smack in case somethin' may be done soon to help us out."

Before Dick had time to make reply a slight heeling of the Phœbe to port told that someone had come aboard softly, and in a few seconds Mr. Barnes entered the cuddy, as if believing himself to be a welcome visitor.

"Well, lads, how are you gettin' along? I thought I'd look in on you to know if you'd got that 'ere sparker you was talkin' 'bout. But didn't come in the daytime because it's just as well on your account that I shouldn't be seen 'round here."

"We haven't got the sparker," Ezra said sharply.

"Strikes me it ought'er been here this afternoon," Mr. Barnes added affably, and Dick was evidently on the point of making an angry reply when Ezra, believing it would be unwise to excite the smuggler's wrath unnecessarily, broke in quickly:

"There's little chance it would be sent until the day after our telegram got there, an' perhaps forty-eight hours might go by, owin' to some delay in the express office, or on account of there not bein' just the right size of fittin' in stock. It's a long pull from here to the town, an' we're not countin' on goin' twice."

“ I allow, though, that you’ll try for it to-morrow afternoon? ”

“ The next day will be as soon as we have any good reason to expect it.”

“ It seems to me you’re takin’ this thing mighty quietly,” Mr. Barnes said suspiciously. “ If I was runnin’ a smack of this size, an’ counted on makin’ anythin’ in the lobster business, I wouldn’t be layin’ here at anchor.”

“ We’re taking things quietly because we can’t help ourselves,” Ezra replied, forcing himself to speak in something like a friendly tone. “ It isn’t costin’ us a great deal to lay at anchor, an’ we’d rather stay here one day longer than pull up to town and back twice.”

Mr. Barnes looked at the lad sharply, as if questioning whether there was not some reason for this apparent content, and then, turning, he went on deck, stopping there to look down into the cuddy as he said in what might well have been taken for a threatening tone:

“ I am advisin’ that you go to-morrow to the express office, for it’s certain you’ll then get what you’re waitin’ for.”

“ I reckon we’d better not take the chances,” Ezra replied cheerily. “ We’re gettin’ in quite a few lobsters as it is, an’ it’s a long pull up there an’ back.”

“ I’m advisin’ you to go,” Mr. Barnes repeated, and without waiting for a reply he went over the rail into his dory, Ezra coming out on deck to make certain he had really taken his departure.

The boys speculated long and anxiously on this

night, as to the meaning of the smuggler's words. All of them were inclined to believe that what he called advice, was in reality a command, and unless they followed it he might take some steps toward enforcing obedience; but how this could be done they failed to decide.

Tommy laughed at the idea of Barnes' attempting to force them to visit the express office, declaring that, bold though the smuggler was in the matter of braving the customs officers, he would not dare do more than threaten.

"How's he goin' to make us go there?" Master Downing asked with a laugh. "I notice he keeps himself pretty clear of Eastport, an' if he should try any such game as draggin' us up to the express office, why of course he'd get himself into a pile of trouble, 'cause *all* the people that live there ain't hand an' glove with him. I wish he'd try it, for then we'd be out of the snarl without waitin' for Dick's father."

Because of having been comparatively idle during the day, the boys did not sleep very soundly on this night, and were astir at daybreak, expecting each hour to receive another visit from Barnes; but determined not to be bullied into doing as he proposed.

Four fishermen came alongside before nightfall; but brought only forty-one lobsters in all, and at sunset, when it seemed positive they could not add any more to their cargo until another day had come, Ezra said as he made certain his cash balance was correct:

"As I figure it we've nine hundred an' seventy-

four lobsters in the well, an' as compared with the first cruise, business isn't very brisk; but when you come to realize that we are disabled, an' much the same as in the clutches of Eliphalet Barnes, it isn't such a bad showin'."

"An' the best of it is that we didn't go up to the express office, 'cordin' to orders," Tommy added with a chuckle of satisfaction which had not yet died away when an unfamiliar voice was heard from the outside.

"Here's a bundle I got for you fellers up to the express office. I kind'er allowed you might be in a hurry for it, an' seein's I was comin' this way, fetched it along."

The boys were on deck in a twinkling, gazing in something very like dismay at the stranger who was alongside in a dory, holding up a small package.

"Who told you to bring that here?" Ezra asked angrily.

"I was just tellin' you 'bout it. The agent he allowed you'd be needin' it, an' I was comin' right past your smack."

"Where do you live?"

"Over on Campebello."

"Do you often row up to Eastport?"

"Well, sometimes I do an' sometimes I don't, jest 'cordin' as it happens," the man replied with a laugh as he tossed the package on board. "To-day it kind'er happened that way, you see. I did have a sneakin' idee you'd say 'thank you' for the favor; but you don't look as if it pleased you overly much."

Then the fellow pulled away as if he had no

further concern in the matter, leaving the boys gazing at each other blankly.

Mr. Barnes had found a means of enforcing his commands, although not to the extent of obliging the boys to take the violent exercise which would have been necessary had they paid a personal visit to the express office.

“Now what *shall* we do?” Dick asked helplessly. “That old pirate will be here to-morrow mornin’, an’ force us to put the sparker in place. It’s likely also that he’ll be prepared to make us do whatever he says, an’ how are we goin’ to get out of puttin’ the Phœbe in trim?”

“I’ll get out of it if I have to disable the engine past all repair,” Ezra cried emphatically. “We won’t have any row with him, if it can be helped, for he’d likely get the best of us, seein’s he goes armed. If the worst comes I’ll guarantee to knock the motor so far out of tune that it can’t be put in shape again this season, an’ that would be better than doin’ as he demands.”

“Now you’re talkin’!” Master Downing said approvingly. “He’s got it into his head that we don’t dare raise a finger, an’ counts on havin’ us leave this place to-morrow mornin’. If you stand by what you say, we’ll give him the surprise of his life, even though we do get the worst of it afterward.”

Dick did not take part in the discussion which ensued. The fact that Mr. Barnes seemingly had plenty of associates in the neighborhood who would help him carry out his plans, served to daze the lad, and for the time he no longer had any hope of be-

ing able to do other than had been commanded.

Before they were through speculating upon the matter Tommy had suggested that the sparker be dropped overboard, and even though Mr. Barnes might not believe it an accident, if it was really thus disposed of he would be powerless, so far as moving the Phœbe was concerned.

Ezra was not willing to do this since it would disable the smack until a second sparker could be procured from Portland; but he pledged himself to work such injury to the motor, if it became absolutely necessary, as would prevent the smuggler from carrying out what was evidently his intentions.

“I can spend a good deal of time tryin’ to put it in, an’ unless Barnes is a machinist he won’t know what I’m about; anyhow we’ll hold as was agreed upon, an’ see what comes of it.”

As a matter of course this did not end the discussion. The boys were in no need for sleep; but remained in the cuddy, now talking excitedly, and again forcing themselves to believe that the smuggler would not dare proceed to extremities, until the sudden heeling of the Phœbe told that a visitor had come on board.

“Here’s Barnes, an’ now we’re bound to have it out with him!” Ezra said in a whisper as he started toward the companion-way. “Don’t arouse him if you can help it, an’ if worst comes to worst I’ll do as I’ve agreed.”

At that moment the companion-hatch was pushed back, and, much to their surprise, the lads saw, by

the rays of the swinging-lamp, an unfamiliar face looking down upon them.

"Who are you?" Ezra asked sharply, and with no little alarm.

"I'll tell you after I'm below," the stranger said in a whisper, and without waiting for an invitation he entered the cuddy.

The boys gazed at him curiously, for he did not appear to be the kind of a man who would follow Eliphalet Barnes' lead, and yet why else was he come?

The visitor very soon allayed their fears by saying in a questioning tone:

"You wrote to Mr. Marshall of Westbay night before last, and he received the letter in time for me to catch the late train. I have had no little trouble in finding you, because of not daring to inquire concerning your whereabouts."

"Are you a lawyer?" Dick asked.

"I am a customs officer who has been looking for Eliphalet Barnes since he went to work again."

"Then father sent you?" Dick cried in a tone of relief.

"Yes; it was something like that. He or his attorney notified me of what had been learned, and I set off at once. So Barnes is counting on your smuggling a cargo of stuff for him, eh? Tell me the whole story; but first we'll make things fast here so that no one can get in on us without due warning."

The officer himself saw to it that the hatch and doors of the companion-way were securely locked,

and then settled himself on one of the lockers to hear the story which was told by Ezra, and added to from time to time by Dick and Tommy as it seemed to them necessary for the better understanding of the situation.

“He wanted to get the sparker as soon as it arrived, because of having a pretty good idea that we were close after him,” the officer said when the explanations were at an end. “It is well that I lost no time in getting here, for the old fox evidently counts on making a move by to-morrow, and unless I am much mistaken we’ll forestall him. Now it is only a matter of waiting until he comes, and then I’ll attend to the rest of it. Which bunk can I use?”

“Take any of ’em,” Ezra said cheerily, all his forebodings gone now that an officer of the law was present who would be able to give evidence in their behalf in case Barnes attempted to use violence. He no longer had any fears as to the future; but Dick did not feel as confident that it would be impossible for their enemy to work them harm, and he asked of the visitor, who had given the name of Harlan Carter:

“Suppose Barnes or some of his friends should make a charge against us of having smuggled what he says was brandy? Would we be arrested?”

“Don’t let anything like that worry you, lad. In the first place it is my opinion they would not dare try anything of the kind; but have only held it out as a threat. If they should, however, it strikes me that the matter would be settled without

any trouble to you, for it is evident, because of your having given the earliest information regarding the Chinaman, that you are not in league with such as Barnes and his gang."

"And you will stay by here to help us, will you, sir?"

"I shan't stay a great while if Barnes comes back as I am counting on, for he and I will take an early train for Portland."

"Then you are going to arrest him?"

"That is what I came for, and it seems to me as if the scoundrel had laid a trap for himself. Now I am going to turn in and keep out of sight when day breaks. Pay no attention to me whatsoever. Set about fixing up your engine as soon as it is light enough to work, and we'll hope that our man pays us an early visit."

CHAPTER X

SURPRISING MR. BARNES

Mr. Harlan Carter had been detailed to look after Eliphalet Barnes, and, if possible, to break up the smuggling operations which had been carried on with comparative success for so long a time that those concerned in thus breaking the laws of their country had come to believe they were more than a match for the customs officers.

Now, thanks to the misfortunes of the Phœbe's crew, it seemed as if Mr. Barnes himself had set a trap from which it would be impossible to escape, and Mr. Harlan Carter was feeling wondrously well content with the situation into which the boys had blundered. He firmly believed that within a few hours at the latest the most daring smuggler on the Maine coast would be in his custody on a charge which could be clearly proven before a judge and jury.

Heretofore Barnes and the members of his gang had contrived to slip off scott free from the more serious charges that had been brought against them. The fact that Eliphalet went to jail for a brief period, was owing to the fact that the transaction in which he had been detected was so trifling as to make him careless, believing it was of such little

importance that the officers would not give any heed to it.

Quite by accident he had been overhauled while bringing a small quantity of liquor across the line, and cheerfully did he serve the sentence of six months in the county jail, knowing that if he had received his just deserts he would have been forced to spend several years at hard labor for the benefit of the country he had defrauded. That he came out of confinement without money, as when the young lobster buyers ran across him, was, so Mr. Carter believed, owing to his unwillingness to show that he had amassed any wealth in his unlawful calling; but those who knew him best felt confident he was possessed of a considerable property.

However that might be, it seemed positive, at least to the government inspector, that the smuggler's race was well nigh run, owing to his effort to use the boys in a scheme to carry across the border a larger cargo than, so far as was known, he had yet conveyed.

Mr. Carter had betaken himself to one of the bunks, counting on sleeping the sleep of a man who has much the same as succeeded in the purpose which had been long on his mind; but the crew of the Phœbe, even though their anxieties were at an end, had become so excited over the prospect of cutting short the unlawful career of one who, a few hours before, had seemingly held them in his power, that they could not have closed their eyes in rest, however long they had been deprived of repose.

Master Downing was particularly jubilant, and

surely it seemed as if he had good right to be. During all the time he lived with Abel Saunders, Tommy had heard more or less concerning Eliphalet Barnes and his ability to deceive and lead astray the officers of the law who had been on his track, until it really appeared as if the smuggler could do much as he pleased.

“He’s goin’ to be brought up with a sharp turn now,” Tommy said in a gleeful whisper as the crew of the Phœbe sat on deck near the companion-way, lest their conversation should disturb the sleeping officer, “an’ the folks ’round here will get a mighty good hint that smugglin’ ain’t the profitable kind of business it looks. I reckon he’ll be surprised when he comes to bully us in the mornin’, at findin’ himself caught in a trap that he won’t get out of so easy as before, when the detectives have pretty nigh had their hands on him.”

And Dick, who was ever on the lookout for trouble in the future, relapsed once more into a gloomy mood as he said in a tone of discontent:

“No matter how soon Mr. Carter gets hold of him, it’s pretty certain he’s broken up our business.”

“How do you make that out?” Tommy asked in surprise.

“Because of his havin’ been taken while aboard this smack, an’ seein’s how he made us help him out in smugglin’, we’ll be called on as witnesses. Nobody knows how long the trial will last, an’ of course we’ve got to lay in port all that time. ’Squire Merrill won’t be willin’ to have the Phœbe

idle, so he'll let her to anybody who'll make her earn a little money."

"Now look here, Dick," and Ezra spoke earnestly and at the same time almost sharply. "You are always lookin' for trouble, even when we've got as much on hand as is needed. It's nothin' less than actually wicked to grumble now at the very moment when we are the same as out of the snarl. Why can't you be satisfied with havin' got clear of the nasty mess, an' try to find satisfaction in this turnin' of the tables on Eliphalet Barnes, instead of reckonin' up what may possibly never come to pass?"

"But you know as well as I that we'll have to appear against him as witnesses," Dick persisted.

"Well, supposin' we do? The trial may not come off until our season is finished, or it may last only two or three days. Any way it turns, I'm thinkin' it's our business to be mighty cheerful just now."

"I've always heard father say that a man must look ahead, if he counts on succeedin' in this world."

"Your father didn't mean that success depended on borrowin' trouble when there was no real need of it," and now Ezra's tone was one of irritation. "We made a handsome profit on the first cruise; have got near to a thousand lobsters already in the well, an' should be able to take on as many more as we can carry, while runnin' from here to Portland, which will give us at least three hundred dollars to our credit. Except for the expense of telegraphin', an' what is to be paid for the new sparker, it hasn't cost anythin' extra to lay here at anchor

disabled, because of our not havin' used gasoline — what we've eaten out of the stores I don't allow amounts to very much, since a good portion of the food has been lobsters that weren't worth anythin' in the market. Now I call that a good showin' for a couple of fellows who started in business less than ten days ago."

"But we owe father five hundred dollars," Dick replied growing yet more gloomy.

"Now see how you are exaggeratin'!" and there could be no question by this time but that Ezra had very nearly lost his patience. "The first two hundred an' fifty dollars which he lent us has come back to him from the cargo we shipped at Westbay, an' the second two-fifty he'll get out of what we buy this trip, or, if we don't succeed in gettin' any more, we shall have the money on hand. As I look at it, we know exactly where he'll get the money that has been advanced, an' we shall have on hand capital enough to do business for ourselves without borrowin'."

"If that don't satisfy you, I don't know what you're wantin'," Master Downing interrupted. "Talk about trouble! Why I'd like to have the same kind, if I could make as much out of it as you fellers have."

Dick absolutely refused to view the situation other than dismally, and tiring of trying to make him realize that which could be seen so plainly, Ezra gave over the effort, saying as he turned to go into the cuddy:

"We'd better turn in for the rest of the night,

even though we can't go to sleep, than to sit out here strugglin' to find trouble for ourselves."

"What with gettin' clear of Eliphalet Barnes so slick, with a show of seein' him brought up by a short turn, I'm feelin' too good to leave, 'cause I don't want to miss any part of what's goin' to happen," Tommy said decidedly. "You fellers go below, an' I'll stay here on watch."

"But there's no need of it," Dick grumbled, and Master Downing replied cheerily:

"I know that; but I'll hold on here for the fun that's comin', so don't pay any attention to me."

Ezra went into the cabin, followed by Dick, both the boys moving softly lest they should disturb the slumbers of the man who had taken such a burden of trouble from their shoulders, and Tommy remained on deck eagerly expectant, determined to have his full share of the "fun."

Although it had not seemed possible to Ezra that he could lose himself in the unconsciousness of slumber while in such an excited frame of mind, within a very short time he was sleeping soundly, knowing nothing of what might be passing around him until aroused by Master Downing, who shouted as if in reply to a hail:

"Yes, we're all here, same's usual. We got the sparker your friend brought down; but Ezra hasn't put it in the motor yet, 'cause it didn't come till after dark last night."

"Barnes is here!" Ezra whispered hoarsely as he literally leaped across the cuddy to arouse Mr. Carter, and the latter replied calmly:

“Yes, so I understand. Don’t pay any attention to me; but keep right along about your work as if everything remained the same as it was last night, and when the time comes I’ll play my part.”

As a matter of course, Dick had been awakened by Tommy’s words, and both the young merchants hurried on deck. Day had not yet fully dawned; the gray light, token of the coming sun, was sufficient, however, to reveal objects within a short distance, and the lads saw, perhaps an hundred feet away, Mr. Barnes alone in a dory, resting on his oars as if not yet ready to pay them a visit.

“What’s the matter?” Ezra asked.

“How long before you’ll be in shape to turn the screw?” the smuggler shouted.

“I don’t know; we can’t work over the motor till it’s light enough in the cuddy to see what we’re about, an’ even then the sparker may not fit — we haven’t looked at it yet.”

“Well, see here, young man, you’ll get that smack inter condition for movin’ mighty quick, or there’ll be the biggest kind of a row you ever had a share in! Don’t think you can hang ’round here on the chances that somebody will come to interfere with my plans, for the cargo’s goin’ aboard. You’ll be sailin’ out of the harbor inside of an hour, or find yourselves in jail on the charge of smugglin’.”

“I reckon it’ll have to be jail then, for there ain’t much show of gettin’ things into shape aboard here within an hour,” Ezra replied in a tone so free from care that Mr. Barnes pulled a trifle nearer the Phœbe, as if to look more closely at the lad.

“Don't think you can fool me with your talk about the time it may take to put in a new sparker, for I've run a power boat before to-day. It's a case of my comin' back in less'n an hour, an' if you ain't ready to start I'll know the reason why.”

Having said this Mr. Barnes pulled straight up the shore, heading, as the boys believed, toward that point where they had landed the goods taken from the fishing vessel, and Dick would have hurried into the cabin to report to Mr. Carter, but that Ezra stopped him as he whispered in his ear:

“Stay where you are, or Barnes will suspect somethin'. I had no business to answer him as I did at the start, for it was easy to see by his comin' nearer to look at us, that he began to fancy somethin' had been changed in the situation.”

“I'm allowin' we'd better get breakfast,” Tommy said in a loud tone, and without waiting for a reply went below where he was soon engaged in the duties of cook, at the same time obeying Mr. Carter's instructions to the letter by giving no heed whatsoever to that gentleman.

The boys busied themselves with this thing or that, exactly as they would have done had the conditions remained unchanged from the previous day, and in less than half an hour from the time of his first appearance, Dick passed the word below that Mr. Barnes, in company with two other men, was pulling down the shore in the direction of the Phœbe.

Now even Master Downing was disposed to borrow trouble. When Mr. Carter had laid his plans, it was with the belief that Eliphalet Barnes would

come on board alone; but since he had two others with him the question in Tommy's mind was as to whether the officer would be able to overpower the three, and he asked in a whisper, as he approached the bunk in which Mr. Carter lay motionless as if asleep:

"Is there anythin' you want us fellers to do in case of a general mix-up?"

"Simply keep out of the way, unless I have to call on you," was the reply.

Then Tommy began singing his favorite ditty as he turned once more to the task of frying bacon, until a sharp blow on the side of the Phœbe told that the smuggler and his friends had arrived.

"Got that sparker in place yet?" Mr. Barnes asked threateningly, as he leaped aboard the smack followed by the others.

"It isn't light enough in the cuddy to see what you're about," Ezra replied. "I ain't machinist enough to do that kind of work in the dark."

"Well, I am!" Barnes cried in a threatening tone. "Where's the sparker?"

"Below on the locker."

The two men kept close at their leader's heels as he descended the companion-way stairs with the hurry and bustle of an angry man, while Ezra and Dick stood helplessly by outside, not knowing what ought to be done, yet eager to render assistance if it should be required.

From where they were it was possible to see all the interior of the cuddy save that portion where the officer lay in the bunk; but although thus aware

of what the enemy were about, and with a very good idea of Mr. Carter's intentions, they were unprepared for that which followed.

Tommy handed to Mr. Barnes, as that gentleman came below, the sparker exactly as it had been received the night before, with the wrappings yet unbroken, and, tearing open the paper, the smuggler went toward the motor, having no little difficulty in seeing clearly what he was about owing to the faint light.

The three men were bending over the machinery, when the lads standing at the head of the companion-way saw Mr. Carter spring out of the bunk with a revolver ready for use, shouting as he did so:

"Hold up your hands, you three! Move quickly, or I'll fire!"

"I thought these young whelps were feelin' a bit more cocky than was natural," Mr. Barnes muttered as he obeyed the order on the instant, the others following his example, and the officer, seeing that the men were apparently ready to submit to the inevitable, cried sharply:

"Keep your hands up, and step out here! Remember that I am counting to shoot at the first who lags ever so little!"

Whether Eliphalet Barnes so arranged matters, or it was simply chance, the lads who were looking on could not say; but certain it is that the smuggler's assistants came out first, standing directly in front of the officer, and in a twinkling Mr. Barnes was making a dash up the companion-way stairs.

To Ezra it seemed as if at the same instant there

came the report of Mr. Carter's weapon, he received a vicious blow from Eliphalet Barnes, in whose path he chanced to stand, and heard a mighty splashing of water telling that the smuggler had leaped overboard.

The bullet from the officer's weapon lodged in the hatchway, doing harm to nobody, and Carter could not pursue the one man of all whom it was important to capture, because of the two in the cuddy. Unless willing to give them an opportunity for escape, he must perforce drive both in front of him on deck before taking any measures toward checking Barnes' flight, and then it was too late.

Mr. Carter emptied every chamber of his revolver, save one, at the small target on the water, for Mr. Barnes swam deeply, as had Tommy when he set out for the light-house, and none of the shots took effect.

When Ezra, whose face was streaming with blood from the blow dealt by the smuggler, scrambled to his feet, Barnes could be dimly seen in the gray light, making his way ashore amid the rocks, and the trap which had seemingly been so certain of working as it should, was shown to be a failure, so far as capturing the leader was concerned.

It could readily be seen by the expression on Mr. Carter's face that he was as disappointed an officer as had ever undertaken an arrest, for instead of getting hold of the man against whom he had ample evidence, there remained in his hands two who might well be able to prove that they had no connection with any smuggling operations.

However, he did not give words to his chagrin; but while reloading his revolver, and at the same time keeping close watch over the two unimportant prisoners, he asked of Ezra, not turning his head to look at the lad:

“Are you hurt much?”

“There seems to be a good deal of blood comin’; but I reckon it’s only because Barnes hit me such a fair clip on the nose. I’ll be all right in a few minutes.”

“How long will it take you to put the sparker in place?”

“That’ll be a short job, if it fits.”

“Get to work at it as soon as you are in shape, for if I can be in Eastport and turn these fellows over to the officers there within an hour, I’ll yet have a show of overhauling my man.”

It can well be imagined that the crew of the Phœbe were exceedingly eager to do all that Mr. Carter desired, for until Eliphalet Barnes was in the custody of the law, they could not feel safe while continuing the business of lobster buying.

If the man went free after this effort to arrest him, there could be no question but that he would devote a considerable portion of his time to squaring matters with those who had set the trap; and, as Tommy said while the three were working over the motor, after Ezra had tied his face up so that the blood would not interfere with their movements:

“If we can help catch Eliphalet Barnes by hangin’ ’round here for a week, it’ll be a good job,

'cause in case he goes free we'll need to keep our eyes skinned for him at every port we make."

Fortunately, so far as Mr. Carter's desires were concerned, the motor was in working order within half an hour, and the Phœbe running at full speed up the harbor.

The two prisoners were rendered submissive by being handcuffed and placed in the cuddy, after which Tommy, eager to get an inkling of what Mr. Carter proposed to do, said in a questioning tone:

"That little plan didn't work exactly as we counted on?"

"No, lad," the officer replied bitterly, "and I can credit myself with the failure of it. I was little less than a fool to make any attempt at taking all three prisoners; but should have given my undivided attention to your friend Barnes, knowing him for the slippery customer he is. I shall get credit for playing the fool, by allowing him to remain behind the other two while I stood at the forward end of the cuddy, instead of at the companion-way where was my proper place. It is enough to make a man ache to kick himself, this having a fellow trapped so completely, and yet giving him an opportunity which would have been taken advantage of by the most bungling criminal that ever went unjailed."

"Do you really think there's a chance of gettin' hold of him?"

"Just a chance, and nothing more, lad. I can't turn these two free; but must spend my time to put them away safely, after which, with such help as can be had in Eastport, and this smack to carry us

from point to point, we'll unearth Barnes if such a thing is within the range of possibilities."

"But we've got lobsters in the well, an' ought'er get them into Portland," Dick said disconsolately, as he overheard the last portion of the officer's remark.

"It don't make any difference what you have got on board. I'm using this smack at present, and it will be for you to put in a claim to the government for services, in case I keep her any length of time."

"So it seems we ain't out of the scrape after all," Dick whispered to his partner, and Ezra replied cheerily:

"Accordin' to my way of thinkin' we are, an' surely for the sake of gettin' rid of Eliphalet Barnes we should be willin' to take Mr. Carter wherever he wants to go, even though there was no chance of our bein' paid for the work."

"It'll be pay enough if he carries that old pirate so far away that there's no show of his ever gettin' back here," Master Downing said emphatically, and there the conversation ceased, for it was necessary Ezra go into the cuddy to look after the motor.

It was much as if the Phœbe wanted to prove her readiness to aid in the chase, for she made the run up from Quoddy Head in remarkably good time, and there was found, strange to say, quite an assemblage of citizens on the pier, as if already had the news been brought to the town of what had occurred so short a time before.

Mr. Carter, after cautioning the boys to keep a sharp lookout lest the prisoners should attempt to

give them the slip, went on shore in search of a local officer, and the crew of the Phœbe found themselves the center of a curious throng, each member of which was eager to learn all the particulars.

“How did you know anythin’ had happened?” Master Downing asked, he in turn playing the part of questioner before making reply.

“Well, I can’t tell,” one of the idlers said with an assumption of carelessness. “When we seen your craft comin’ up at full speed, it kind’er seemed as though somethin’ might’er happened, an’ havin’ nothin’ else to do we loafed down here to find out.”

“I don’t suppose any of you was expectin’ to see Mr. Eliphalet Barnes run up here in command of this craft, eh?” Tommy asked in a meaning tone, whereat four or five of the bystanders professed to be indignant because of what seemed much like an insinuation, and there was no doubt in the minds of the lobster buyers but that these very sensitive gentlemen were in some way connected with the smuggler whom Mr. Carter was so eager to capture.

Neither of the boys felt at liberty to answer very many of the questions which were asked, and more particularly were they cautious because of the possibility that there might be a sufficient number near-about who were so friendly with the prisoners as to make an attempt at rescue, in which case it must have succeeded, for the crew of the Phœbe had no weapons with which to defend themselves.

Meanwhile the two in the cuddy who were wearing handcuffs appeared to be very well content, and Ezra set it down in his mind as a fact that they

counted on claiming to have been employed by Mr. Barnes for some innocent purpose which had no connection whatsoever with any violation of the law.

One of them came to the companion-way, for the hatch had been left partially open, and would have entered into conversation with those on the pier; but Ezra, fearing an appeal for rescue might be made, closed the aperture hurriedly, fastening the hatch securely.

As if seemingly bent on satisfying their curiosity, the idle ones from the pier came aboard the *Phœbe*, looking into the wheel-house and the well, as if never having seen a lobster smack before, and the lads did not believe it wise to forbid any such intrusion lest it should provoke a quarrel in which they might be worsted. But Ezra paced fore and aft, keeping his eyes upon the unwelcome visitors lest they succeed in doing a mischief, and once when he had stopped at the door of the wheel-house to look in at two who had apparently taken possession of the place, a voice behind him said in a low but threatening tone:

“Don’t make the mistake of bein’ too hot in chase after Eliphalet Barnes, for them as help capture him, if so be he is captured, will have a hot time of it.”

When the speaker first began Ezra did not realize that he was addressed; but when the threat was come to an end he understood that the words were intended solely for him, and wheeled about suddenly to face the speaker, but in this he was disappointed.

The man who had made the threat must have

joined three or four others who were near at hand, very suddenly, for the master of the Phœbe could see no one standing near him.

Without being so directed, Tommy had taken his station near the cuddy companion, and perhaps it was well he did so, for two or three of the visitors loitered in that locality much as if bent on having speech with those confined below, whereupon Master Downing insisted peremptorily, as if he had the means of enforcing his orders:

“You mustn’t stand ’round here. Mr. Carter told us to keep everybody away from the cabin.”

“So ‘Mr. Carter’ is the name of the guy who’s runnin’ this ’ere business, is it?”

“He’s the customs officer who has just gone ashore.”

“Well, Mr. Carter better not hang ’round Quoddy Head very long,” one of the men said boldly. “I allow he can do pretty nigh as he pleases up here; but further down the harbor we don’t reckon on havin’ strangers nosin’ inter our affairs.”

According to Tommy’s ideas it was well that the customs officer returned quickly, and with a force of three men at his heels, otherwise there might have been decided trouble on the Phœbe’s deck, for those who had come aboard without an invitation were growing bolder each moment, until, a few seconds before Mr. Carter appeared, Ezra was literally trembling with apprehension, believing a rescue would be attempted.

The officers of Eastport made short work of clearing the deck. Two of them took the prisoners from the cuddy, while the third remained on board as if under orders to do so.

“Now then, lads, you will get under way as quickly as you know how, for it’s a case of putting me ashore nearby where Barnes landed, and that as soon as may be.”

“Then what, sir?” Ezra asked as he started the motor, for he was already in the cuddy when the officer gave the command.

“Then it’s all a matter of luck, my lad.”

Ezra repeated to Mr. Carter even while the Phœbe was being got under way, the threat which had been made for his benefit, and Tommy, who came up in time to hear the words, added the information which had been given him regarding the danger of loitering in the vicinity of Quoddy Head, all of which appeared to disturb the officer not one whit.

“We knew a year ago that Barnes had plenty of partners nearabout here, otherwise he could not have carried on the business as he did before we made the mistake of catching him with a small amount of goods in his possession.

“Made the mistake, sir?” Tommy repeated in bewilderment. “I thought that’s just what you wanted to do, was to catch him.”

“Ay, lad; but what we’re after is to trip him in some big transaction such as this evidently was intended to be. However, we haven’t utterly failed,

for we'll find the goods ashore, most likely where you landed that small lot, and I shall not give up hope of bagging the rascal yet."

Then Mr. Carter went forward to the wheel-house, and Tommy suddenly remembered that the breakfast which he had begun to cook had been forgotten, therefore he went about the task once more, while Ezra remained at the motor lest anything should go wrong at a time when the Phœbe's best speed was needed.

"The way things have turned out, this 'ere business of lobster buyin' don't seem to be anythin' very tame," Master Downing said as he gave his first exhibition of bread-making since coming aboard the smack. "When I hired out it struck me that, except when we got up near 'round Portland, things would be kind'er dull — jest a case of loafin' along shore, hittin' up whatever fishermen we found; but it begins to seem as if I was goin' to see a good deal of this 'ere world. So all hands of us are in the custom-house business now, an' at the rate things are goin' nobody can say what we'll be up to by this time to-morrow."

"We'll hope, Tommy, that within the next twenty-four hours we'll be headed for home, stoppin' by the way only long enough to take on more of a cargo, an' even though we ain't able to buy another lobster, I shall be satisfied to go back so's to start over again," and Master Downing understood by the expression on the face of the senior partner that he was beginning to be worried concerning the final outcome.

"I'm allowin' things will turn out all right in the end," Tommy said cheerily, working as energetically at the bread-making as if upon it depended all the future. "'Cordin' to my way of thinkin', Mr. Carter won't loaf 'round here a very long spell, an' I don't believe he's got as much chance to catch Eliphalet Barnes as I have of strikin' a gold mine. 'Cause why? 'Cause Barnes knows every crook an' turn of this 'ere coast, an' with so many to help him it'll be queer if he don't get out'er the way, seein's he's had such a good start."

"But that isn't what's troublin' me, Tommy," Ezra replied thoughtfully. "Mr. Carter came down here believin' it was goin' to be a reg'lar snap to get his hands on Barnes, an' now that he has failed through his own fault, I'm afraid he'll keep up the chase, useless though it seems, longer than will be pleasant for us. I wouldn't say as much where Dick could hear me, 'cause he gets down to the heel so quickly, always lookin' out for trouble; but it appears to be a fact that we shall be kept from our reg'lar business quite a spell."

"Now you're the one who is lookin' out for trouble," Master Downing said with a laugh. "Wait till this day is ended before you bother your head so very much, 'cause I've got an idee that this officer of ours will find he's bitten off more'n he can chew, when it comes to chasin' Eliphalet Barnes round Quoddy Head, though perhaps the man he's got with him knows a trick or two that'll help out. I'm goin' to give you fellers the breakfast of your lives, if these 'ere biscuit rise 'cordin' as they ought

to, an' when a feller is filled right up with his insides chock full, he stands a little bother a good deal better'n when he's hungry. You may not believe it; but I'm tellin' you that in a time like this the cook is the biggest toad in the puddle, an' I know what I'm talkin' about. When things was pretty blue up to Abel Saunders I could have stood 'em all right if I hadn't been hungry, so you watch me keep this stove hummin' from now till Mr. Carter says we can 'tend to our own business."

CHAPTER XI

TOWING

After having explained to his employer that he believed a plentiful amount of food was the one thing necessary in order to keep lads in a contented frame of mind, Master Downing seemingly set about proving his proposition.

From that moment until after breakfast had been served, he apparently gave no heed to anything around him save his duties as cook, and certainly he did dish up a very tempting meal within half an hour after the Phœbe had left Eastport.

The biscuits were done to a turn; the bacon was crisp and dry, while the shredded salt-fish with alleged cream, was as palatable as a hungry boy could desire.

Even Mr. Carter, who was seriously disturbed in mind because of the blunder he had made, and anxious regarding the possibility of catching the smuggler, found amid his mental perplexities not only opportunity to praise the cook, but to show by the quantity he ate his opinion of the breakfast.

As a matter of course, Mr. Carter could not remain long at table because of the desire to keep close watch upon the shore; therefore he ate hurriedly, and when he went on deck Master Downing said triumphantly to Ezra:

“ Now you can see that what I told you was true. I’m allowin’ that Mr. Carter is about as mixed up in his mind as a man well can be, an’ yet did you notice how kind’er chipper he looked when he went out of here? That’s because he was filled up with stuff that tasted good.”

“ You boys been having some kind of an argument about eating?” the officer from Eastport, whose name was Jack Marriner, asked with a laugh, and without hesitation Tommy gave him a brief outline of what he had said to his employer regarding the importance of having a cook who knew his trade thoroughly well.

“ I’m allowing you come pretty nigh being right, my son,” Mr. Marriner said in a tone of approval. “ I don’t call myself a glutton by any manner of means; but yet it’s a fact that if I can have what I want to eat I’m in better trim for a day’s work, whatever it may be.”

Then the officer gave his attention once more to the food before him, and if the quantity eaten had a beneficial effect, surely Jack Marriner should have been in proper “ trim ” during the remainder of the day.

When Ezra had finished his breakfast he went out to relieve Dick of his duties as helmsman, and as the latter came below Tommy asked, showing an interest in the movements of the Phœbe for the first time since she left the dock at Eastport:

“ How far down are we now? ”

“ You can just see the row of sticks that stand

near where you put the stuff ashore in order to oblige the fisherman who was playin' into Eliphalet Barnes' hands."

"It's time I was on deck then," Mr. Marriner said as he rose from the table hurriedly. "Say, cook, keep a little of that fish and four or five biscuits, warm for me, will you? I haven't had more'n half enough yet."

"All right, matey, I'll do so; but it strikes me you brought your appetite with you."

"That's what I did," the officer replied laughingly. "It seemed hard lines when I was ordered to come down here without having a chance to go home for a bite to eat; but so far as I have gone it looks as if it was a bit of good luck, for you're what I call an A-1 cook, even though you are working on a lobster smack."

"I suppose you allow I belong in some of them big hotels where they take in city folks for the summer, eh?" Tommy said with a chuckle, and one could readily see that he was well pleased at being thus praised.

"Of course you didn't get a sight of Eliphalet Barnes?" Master Downing said questioningly when he and Dick were alone.

"Not a bit of it, an' what's more, we shan't. It strikes me that Mr. Carter is acting considerably foolish in thinkin' he can catch that old smuggler after givin' him the start of a couple of hours. I'm not allowin' but he knows his business; yet if all the customs officers have gone about their work in the

same way, I don't wonder Barnes has kept clear of the law so long. Do you know we're likely to be held here for a week?"

"That's what Ezra was fussin' about; but I told him same as I'm tellin' you, that I don't believe anythin' of the kind, 'cause Mr. Carter will get tired of his job after a spell, an' tumble to himself. Any how, s'posen we should have to cruise back and forth here! It ain't so terrible cruel compared with what would have happened if the officers hadn't come down."

"Right for you, Tommy; but all the same I'd rather be alongshore pickin' up a cargo of lobsters, for there can't be many dollars in this kind of business."

Then Dick gave his undivided attention to the food before him, while Tommy made up the beds and set the cuddy to rights generally, so far as was possible while breakfast was still in progress.

Five minutes later the signal to stop the motor was given, and as Dick obeyed, he said with the air of one giving desirable information:

"We've come off that landin' where the stuff was left, an' I reckon Mr. Carter is goin' ashore. In that case you'll have to man-the dory, unless he gives orders to come to anchor."

Tommy ran on deck ready for any duty which might be demanded of him.

Mr. Carter was going ashore, and evidently counted on remaining for some time, if one might judge from the orders he gave Jack Marriner.

"You are to cruise back and forth around the

Head, until I show myself on the shore again," he said as he stepped into the dory which Tommy had promptly pulled alongside. "In case you get your eye on our man, don't let him slip you if it can be helped."

"I allow I know enough for that part of it," Mr. Marriner said half to himself, and Tommy, who was pulling toward the shore by this time, asked of his passenger:

"Do you think there's any show of your gettin' hold of Barnes now that he has had two hours or more the start?"

"I'm afraid not, my lad. The old fox probably has plenty of hiding places around about here; but I'll get an idea of the lay of the land, so that if we should round him up later on, I'll know better than I now do what ought to be done."

Tommy set the officer ashore, and when he returned to the Phœbe it was to whisper cheerily in Ezra's ear:

"'Cordin' to what Mr. Carter told me, I'm allowin' we shan't knock about here much longer than to-day."

And in this Tommy was correct, as was soon learned. At half-speed the Phœbe steamed up and down the coast, running as near the shore as was prudent, while Jack Marriner kept closest watch from the pilot-house; but without seeing anything of the man who had escaped so easily from what Mr. Carter had thought a perfect trap.

Twice the boys saw the customs officer as he wandered here and there in an apparently aimless

manner, and thus they knew that his search had been in vain.

True to his old doctrine, Master Downing prepared an unusually elaborate dinner, and kept the coffee-pot filled and on the stove from morning until night, for the benefit of the officers as well as his employers.

Shortly before sunset Mr. Carter showed himself on the rocks near about where the Phœbe had lain so long at anchor, and made signals to be taken on board.

“I reckon we may as well give up the search for the time being,” he said disconsolately when he was on the deck once more. “There was little hope in my mind that I could run across the scoundrel; but still I was bound to make a try for it. Have you seen anything of him, Marriner?”

“Not so much as a hair. If he hadn’t some one near at hand who took him off in a boat, you may count it certain that from the moment he landed he has been making his way up the coast. I have heard it said that there are two or three shanties within eight or ten miles of here where he can lay under cover in case things get a trifle too warm for him.”

“We’ll have a look at them to-morrow, if that’s the case,” Mr. Carter replied, his face brightening not a little.

“You’ll have to walk, for there’s no show of getting to either place in a boat, if I am rightly informed as to their location.”

“Then we’ll trust to our legs, and these lads, after setting us ashore at Eastport, may go their

way. I reckon they won't be sorry to part company with us."

"We might like to keep you longer as passengers; but don't have any great fancy for moonin' around the way we have been doin' to-day," Ezra said with a laugh, as he went into the pilot-house and gave the signal "ahead at full sped."

"Suppose some of Barnes' friends should make the charge of smugglin' against us, sir?" Ezra asked when the Phœbe was headed for the harbor and Mr. Carter had come into the pilot-house.

"There's little fear of that, lad. Even though you had refused to do what Barnes commanded, I question very much if he or any of his mates would have had the nerve to carry out the threat. If it should be done, however, no attention will be paid to the matter after my report has been sent in. Where are you going from here?"

"Very nearly straight home," Ezra replied emphatically. "It may be we shall stop here or there if Tommy thinks there's a chance of gettin' a few more lobsters; but we shan't loiter by the way, that I can tell you for a fact."

"Keep your eyes and ears open all the way up, and if you see anything that might have to do with Barnes, or hear a word concerning him from those fishermen whom you meet, send word to the custom house as soon after you arrive as possible. Your father will attend to that part of the business."

This was very nearly all Mr. Carter had to say to the young lobster traders before parting with them at the pier in Eastport. He was in haste to get

ashore, and the boys equally eager to be under way, therefore little time was spent at the dock after the Phœbe had landed her passengers.

The sun had already set, and Dick was in favor of remaining in the harbor during the night; but to this Ezra would not listen.

“You know very well the threats that have been made, an’ I shan’t feel comfortable in mind until we have left this part of the coast a good many miles behind us,” he said to his partner. “There’s no need of takin’ any risks, an’ if we can’t run this smack in the night, it’s time we gave over the business of buyin’ lobsters.”

Therefore it was that an hour after sunset the Phœbe rounded Quoddy Head, with her bow as nearly due west as the conformation of the shore would permit, and once more it seemed to the young lobster traders as if they had an opportunity of transacting business.

While Mr. Carter had the same as been in command of the Phœbe, Master Downing ceased to take direction of affairs, as he had done when they were attending strictly to the work of buying lobsters. He had apparently been content to play the part of cook, and there was no question whatsoever but that he had played it well.

Now, however, as soon as the smack was heading westward, and the customs officer was far astern, Tommy came to the front in his peremptory way, deciding, without consulting his employers, as to what should or should not be done. This he did as if believing he had been hired for the purpose,

but not in what might, even by the widest stretch of the imagination, have been considered in any way offensive or disrespectful.

“We’ll pull up at Head Harbor island,” he announced when he came from having put the cuddy to rights, to take his trick at the wheel. “It can’t be more’n forty miles away, an’ we’ll get there jest about the right time to catch the fishermen before they start out for the mornin’s work.”

“After waitin’ at Quoddy Head so long, I had it in mind that we’d better put straight for home,” Ezra replied doubtfully. “We haven’t got quite a thousand lobsters in the well; but, if the market price has held up, even that number will pay a profit on the cruise, if we don’t count our time as bein’ worth anythin’.”

“Well, we are goin’ home all the same, as I take it,” Master Downing replied promptly. “Stoppin’ at Head Harbor won’t hold us back very long, an’ we ought’er get two or three hundred there, besides makin’ a trade for the fishermen to hold their catch till we come again. It would be crazy business to sail right past, when the true course to Portland will take us within a mile of the place.”

“All right, we’ll stop there, that is,” Ezra added quickly, “if Dick don’t make any objections. He should have more of a voice in the matter than I, since it was his father who lent us the money to start with.”

Tommy, determined that the matter should be settled at once, asked through the speaking tube of the junior partner, who was looking after the motor:

“What about stoppin’ at two or three places on the way to pick up sich lobsters as are hangin’ ’round loose?”

“I want to get home as soon as possible,” Dick replied. “After all the trouble we’ve run up against, it seems as if we ought to have a talk with father before gettin’ into a worse fix than we’ve already lighted on.”

“I don’t reckon you’d be in any very great danger if you took on a full cargo, providin’ it didn’t cost more’n a day’s extra time,” Master Downing said in a fine tone of scorn. “Of course, if you’re out here for fun, it’s all right to run home every hour or two; but seein’s you’ve gone inter the business of buyin’ lobsters, an’ owe your father considerable money, he’d take it as a favor if you did what you could towards makin’ a dollar or two so’s to come somewhere near squarin’ accounts.”

Dick did not reply through the tube; but Tommy had no more than ceased speaking before he was at the door of the pilot-house, saying irritably:

“I don’t have to run home every little while; but we’ve been so mixed up that it seems as if we ought to have a talk with father.”

“Do you allow any great harm would come if you didn’t get at him for another day?” Master Downing asked sarcastically. “Don’t you reckon we’d make a better showin’ if we sailed inter West-bay with the well chock-a-block with lobsters, than to go back showin’ ’bout a thousand? It won’t cost a cent more to take on all we can carry!”

“All right, work it your way,” Dick replied after

a brief hesitation. "So long as we don't go out of the course, I suppose we may as well buy what we can."

"Then that part of it is settled," Tommy said with an air of relief. "What I want is to have you fellows make the biggest kind of a showin', an' if we went back half loaded, when there are plenty of lobsters to be bought, it would look as if we got scared out'er our boots. You two can get supper if you want any, an' then may turn in, for I'll stay here till we make Head Harbor."

"I'll lend a hand after I warm up something to eat," Ezra said cheerily as he followed his partner below, and Master Downing said to himself as a smile of satisfaction overspread his face after he was alone:

"I only wish I owned a third of this business! You can bet this 'ere smack never'd poke her nose inter Westbay harbor till the well was full, not if I had to lay by somewhere an' put out pots!"

Ezra kept his word, so far as coming back an hour later to relieve Tommy; but that young gentleman insisted that he could "stand there all night" if he saw a chance to make an extra dollar, and urged that the two partners stand watch and watch below, in order that each might get a certain amount of sleep.

"You'll need a turn in the bunk as much as we," Ezra protested, and Master Downing replied in a tone which admitted of no argument:

"There are a lot of islands 'round Head Harbor, an' I'm countin' to give 'em all a call 'twixt sunrise

an' sunset to-morrow. You couldn't do it on account of not knowin' the water. After we leave there, I'll turn in an' get all of my sleep in one lump. Better let me handle this smack for the rest of the cruise, for somehow it seems as if I was more used to the business."

Ezra went below without further parley, and once there said to his partner, after repeating what the "crew" had proposed:

"If we ever get entirely rid of Eliphalet Barnes, I'm thinkin' we'd better give Tommy an equal share in the business; he can do twice as much work as either you or me, an' do it better."

"I wouldn't wonder if you were right, Ezra. That boy is havin' the highest kind of a time bargainin' with the fishermen, an' seems to know all of them on this coast. We'll see what father says about takin' him into partnership."

The young traders were not quite so selfish as to leave Tommy alone at the wheel all night while they slept below, for one of the other visited him every half-hour, and offered to take the helm while he "scooped in forty winks;" but Master Downing remained at his post until entering Head Harbor bay, an hour or more before sunrise, when, having given the signal to stop the motor, he let go the anchor.

"Here we are," he said cheerily, "an' I'm goin' ashore to see what's to be done. You're to stay here an' take care of the fishermen as fast as I send 'em aboard. That'll be the quickest way to wind up the job," he added when Ezra would have insisted on doing his share of the work at the oars.

“Be gettin’ breakfast, for I’m growin’ kind’er empty, an’ will need considerable grub by the time I get back.”

Because of the darkness it was impossible for the partners to see whether there were any buildings nearby on shore, and Dick said sleepily as he re-entered the cuddy after Tommy was lost to view in the blackness:

“I’m goin’ to turn in for a spell; he won’t find anybody till daylight, an’ there’s chance for quite a nap before then.”

Master Downing did not give them an opportunity for any lengthy time of repose; it seemed as if the partners had no more than stretched themselves out in their bunks before the smack was hailed, and when Ezra went on deck it was to find a fisherman close alongside.

Then in rapid succession four others arrived, and when Tommy came on board they had added three hundred to the number of lobsters in the well.

“That’s the way to do business!” Master Downing said in a tone of approval when the last visitor had been paid for his catch. “The sun ain’t fairly up yet, an’ you’ve made a dozen dollars sure. What about that breakfast?”

“We didn’t have time to cook it before the first man came alongside.”

“I didn’t allow you would,” Tommy said with a chuckle of satisfaction. “These folks ’round here are early birds, an’ the best time to catch ’em is jest before daylight. We won’t wind things up so quick at Steel harbor, for it’ll be a case of waitin’ till

they've pulled their pots an' done the chores ashore. If you'll start the screw we'll run over now, an' you can get breakfast while we're under way."

"Why not hold on here a spell, an' eat with some degree of comfort?" Dick asked laughingly.

"We've got too much on hand to waste any time to-day," Tommy said briskly as he began to heave in on the anchor. "I want to strike all these places 'round here, an' you fellers will get to fussin' if it's a question of holdin' on another twenty-four hours."

"Go ahead your own gait, Tommy, an' we'll agree to whatever you may say," Ezra cried with a hearty laugh. "You've already shown us that you know how to run this smack to the best advantage, an' we'd be fools not to let you have your head."

"That's what I think," Master Downing replied in a matter-of-fact tone; "but even at that we don't hang 'round here jest for the sake of eatin' breakfast after we've gathered in all the lobsters. Start your screw, an' I'll look after the rest of it!"

During the next five hours Tommy was so engrossed with the business of his employers that he did not even have time to get his share of the breakfast which Ezra had prepared, and in that time the cargo had been added to very materially. At Steel Harbor island they bought two hundred and ten; at the small islands in the immediate vicinity exactly the same number were taken on board, and then Master Downing said as he weighed anchor for at least the fifth time:

"I reckon we've cleaned up all that are to be found in this bunch of settlements. It must be about fifty

miles to Swans island, an' I reckon, if one of you'll take the helm, I'll get a bite an' a nap. We ought'er come to anchor pretty early in the evenin' an' can do up our business right lively in the mornin', seein's we'll be there in time to catch the fishermen on the jump."

"We mustn't put in at Swans island," Dick said decidedly, and Tommy cried in a tone of discouragement:

"I knew that's the way it would turn out. Here we are gettin' a cargo without spendin' very much time over the job, an' you're hungry to get home."

"It isn't that," Dick said with a laugh. "We've come to the conclusion that you can run things your own way; but all the same I'm not willin' to put in at Swans island because of Eliphalet Barnes. That's where he wanted to go, an' we may run afoul of some of his gang."

"S'posen we do? They don't know where Eliphalet is, 'cause he's dodgin' 'round Quoddy Head yet, an' we can leave there before anybody finds out that the old pirate ever played us a trick."

"Now I believe you're too cautious," Ezra interrupted, and his partner, finding himself in the minority, said with an air of resignation:

"Very well, go it your way. Perhaps you're right; but Barnes has given me such a scare that I don't even dare to go where he may have been, however long ago."

Tommy set about making ready his first meal on that day as soon as Dick had agreed to the proposition. Ezra went into the wheel-house, and once

more the Phœbe was on her course with a big bone in her teeth.

Master Downing kept his word so far as getting a nap was concerned. After eating heartily he turned in "all standing," and slept the sleep of a tired boy until nearly sunset, when he partook of another meal and then went to the pilot-house, saying as he took the wheel from Dick.

"You fellows can go below now; I'm all right for the next twenty-four hours, an' I'll give you a call when it's time to stop the motor, for we should make the easterly side of Swans island 'twixt now an' midnight."

Neither of the partners disputed his right to come on watch, and both went below, where they remained alternately sleeping and looking after the motor until about ten o'clock in the evening, when they were startled by hearing Tommy cry through the tube:

"Get on deck lively! Here's some kind of a pleasure boat disabled, an' signalin' to us like mad!"

As a matter of course the boys were out of the cuddy in a twinkling, and could see, a mile or more to starboard, what appeared to be a motor boat very nearly as large as the Phœbe, rising and falling on the gentle swell, while from fore and aft were lanterns being swung vigorously, evidently to attract attention.

"How long since she's been in sight?" Ezra asked, and Tommy replied:

"I saw her 'bout half an hour ago, an' she hasn't moved since. I reckon she's disabled, an' now they're wantin' us to give 'em a tow."

“We’d better keep our distance,” Dick grumbled. “The last time we answered signals of distress we got ourselves into a scrape that is like to cost us dearly.”

“But this is a case of earnin’ a lot of money, if them as are on board are out pleasin’. They’re a lot of summer visitors, most like, an’ that kind of creeters allers have more cash than they know what to do with.”

“Don’t go ’round huntin’ for easy money, Tommy,” Dick cried. “We got twenty dollars that way the last time we were here.”

“We’ll have a look at ’em any how, if I’m to run things my fashion for the rest of the cruise,” Master Downing said decidedly, as he swung the helm down ever so little to come up under the stranger’s stern.

As the Phœbe drew nearer it was possible for the boys to see, even in the gloom, that the disabled craft was a motor boat forty feet or more in length, with a cabin that ran well aft from the pilot-house, leaving eight or ten feet of cockpit in which could be seen lounging-chairs. There was no question but that she was a pleasure yacht, and Tommy grew so excited that he could hardly remain at the wheel, as he muttered:

“She’s got one of them summer gangs aboard all right, an’ here’s where we make up for the money them Portland lawyers are sure to charge on account of what we did with the Chinaman.”

“Ahoy!” came from the disabled craft, and Tommy replied, speaking quickly as if afraid one of

his employers might attempt to conduct the conversation.

“ Hello! Was you wavin’ them ’ere lanterns for us? ”

“ We surely were! Where are you bound? ”

“ Portland. This ’ere is the lobster smack Phœbe, an’ we’re takin’ in a cargo alongshore.”

“ Will you give us a tow? ”

“ Where to? ”

“ We’d like to go to Portland; but if you can’t do the job, take us where we can get a tug.”

“ I’m allowin’ you wouldn’t find one nearer than Rockland, an’ for us to go there would break up our whole cruise.”

“ We don’t care what it breaks up; we’re disabled, and likely to remain so until we can make port at some decently large city. How much will you take to tow us into Portland? ”

“ The Phœbe isn’t heavy enough for that kind of a job,” Ezra said in a low tone, and Tommy replied sharply:

“ You allowed I could run things my way for the rest of this cruise, so keep out’er sight while I do it, an’ I’ll put more dollars in your pockets than you’ll have to pay the lawyers.” Then he cried to the strangers, “ We’re willin’ to do all we can for them what can’t help themselves; but it’s a case of losin’ more’n a hundred dollars if we tackle the job of towin’ you, an’ I ain’t dead certain’ this craft can do the work.”

“ If you’ll put us into Portland harbor we’ll pay you an hundred dollars, and as much more as you

might be able to earn in the same length of time."

Now it was possible for the lobster buyers to see that the disabled yacht had on board two ladies and three or four men, in addition to several sailors who evidently made up the working crew. A dainty craft she appeared to be, and even the suspicious Dick could not fancy that by taking her in tow any trouble would come to them.

"We're bound to help those people out of their distress," Master Marshall said in a low tone, stepping toward the rail as if to make some remark; but Tommy was on the alert to prevent any interference with his plans.

"I've had your promise that I might run this thing, an' if you get to chinnin' with the crowd it'll be a case of doin' the towin' for nothin'. You didn't hire this smack for the sake of helpin' pleasure hunters out'er scrapes, an' I'm goin' to make 'em pay for what they get," and once more he hailed the yacht, asking, "Have you got a hawser that'll hold the strain?"

There was a brief consultation between two of the yachtsmen and the sailors, after which he who had acted as spokesman replied:

"I'm told we've got lines in plenty. Will you take us in tow?"

"It's jest like this," Master Downing said in a confidential tone as he bent over the rail in such a manner as to prevent Dick from being seen. "We're out for a cargo, as I've told you, an' have got in the well about two thousand lobsters, worth three or four hundred dollars, 'cordin' to the market

price. Now we're runnin' the chances of losin' all them, to say nothin' of what we might pick up in case we didn't fool 'round with you. If our boat can tow yours, an' I reckon she can, we'll do the trick for a hundred dollars an' as much more as we might'er made by keepin' on 'bout our business. Is it a bargain?"

"How much could you make by taking on a full cargo?"

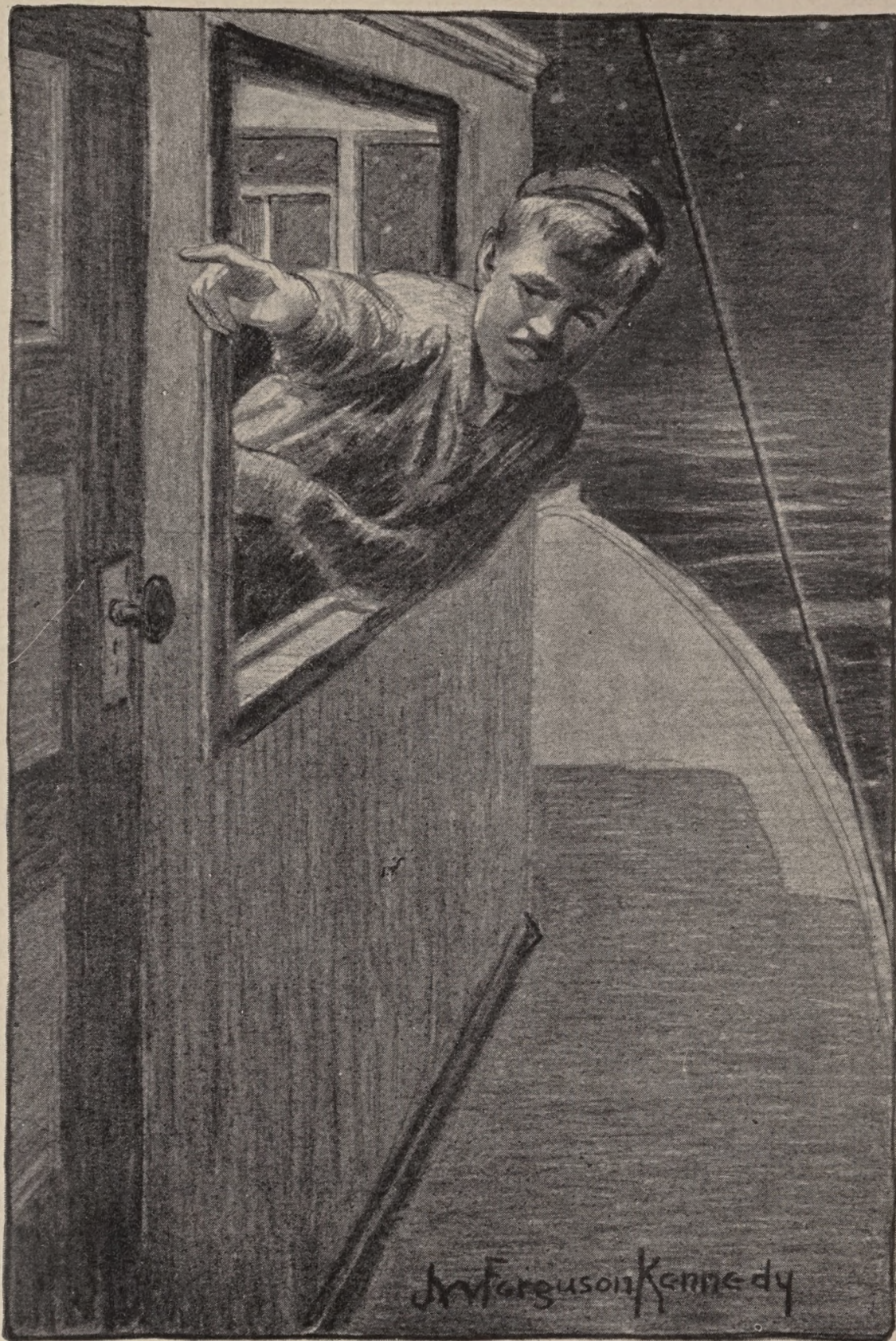
"Another hundred, sure."

The yachtsmen consulted among themselves, the ladies taking part, until the spokesman cried:

"We'll give you two hundred dollars if you get us inside Portland harbor, and not a cent if you're obliged, because of our being too heavy, to drop us on the way."

"It's a whack!" Tommy cried sharply. "Rouse out your hawsers, an' be lively 'bout it. Ezra, stand by to take their lines, an' Dick, get below so's to send us ahead about a dozen turns of the screw."

Tommy gave these orders as if he was the only person in authority, and since his employers had allowed him to act the part of captain, they could do no less than obey promptly, though Dick said some very harsh words under his breath as he went into the cuddy, expressive of what he would do in the way of taking the conceit out of Master Downing as soon as a convenient opportunity presented itself.



“LEANING OUT OF THE PILOT HOUSE, HE GAVE HIS COMMANDS
IN A PEREMPTORY TONE.”

CHAPTER XIII

A LONG PULL

The name of the disabled yacht was the *Electra*, as those on board the smack could see when the wind swung her around ever so little, and her crew set about obeying Master Downing's commands with an alacrity which filled that young man's heart with glee. For the time being, at least, he was the captain in command, and with two vessels directly under his control.

Now it is not at all probable that Tommy intended to be in any degree offensive; but certain it is that he did put on more high and mighty airs than would have been warranted in the commander of an ocean liner.

Leaning out of the pilot-house, he gave his commands in a peremptory tone, finding fault because they were not obeyed as soon as spoken, and ordering the passengers as well as the crew of the *Electra* until he had every person on the two vessels, even including his own employers, jumping to the sound of his voice.

It must be set down to the credit of Master Downing, however, that he knew exactly what ought to be done, and he set the workers about it in a most seamanlike fashion.

The sailors on the yacht had brought out, in obedience to Tommy's command, a new two-inch hawser, and when they would have cast one end aboard the smack by aid of the heaving line, Master Downing found fault with them individually and collectively.

"What's crawlin' on you fresh water sailors?" he shouted, and by the volume of noise one might have thought he weighed at least two hundred pounds. "Do you allow we're goin' to make any fist at towin' you with a single line? Stretch that out along your deck, an' don't do so much sogerin'! Get the bight, an' make your heavin' line fast to it! Hey, you Ezra, clear away that after bitt, an' see if you can't find somethin' to put on our rail to prevent the hawser from chafin'! Dick, stand by in case them lubberly sailors contrive to find the bight of that rope."

"I'll twist his neck for him as soon as we part company with this yacht," Dick said savagely in a half-whisper to Ezra, and the latter, who was literally shaking with mirth, answered as soon as it was possible for him to speak:

"I think it's mighty comical to see him puttin' on airs, an' if it should happen that we succeed in earnin' two hundred dollars, we can well afford to let him swell around a bit more, especially since it's amusin'."

"I'll make him pay for it just the same," Dick muttered. "It's all our own fault, for if instead of remainin' silent when the yachtsman hailed, we'd attended to the business as it should have been done, the little monkey wouldn't have had the chance to strut around in this fashion."

“ Let him strut, an’ I only hope he won’t get tired, for it’s the funniest exhibition I have ever seen.”

There was no danger Tommy would tire of playing the captain. It was as if he increased his efforts each moment, until so muddled grew the crew of the *Electra* that they hardly knew which way to turn:

“ Get the kinks out of that hawser, you lubberly sogers! I thought you knew somewhere near enough to carry one end clean around the deck until you’d got it near the middle. Bear a hand there lively! Do you allow we’re goin’ to lay by here till morning waitin’ for you to do a job that ought’er been folded an’ wrapped up before this? ”

Then when the sailors had succeeded in obeying his commands, and one of them stood ready to pass the heaving-line, Tommy added savagely:

“ Stand by there, you Ezra, an’ you’ll hear from me if you make a slip of it! We’ll show fresh-water imitations of sailors what an *A-I* fisherman is like! ”

Ezra sprang to the rail, pulling the collar of his coat around his face so that those on the yacht might not see he was laughing, and the bight of the hawser was brought inboard smartly.

“ Now take a couple of turns around the bitt, my bold lobsterman, an’ you fellers on the yacht there, make the end fast on either side the bow, so’s to bridle her up to it! See that you don’t have one side longer’n the other! There! Steady! Hold her as she is till we straighten her up a bit! ”

Then Tommy gave the signal to send the *Phœbe* ahead a few turns of the screw, until the hawser was

so stretched that those on the yacht might bring both sides of the bridle even. When this had been done Tommy shouted in his loudest and most commanding voice:

“Now then, let whoever is skipper of that 'ere yacht send a man into the wheel-house that knows how to steer. I don't reckon we'll stand much in need of him; but it's just as well to make certain she don't yaw, for we've got all the job that's needed to get you into Portland harbor. Hello, there! What if we run short of gasoline?”

“We've got plenty on board, sir!” was the laughing reply, and Dick felt a trifle more comfortable in mind when he thus understood that those aboard the yacht were amused by Tommy's excessive show of authority.

“Now then, Ezra,” Master Downing cried through the speaking tube, “straighten her out slow, so's not to give too much of a jerk at first, an' we'll see how she holds the strain. Kind'er keep your eye skinned till we get her movin' smoothly, an' then open up as wide as you can.”

“There's one thing about Tommy,” Ezra said to Dick, who had just come into the cuddy. “Even though he is puttin' on a good many airs, the boy knows his business. Neither you nor I would have thought of puttin' on a bridle, an' as for his orders about startin', why a tug-boat captain couldn't have bettered them.”

Then Ezra obeyed the command. The hawsers straightened out like bars of iron as the Phœbe forged

ahead, and then almost stood still for a full minute while the screw was taking up the weight of the tow. But there was power enough on the smack, while the sea remained like an undulating mirror with not wind sufficient to ruffle the surface, to bring the Electra into her wake, holding her there steady with a headway of at least four knots.

“It’s all right, boys!” Tommy shouted through the speaking-tube. “She’s comin’ after us handily, an’ if so be this weather holds, we’ll earn that two hundred dollars mighty easy.”

“Yes, we have had easy money before, an’ it cost us two or three dollars to get one,” Dick replied sharply.

“But this is a different kind,” Master Downing cried triumphantly. “We are earnin’ it fairly, an’ if so be that bitt holds, we’re all right. How about the motor?”

“Goin’ smoothly, an’ I see no reason why it can’t do the work,” Ezra shouted. “Of course if we get wind enough to kick up a sea, it’s good-bye to your chances of finishin’ the job.”

“We won’t bother about what may happen, so long as things are runnin’ all right now,” the small captain cried shrilly, and the click of the speaking tube told that he had finished his portion of the conversation.

“You may think it’s funny to have Tommy swellin’ ’round in this way, as if we’d been hired to tremble at his beck and nod; but how about to-morrow mornin’? We shan’t feel very comfortable at

havin' those people aboard the yacht lookin' at us in the belief that we are nothin' more than foremast hands aboard a lobster smack."

"If I don't like it I can keep out of sight," Ezra replied as he watched the motor keenly. "In case the situation becomes too distressin', I'll sooth my wounded spirit by rememberin' that if you or I had done our duty Tommy wouldn't have had much chance to puff up so big. This is goin' to be an' all-night job, as a matter of course, an' there won't be any chance for sleep durin' the next thirty-six hours at the least. Therefore it strikes me you had better turn in for an hour. Then relieve Tommy or me, an' from that out one of us will have a show for a snooze every hour."

Dick was perfectly willing to act upon this suggestion, because now that the excitement of getting the yacht into shape for towing had subsided, his eyes were growing narrow, and ten minutes later matters were progressing much as if the Phœbe had been built for, and always run as, a tug boat.

When the sound of heavy breathing told that Dick had fallen asleep, Ezra, with a glance at the motor to assure himself it was running smoothly, hurried forward for a few moments conversation with Tommy, explaining as he looked in at the wheel-house door what arrangements had been made in the way of standing watch.

"I'm allowin' I can do my trick here till we get into Portland harbor," Master Downing said stoutly, and Ezra replied in a tone which admitted of no argument:

“ You’ll take your share of sleep with the rest of us, an’ whoever is attendin’ to the motor must play the part of cook. What about the weather? ”

“ I can’t see any sign of a change,” and Tommy peered up at the sky with an air of exceeding wisdom. “ It’s likely the wind may freshen a bit just before sunrise, an’ then will come the hardest time; but it always dies down as the day grows older, so if we can hold the yacht in tow from four o’clock until seven, the job is the same as done. Of course I don’t know anythin’ about motors; but it seems to me that perhaps if you slacken up on the speed a bit in case there’s much weight in the wind, it may help us out. Never mind if we don’t get ahead half a mile an hour, so that we hold her.”

“ I guess we’ll get along all right, an’ in case we should succeed in earning that two hundred dollars, you’re the one who has made it possible.”

“ I allowed at the start I could do it better than you fellers, ’cause you’d think these pleasure hunters ought to have everythin’ for nothin’, an’ wouldn’t hang out for the price. Say, I made ’em jump some, didn’t I? They must have thought I was a reg’lar old shellback.”

“ You roughed into all hands of us pretty smartly, Tommy! ” Ezra replied laughingly.

“ Yes, I know it, an’ I counted on doin’ it. You see there ain’t much show I’ll ever get such a chance again, an’ I thought to myself I’d make the most of it. It come pretty near ticklin’ me till I doubled up into a reg’lar curl, to see Dick’s face when I was

yippin' at him. I allow he chafed a little under the collar?"

"He says that you shall pay up for it as soon as we drop this tow."

"That'll be all right. I'm willin' to settle with the fiddler when I do any dancin'; but seein's how you fellers let it go as if I was the cap'en, you'll find I'll keep right on bein' one till we get rid of the yacht, an' then Dick can begin gettin' square whenever it pleases him. You'll stand by the anchor when we get off Matinicus, of course?"

"Stand by the anchor at Matinicus? What do you mean?"

"To make up our cargo, of course. Would you allow to run by there, an' miss the chance of gettin' what lobsters those fellers have saved for us?"

"But look here, Tommy, you can't run a lobster smack an' a tug boat at the same time."

"What's the reason I can't? Just keep your eye on me, an' see how easy it'll be done. Why it would be jest the same as throwin' good money away, to keep on past Matinicus when we've got to go within half a mile. Them fellers in the yacht won't take any account of an hour or two that we may spend, an' even if they do, how are they goin' to help themselves? I didn't say we wouldn't stop anywhere we wanted to."

"It won't do, Tommy. You mustn't run the risk of bitin' off more'n you can chew."

"I'll agree not to do anythin' of that kind; but you allowed I was to run this smack, an' I'm goin' to do it so's to show you how to pile up the dollars."

I didn't live three years with Abel Saunders for nothin'."

Ezra realized that it would be useless for him to enter into any argument just at that time, and, besides, he did not feel at liberty to remain away from the motor many moments, therefore he went aft, saying to himself as a smile overspread his face:

"I've heard about drivers before now, an' have seen some captains who could do a good deal of it; but it is my opinion that if Tommy Downing ever has command of a craft he'll be the worst driver that was ever seen off the Maine coast."

Once only during the night did Tommy come off duty, and then much against his will. He declared that it would be impossible for him to sleep while it was yet a question as to whether the Phœbe would be able to tow the yacht throughout the coming day, and begged permission to remain at his post; but Ezra was firm, and Master Downing crawled into the bunk protesting sorely.

Within half an hour, however, he was on his feet once more, declaring that try as he might slumber was impossible, and Ezra was virtually forced to let him have his own way.

Fortunately for the lobster traders, the wind did not spring up at sunrise. It was hardly more than a breath of the night that came over the sea, barely wrinkling the waters, and Master Downing cried triumphantly through the speaking tube:

"Earnin' that two hundred dollars now is just like takin' money from a baby, an' you'll have it in your pockets by midnight."

"You are allowin' us a long run," Ezra replied.

"I don't want to figger too close. If we say we won't get in for eighteen hours, an' then make it twelve, we'll feel all the better. It's a case of anchorin' now in about half an hour."

"What's he goin' to anchor for?" Dick asked, having just come out of his bunk.

Ezra repeated what Tommy had said to him during the night, and Dick was highly indignant that any such idea should be entertained.

"If we're to get two hundred dollars for towin' that yacht, surely we can afford to attend to the work, instead of keepin' them foolin' 'round while we try to buy lobsters. He shan't do anythin' of the kind."

"Now look here, Dick," Ezra said soothingly. "I threshed all that out with Tommy last night, an' believe he's in the right. It don't make any difference how much we are to get for this job of towin', because the people on the yacht were perfectly willin' to pay it. We agreed Tommy should have his way for the balance of the cruise, an' can't afford to go back on our word."

Dick was still arguing the matter when Tommy could be heard shouting from the wheel-house to those on the yacht:

"Ahoy there! We've got to haul up off Martinicus for half or three-quarters of an hour. Have a man standin' ready to let go your anchor when I give the word, for if each craft isn't in line, there's a chance we pick up the hawser with our screw."

"Ay, ay, sir," came back promptly from the Electra, and Ezra said to his partner with a laugh:

“Tommy’s swellin’ has done those sailors on the yacht considerable good, as it seems to me. They acted like a shiftless set when he tackled them; but now see how thoroughly awake they are to their duties.”

Dick made no reply, and that he had been convinced Tommy could be trusted to run the Phœbe, was shown when he promptly answered Master Downing’s call for some one to stand by the smack’s anchor.

“Let go there on the yacht!” Tommy shouted, giving the signal for half-speed to Ezra, and when the Phœbe had straightened up the hawsers, he ordered Dick to drop the anchor.

“Now then, you fellers can kind’er put things ship-shape, while I go ashore an’ pick up what lobsters they’ve got for us.”

“Dick or I’ll go with you, for we are not minded you shall do quite all the work, Tommy.”

Master Downing protested that he was well able to do such “chores” as were required aboard the smack; but Ezra stood firm this time, and Dick was left in charge of the Phœbe.

“We’re going to catch ’em jest at the right time of tide,” Master Downing said in a tone of satisfaction as they neared the cove. “There’s no use talkin’, Ezra, if a feller keeps pluggin’ right at his work, an’ don’t go whiffin’ here an’ there an’ mindin’ everybody’s business, he generally comes out right end up. Now I’m allowin’ if you and Dick had had your way with the swells what are out in their fancy yacht, you’d have been so tender-hearted that all

hands of us would have been down 'round Swans island by this time. We didn't fool any, but kept on movin', an' here we are just at the very minute when we want to strike our customers."

"Go ahead, Tommy," Ezra said laughingly. "You're doin' well enough, an' if the time ever comes that you have a smack of your own, I'm pityin' those who have to work under you."

"They'll earn their wages, an' don't you forget it," and then Master Downing raised his voice as he saw one of the islanders coming down to the shore: "Ahoy, my hearties! How about lobsters this mornin'?"

"Oh, it's you, is it; the baby lobster traders, eh? That's what we've allowed to call you down this way, seein's you ain't more than babies at the business."

"We're old enough to put aboard what you've saved for us, if so be you kept your word," Tommy replied cheerily.

"We are holdin' the catch for you all right, my son; but what's goin' on? Business so good you have to take two smacks instead of one?"

"Oh, that's nothin' but one of them toy yachts what come down here for the summer. We had to pick her up 'cause she'd got disabled; towin' her into Portland, that's all," and Tommy spoke as if that which had been done was no more than an incident in a lobster buyer's life, instead of an event. "We don't want to fool 'round here any longer'n we can help, an' if it so be you're ready to do business, we'd like to kind'er hustle."

"It strikes me you're always hustlin', ain't you?"

the man said good humoredly, as the bow of the Phœbe's dory grated on the sand.

"Well, that's what we've got to do if we're goin' to make a success of this business, so how long before we can wind up the trade with you?"

"What are you payin'?"

"Same old price. Give you more if I could, but it don't seem as though the market would stand it."

"All right, my son. We've said you should have our catch providin' you come in season, an' we Martinicus folks don't go back on our word. I'll get my end of the work done up in short order."

"Then we'll pull back to the smack, for the rest of the folks will see what's goin' on I reckon, by the time you get through," Tommy replied, and five minutes later he and his employer were on board the Phœbe where, within the next hour, they took aboard three hundred and twenty-five lobsters.

"How many do you figger we've got in the well now?" Tommy asked when the fishermen had departed and the lads were ready to continue the voyage.

"Seventeen hundred an' twenty-nine," Ezra replied.

"An' you fellers wanted to go home with less'n a thousand in the well. Now we've got some excuse for puttin' in at Westbay. Folks can't say we come back 'cause we got scared of Eliphalet Barnes, seein's we've got pretty nigh a full cargo, an' it hasn't cost us but one day's time to get that extra hundred or more. 'Cordin' to my idee, that comes pretty near bein' the way to run the lobster business. Of course

them as are out pleasure huntin' can loaf along to suit themselves; but fellers what have got to make a livin', same's I have, can't do very much idlin', else they'll run down to the heel mighty quick."

Then Master Downing hailed the lookout on the yacht, sternly commanding him to stand by to weigh anchor, and just at that moment one of the pleasure seekers came out of the cabin.

"Still at it, are you, my bold fisherman?" he cried in what might well have been either a mocking or a cheery tone. "Still showing our crew what it is to be under the command of a thoroughly good sailor?"

"Well, I'm trying to make 'em earn the wages I reckon you're payin', but they seem dreadful loath to do it."

"Do you have any objections to telling me why we're lying at anchor, instead of keeping on toward Portland accordin' to your contract?"

"No sir; you're welcome to anythin' I know myself," and Tommy waved his hand in a patronizing manner. "There was a little jag of lobsters waitin' for us here, an' I allowed that we couldn't afford to go past without pickin' 'em up."

"Combining business with pleasure, eh? Or perhaps I should say business and business; but I thought we had the first call on your services."

"Well, as nigh as I can make out the trade was that if we should pull you into Portland we got two hundred dollars for the job, an' there was nothin' said 'bout haulin' up to give our motor a chance to breathe. We haven't got through towin' of you yet,

an' when we let go of that 'ere hawser, you'll be ready to anchor inside Bug light."

"Where's Bug light?" the yachtman asked with a laugh.

"Just about as nigh the city of Portland as you can get unless you tie up at one of the docks. Now if there ain't anythin' else I can post you up on, we'll make a start."

"How many times do you intend to stop between here and Portland?"

"Nary once if we have good luck. It's a case of boomin' her right along from now on."

"How many lobsters did you take on board here?"

"A little more'n three hundred."

"Are they good ones?"

"You can bet they are, else we wouldn't bought 'em."

"What are they worth?"

"Well if we was goin' to peddle 'em, I'd say forty cents apiece."

"I'll take ten at that price, and send a man aboard to get them."

In the cuddy stood Dick and Ezra their faces crimsoned with shame because Master Downing, after insisting upon receiving two hundred dollars for towing the yacht, should put such an exorbitant price upon his wares.

"I believe I shall wring that fellow's neck for him!" Ezra said angrily. "The idea of *sellin'* lobsters to those yachtsmen after we are countin' on receivin' so much money for a little towin'."

“I could easily forgive Tommy if he had named somewhere near a decent price; but to charge forty cents!” Ezra exclaimed.

Master Downing came below just in time to hear this last remark, and said in a tone of surprise.

“What are you fellers kickin’ about? Did you go into the lobster business for your health, or to make a dollar or two? Here’s this ’ere crowd of pleasure hunters with more money’n they know what to do with, gettin’ a chance to buy lobsters for about what they’d pay for ’em in Boston. Yes, I reckon you’d have given ’em dead away, an’ been four dollars out by it! That ain’t my style of workin’. You’ve got considerable of a profit on what we’re goin’ to send aboard the yacht, an’ if that goes agin your grain, it strikes me the best thing you can do is to pay the full market price to the fishermen, ’cause it’s clean case that you don’t want to turn a dollar. Now then we’re ready to go, an’ you can start her up jest as soon as I pull them ten lobsters out’er the well.”

Five minutes later, so expeditiously did Tommy work, the Phœbe was under way once more with the Electra coming steadily behind her, and in the cabin the partners, all their ill temper gone, were laughing because Master Downing had insisted on getting the cash for his lobsters before he delivered them.

During all this day Tommy insisted upon standing at the wheel, despite everything Ezra could say against it. He did indeed come below when the

meals were served; but it was only to eat the food as rapidly as possible that he might get back to the wheel-house without delay, for there appeared to be the belief in his mind that nobody but he could steer the Phœbe to a successful conclusion of the voyage.

And the voyage was concluded successfully, whether Master Downing or the Phœbe should be credited with the performance. It was not yet nine o'clock in the evening when Master Downing came up into the inner harbor, swinging the Phœbe around in order to straighten the Electra out in a good mooring-place, gave the word to cast off the hawser, and then signalled for the smack to be backed down alongside the yacht.

"I am allowin' the job has been done," Tommy said, standing with his head out of the pilot-house window. "An' we haven't spent any too much time in the doing of it."

"You're right, my lad," one of the yachtsmen said, for all the party were in the cockpit of their dainty little craft. "You have fairly earned your money, and here it is, unless you feel that your dignity will suffer by coming for it."

The man was holding out a number of bank notes as he spoke, while the others watched curiously to see what the inflated little captain of the smack would do.

"I'm reckonin' I can afford to lose my dignity for the sake of gettin' hold of two hundred dollars," Tommy said with a laugh as he clambered on board

the *Electra*, and the gentleman who had previously spoken, instead of at once delivering up the money, said:

“Tell me your name, young man. It might be that I would like to engage a master for a yacht, and young though you are, I believe I would be willing to entrust any ordinary sized craft to your keeping.”

“Well, that’s where you’d be makin’ a big mistake, Mister,” Tommy replied frankly. “I don’t know much of anythin’ but the lobster business, an’ that I ain’t got down quite as fine as I might.”

“Have you ever done anything else to earn money?”

“That’s all I ever had a chance to do. You see I’m only hired on this smack. I don’t run her myself.”

“Indeed!” one of the men interrupted. “I had an idea last night that you not only owned her, but this yacht as well.”

“Well, you see the fact of it was, Mister, somebody had to get a hustle on when we took you in tow, else you wouldn’t have been here now, an’ there didn’t seem to be anybody who could do it but me.”

“Where do you live?”

“Well, I suppose I live aboard this smack,” Tommy said hesitatingly. “You see I ain’t stocked up on homes very rich. I did hang out with Abel Saunders down to Isle au Haut; but the fellers what have gone inter the lobster-buyin’ business gave me a chance to work for ’em, an’—Well, come right down to facts, I don’t live anywhere.”

“See here, my son,” the yachtsman said as he gave

the money into Tommy's hands, and now speaking seriously. "I have left my card with that money, and when the lobster business is over for the season, as I suppose it will be when winter comes, I'm asking you to write telling me if you would like a position of any kind, and what. I believe that with half a chance you would make quite a man."

"I don't know about that, sir; but I am telling you the truth, that I'd like to try."

"Well, when you're ready send me a letter, and it isn't impossible that you and I may see each other sometime in the future."

Tommy hung in the wind a few seconds, as if doubtful whether the interview was at an end, and then with a quick jerk of the head which was intended as a bow, he went aboard the Phœbe, stopping at the cuddy companion to hand the money to the partners, who had been careful to keep out of sight, after which he said briskly:

"Now then, if you fellers want to make Westbay in time to get a little sleep before mornin', you'd better be turnin' that screw. Good-night, you people on the yacht!"

"Good-night, captain!" came back from half a dozen voices as the Phœbe darted ahead, sending up tiny jets of spray from her bow, and in the cuddy Ezra and Dick, ashamed of themselves for being ashamed of their temporary captain, were congratulating each other upon the success of the cruise.

"It's a big thing that's been done, all owin' to Tommy," Ezra said emphatically, determined that Master Downing should have his full share of the

credit. "Without him we would have come back with less than a thousand lobsters in the well, an' shown to the people at home that we'd been frightened by Eliphalet Barnes. Now we've got nearly a full cargo, an' have made two hundred dollars with but very little cost of labor."

"You are forgettin' that four dollars Tommy got for the ten lobsters he sold the yachtman," Dick said laughingly. "I have come to believe since yesterday that he deserves an equal share with us in this business, an' if you say the word we'll make the style of this concern Upton, Marshall & Company."

"Indeed I do say it!" Ezra replied as if highly pleased, and stepping to the speaking-tube he shouted:

"Say, Tommy, we've taken you in as a partner. You now belong to the firm of Upton, Marshall & Co."

"Oh, I do, eh?" Master Downing replied as if in bewilderment. "Well, say, does that knock off the five dollars a week?"

"Of course you can't be a member of the firm, an' be paid a salary at the same time; but you are to have a full third of all the profits."

"Me? A third of what you fellers are makin'?"

"Of course. You are an equal partner."

"Say, you ain't foolin' me, or anythin' of that kind, are you?"

"No, it's a straight thing. We have just decided that you are entitled to get as much out of this business as either of us, an' from this on we are to share and share alike."

While one might have counted twenty there was

no reply to this statement, and then came the words:

“ Say, I haven’t begun to work yet. Talk about my gettin’ a third of all the money you fellers have been makin’! If we don’t hump her up after this it’ll be because my name ain’t Tommy! ”

CHAPTER XIII

SETTLING ACCOUNTS

The Phœbe was made fast to the pier in front of Marshall & Jordan's warehouse in Westbay shortly after midnight, and the tired boys crept into their bunks triumphantly happy despite the weariness which weighted heavily every limb.

Master Downing would have talked of his "great luck" in having been admitted to partnership, or discussed the possibility of making a "pot of money" before the season closed, but that Ezra and Dick positively refused to listen, the latter saying sleepily and impatiently:

"I wouldn't stay out of my bunk a minute longer if you could tell me where to find a cargo of gold dollars, for I'm even more tired than on the night we towed the Phœbe around Quoddy Head."

Within two minutes after having said this he was breathing heavily in slumber, as also was Ezra, and Tommy could do no less than follow the example set by his partners, unless he was minded to talk to the motor, which would not be very satisfactory.

However, the new partner made up for the time thus lost by arousing his companions before the new day had fully dawned, and when Dick grumblingly asked what he expected to gain by thus "getting up

in the night" when they were in port, he replied calmly, at the same moment beginning to build a fire in the cook-stove:

"It's no reason why we should jest the same as waste a whole day, even if we are at the dock. There are the lobsters to be packed —"

"We can't do that till the shops are open, for we haven't more than five barrels in the store-house, an' it won't be possible to buy any more for two or three hours yet," Ezra said sleepily, rolling over as if to take another nap."

"You've got to eat breakfast, haven't you?" Master Downing asked innocently. "It strikes me that it's time to overhaul the motor, seein's how it has been runnin' pretty hard for the last forty-eight hours without so much as havin' one stroke done in the way of cleanin'. I'm allowin' it must be gummed up mighty bad."

"All that can be done in half an hour," and Ezra covered his head with the blanket to shut out from his eyes the light of the fire.

"Then this is jest about the half-hour in which to do it," Tommy persisted. "It'll take quite a spell to get breakfast, if we count on havin' much of anythin' to eat, an', besides, I'm reckonin' this 'ere stove will heat the cuddy a bit too hot for comfortable sleepin', after I once get the fire goin'."

The boys were convinced of the truth of this last remark, for already was it possible to feel the heat, and Dick cried irritably as he sprang from the bunk,

"Look here, Tommy, there's no question but that you're a mighty good hand on a craft like this, for

you surely know how to work, an' keep it up all the time. We've proved that we believe it, by givin' you an equal share in the business; but it strikes me that now has come the time when there should be a few rules laid down, otherwise you'll have Ezra an' me worn to skeletons. You showed yesterday what could be done in the way of takin' command, an' we're not minded to have that thing happen again. You're not to ride over us as you did then."

"If it hadn't been for my hustlin' you wouldn't have had two hundred extra dollars in that 'ere bag, an' the Phœbe wouldn't be here at the dock in West-bay," Master Downing replied placidly.

"I'm agreein' to all that; but at the same time it's dead certain we can't keep the pace you're settin'," Dick said with a smile, for he was rapidly getting the best of his temper.

"What is it you want?"

"To have it understood that you're not to rush the work too fast, at least, not until Ezra an' I've got broken in to it. Then again, you're not to bully as you did when we took the yacht in tow. We're willin' to obey orders when it's certain, as it was then, that you know best how to do the job. I don't like the idea of bein' called a lubber."

"Then I'll knock off on that part of it; but when a feller is tryin' to get a big craft like the Electra in tow, he has to rave a good bit to keep things movin'. I reckon I did bear down a little rough, 'cause I thought it would be the last chance I'd have, an' I was bound to make the most of it."

"You did bear down all right; but now you've had

your fun, an' if we should come alongside of another yacht, don't try to make it so apparent that Ezra an' I have just come out of a farm-yard," and now Dick was really laughing. "You are one of the partners, an' have equal rights with us. I'll go even further than that, an' say we're willin' you should act as captain, for I surely believe you know more about the business than three or four like us; but what we're askin' for is a fair deal, Tommy."

"An' that's what you shall have," Master Downing replied, as if it was in his power to refuse the request. "Then it's a sure thing that I'm to be cap'en right along?"

"We are not allowin' that you're to stay in the wheel-house, an' put on frills; but when it comes to sayin' where we shall go, or how the work ought to be done, we'll obey orders. However, you're to remember this: While the smack is in port, same as now, an' we're pretty near tired to death, you're not goin' to rout us out before daybreak by buildin' a smotherin' fire in that cook-stove."

"Do you count on layin' at the dock with a well full of lobsters till long about nine o'clock in the mornin'?" Master Downing asked seriously, and Ezra replied, as soon as it was possible to check his mirth sufficiently to admit of speaking:

"We'll agree to turn out at sunrise."

"I'll remember that part of it," Master Downing said, and then he relapsed into silence while one might have counted thirty, after which he asked abruptly:

"How much do you reckon would be coming for my share of these two trips?"

“That’s what we can’t tell until after gettin’ the account of sales from Dick’s father,” Ezra said as he took from the drawer beneath the table a small book in which he had kept a record of the several transactions. “If you want some kind of an idea I can give it to you; but how about goin’ to work? Can you afford to spend the time in lookin’ over these figures?”

“I’ll keep right along cookin’, an’ you can do the talkin’; then we’ll get ahead just as fast as if you laid still an’ watched me,” and Tommy made a great pretense of working rapidly as if to show that no time would be lost if Ezra gave an account of the business already done.

“Well, here goes; but of course a good deal of it’s guess-work,” and Ezra read from his book. “We bought two thousand an’ forty-nine lobsters on the first cruise, an’ allowed that they’d average a pound an’ a half apiece; which is what they will really go, if not a little more. Now the weight of that number should be three thousand an’ seventy-three pounds, for which we paid two hundred, forty-five dollars and eighty-four cents, or if you should figure it at twelve cents apiece, an’ not take care of the fractions, it would amount to four cents more. Now I assume that the provisions cost us three dollars on that cruise; gasoline five dollars; freight on the lobsters seven dollars; twenty-five barrels at ten cents each would be two dollars an’ a half, an’ the lobsters we ate cost twelve cents —”

“Are you going to figure it down as fine as that?” Dick asked with a laugh.

“ Well, that’s what we’ve got to do, if we’re goin’ to keep a strict account. Your father will want us to figure within twelve cents, I reckon.”

“ All right; go ahead! What does she make? ” Tommy asked impatiently.

“ I reckon the expense at seventeen dollars an’ sixty-two cents; add that to two hundred forty-five dollars an’ eighty-four cents, an’ the cargo stands us two hundred sixty-three dollars an’ forty-three cents. We were to get fifteen cents a pound, an’ fifteen times three thousand an’ seventy-three is four hundred, sixty dollars an’ ninety-five cents. Subtract what the lobsters cost from what you allow Mr. Marshall has already received, an’ it leaves us a profit of one hundred, ninety-seven dollars an’ forty-nine cents —”

“ Jimminy crickets! Does she come out as big as that! What would I have thought of havin’ a share in that big lump of money when I was livin’ with Abel Saunders! ” Master Downing cried as he came within an inch of dropping the frying-pan in which he was cooking the bacon.

“ Yes; but that doesn’t all belong to us,” Ezra replied. “ We agreed to pay one-quarter of the earnings to ’Squire Merrill. Then there’s that ‘easy’ twenty dollars from the sick man, which makes the earnings two hundred, seventeen dollars an’ forty-nine cents. That would give as the boat’s share fifty-four dollars an’ thirty-seven cents, leavin’ each of us the same amount.”

“ Well, say, I’m rich already! Fifty-four dollars for my share! Why, I might have staid with Abel

Saunders five years, an' I wouldn't have seen half that much money!"

"You may not see any of it now," Dick said laughing boisterously. "Don't forget that father hired a lawyer to help us out of the scrape which earnin' 'easy money' got us into. When that's paid we may find ourselves in debt on the first cruise."

"I don't believe it can be anywhere near as bad as that," Ezra said gravely. "At all events we won't count those chickens. Now if you want to hear the way I have figured on the second cruise, with a good deal of guess-work to it, of course, why here she is: We bought seventeen hundred an' twenty-nine lobsters on this cruise, an' sold to the yacht people ten. Now the way I've figured it is to subtract that ten from the first number for the sake of easy reckonin', which leaves us seventeen hundred an' nineteen; or twenty-five hundred an' seventy-eight pounds that cost us eight cents a pound, makin' two hundred, six dollars, an' twenty-four cents. I've allowed that we'll need nineteen barrels to send 'em away in; that makes one dollar an' ninety cents. I've guessed that we used up five dollars worth of provisions, an' eight dollars worth of gasoline, with the freight at seven dollars. That makes twenty-one, ninety. Then there are those ten we sold the yacht that cost one-twenty, so it brings the cost of our cargo to two hundred, twenty-nine dollars, an' thirty-four cents. Now allowin' we get fifteen cents a pound for 'em, we shall have three hundred, eighty-six dollars, an' sev-

enty cents, which gives us a profit of one hundred, fifty-seven dollars, an' thirty-six cents —"

"What about the lobsters we sold the yacht?" Tommy asked jealously.

"If you wait a minute you'll see. I said the profit on the lot which we sent away will be one hundred, fifty-seven dollars, an' thirty-six cents. Now we must add to that the two hundred we got for towin', an' the four the yachtsmen paid us. That gives a clean profit of three hundred, sixty-one dollars, an' thirty-six cents. 'Squire Merrill's share for the boat is ninety dollars an' thirty-four cents, leavin' that same amount comin' to each of us. So, if I've guessed rightly, we made on the first cruise fifty-four dollars an' thirty-seven cents apiece, an' on this cruise ninety dollars an' thirty-four cents, givin' as our earnings for the two trips one hundred, forty-four dollars, an' seventy-one cents apiece, with the lawyer still to be paid."

"Gee Willikens! Unless that lawyer is a reg-lar shark I'll bet there's more comin' to me out'er this trip than Abel Saunders could raise in six months' time!" Tommy cried. "When things are settled down so's we can square up for the money you fellers borrowed, an' we get the lawyer paid, I'm goin' to buy a whole suit of store clothes. I'd like to know how it feels to have sich things on. Then I'm goin'—"

Tommy did not not have an opportunity to go into the details of what he would do with his share of the earnings, for at that moment a footstep was

heard on the deck, and Mr. Marshall looked in through the companion-hatch.

“Well, boys, been doing any more smuggling since I saw you last?”

As a matter of course he expected to receive a negative reply to his question; but much to his surprise Dick replied with no little of shame-facedness:

“That’s what we have been doin’, sir; but Mr. Carter got there in time to see that it was only a plot which Eliphalet Barnes had laid for us.”

“So you have got that precious Mr. Barnes in jail at last, have you?”

“That’s just what we haven’t, sir. Barnes gave Mr. Carter the slip very neatly, an’ one is chasin’ the other now.”

Then, when Mr. Marshall had come into the cabin, Dick gave him a detailed account of this second cruise, concluding by saying much to Master Downing’s delight:

“If it hadn’t been for Tommy we shouldn’t have taken in a very large cargo, nor would we have run the risk of tryin’ to tow the yacht, so it can be set down that what was earned on this second cruise has been by him. Ezra an’ I believe he ought to be made a partner in the business, an’ we have promised him as much.”

“I think you have done well, my son. From what I have already seen of the young gentleman, he will keep matters moving in proper shape.”

“An’ we’ll have to dance to his pipin’, or he’ll do as he did this mornin’—build a fire to roast us out,” Dick replied laughingly, and added seri-

ously, "How much do you suppose we'll have to pay the lawyer, father?"

"That I can't say, my boy, for it is impossible to guess how much more trouble you may have in regard to the Chinaman."

"What do you fancy it may be?"

"Perhaps fifty dollars."

An expression of relief came over the faces of the boys, and Mr. Marshall asked with a smile:

"What were you counting on being obliged to pay?"

"That's what we didn't know, sir; but Ezra was figurin' up the profits on the two cruises, guessin' pretty nearly at the expenses, an' we were wonderin' how much would be left after the lawyer was paid."

"At how much are you estimating the profits?"

"One hundred, forty-five dollars, an' seventy-one cents for each share!" Dick cried triumphantly. "I reckon 'Squire Merrill will think he made a good trade when he leased us the Phœbe for one-quarter of the earnings. He's gettin' nearly an hundred an' fifty dollars for the use of her eight or nine days, to say nothin' of what's been done in the way of repairs. I wonder how much he reckons her worth?"

"'Squire Merrill doesn't own the Phœbe," Mr. Marshall said, speaking slowly as if the better to enjoy the surprise caused by the announcement, and Ezra cried in a tone of dismay:

"Then he sold out after agreein' we might use her the whole season!"

"The sale of the Phœbe won't make any differ-

ence in your bargain, save that it may work very much to your advantage," Mr. Marshall replied. "Believing that it was an excessive rental for the boat, in comparison with her value, I bantered 'Squire Merrill to sell her outright, and he set the price at eleven hundred dollars, which I paid at once."

"Then you own the Phœbe, father?" Dick exclaimed.

"Yes, she is my property, and you can run her on the same terms as those agreed upon with 'Squire Merrill, or you may pay the legal rate of interest for the use of the money, and on each cruise deposit with me one-quarter of the earnings to go toward the purchase money. It is an opportunity for you to own her outright at the end of the season, providing you attend to business as well as you've begun, and do not make any more acquaintances of the same stamp as Mr. Barnes."

"We're to have a chance of buyin' the boat, eh?" Tommy asked eagerly. "Well, see here, if that's a fact why don't we put in *half* our earnin's, an' save payin' interest on what she costs? Let's see, twice one forty-four is — two fours are eight, two fours are eight, two ones are two — two hundred an' eighty-eight dollars. That would be payin' more'n a quarter of the price in two weeks, an' at the same time leave each of us a big pile."

"You can pay for her as you please, providing you set aside not less than one full quarter of the earnings. Mr. Jordan and I have decided that you shall open an account with the firm; we have charged

you with five hundred dollars cash advanced, and have received from the first lot of lobsters sent to Boston four hundred, sixty dollars, and ninety-five cents. Of course you will need money for the next cruise, therefore in payment of the loan we shall deduct from the amount sent by the Boston parties, only the first two hundred and fifty dollars, leaving you at liberty to draw on us for as much more as may be needed to buy a third cargo."

The possibility of owning one-third of such a craft as the Phœbe, and the knowledge that he had already earned what seemed to him like a very large amount of money, caused Master Downing to forget entirely his duties as cook. The pork was allowed to remain in the frying-pan on the stove until it was burned to a cinder, and only when the pungent smoke literally filled the cuddy, did he realize that visions of future wealth were making him extravagantly reckless regarding the present.

"Well, if I go on this way burnin' up good pork that's worth twelve cents a pound, I'm reckonin' I shan't stay in the concern very long," he said ruefully as he set about preparing breakfast anew. "When a feller has made a hundred an' forty-four dollars in two short cruises like we've had, a pound of twelve-cent pork don't seem to amount to much of anythin', an' yet eight of 'em come pretty near standin' for a dollar."

"That's the way to figure it, my boy!" Mr. Marshall said approvingly. "The old saying that if you take care of the cents the dollars will look after themselves, is a true one. But when the cook

of a lobster smack doesn't indulge in any more mischief than the waste of a pound of pork, especially at such a time as this, he may be forgiven. Dick, you and Ezra had better go to your own homes for breakfast, and there is no question but that your mothers want to see you. Tommy can go with either of you, or cook his own meal here."

"I reckon I'll stay where I am," Master Downing replied thoughtfully. "You see I don't look no ways fit to go inter a decent house; but you wait till I get some real store clothes, an' then I'll be willin' to go to breakfast with anybody."

As a matter of fact, Ezra had been very eager to go home and acquaint his mother with the good news; but did not believe himself at liberty to do so until Mr. Marshall made the suggestion, whereupon he hurried away at the top of his speed, Dick and his father following at a more leisurely pace, leaving Master Downing in sole charge of the Phœbe.

"I'll get enough to eat; but ain't goin' to waste sich a terrible lot of time cookin'," Tommy said to himself. "What I want is to go up inter the pilot-house an' look 'round on my property. Gee! Don't I wish Abel Saunders knew how much money I've made! He'd jest about turn green! I did think catchin' lobsters was a pretty fair kind of business, but buyin' 'em knocks it endways. One hundred an' forty-five dollars belongin' to Tommy Downing Esquire! Say, that's goin' some, ain't it? If things keep on this way I can buy the whole of Isle au Haut, if I want to. But I don't! I'm go-

in' to have a smack all to myself some day, an' it ain't no ways certain I shan't have a reg'lar store to go with it. I could carry a load of stuff down to the islands, an' trade it off for lobsters; that would give me a profit both ways. Guess I won't cook anythin', anyhow! A couple of pilot-breads will do for me, an' I'll go up on deck so's folks can see what Tommy Downing Esquire is like!"

Then Master Downing, pacing fore and aft in view of such of the Westbay citizens as were astir at that early hour, burst into melody:

"I'se bound to run all day,
I'se bound to run all night;
I've bet my money on a bob-tailed nag,
Somebody's bettin' on the bay."

A thoroughly enjoyable hour did "Tomas Downing Esquire" spend building air castles which were not so shadowy but that realization was possible, and it is safe to say that if any party of yachtsmen, finding their craft disabled, had asked the young gentleman for a tow, they would have been treated to a greater flow of emphatic language than was indulged in on the night when the Electra's hawser was made fast to the Phœbe.

Then Ezra and Dick came on board, and the serious work of the day was begun.

To pack the cargo properly, mark the barrels according to the directions which Mr. Marshall's partner sent aboard, refill the gasoline tanks, replenish the stores, give the motor an overhauling, and set the Phœbe to rights generally, was indeed a full day's work.

When it had been done the partners were tired enough to look upon the bunks in the cabin with longing eyes, and yet it had been decided that Ezra and Dick should spend the night at their homes, Tommy being more than willing to remain alone.

"We'll be back by daylight," Ezra said as they went over the rail leaving Master Downing monarch of all he surveyed, and that young gentleman replied almost threateningly:

"You'll be here by that time or I'll know the reason why! If we're to start out on another cruise, the screw of this 'ere craft must be turnin' as soon as it's light enough to see our way down the harbor."

"All right, Tommy. Don't fret yourself; we'll be here!" Ezra cried merrily, and then Master Downing had another opportunity of building air castles, or of gloating over the good fortune which had come upon him so suddenly.

Mr. Marshall had visited the Phœbe during the afternoon while the boys were working industriously, to explain that in the opinion of the attorney who had been engaged to look after the matter, there was little need for them to borrow trouble concerning the outcome of the Chinese affair, save that it was probable they would be called upon to spend some little time ashore in event of Mr. Barnes' capture; but until that had been effected they need fear no interruption to their business.

True to their agreement, Dick and Ezra came over the rail of the Phœbe as soon as the first gray light of a new day could be seen in the eastern sky,

and early though the hour was, they found that their partner had already done a goodly amount of work. Breakfast was ready and on the table; all the hawsers save one had been cast off, and everything was in order for a quick departure.

“I reckon we’d better eat breakfast while we’re under way,” Master Downing said in a business-like tone as he cast off the last remaining hawser. “It won’t pay to loaf here now that there’s light enough to see our way past the shippin’ in the harbor.”

“That’s all right, Tommy, drive her! She’s nothin’ but a lobster smack, so shove her through!” Dick said laughingly as Ezra went into the cuddy to start the motor. “If you live long enough, I’m countin’ on hearin’ you spoken of as the hardest driver to be found on the Maine coast, an’ that’s sayin’ considerable.”

“I reckon you won’t be disappointed there,” Master Downing replied as he stationed himself at the wheel. “If ever I have a crew of two fellers that can do half as much work as they ought’er, I’ll show folks what drivin’ is. Why, look here, Dick. S’posin’ we buckle right down to it, an’ don’t waste a minute of time day or night for this summer, see where we’d come out! It would be a clear case of ownin’ this smack, an’ havin’ dollars in the bank before the season’s over.”

“Do you allow that it would be necessary to sleep any?”

“Well, we might turn in now an’ then, when there wasn’t anythin’ else to do; but I hold to it that a feller can keep his eyes open if there’s work enough

on hand to make him move 'round. We shan't have any sich luck this cruise as we had last, 'cause disabled yachts with them on board as don't know the value of money, ain't to be picked up every day. Say, that was a great snap, eh? Two hundred dollars! Two hundred great, big, heavy dollars jest for towin' that dandified yacht up here! How much cash are we takin' with us this time?"

"A little over three hundred dollars, I believe, was what Ezra got from the shop yesterday. At all events it's enough to fill the well, providin' we come across the goods, an' father's partner says that he believes lobsters will go up a little in price before we get back."

"But we can't afford to pay any more on the chances of what your father's partner thinks," Tommy said decidedly. "Now if you'd got him to telegraph us at some of the towns along the coast where we're likely to put in, that would be another matter."

"I never thought of that," Dick said ruefully. "It might be a big advantage to us, especially if we should run across other smacks who wanted to fill their wells."

"Yes, an' that's somethin' you've got to count on, for you'll find plenty of 'em before we're done with the business, an' the feller what wants to bring in the biggest cargo without a chance of loss, has got to keep posted on the market price. It seems to me if I'd been ashore all night, I'd kind'er thought up sich things."

"You had plenty of chance yesterday, I notice,"

Dick said laughingly, and then he went below for breakfast, finding Ezra already at the table, for the motor was running, as Master Upton declared, "like a lady."

Ezra and Dick had expected that on this day, at least, Master Downing could think of, and talk of, nothing save his share in the lobster-buying business. They fancied that during every moment when he had an auditor, what might be done in the future would be his theme, and yet it was as if Tommy had forgotten entirely his good fortune, remembering only the fact of being aboard the Phœbe, where it was necessary to drive his partners as well as himself in order that the greatest possible amount of work be performed in the shortest space of time.

As soon as he had eaten breakfast Dick said to Ezra, believing he knew of an opportunity for sport:

"Now I'll go into the pilot-house pretending I've come to relieve Tommy, an' you'll find that he won't show himself here for breakfast, because of wantin' to explain how he's goin' to spend his money. After his tongue has been runnin' a while, you come up softly so's to hear him. It will be great fun."

Then Dick did as he himself had suggested, and on entering the pilot-house was surprised to hear the junior partner of the concern say somewhat testily:

"Well, you couldn't find anythin' else to do below, I s'pose, or you wouldn't have been here now?"

"If I'd known you were hungry I'd have hurried; but you had plenty of chance to eat before

we came abroad, an' I didn't fancy it made any difference to you."

"So far as eatin' is concerned, that don't count; but we're out for work, an' it strikes me it won't pay to hang 'round the table longer than's necessary."

"What's to be done that's so important?" Dick asked in surprise.

"I've never seen the time yet when a feller couldn't find somethin' to do aboard a craft of this size, an' we want'er get inter shape before strikin' Monhegan."

"Are you goin' to stop there this trip?"

"Sure; didn't we get six hundred lobsters there the last time, an' agreed to be back inside of ten days? You've got to keep your word in this business if you count on the fishermen savin' their catch."

Then Master Downing went below where he spent not less than five full minutes eating, after which he stumped on deck, taking the helm despite Dick's protests, on the ground that he was the only member of the party who could hold the craft steady enough to leave a straight wake behind.

"We ought'er be off Monhegan by noon, an' then it'll be a case of beginnin' to put the third cargo aboard, so I reckon some of you better have dinner ready 'long 'bout eleven o'clock. Then we won't have anythin' to bother us till we get through with the fishermen there."

More than once during the forenoon did Master Downing whistle through the tube to ask if the Phœbe was being kept at her best pace, or to grumble

because she seemed to move sluggishly, until Ezra came so near losing his temper that he replied sharply:

“ See here, old man, you can’t attend to both ends of this craft at the same time. She’s runnin’ as well as possible, an’ we who are below will look after this part of the business.” Then, as if regretting having spoken thus curtly, he added with a laugh, “ Look after yourself, Tommy, or you’ll break a blood vessel tryin’ to drive Dick an’ me.”

“ I’ll have to break more’n one if I get you fellers to movin’ lively,” came grumblingly through the tube, and the conversation was at an end.

The Phœbe arrived in due season at Monhegan, and although Tommy declared that she had been running at no more than half-speed, remarkably good time had been made.

As a matter of course, Master Downing insisted on going ashore to look after the business, as if believing his partners were incapable of so doing, and Ezra insisted on accompanying him.

The first fisherman they saw was the old man whom the others had called Uncle ’Siah, and he greeted the boys right heartily.

“ Glad to see you’re keepin’ your word, lads, an’ I’m hopin’ you made good money on the cruise, ’cause there’s nothin’ that’ll spur boys up to work so much as seein’ somethin’ comin’ out of it. Did you do fairly well? ”

“ Yes, sir; we made good wages,” Ezra replied, not caring to go into details, and Tommy asked impatiently:

“Got any lobsters for us this trip?”

“Sure; I reckon you’ll scrape up about as many as you got the last time, if not a little more. What’s the news?”

“Nothin’ in particular, sir,” Ezra replied, regretting now that he had not remembered to bring some newspapers. “The fact is, we didn’t stop in port but one day, an’ hardly went ashore. I don’t suppose anythin’ has changed here?”

“Well, not to speak of, not to speak of. I allow you didn’t meet Eliphalet Barnes while you was comin’ down, eh?”

“He was at Eastport the last time we heard of him,” Ezra said carelessly, not fancying Uncle ’Siah could give him anything startling in the way of information.

“Yes, but that must have been quite a spell ago, seein’s he went past here yesterday in one of them power dories, an’ give us a hail.”

“He went by here yesterday?” Tommy repeated in mingled amazement and surprise.

“Sartin; why not? Eliphalet’s a powerful traveler, he is, an’ it wouldn’t surprise me a little bit if that dory of his was loaded plumb to the gun’le with drinkables that never paid a cent of duty.”

CHAPTER XIV

AGROUND

When Uncle 'Siah gave what was surely startling information to the young lobster traders, the lads stood silent and motionless, staring at each other a full half-minute, when the old man asked in surprise:

“What seems to be the matter? I'm hopin' you youngsters haven't been mixin' up in any of 'Liphalet's business, eh? Somehow folks down this way have got in the way of thinkin' that smugglin' ain't anything so far out'er plumb; but it's a mighty serious matter when the government pulls a man up for doin' it.”

“We've got nothin' to do with him in a friendly way, an' would be mighty glad if we were certain of never seein' the man again,” Ezra replied quickly, determined to disabuse Uncle 'Siah of any idea that they had been tempted to engage in smuggling. “The fact is that he tried to get us into trouble, an' when we left Quoddy Head the officers were after him hot. It surprised us to know he had given them the slip so quickly.”

“It wouldn't jar me to know 'Liphalet had taken to flyin',” the old man said thoughtfully. “I've known him to crawl out'er a hole which didn't seem to have but one end, an' how it happened that the

officers caught him a spell ago is somethin' I never could figger out."

"Do you suppose he was headin' for Portland when he went by here?" Ezra asked, and Uncle 'Siah replied:

"I'm allowin' he wouldn't do anythin' quite so brash as that. Most likely he counted on pullin' in somewhere 'round Boothbay, an' come out here to show himself, reckonin' we'd report, if any questions were asked, that he was makin' straight to the westward. I wouldn't be afraid to predict that you'll find him well down to the east'ard when you get there, for there's no man in this country who can hop 'round livelier than that same 'Liphalet Barnes."

There could be no question as to the correctness of this information, and the boys understood that Mr. Carter had failed in his attempt to capture the smuggler. It was not pleasant to thus know that they might come upon their enemy at any time, for there was no doubt in their minds but that Barnes would do what he could to punish them for having sent word to the customs officers.

So agitated were they that for the time being even Tommy Downing forgot the purpose for which they had anchored off Monhegan, as the two lads speculated upon the dismal possibilities of the future; but the junior partner was the first to collect his scattered senses, and cried as if having suddenly awakened from profound sleep:

"Say! what did we come here for? Anybody'd think there was nothin' to be done but loaf 'round

on shore swappin' yarns! We're bound to get a cargo of lobsters, no matter how many smugglers are kitin' 'longshore in power boats, so s'pose we make a beginnin' by pickin' up what Uncle 'Siah's got?"

Ezra aroused himself as if with an effort, and soon the partners were at work taking lobsters aboard, not coming to an end of their labors until three hundred and ten had been put in the well.

By the time all this was done and settlement made with the fishermen, the afternoon was nearly spent, therefore Dick proposed that they remain in harbor until morning, rather than, as he expressed it, "work themselves to death at the start."

"That's a nice way to begin layin' up money to pay for the smack!" Tommy cried scornfully. "If we can't run nights it'll pay us to hire somebody who can. I'll agree to stand at the wheel from here to Matinicus, if you two will fix it so's to keep the screw turnin', an' when we get there I'll do a full day's work on the end of it."

"But see here, Tommy," Dick said almost imploringly as Master Downing began to heave in on the anchor cable; "we can't keep on runnin' from one island to the other without gettin' some sleep! It's a case of restin' part of the time."

"Wait till we get back to Westbay with a well full of lobsters, an' then take a couple of days off for restin'," Master Downing replied as he brought the anchor inboard, thus forcing one of his comrades to start the motor in order to prevent the Phœbe from drifting ashore. Then, when she was

forging ahead once more he shouted from the pilot-house, "You fellers can stand hourly watches, an' in that way you'll bottle up all the sleep that'll be needed, by the time we make Matinicus!"

"There's no use tryin' to argue with him," Ezra said laughingly. "He has got such a chance for makin' money as he never had before, an' intends to work the snap for all it's worth. An' a mighty good thing it is for me," he added in a more serious tone. "I'm the one who needs to earn a dollar worse than any other member of the firm, 'cause I've got a family dependin' on me, an' the harder he drives the more cheerful I ought to feel. You keep an eye on the motor, an' I'll get supper; when that has been eaten you can turn in as he proposes."

"I'd feel like a fool to be sleepin' while you two were doin' all the work," Master Marshall grumbled, while at the same time he realized that the junior partner was doing right to "drive" them once a cruise had been begun.

When the evening meal was ready, Ezra went into the pilot-house that Tommy might go below and get his share, and while the two were at table Dick and Master Downing had a long discussion as to how the business of lobster buying could be conducted to the best advantage.

It goes without saying that Tommy had the best of the argument; but Dick would not admit as much, and Master Downing said before he went on deck, having eaten the meal in less than ten minutes:

"You've got a father who is willin' to pay all your bills, so it wouldn't be such a very serious mat-

ter for you if this 'ere concern should bust up; but here's the chance of my life, an' if a little extra work is goin' to give me a better grip on it, then you bet I'll hustle. Ezra is fixed better'n I am, 'cause he's got a home; but it costs him considerable to keep it goin', an' he's bound to do a big pile of humpin', if he counts on makin' both ends meet. So you see us two must drive; but we're willin' for you to get all the comfort you can out'er the cruise, an' I'm ready to do your share of the work."

"I may not be willin' to plug into it as hard as you fellows; but I'm not such a duffer as to stand by an' see you drivin' at what ought'er be done by me."

To this Tommy made no reply; but there was a smile on his face as he entered the pilot-house, and Ezra asked:

"Has Dick been scoldin' because you try to drive him too hard?"

"He's been kickin' a little," Tommy replied carelessly; "but I'm beginnin' to believe he likes to find fault—some fellers are built that way—so it don't bother me a little bit. We'll have the anchor down off Matinicus quite a spell before midnight, so there won't be much chance for any of us to get a great deal of sufferin'."

And in this Tommy was correct. Dick was not yet ready to turn in when the helmsman shouted through the speaking-tube:

"If one of you'll stand by the anchor, I reckon we'll find good holdin' ground jest off that point."

"Have we arrived so soon?" Dick cried as he

ran on deck, and to his surprise found that the Phœbe was already in a snug harbor.

"Why do you turn in?" Dick asked after the smack had been put in shape for the night, and Tommy was making his preparations for bed. "If you keep awake you can save half an hour or more in the mornin'."

"I'll save that all right," Master Downing replied placidly. "Don't fear but that I'll be movin' as soon as any of the fishermen are, an' get all the sleep that's needed inter the bargain."

Ten minutes later the sound of heavy breathing told that the crew of the Phœbe had crossed over into Dreamland, lulled to unconsciousness by the rise and fall of the little smack on the gentle swell.

Tommy kept his word to the letter next morning, for Dick and Ezra, aroused by a sense of suffocation, looked out of their bunks to see a roaring fire in the cook-stove, the swinging lamp lighted, and Master Downing deep in the mysteries of frying eggs.

"Is it midnight yet?" Dick asked sarcastically, and Tommy replied with a laugh as he deftly turned an egg:

"It'll be midnight to-morrow before you fellers get to work, if a move ain't made right soon. I reckon you'll kick, on lookin' outside, because it's dark; but day'll break in less'n half an hour, an' then's when we must strike these fishermen. Breakfast'll be ready as soon as you are."

An hour later the partners were taking lobsters on board, and when the last fisherman had departed

Ezra announced that he had paid for three hundred and sixty, saying by way of comment:

“We’ve bought six hundred an’ seventy in twenty-four hours, an’ I call that as good a beginnin’ of the cruise as could be asked for. We can’t pay for more than twenty-five hundred, an’ I believe it wouldn’t be wise to squeeze even so many as that into the well. When we’ve got somewhere near two thousand I shall advise that we head for Westbay.”

“We ought’er be satisfied with that many,” Master Downing said as he brought the anchor inboard, “an’ I’m hopin’ we’ll get ’em ’round Isle au Haut within the next forty-eight hours. We’ll be there in time to do some little work to-night, if we have good luck, so send her along, Ezra.”

The Phœbe was headed northeast with a big bone in her teeth, and Dick and Ezra, who were in the cuddy going over the cash account, could hear Master Downing as he roared at the full strength of his lungs:

“I’se bound to run all day,
I’se bound to run all night;
I’ve bet my money on a bob-tailed nag,
Somebody’s bettin’ on the bay.”

A strong northerly wind headed the little smack, therefore she did not cover the distance as quickly as Tommy had believed would be the case, and the harbor was two miles or more distant when Dick went into the pilot-house to announce that the second meal of the day, which was dinner and supper rolled into one, had been served.

“You’ll have just about time to eat it before we get into the thoroughfare,” Master Marshall said grimly, “although any other fellow would spend half an hour takin’ in the same amount of food. Do you think I’m to be trusted with the helm for such a short time?”

“I reckon you can look after her a few minutes,” Tommy replied doubtfully. “All that’s needed is to keep her straight for the dead tree you see yonder; but remember that this wind is headin’ us mighty strong, an’ don’t let her swing too near that point to starboard, for the water’s none too deep there.”

Dick took the helm with a sailorly swagger, and Tommy went aft, shouting as he gained the cuddy companion:

“Bear in mind that the wind is tryin’ to throw her nose around, an’ the current sets right over towards the point.”

“If I can’t keep her on a course I’ll eat the wheel,” Dick replied just a trifle impatiently, and Ezra asked as Tommy seated himself at the table with the air of one who has but little time to spare:

“What’s the matter? Have you got an idea that Dick can’t steer? He has handled larger boats than this, an’ in mighty nasty weather.”

“He might have run a whole fleet of war vessels, an’ then come to grief in Isle au Haut thoroughfare, for it ain’t the best water in the world when the wind comes as we’re gettin’ it now,” Tommy replied with an expression of anxiety on his face, and then he made an attack upon the food as if counting

on compressing an entire meal into a single mouthful.

“It’s so late now that we won’t be able to do very much toward addin’ to the cargo,” Ezra suggested as if to change the subject of conversation.

“I’m allowin’ that we’ll have on board Abel Saunders’ catch before dark, ’cause I come near to knowin’ how he should be handled. If he thinks that we’re achin’ to buy his lobsters he’ll back an’ fill like a contrary steer; but make him think it’s a toss-up whether we take ’em or not, an’ he’ll tumble all over himself tryin’ to get ’em aboard. I’ve summered an’ wintered with —”

Tommy did not conclude the remark, for at that instant he was thrown from the locker as the smack stopped short with a shock that sent the dishes flying into the bunks, with Ezra on top of them. Then the Phœbe swayed to and fro with a motion that made one dizzy, and pounded her bow upon some hard substance for a second time before Master Downing could scramble to his feet.

“I ought’er be kicked for comin’ below when we were so near Haskell’s Point!” Tommy cried angrily as he struggled to disengage himself from the legs of the table, which seemed suddenly to have multiplied. “The wind was headin’ her, an’ he didn’t know how to ease her!”

The lad was on deck before the words were fairly out of his mouth, and that which he saw was not calculated to ease the distress which had come upon him with the first shock.

The Phœbe had run her bow up on the rocks in

such a manner as told that she must have been far out of her course, and was now slowly settling over on the starboard side as if having become discouraged with trying to extricate herself.

Standing near the pilot-house, clinging to the window-ledge to save himself from slipping overboard, was Dick, who gazed wildly aft, but said not a word. He looked dazed, and did not appear to hear Tommy when he asked angrily:

“How did she get headed that way?”

“Shall I reverse the screw?” Ezra shouted from the cuddy as he stopped the motor which had been forcing her yet further onto the rocks.

“She’s too far out of water for that screw to do any good!” Tommy cried as if in a rage, and, going close to the bewildered Dick, he asked again, “How did she get turned around? She was headin’ northeast when I went below.”

“I can’t make out how it did happen,” Dick replied at length, speaking indistinctly as if his throat was filled with some foreign substance. “The wheel-rope wasn’t runnin’ smoothly, an’ I stopped to fix it —”

“Givin’ no heed to the smack when the wind was strong enough to hold her back to half-speed!” Tommy interrupted. “I saw that the rope chafed a bit, but didn’t count I had any right to meddle with it when both hands were needed on the wheel all the time!”

“Go ahead an’ say everything rough that can be thought of,” Dick said meekly. “I made the big-

gest kind of a fool out'er myself, an' am ready to take all you two fellers want'er spit out."

"It won't do any good to scold," Master Downing replied as if the soft answer had dispelled his anger. "We're here on the rocks, with the tide about half ebb, an' the wind comin' from the east fit to take the hairs off a dog's head. I reckon if we don't get a move of some kind on, it'll be a case of takin' to the dory mighty soon."

"What can we do but wait for the tide to lift her?" Ezra asked helplessly, not yet recovered from the fear caused by the first shock.

"Wait?" Tommy cried. "It'll be six hours before there's a chance of the tide's doin' any good, an' even then I ain't certain as she'll come off without a tug-boat, 'cause the screw must have driven her on a good bit. The wind will get its work in long before then! Let's think about it," and the lad walked slowly along the forward rail as if having forgotten that he had but just declared it was necessary to make haste.

Not until a full five minutes had passed, during which his comrades watched him anxiously, did Master Downing speak, and then it was to say:

"The first thing is to get both anchors out astern, an' after that's been done we'll try to hatch up somethin' else."

Instead of waiting for the others to act upon his suggestion, Tommy hauled the dory alongside, making her fast to the port rail where she would be under the lee of the smack. Then he set about drag-

ging the heaviest anchor across the deck, and was well along with the work before his companions recovered from their stupefaction sufficiently to lend a hand.

It was a heavy task, getting the anchor with a sufficient length of hawser into the dory; but the boys, working now to save the smack from going to pieces, labored as they never had before, and it really seemed as if Tommy had the strength of half a dozen men in his arms.

When the anchor was aboard the small boat, Master Downing and Ezra pulled straight away from the smack, Dick paying out the hawser as they advanced, and, having come as far from the Phœbe as the length of the cable would permit, the anchor was dropped over the dory's stern after considerable labor, during which the wind forced them back until a good third of the distance was lost.

"It's the best we can do," Tommy said with a sigh as he pulled back to the smack. "The other anchor is considerably lighter, an' we may contrive to do a better job with it."

While Master Downing and Ezra were getting the second anchor into the dory, Dick was obeying orders by heaving in on the hawser of the one which had been put in place, working to such good effect that he had it well in hand when it became necessary to assist his comrades.

After this last portion of the task had been performed successfully, with the lighter anchor a full six yards further out than the first, all hands set about hauling in on both hawsers until they were as

nearly straight as was possible without a windlass.

"We'll have to call that part of the work done," Tommy said with a sigh, as he realized how much better it might have been performed if they could have brought into play some kind of a purchase. "I reckon she won't swing very much while they hold, an' it's the swinging with this wind that'll do the most mischief, for she's likely to chew a hole in the bow. Say, get below an' see if she's takin' in any water."

While Ezra was obeying this command Tommy set Dick to work moving every movable thing aft, with a view to taking the heaviest part of the strain from the bow, and this task was but just begun when Master Upton returned on deck with the cheering news that there was no water in the run more than might have been expected.

"I can't make out that a single drop is comin' in; but if you say the word I'll start the motor on the siphon, an' pump her dry so that we can tell to a certainty."

"Never mind that part of it just now. Get everything in the cuddy as far aft as possible, an' work lively," Tommy cried as he literally scraped the perspiration from his face, and on turning again to continue the labor of shifting the weight aft, he saw a dory in which was one man, putting out from the opposite shore. "There's Abel Saunders comin' to crow over us, an' he needs to keep a mighty meek tongue in his head, 'less he's achin' to have me open out on him."

The boys were working like beavers when Mr.

Saunders came alongside under the lee of the hull, and one might have thought he was particularly well pleased because of the disaster, for he cried:

“Hello, Tommy! Seems you didn’t know the thoroughfare quite as well as you counted on, eh?”

Master Downing made no reply, but dragged this thing or that aft with a savage energy which told that his temper was none of the best.

“Runnin’ a smack is different work from handlin’ a dory close under the lee of the shore, eh?” Mr. Saunders continued as he made his boat fast with the evident intention of coming aboard.

“I was the one who put the smack ashore,” Dick cried. “Tommy didn’t have anythin’ to do with it, for he was gettin’ his supper when we struck.”

“Oh, oh, fillin’ right up, eh? Tommy allers was a master hand at eatin’, an’ I’ve told him time an’ time agin that he’d come to grief some day if he didn’t put a bridle on his appetite. I’d have thought, Tommy, that you’d been lookin’ after the interests of them as have hired you, instead of gorgin’ all the time!”

Mr. Saunders came over the rail as he spoke, and stood looking down at the lad reproachfully until Tommy could remain silent no longer, but asked without ceasing his labors:

“Did you come aboard to see if we’d buy your catch, Mr. Saunders?”

“I wasn’t sich a fool as to think them as are wrecked would want to take on any more of a cargo, no matter what might be the price. I reckon this ’ere smack has made her last port. If you are

wantin' to sell the hulk jest as she lays, an' will make it an object, I might be willin' to dicker."

"We ain't sellin' anything," Tommy replied curtly, "an' this isn't the last port the Phœbe will make by a long shot."

"Be you fool enough, Tommy Downing, to think you can ever float a craft that's been piled up on the rocks the same as this one has? She'll go to pieces 'twixt now an' mornin', for this wind's goin' to have more heft 'long 'bout sundown," and Mr. Saunders gazed over the rail critically as if expecting to see signs of the Phœbe's immediate breaking up.

"She won't cost you anythin', so don't begin to feel so terrible bad 'bout it," Tommy said sharply, and Mr. Saunders added quietly, with never a token that he realized his former employee was speaking impertinently:

"P'rhaps, if you was willin' to pay a fair price, all hands of us 'round here might turn to when the tide comes up, an' see what could be done by pullin' at her with dories. Say, Tommy, why don't you look up Eliphalet Barnes? He's a handy man at sich scrapes as this, an' I'm allowin' he won't begrudge comin' over here if you go after him."

Tomy straightened himself much after the fashion of a steel spring, that he might look his former employer full in the face, and Ezra and Dick started back in alarm as if meditating flight.

"Is Eliphalet Barnes anywhere near here?" Master Downing asked sharply.

"Sure; I reckon he's over to the old man Bark-

er's yet, leastways he was when I come in from pullin' pots."

"When did he come there?"

"Not above two hours ago. As I was sayin', he's a master hand at wreckin', is Eliphalet, an' if you pay him for his time, I'm allowin' he'd give you a lift."

"We'll get the smack off the rocks without any help, or leave her here," Ezra said quickly, speaking for the first time since Mr. Saunders had come on board. "If the tide don't raise her, nothin' but a tug will do any good."

"Now I ain't so certain 'bout that," and again Mr. Saunders looked over the rail critically. "With the right kind of help, pervidin' you was willin' to pay a fair price, it looks to me as if considerable might be done."

"We'll wait to see what the tide will do," Ezra replied, wishing most fervently that the officious visitor would take his departure, for with the knowledge that Barnes was in the vicinity it seemed absolutely necessary they form some kind of a plan for defense, and that could not be done in the presence of strangers.

Unfortunately for the lobster buyers' peace of mind, Mr. Saunders was in no hurry to leave, most likely fancying he could make a dollar or two through the misfortunes of the boys, and he remained criticising everything that had been done, meanwhile making the most doleful predictions, until Tommy could control his temper no longer.

"See here," he cried angrily, "it may make you

feel terribly good to hang 'round here tellin' us what's goin' to happen; but it ain't helpin' out a little bit, an' if you can't keep that calamity howlin' to yourself, the sooner you go ashore the better we'll be pleased."

"I allers knowed yours was a hot temper, Tommy Downin'; but never had an idee you'd talk like that to them who allers stood ready to do you a good turn. It ain't respectful to one who's fed you as long as I have," and a stranger might have believed, because of the sorrowful tone, that the tears were very near Mr. Saunders' eyes.

"Yes, you fed me after your fashion!" Tommy cried scornfully; "but I never ate the littlest piece of bread that I didn't pay for in work a dozen times over. I 'tended your traps day in an' day out with never a soul to give me a lift, an' all I got for it was what little you put out for me to eat, with you all the time tellin' 'bout the gluttony of boys."

"You're an ungrateful little wretch!" and now it was evident that Mr. Saunders had in turn lost his temper. "I come out here countin' on doin' you a good turn for the sake of old times; but I can go back, an' you won't see me agin till your smack has been stove inter kindlin's by the rocks!"

"Don't think I'm goin' to cry if you never come across me agin," Tommy said as Mr. Saunders went over the rail into his dory, with a certain assumption of dignity which would have appeared comical to Dick and Ezra if they had not been plunged into such great trouble.

Without a word of parting the fisherman pulled

toward the opposite shore, and when he was beyond earshot Tommy turned to his partners as he said:

"You heard what he said 'bout Eliphalet Barnes, an' we can make up our minds that he'll be nosin' 'round 'twixt now an' mornin', for Abel Saunders will spread the news that we're piled up here. I don't allow that this 'ere smack is likely to go to pieces, even if the wind does get up considerable stronger; but what's to hinder Barnes from comin' aboard if he feels like it?"

"It strikes me that the three of us should be able to prevent him, unless we're the biggest kind of cowards, an' these people 'round here stand ready to let him do whatever he pleases," Dick cried stoutly, and Master Downing added:

"You can be certain the folks here won't raise a hand to prevent him from kickin' up a row. There ain't one of 'em who isn't afraid of that miserable smuggler, an' the whole crowd don't dare to say their souls are their own, when he's near to hear it."

"Then you've settled down that he'll do pretty much as he pleases?" Ezra cried in astonishment.

"Not much I haven't!" Tommy said emphatically. "I was only tryin' to give you an idee of what we'd got to buck up against. I don't know of anythin' more we can do to help the Phœbe out'er her scrape, till after the tide comes in, so s'posed we kind'er figger out what's to be done if that old pirate shows up ripe for mischief."

Then Master Downing went into the cuddy as if having decided upon his course of action, and,

as a matter of course, Dick and Ezra followed him.

Night had come while the boys were straightening out the hawsers, and it was now so dark that it became necessary to light the swinging lamp in order to avoid tumbling over the litter of stores and goods of all kinds that had been thrown, rather than stowed, near the cuddy stairs in order to shift as much of the weight as was possible from the bow.

It was surely a scene of desolation, and gave one a sense of being aboard a real wreck, for the Phœbe had heeled over until the deck sloped at an angle of thirty degrees, consequently all the smaller articles, including the dishes and cooking utensils, were strewn along and over the starboard lockers. From the outside could be heard heavy blows as the waves, raised by the freshening wind, struck against the hull of the helpless craft, while the hum of the wind across the companion-way was nearly as loud as if a gale had been raging.

“It looks as if she was already goin’ to pieces,” Ezra said mournfully after he had lighted the lamp and gazed around, forgetting for the moment that Eliphalet Barnes ever had an existence. “I believe we’d feel a bit better if we set things to rights.”

“There’s no sense in spendin’ our time uselessly, for I’m allowin’ this ’ere smack will have a worse shakin’ up before we get her off the rocks,” and Tommy began throwing the different articles aside as if in search of something, until Dick asked impatiently:

“What are you huntin’ for?”

“There was part of a heavin’ line down here somewhere, an’ I’m tryin’ to find it.”

“What for?”

“To rig up somethin’ that’ll help us keep Eliphalet Barnes at a distance, if so be he takes it inter his ugly head to pay us a visit. Here it is!” he exclaimed an instant later, and then, to the surprise of the boys, he set about tying to one end of the line a deep-sea sounding-lead which had been left aboard by the former captain of the Phœbe.

“I’d rather have a good stout club — say one of the oars, than that, if we should have a regular row with Barnes,” Dick said with a laugh, and Tommy replied in a matter-of-fact tone:

“We’ll have the oars where we can get at ’em all right; but what I’m after is somethin’ that’ll make him afraid to get out of his boat, in case he comes, as I reckon he will. With this ’ere lead to swing, I’m allowin’ he won’t want to get very near after havin’ been warned off. I’ll lay this inside the companion, an’ then we’ll take the oars out’er the dory so’s to have ’em ready for use. If Eliphalet Barnes wants to give us a call, after seein’ how we’ve made ready for him, I’m allowin’ we’ll make things considerably hot.”

CHAPTER XV

A FRIENDLY ENEMY

It was as if the crew of the *Phœbe* had ceased to give any attention whatsoever to the possibility that the smack might be wrecked beyond all saving, and thought only of how they might defend themselves from the man who had vowed vengeance upon them.

It is true that nothing more could have been done to aid the stranded vessel, for by this time the tide had fallen so much that two-thirds of her hull was resting upon the ledge, and that she had gone so far up on the rocks would have given her crew cause for rejoicing had they spent the time necessary to discover the actual situation. If the bow of the smack only held her back upon the ledge, then would there have been the possibility that her back might have been broken; but as it was, she rested comfortably upon the hard cradle, and although the wind had, as Abel Saunders predicted, increased in strength, the surf was not dangerous because the point of the opposite shore served as a natural break-water.

However, the crew of the smack did not spend any time seeking to find cause for thankfulness. All their energies were centered upon plans for defense, because it was set down in their minds as an absolute fact that Eliphalet Barnes would pay them a

visit with the intent of doing grievous injury, as soon as it came to his knowledge that the Phœbe was held prisoner by the rocks.

Tommy had shown himself a better trader than naval tactician. He relied mainly for defense upon the deep-sea lead made fast to the heaving-line, believing it would be possible to hurl this heavy weight at whoever should approach in a boat, and pull it back into the smack, thus using the missile over and over again; but he failed to realize that whosoever might be bent upon going aboard against the wishes of the crew, could very readily seize upon the lead once it had been cast, and, with a stroke of a sharp knife, sever the weight from the line, until Ezra called his attention to this defect in his plan.

"I never thought of that," Master Downing admitted ruefully. "It can't be helped now, an' what I'm kickin' myself for, is that we didn't buy somethin' in the shape of a gun when we were in Westbay. Then it would have been a case of Eliphalet Barnes' keeping his distance, or takin' the chance of bein' killed."

"I wouldn't have agreed to puttin' any kind of a deadly weapon aboard the smack, even though we had known this thing would happen," Ezra said decidedly. "Better an hundred times over that the Phœbe should be smashed into kindlings on these rocks, than for us to kill, or even wound, a man, however evil his intentions toward us."

"Well," Tommy said after a brief pause, "if that's the way you're feelin' 'bout it, I don't know but this deep-sea lead will make as good a weapon

as any, for it's likely to do precious little harm if Eliphalet hits upon a plan to catch it, an' I'm free to admit he's got head enough to think of settlin' matters that way."

"We'll stand him off as best we can, an' perhaps your lead may serve to frighten him, at all events," Ezra began, and did not finish the sentence, for at that instant Dick raised his hand for silence, and even above the whistling of the wind was it possible to hear the clicking of oars in the rowlocks.

"He's comin'," Tommy cried, coiling the heaving-line ready for use as he ran on deck followed by his companions, and to their dismay the three saw, hardly more than twenty feet away, coming up under the lee of the Phœbe, Eliphalet Barnes in a dory.

He was alone, pulling hurriedly with apparently no idea that it might be necessary to defend himself, until Tommy cried shrilly:

"Hold on there! Don't dare to pull another stroke or I'll smash your head in!" and Master Downing swung his improvised weapon threateningly.

Mr. Barnes turned to look upon the speaker as if in surprise, and really appeared astonished at seeing the crew of the smack standing in warlike array to oppose his boarding the craft.

"What's up now?" he cried as if bewildered by such unfriendly demonstrations. "It strikes me that you're needin' someone to lend a hand, an' Abel Saunders didn't allow he'd raise a finger un-

less you lads would pay him well for the service.”

“What has that got to do with it?” Tommy asked, and now it was his turn to be surprised because Mr. Barnes spoke them in such a friendly manner.

“Why seein’s I’m the only man hereabouts willin’ to lend a hand without askin’ for pay, I’ve come out.”

“Look here, Eliphalet Barnes,” Tommy began angrily. “Don’t run away with the idee that you can shut our eyes so easy as all that. We may be pretty soft marks when it comes to ropin’ us inter smugglin’; but ain’t duffers enough to swallow the yarn that you’d be willin’ to help us, unless there was a string to it in some way.”

During this conversation it had been necessary for Mr. Barnes to continue rowing, otherwise the dory would have been hurled upon the rocks by the wind, and now he said, running the boat nearly alongside by an extra vigorous stroke of the oars:

“Jest make this ’ere dory fast, will you, while we talk? I’m givin’ you my word that I won’t step foot on your smack till you ask me to come.”

“An’ all the same you’ll be over the rail at the first good chance,” Tommy replied mockingly.

“See here, lads,” and now Eliphalet Barnes spoke in such an earnest tone that the boys could not but give heed to him. “It’s true I allowed to get square with you for sendin’ after that bloomin’ inspector; but nobody could ever accuse Eliphalet Barnes, whatever he may have done in the smugglin’ line, of jumpin’ onto man or boy who was in

trouble. I've come out to lend a hand, if it's needed, an' I reckon it is, because the fishermen 'round here ain't given to doin' charitable deeds unless they see a good many dollars comin' in. Don't think I'm agreein' not to square matters because of your playin' me that trick in Eastport bay; but it isn't in my mind to do anythin' so dirty as to take advantage of them as are the same as wrecked."

"Do you mean that you'd help us now to get this smack off the rocks, an' as soon as it was done turn 'round to do whatsoever you might against us?" Ezra asked in astonishment, and Mr. Barnes replied, still in a tone which carried conviction of its truthfulness.

"You are in trouble now, an' I ain't beast enough to try to make more for you at this time. You played me a smooth trick; but perhaps it wasn't any more than evenin' things up for what I'd been workin' agin you. All that is outside of this 'ere wreck. I'm ready to lend a hand the same as I would to Inspector Carter, if so be he was in as tight a place as you; but once you're afloat an' able to take care of yourself, I'm allowin' to pay off the score that was run up when you laid inside Quoddy Head."

Surely it was an odd enemy — this man who disdained to strike a blow when those against whom he had a grudge were much the same as powerless to defend themselves, and who, while ready to do a favor, claimed that his enmity was in no degree abated! It was a new phase in Eliphalet Barnes' character to Tommy Downing, and he stood staring

at the man whose outline only could be discerned in the gloom, as if having lost all power of speech.

Mr. Barnes, accepting the silence as permission to come aboard the stranded smack, pulled alongside, made his dory fast to the port rail, and clambered inboard, walking fore and aft on the starboard side, trying to ascertain exactly the situation of the vessel.

Unable to do this to his satisfaction in the darkness, he took from Dick's unresisting hands the oar which the lad been intending to use as a weapon, and with it ascertained the depth of water from the bow of the smack to the point where the ledge ended.

During all this time, which occupied probably ten minutes or more, no word was spoken. The boys remained like statues, following with their eyes Mr. Barnes' movements; but asked no questions either of him or each other.

It was the smuggler who broke the silence, and this he did by asking in a matter-of-fact tone, as if he had been putting the question to one of his best friends:

"How was the tide when you run her on?"

"About half ebb," Tommy replied mechanically.

"Do you allow them 'ere anchors will hold the strain?"

"We put all the weight we could on 'em, an' they've showed no signs of givin'," Master Downing replied.

"Is she takin' in any water?"

"I looked in the run half an hour after she struck, an' didn't find more than might have been

expected," Ezra said in reply. "We did think of puttin' a siphon on to make certain whether there was any coming inboard, but somehow seemed to forget it."

"I'm allowin' that's what you'd better do now," Mr. Barnes said as he took the deep-sea lead from Tommy's hands and dropped it over the stern. "You can't do any harm by using the screw now, for she's fixed fast."

At the moment, and because the smuggler was seemingly in command, Ezra obeyed as promptly as if 'Squire Merrill himself had given the order, and during five minutes or more the thumping of the motor could be heard. Then it ceased, and Ezra cried:

"She's as dry as you can get her, an' I don't believe there has been a quart of water come inboard since we struck."

As if he was the owner of the smack instead of being an avowed enemy of her crew, Mr. Barnes descended into the cuddy followed meekly by Tommy and Dick, and there surveyed the scene of disorder. He seated himself as best he might upon the bedding which had been thrown from the port bunks onto the starboard locker, and proceeded to fill his short, black, disagreeable-looking pipe, saying after it had been lighted to his satisfaction, while he puffed away vigorously:

"I'm allowin' that by puttin' out both anchors you lads did about all that was needed. It's certain she won't come to grief 'twixt now an' when the tide is at half flood, unless the wind changes, which

don't seem likely. I see you've carried everything well aft. Is there much extra weight?"

"We didn't have anythin' movable that was very heavy after the anchors were taken off," Tommy replied meekly. "I'm allowin' that the motor is aft of the edge of the ledge, which should make considerable weight."

"I was thinkin' that perhaps we might be givin' her a chance to break her back, for this 'ere ledge makes off right sharp, an' the stern overhangs. Perhaps you lads better keep well up in the fore part of the cuddy, so's to take off the strain, an' when that's done there's nothin' for us but to wait."

By acting upon this suggestion the crew of the Phœbe would be well forward of where Mr. Barnes was sitting, and in case he was disposed to make prisoners of them, they would be helpless; yet without hesitation all three did as he proposed, thus putting themselves wholly in his power.

Evidently it was not his intention to abuse their confidence, for after this change of position had been made, he said as if reviewing the situation in his mind:

"I left word with old man Barker where I was comin', an' the chances are he'll be here as soon as he gets the message. That'll give us three dories for towin', an' you can count on it he won't try to put the screw to you as Abel Saunders did. We can heave in on the hawsers so's to take up all the slack, an' the minute she feels the tide, set to work with four pairs of oars, when I'm allowin' somethin'

ought'er be done; but until then it's a case of makin' ourselves comfortable, eh?"

"Then you are countin' on standin' by?" Ezra asked, and Mr. Barnes replied, as if surprised that there should be any doubt regarding his intentions:

"Of course I am, lads; I'll see you off this ledge, if so be the wind don't interfere."

"An' what then?" Tommy asked suspiciously.

"Why, then it's a case of your lookin' after yourselves. Didn't allow that Eliphalet Barnes had it in him to do a good turn for anybody, eh?" and the smuggler laughed as if such an idea was to him very comical, whereat Ezra replied in a half-apologetic tone:

"After all that's been said and done you can't wonder we'd believe that you'd take advantage of our helplessness."

"That's where you're makin' the mistake of your life, lad, an' anybody will tell you the same thing. I ain't denyin' but what I have run stuff across the line a good many times in the course of my life. Some folks say it's a crime, an' the government looks after a smuggler mighty sharp — but why? It's the money for the duties they want, an' that's what this bloomin' inspector's after. If it wasn't for gettin' the dollars out of it, you wouldn't find 'em hoverin' 'round us so thick. Some folks call me a pretty bad man, an' perhaps I am, 'cordin' to the way they look at it; but you lads are not to think I'm quite as black as they've painted me. Nobody can say I ever saw a chance to help a man

out'er a bad scrape, same's you're in, without turnin' to an' doin' my best, whether it was friend or customs officer that was in hard luck, an' that's a good deal more'n you can say for some of the fishermen along this 'ere coast, meanin', for instance, Abel Saunders."

"So you're countin' on helpin' us get the Phœbe off, if that is possible, an' afterward turnin' 'round an' doin' all the harm you can by way of squarin' accounts because we sent word to Portland?" Dick said questioningly, and Mr. Barnes replied as if there was really no need of an answer:

"Why, of course I am. The little account 'twixt you an' me stands off till you're in shape to look after yourself, an' then we'll see about settlin' it. I'd like to know just how you did get word to that 'ere inspector, though, for there's where I'm willin' to admit you fooled me in great shape."

"We pulled up to Eastport in the night, an' mailed a letter," Tommy replied with a chuckle of satisfaction, and Mr. Barnes, slapping his knee vigorously, exclaimed:

"Well, now there's where a man can make a fool of himself, an' think he's terrible smart! I was keepin' an eye on you lads, until night shut in, an' then allowed you'd hug the cuddy mighty close; but you can't take any great credit for bein' smart in that 'ere trick, 'cause it was only a case of my bein' an idjut. I ought'er kept Jerry Shaw on watch all that night?"

"Who's Jerry Shaw?" Tommy asked.

"The man what took the goods you brought from

the vessel for me. He ain't an overly mild tempered party, as perhaps you lads found out; but set him to doin' a thing, an' he's a good deal like a dog — holds on till everything cracks. I was reckonin' that you'd idle 'round, not fixin' up your motor even if the sparker came, in the hope some of the bloomin' inspectors would happen around; but do you know, lads, it never came into my thick head that you might give information except by telegram, an' that I guarded against."

Then Mr. Barnes laughed vigorously, as if he found in his own carelessness that which was very comical, and beginning now to have no little faith in this smuggler who so frankly said that he intended to do them a harm later, Tommy asked curiously:

"Did you go around Monhegan in a power boat day before yesterday?"

"That's what I did. I run in a load of stuff slick as grease, while your friend Carter from the custom house was scrapin' his shins over the rocks of Quoddy Head lookin' for me," and again Mr. Barnes indulged in mirth.

"How did you get back here so quickly?"

"Well, you see I ain't allowin' it was done so very quickly," and Mr. Barnes relighted the pipe which had been neglected during his spasms of mirth. "You see a man in my line of business can't afford to hang 'round one place very long at a time, an' when I've got a job on hand I generally do it up in short order so's to get out. Never mind where I landed the stuff, so long as I got it ashore. Then I strayed back this way, because it ain't a

bad idee to keep run of what Inspector Carter is about. If he was only as smart as he thinks he is, perhaps I'd have a harder row to hoe; but seein's how he's a bit thick-headed, it ain't much of a job to keep clear of him, though I'm admittin' he had a chance in this very cuddy to make it hot for me. Think of a man tryin' to arrest another, an' that same bein' me who knows the ropes pretty well, layin' up forward here while I'm standin' near the companion-way! Why, he give me all the chance in the world, an' I'd have been a bloomin' idjut if I hadn't taken it."

Again Mr. Barnes laughed in a most jolly manner, and Tommy continued to gratify his curiosity.

"What did you do with the boat you had up Monhegan way?"

"That's the secret 'twixt me an' myself," Mr. Barnes replied in a most friendly tone. "She ain't the only power boat that I can lay hands on along this shore, which 'counts for my bein' able to travel pretty much as I please, while this 'ere government inspector's foolin' 'round with a single craft. You see there are times when it pays a man to take to the land, which couldn't be done if he's pinnin' all his faith to one boat."

"I was thinkin'," Tommy said hesitatingly, "that if we had such a boat here she might do a good deal toward helpin' pull the Phoebe off the reef."

"Ay, that's a fact, lad; but you see I couldn't get mine here 'twixt now an' high water; but this much I'll promise, that if the smack don't come off with

what towin' we can do in the dories, an' the weather holds favorable, I'll have the smartest power boat to be found on this 'ere coast ready for work at the next tide."

"You are puttin' us in a queer place, Mr. Barnes," Ezra said after a moment's hesitation. "I don't believe there's a man around here who would do as much for us, an' yet after the smack has been floated, if so be that is possible, we're bound in self-defense to give information to the officers concernin' you."

"Of course you are, lad; I'm countin' on that. It's all your part of the game, an' my aim is to put you lads in such shape that you can't do much mischief. We are good friends now — that is, I'm showin' myself such, an' allowin' for the time bein' you're feelin' chummy-like toward me; but when this 'ere smack is in condition to run, an' you have started, I'm lookin' out sharp for a show to get the best of you."

"Meanin' that you will help pull the Phœbe off, an' before we can get under way play some trick?" Tommy asked sharply, whereupon Mr. Barnes replied in an injured tone, as if such an insinuation pained him deeply:

"Don't think I'm such a reprobate as that, Tommy Downing! You'll come off of these rocks, if so be we can work it, an' get under way without my raisin' a finger, except to do what good I can. But once this craft is in runnin' shape, an' you've gone about the cruise, there'll be no more hobnobbin' till you pull up on another reef perhaps."

“It’s a mighty queer way of figgerin’, Mr. Barnes,” Tommy said in perplexity, “an’ I can’t seem to get it through my head why you are willin’ to do all you can to put us in shape to work harm to your plans, an’ then count on jumpin’ in to make it hot again.”

“I don’t know as I can make it any clearer, lad; but that is a way I’ve got. I stand ready to lend a hand to my worst enemy when he’s in a tighter fix than I am, an’ after it has been done, why what’s to hinder pickin’ up the quarrel again?”

“How long have you been smugglin’?” Ezra asked after a short time of silence.

“Off and on perhaps twenty years,” Mr. Barnes said as if he was speaking of some praiseworthy effort. “I don’t allow that I’d ever made a reg’lar business of it, if it hadn’t been that the government give it to me in the neck when there was no call for anythin’ of the kind. You see I had a little fishin’ smack, thirty-two tons, as neat a craft as ever was launched. Down off the bay of Chaleur I bought some bait from the blue-noses, allowin’ a man had the right to dicker for whatever another owned. But lo and behold, both governments jumped down on me, claimin’ it was agin some treaty, an’ the upshot of the whole matter was that I lost my vessel, together with every dollar I’d ever made in the world. It’s too long a story for me to go into now, an’ perhaps you wouldn’t understand it any better than I did at the time; but such cases are comin’ up every little while because the folks at Washington an’ Ottawa, who don’t know a

codfish from a herrin', get together an' say how we poor fishermen shall carry on our business. The law allows it's all right for 'em to make a pauper of me when I hadn't done anythin' more'n seemed dead right, an' then it's a crime if I bring over the line stuff without routin' out the customs officer an' payin' him what he calls duties on my own goods."

To Tommy, who had heard such stories many time, this brief recital of Mr. Barnes' fancied wrongs was not novel; but Dick and Ezra were deeply interested, and questioned the smuggler as to this and that regarding the so-called fishing treaties, until a resounding blow was heard and felt against the Phœbe's stern, causing Mr. Barnes to leap to his feet with no little excitement as he cried:

"The tide is gettin' well in, lads, an' it stands us in hand to be movin'. I did allow the old man Barker would have shown up before this; but most likely he didn't get the word I sent him; so it's a case of our bucklin' down to it alone."

Mr. Barnes led the way on deck, and when the boys were in the open air they fancied the wind came with less weight from the eastward, while the surf could not be heard so loudly on the opposite point.

"It won't be so big a job as we counted on, lads," the smuggler said as he stood well aft peering out into the darkness. "I'm allowin' this breeze is finin' down, an' before high water it'll come a dead calm, else I'm way off my reckonin'."

"An' if your predictions come true, we shall have no trouble in floatin' the Phœbe," Ezra cried in delight.

“Right for you, lad; but we won’t count chickens until they begin to hatch, for we can’t say now to a dead certainty that the wind won’t breeze up again. The question is what you’ve got in the way of hawsers.”

“I’m afraid that’s where we’re stuck,” Tommy said thoughtfully. “When we got out the cable for the small anchor I took the only one that could be found. If Abel Saunders was a different kind of a man, perhaps we might borrow a couple from him.”

“Has he got any that you could put your hand on?” Mr. Barnes asked quickly.

“Yes, there are three or four coils of inch an’ inch an’ a half rope in that shanty of his at the head of the cove; but he wouldn’t lend ’em unless a feller paid two or three times what new ones would cost.”

“I’m allowin’ you don’t care to go ashore an’ take ’em without makin’ overly much talk about it?” the smuggler asked, and Tommy replied quickly:

“If I should do anythin’ of the kind Abel Saunders would have the law on me mighty quick. You see he don’t feel terrible good about my leavin’ him, though he didn’t pay a cent of wages, an’ if a chance came for him to get me arrested for stealin’ he’d do it, no matter if I was only borrowin’.”

“I reckon that’s so, lad, an’ yet Abel Saunders is one of these ’ere honest men that would come nigh havin’ a fit if you asked him to do a bit of smugglin’. But he don’t dare to play funny with me, an’ I’ll have his hawsers whether he’s willin’ or not.”

Having said this, Mr. Barnes went over the rail

into his dory, and pulled for the opposite shore, Dick saying as he disappeared from view:

“Well, if this ain’t the oddest kind of an adventure any lads could ever have, then I’m mistaken! Here’s Eliphalet Barnes eager to do us a bad turn, yet lendin’ a hand when we’re in trouble, an’ promisin’ to do all the mischief he can after we are in condition to defend ourselves. Say, I’m beginnin’ to believe he isn’t half as bad as he has been painted.”

“I always knew he’d do a good turn for anybody; but believed it was because he wanted to make friends,” Tommy added. “Now there’s Abel Saunders, he’d allow, if you talked with him, that there wasn’t a greater villain ever went unchanged than Barnes, an’ yet Eliphalet spent three whole days helpin’ us pick up our traps after that big gale when about all of ’em were blown off-shore.”

“I don’t know what I should do just now if Mr. Carter came along an’ asked us to help catch the smuggler,” Dick said thoughtfully, “an’ after we get the Phœbe afloat I’m not certain I’d like to do anythin’ against the man who has helped us out of this scrape, even though he does insist that we’re to be enemies.”

“There’s no need of figgerin’ on that now,” Tommy said shrilly. “It’s a case of puttin’ the Phœbe where she was before you lost your head because the rope chafed a bit, an’ after that’s been done we can make up our minds how to act in case of runnin’ across Mr. Carter.”

Mr. Barnes returned, bringing the hawsers which he had borrowed without permission, before it

seemed to the boys as if he could have gained the opposite shore, and once alongside the Phœbe again he took full command of the wrecking operations.

“Seein’s old man Barker hasn’t come, one of you lads will get into the dory with me, an’ each of us is to pull a pair of oars,” he said, while making the hawsers fast to the after bitt. “It’ll be a case of jumpin’ to it heavily; but I’m allowin’ that we ought’er bring considerable weight to bear on her, an’ when the tide comes just right, the strain of the anchors, with what we can put on, should slip her off. Now s’posin’ we lay down on these hawsers agin’, the whole of us, an’ run ’em up to the forward bitt, one each side of the pilot-house? That’ll give us a pull fore and aft.”

As he suggested, so the lads did, and during the next half hour tugged and strained at the wet ropes, Dick holding the turn so that every inch gained might be kept, until the smuggler declared that it was impossible to do more.

Then with exceeding care Mr. Barnes made each of the borrowed hawsers fast to the dories, and a nice job it was, for with two pairs of oars in each boat there was chance of pulling the craft apart, if peradventure the lift of the sea caught them just at the right time.

All this Mr. Barnes did in a most methodical manner, working slowly that there might be no mistake made, and when everything had been done to his satisfaction, he said, as he refilled his pipe once more:

“I’m allowin’ that we’ll begin work in less’n half an hour, an’ once havin’ started we must keep at it.

If she slides off, as we are reckonin' on, you must work lively, Tommy Downing, to get aboard an' haul in the slack of your anchor cables, else there's a chance of her swingin' around till she chews the screw out of her on some of these 'ere rocks."

Mr. Barnes marked the time by the consumption of tobacco in his pipe, and when that had been smoked out, he said in a tone of command:

"Now, then, lads, go to work, an' I want you to put on them oars every pound of beef you've got. Who's goin' with me?"

"I will!" Dick replied, for he was beginning to have almost an admiration for this "bad man" who was so ready to assist an enemy.

"Then into the dory with you, an' take the after thwart, for I reckon I'm a better hand at keepin' stroke!"

Ten minutes later the two dories were out astern of the Phœbe, the hawsers straightened, and Mr. Barnes gave the word for the beginning of the weary work.

"Don't let the boat yaw," he shouted to Tommy. "An' keep up a steady strain. There's no sense in slackenin', an' then comin' up with a jerk, for you stand a chance to rip the thwart out of your dory, an' will be doin' no good to the smack. Now together with a will! It ain't likely she'll come for quite a spell, so don't get discouraged!" and Mr. Barnes dipped his oars deeply.

It goes without saying that the crew of the Phœbe obeyed the smuggler's example to the best of their ability, and for a full half-hour they strained every

muscle at the oars, keeping the hawsers taut as possible while the tugging boats were tossed about by the waves, until the strain suddenly ceased, when Mr. Barnes shouted in a triumphant voice, as if his one aim in life had been to pull the Phœbe from her hard resting-place:

“We’ve done it, lads! We’ve done it! An’ without dependin’ on anybody but ourselves. Jump to it, Tommy, an’ get aboard there! Haul in on your anchor, an’ have a care that you don’t foul the screw. We’ll keep her movin’ gently. Ezra, take in the slack of your hawser as you go, an’ once aboard, cast off. We don’t want too many ropes trailin’ ’round here while she’s got sternway.”

These orders were obeyed promptly and properly, with the effect that within ten minutes the Phœbe was anchored stem and stern at a safe distance from the dangerous reef.

“Now coil up Abel Saunders’ hawsers an’ put ’em aboard this dory,” Mr. Barnes cried as he ran alongside that Dick might join his companions. “If you take my advice you’ll lay where you are till morning, for the tide is risin’ all the time.”

“Are you goin’ ashore, Mr. Barnes?” Ezra cried, and the smuggler replied:

“I’m allowin’ there’s nothin’ more to be done here, an’ now I’ll ’tend to my own business.”

“Why don’t you turn in with us until daylight?”

“Can’t afford the time, lads, for there’s no knowin’ how soon that friend of yours may get tired of barkin’ his shins over the rocks of Quoddy Head.

Besides, I'm bound to have a little the start of you lads, seein's how we've each got to take care of himself after sunrise, watchin' out for a chance to do the other an ill turn."

As he said this, and before the boys could make reply, Mr. Barnes was lost to view in the darkness, and the crew of the Phœbe stood staring at each other as if asking whether this visit and assistance by an exceedingly friendly enemy, was a reality or some odd dream.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PURSUER

It was Tommy Downing who first gathered his senses which had been scattered in a certain degree by the friendly behavior of Eliphalet Barnes, and he aroused his companions by saying impatiently:

“There’s no use of our standin’ here, lookin’ like a lot of dummies, because there’s considerable work to be done yet.”

“But Mr. Barnes seemed to think we’d better stay here at anchor till mornin’,” Dick replied, and Tommy seemingly exploded with wrath.

“That’s it! I knew that would be just the way of it! From this out it’ll be Mr. Barnes, Mr. Barnes, Mr. Barnes, all the time, till you’d think that bloomin’ old pirate was the salt of the earth! Mr. Barnes says we must stay here at anchor, an’ of course we must; it don’t make any difference what we think about it. Mr. Barnes says we must stand on our heads, an’ up comes our heels into the air! Now my part of this ’ere business is goin’ to be run accordin’ to what I think, not ’cordin’ to what Mr. Barnes thinks!”

“Oh, Tommy!” Ezra cried in surprise. “What makes you so angry? Surely if it hadn’t been for Mr. Barnes the chances are the Phœbe would still be on that reef. I’m sure he behaved like a gen-

tleman, an' didn't attempt to dictate as to what we should do."

"That's just it," Tommy cried, his anger apparently increasing. "I want to know what it all means? He comes up here sweeter'n pie; works like a beaver helpin' get the Phœbe off, an' says when it's all done that we're enemies same's we was before. Now I counted on squarin' off with Eliphalet Barnes in some way before I died, an' yet how can a feller rough inter him very bad after what's been done to-night?"

"Then you are angry simply because he has been friendly durin' the past few hours?" Ezra said with a laugh.

"Well, it's because I don't make out what he's drivin' at by bein' so terrible sweet; then agin after what's just happened, we can't very well make things hot for him to square off the Quoddy Head business. It's all mixed up to me, an' I'm beginnin' to wish the Phœbe was back there on the rocks."

"Now don't be foolish, Tommy," Ezra said entreatingly. "You are not wishin' anything of the kind. We were in a tight place with the chance of losin' the smack, an' perhaps she would have been a total wreck but for Mr. Barnes."

"An' then agin perhaps she wouldn't."

"Very true; but either way you put it Mr. Barnes has done us a big favor, an' after it's all over you fly into a temper about it. Now it strikes me, since we can't understand his reasons for bein' at the same time a friend and an enemy, that we'd best put it out of our minds, an' attend to our own business."

“That’s what I counted on doin’,” Master Downing cried irritably; “but you tell ’bout what Mr. Barnes advised, as if we’d got to run ’cordin’ to his ideas. Now because he said we’d better stay here till daybreak I’m thinkin’ it stands us in hand to get under way right off. He allowed as soon as we was afloat he’d do all he could to get square with us for havin’ sent after Mr. Carter. We know he’s yonder on the island, an’ I’m thinkin’ it’ll be the wisest plan to pull out as soon as possible.”

Dick and Ezra, looking upon Mr. Barnes as a real friend because of his labor in their behalf, left unheeded the warning he gave them; but now it was brought to mind both began to believe that Tommy might be in the right, and Ezra said soothingly to the lad:

“You may go ahead an’ do just what you please, but where are you countin’ on makin’ harbor if we get under way now?”

“Inside of Quoddy Head,” Master Downing replied explosively, and his comrades repeated in surprise:

“Quoddy Head?”

“That’s what I said,” Tommy added with no little emphasis. “I’m allowin’ to get just as far away from Eliphalet Barnes as possible in the twenty-four hours’ run.”

“But are you going to lose the chance of gettin’ lobsters around here?” Ezra asked in bewilderment.

“That’s exactly what I believe in doin’. While Eliphalet Barnes is on the island I’d a good deal rather give it a wide berth, even though he has

helped us out of a nasty scrape. Of course, if you fellers hold to it that we ought'er pick up what lobsters we can, I'll give in, 'cause it's two against one; but don't forget that we went on the reef through carelessness, an' may strike a good deal harder luck by bein' so reckless as to hang 'round where that pirate can get at us."

Being thus reminded that through his lack of prudence the Phœbe had struck the rocks, Dick could not well oppose Master Downing any longer, therefore he held his peace, and Ezra said in a tone of resignation, as if having come to believe that it would be useless to argue:

"Go ahead, Tommy! Give your orders an' we'll obey 'em, no matter what we may think. It's pretty hard to believe that after this night Eliphalet Barnes will be lookin' for a chance to do us harm; but we'll allow you've got the rights of it."

"Then it's a case of gettin' the anchors inboard right lively, an' givin' the island a wide berth as we go around it, in the hope that Eliphalet may believe, because he ain't seein' us, that we're followin' his advice."

"Where do you suppose he went?"

"Over to the old man Barker's, I reckon, 'cordin' to the way he talked. Them two always have been thicker'n thieves, an' Abel Saunders used to say that Barker knew more about Eliphalet's smugglin' than any other man."

Tommy set about obeying his own commands by heaving in on the anchor cable with a will, the other partners following his example after a brief time of

hesitation, and within five minutes the Phœbe, so lately entrapped by the reef and Dick's carelessness, was skimming over the waves in a wide detour around Isle au Haut, with Master Downing at the helm.

"Why not stop near about Swans island?" Ezra asked as he went into the wheel-house after having started the motor, and Tommy replied curtly:

"Because it ain't far enough away from Eliphalet Barnes. Roundabout here is his stampin' ground, an' I don't count on givin' him a chance to pay us any visit for quite a spell. Say, don't you think you fellers better be humpin' yourselves puttin' things to rights? With all the weight we're carryin' astern this 'ere smack's steerin' pretty wild, an' she ought'er be trimmed."

"We'd just begun to do that when, thinkin' we might pick up quite a cargo around Swans island, I came to talk about it," Ezra replied as if apologizing for his neglect of duty, and then he went aft again, saying to Dick when he was in the cuddy:

"Tommy's jest like a bear with a sore head, an' we'd better let him have his own way, for it don't make much difference if we do go as far east as Quoddy Head. In case Eliphalet Barnes *should* do anything in the way of mischief, which I doubt, he would be able to say we'd brought all the trouble on ourselves. Now we'll set things to rights, an' then get breakfast, for I suppose that driver of ours won't allow we need any sleep to-night."

Even though Master Downing might have been willing that his partners should follow their inclination, there was no opportunity for rest during the

hours of darkness, for before the smack was put into sailing trim another day had come.

Tommy ran straight away to the southward five or six miles before hauling around on the northerly course necessary if they counted on making Quoddy Head, and although Dick and Ezra did not approve of so far extending the cruise without putting in alongshore to add to their cargo, neither ventured any protest.

Ezra seemingly settled the matter when he said to Dick:

“Let him have his own way, an’ then if anythin’ happens it can’t be charged against us. At the worst, it’s only a question of runnin’ forty-eight hours longer than seems necessary, an’ it’s certain we shall pick up a few lobsters roundabout the Head.”

“Yes, an’ while so doin’ be in the very midst of Eliphalet Barnes’ friends,” Dick grumbled, “although, after last night’s happenings, I’m not much afraid he’ll work us any great mischief.”

Master Downing, after putting to sea as has been said, laid the course direct for Quoddy Head, not attempting to engage in conversation with his partners; but seeming to hold himself aloof from them in the pilot-house.

Not until the Phœbe was in sailing trim and breakfast had been made ready, did Ezra go on deck, and then it was to summon Tommy to the morning meal, asking carelessly as he took the helm:

“In case we keep straight on, when do you count on makin’ Quoddy Head?”

“This side of midnight if nothin’ happens,” Mas-

ter Downing replied curtly. "Hold her as she's goin', an' don't try to tinker with the wheel ropes, though I reckon you couldn't put her ashore here; but at the same time I'd rather you fellers looked sharp after your steerin'."

Ezra could well afford to laugh at his partner's crustiness. The Phœbe had come off the rocks where at one time it had seemed she must go to pieces, and gave no token of having suffered because of contact with the ledge. It was a piece of rare good fortune, as also was the fact that the smuggler had lent a hand when it was most needed, and surely there was no reason why the boys should allow themselves to be annoyed because, for the first time since coming aboard the smack, Master Downing had lost his temper.

Tommy remained what was for him an unusually long time in the cuddy, because, as Ezra afterward learned, of having entered into a discussion with Dick regarding Eliphalet Barnes' intent to do them harm after having shown himself so friendly, and he was yet thus engaged when the Phœbe was off Long Island, two miles or more distant.

Then it was that Ezra saw a small schooner, evidently a fisherman, putting out on a course which, if continued, would bring her directly in the path of the Phœbe, and through the speaking-tube he gave such information to Master Downing, saying in conclusion:

"It strikes me that you might learn from the fisherman if there were any lobsters for sale right around here. Surely if such was the case, we could

pick 'em up without bein' afraid of Barnes' inter-ferin'."

Tommy was on deck in a twinkling, all signs of ill-temper having vanished, perhaps because of the heated argument with Dick, and considerably to Ezra's surprise he said in a tone of approbation:

"I reckon you're right, Ezra, an' we'll speak that schooner if so be she holds her course. I'm willin' to admit that I got considerably mixed up over Barnes' actions last night, an' most likely made a fool of myself. Of course there's no reason why we shouldn't do what we can toward takin' on a cargo alongshore."

Although Ezra should have gone below to get his own breakfast, he remained in the pilot-house until they were come within hailing distance of the schooner, Tommy having swung the Phœbe inshore so that he might come up under the fisherman's stern.

"Ahoy on the schooner! Any lobsters for sale roundabout your place?"

The fisherman came up into the wind, thus showing that he was inclined for a conversation, and Tommy gave the signal to slow down.

"I'm allowin' we've got quite a few if you're payin' price enough," came the reply from the schooner's deck; "but we ain't keen to sell for a song."

Now it was that Master Downing forgot all his forebodings and suspicions. The prospect of being able to drive a bargain had made him once more the shrewd lobster-buyer, and he replied banteringly:

"We ain't countin' on makin' more'n a dollar apiece out'er what we take, an' if so be you've got any to sell at eight cents a pound, we'll buy 'em."

"Have to weigh 'em out, eh?"

"No; we'll allow they'll run a pound an' a half."

"What are they worth to the westward?"

"That's what I can't say," Tommy replied, and with truth, since it was possible the market price might have advanced or fallen since the Phœbe left Westbay.

"I allow you've got some idee of what they're fetchin'."

"Well, a week ago they were worth nearabout fifteen cents delivered in Boston, so if you've got very many of 'em, of course it would pay you to carry them in yourself."

"I don't allow there's more'n three or four hundred to be picked up on Long Island, an' seein's how it wouldn't pay us to make the run to the westward for that number, we'll sell to you for ten cents."

"I don't dare to pay it," Tommy replied. "We've got to make a profit if we count on payin' freight an' runnin' expenses. Perhaps we might chance it if you had a full cargo for us; but to take on a few hundred ain't any object."

"All right. I guess you may have 'em, though it seems a good deal like robbery," the speaker on board the schooner said with a laugh. "I can't put back now, so run in an' tell the folks Jim Beals said you was to have what's in his car at eight cents."

"Ay, ay," Tommy replied, and with a view to economy of time he immediately gave the signal for

full speed ahead, saying a moment later much to Ezra's satisfaction, "we'll skin this 'ere coast to-day, I reckon, but I don't feel like hangin' 'round here very long 'cause Eliphalet's sure to be makin' Eastport way mighty soon."

Ezra went below to tell Dick that Tommy had come to his senses at last, and while there decided to take advantage of the opportunity to get breakfast before they should begin taking in lobsters.

He had hardly more than begun when Master Downing shouted through the tube:

"Get up here lively, Ezra! There's a power boat of some kind comin' out from Long Island, an' I ain't jest certain who's runnin' her."

"If Mr. Carter don't get hold of Eliphalet Barnes pretty soon Tommy will die of fright," Dick said as Ezra obeyed the summons, and when the senior partner was standing at the pilot-house door, it could readily be seen that there was no opportunity of avoiding the on-coming craft even though the boys felt so disposed.

"She can sail two miles to our one, an' has evidently put out to speak us," Ezra said as he looked critically at the little craft which was coming down so swiftly upon them. "You may as well hold up for her, Tommy; we know it can't be Barnes, for he certainly was at Isle au Haut when we left, an' couldn't have passed us."

Realizing the truth of his partner's statement Tommy swung the Phœbe around ever so little to meet the stranger, and five minutes later a cry of surprise burst from his lips:

“It’s Mr. Carter! I wonder where he got that boat? If he’s sharp, now’s the time when he can lay Eliphalet Barnes by the heels.”

“What shall we do, Tommy?” Ezra asked in perplexity. “After what the smuggler did for us last night it doesn’t seem right that we should set this officer on his track, an’ yet —”

“Do you mean that because Barnes helped us off the reef we’re bound to lend a hand in his smugglin’ business, for that’s what it will amount to if we hold our tongues now?” Tommy cried fiercely. “Mr. Carter’s sure to ask if we have seen anything of him, an’ it’s a case of lyin’ jest ’cause Eliphalet took it into his head to be friendly for a spell, or of tellin’ the truth.”

“Of course we’re bound to give him all the information we can,” Ezra said slowly; “but it goes mightily against the grain. When you come right down to facts, Tommy, if it hadn’t been for Barnes we’d have stayed on that reef, perhaps, until the Phœbe went to pieces, an’ now, within four or five hours after he did for us what nobody else would at that time, we’re goin’ to jump the officers down on him.”

“Well, I don’t know about jumpin’ the officers down on him,” Tommy replied grimly, “for it ain’t such a very long while ago that Mr. Carter had Barnes to rights in our cuddy, an’ then didn’t hold him. Tellin’ where we believe Eliphalet Barnes is, ain’t givin’ him over as a prisoner by considerable.”

Ezra’s face brightened at the possibility that the information which they should give to the officer might not result in the capture of the smuggler to-

ward whom he was feeling very friendly, and at that point the conversation ceased because the officer's craft was within hailing distance.

"Ahoy there!" Mr. Carter shouted from the bow, as he waved his hand imperatively; but before Tommy had time to give the signal to slow down, the officer had recognized the Phœbe.

"Ahoy, lads! Where are you bound?"

"Alongshore, sir. Pickin' up a cargo," Ezra replied.

"I don't suppose you've seen anything of our smuggler, have you?"

"We run on a reef last night, an' he turned to like a major to help us off."

Mr. Carter stared at the lad as if not believing the statement, and Ezra added:

"I'm allowin' it don't seem reasonable; but it's a fact just the same. He came aboard when one of the fishermen refused to lend a hand unless we paid a big price, an' it was through him that we succeeded in gettin' clear of the rocks without any damage."

"Then I fancy you are looking on him as a warm personal friend by this time?" Mr. Carter said sarcastically, and Ezra replied with a laugh:

"I'm not certain we can say quite that, for he warned us plainly that we might expect he'd pay us off for havin' sent to you."

"That is Eliphalet Barnes to a dot," Mr. Carter said laughingly. "There's a queer streak in the man that you can't but admire; though it doesn't show itself very often. I'll come alongside and you shall tell me the story."

The two boats were brought as near together as was safe while the sea was so choppy, and Ezra told in detail all the happenings of the night, asking when the story was finished:

“Did you get that boat at Eastport?”

“No; she was sent me from Portland. So Barnes thought I was scrapin’ my shins over the rocks on Quoddy Head? As a matter of fact I was waiting for some kind of a craft which would give me a fair show in the chase. All the people down in that section are not in the smuggling business, and it wasn’t difficult to get a clew to the smuggler’s whereabouts. He isn’t expecting to see me hereabouts, and I’m hoping to be able to come upon him unawares this time, when I will guarantee he doesn’t give me the slip as easily as when I had him trapped in your cuddy. Now, then, describe to me this man Barker’s place, so that I shan’t make any mistake at the start.”

Tommy gave the desired information to the best of his ability, and having done so, said:

“We’d like to do what we can toward pickin’ up a cargo of lobsters roundabout the islands here; but I ain’t in favor of it if there’s a chance Barnes can come at us. Ezra an’ Dick seem to think that because he was so friendly last night, there’s little risk he’ll try to do us harm; but I know him better, so if you’ve no objections to tellin’, I’d like to know what your plans are in case you don’t happen to strike him ’round Isle au Haut.”

“You may attend to your business without fear

of interruption from the smuggler at any point to the eastward of here, for I'll guarantee he won't get past me either by day or night. I'm equipped now for catching him, and intend to do it."

Then Mr. Carter's craft was sent ahead, and the partners, for as a matter of course Dick had come out of the cuddy by this time, stood watching the little boat as she seemingly leaped from one wave to another with a swiftness that was astonishing.

"That beats anything in the way of sailin' I've ever seen," Master Downing said, after gazing astern at the rapidly receding craft, and then his business instincts coming once more to the surface, he shouted peremptorily, "Get a move on, one of you fellers! It's pretty nigh certain. Mr. Carter told the truth — at least it will be the truth from now till night, an' we'll get what lobsters we can while it's safe to loaf 'round here."

Half an hour later the boys were taking in "Jim Beals' catch," which consisted of four hundred and five marketable lobsters, and the remainder of the day was much the same as wasted, for they visited every fisherman in the vicinity without being able to make a single purchase.

"I s'pose we ought'er put her right along, takin' turn an' turn about with the watches," Tommy said as if uncertain whether he really meant what he said. "It don't seem as if we had any right to lay still jest on account of its bein' night."

"It seems that way to me," Dick replied emphatically. "It's a foolish trick to hurry down to

Quoddy Head where we know it won't be possible to find many lobsters, an' skip all the islands that lay in the course."

"We can take 'em in on our way back," Tommy suggested, much as if he was willing to be convinced to the contrary.

"You won't be willin' to stop then, because of not knowin' where Eliphalet Barnes may be," Ezra cried with a laugh. "Now it's certain Mr. Carter is between him and us, an' there's no good reason why we shouldn't call on all the fishermen nearabout, even though they haven't any lobsters on hand. If we count on runnin' this business all summer, we can't afford to jump back and forth from Monhegan to Quoddy Head, never lookin' in anywhere for fear of gettin' into trouble."

"What is it you want to do?" Master Downing asked.

"Anchor here for the night, an' start out as early as you please to-morrow with the idea of makin' a clean sweep of the coast. It isn't reasonable to suppose we'll be able to pick up many lobsters; but we shall be puttin' things in trim for the next cruise."

"All right, we'll stop, an' I'm hopin' you fellers'll turn in as soon as you've swallowed supper, so's there won't be a row when I want to get under way at daybreak," and Master Downing took the precaution of putting out another anchor in case the wind increased during the night.

When this had been done he set about getting the evening meal, allowing his partners to give some

little assistance, but performing the greater portion of the work himself.

“Now it’s a case of takin’ things comfortable-like, without worryin’ ’bout what Barnes may do,” Tommy said as he seated himself at the table. “I ain’t allowin’ that Mr. Carter will catch our smuggler in any very short time; but while he’s hangin’ ’round here Eliphalet will be careful to keep well to the westward.”

This quite naturally led the conversation around to what Barnes might do to them, if opportunity offered; but because neither Dick nor Ezra believed he would make any attempt at carrying his threat into execution after having been so friendly, the discussion was not particularly animated, especially since all hands gave remarkably close attention to the food before them.

Tommy had just ventured the remark that Eliphalet Barnes was the “slipperiest customer” to be found on the Maine coast, when a sharp blow on the side of the Phœbe told that some small craft had come alongside.

“Better be careful what you say, for that may be him,” Dick said with a laugh, and Tommy replied in a matter-of-fact tone:

“It wouldn’t start me a little bit, for it’ll take more’n Mr. Carter to keep him west of here when he’s made up his mind to go east.”

“Well, lads, have you finished work for the day?” came a voice from the head of the companion-way, and the customs inspector descended the stairs.

"After we've eaten all we need, washed the dishes, an' set the cuddy to rights, we'll call it a day's work, I reckon," Tommy said glibly, and the smile died from his face very suddenly as he guessed from Mr. Carter's manner that the visit was not purely a social one.

"I have come for assistance," the officer began abruptly, "and prefer that you should volunteer rather than force me into impressing you, as I have the right to do. I believe Barnes is on Marshalls island at this moment; but if not, I have good cause for thinking he will be there before morning. I want you to run over and find him."

"Is there any reason why you don't want to go?" Tommy interrupted.

"Yes; if he is there, I can answer for it that the old fox is keeping a sharp watch, and the moment I heave in sight, he will get under way in a power boat, which, while it isn't as fast as mine, would give me a hard chase, with the chances of escaping in the darkness. If he isn't there, and I put in an appearance, his friends will contrive some means of warning him that I am near at hand."

"You surely don't think we can go there an' capture him?" Ezra asked in surprise.

"Certainly not. What I want is that you shall go over under the pretense of looking for lobsters. It will be an easy matter to learn if he is on the island, because he won't be afraid to show himself, and you will find there as snug a harbor for the night as here," Mr. Carter replied, as if believing he had explained his plan fully.

“But what good will it do you for us to find out where he is?” Tommy asked, not looking particularly well pleased with thus being forced, so to speak, into the work of trapping the smuggler.

“In case he is there, you can hoist one lantern, and no suspicion will be raised, for you generally have riding lights out in the night. There are but two places where he would be likely to moor his boat for the night — one on the west, and the other on the south side of the island. You carry both red and green lights; in case he is now, or comes to anchor later, in the west cove, leave the green lantern alight, and the red one if his craft is on the southerly side. I will lay between here and Burnt Coal, where I can keep you in sight. When a single lantern is hoisted, I’ll come on at full speed, and before arriving can easily make out what color you’re showing.”

“Do you allow that Eliphalet Barnes will see us foolin’ ’round with lanterns an’ not mistrust the meanin’ of ’em?” Tommy asked sharply.

“I don’t believe he will pay any attention to what you do, for the very good reason that at Stonington I gave out my intention of getting to Portland as soon as possible, and set off as if in a hurry. I’m supposing that Barnes will get word of that, even if he hasn’t done so already, and count that he has shaken me off the scent.”

Neither of the boys made reply. Even Tommy did not look upon the officer’s plan with favor, while Ezra had decided objections against aiding in the capture of a man who had but lately been so kind to them.

“ You won’t be able to carry on your business in peace while Barnes remains at liberty, for however friendly he may have shown himself when you were on the reef, he has given fair warning that he’ll take revenge because you sent for me. It’s your own safety that you’ll be working for, and surely that should be sufficient inducement.”

“ I suppose we’ll have to tackle the job,” Dick said, speaking slowly and thoughtfully; “ but it’s a mighty mean trick to pay within twenty-four hours of the time when he lent us a hand as no other thereabout would.”

“ His helping float your smack was to show himself in the light of Good Samaritan, and he has often done similar acts only to work harm later to those whom he befriended. Surely you, who are already charged with smuggling a Chinaman, have every reason for wanting to cut his career short. Remember, that until he can be brought to book, you are the ones the law will hold responsible for what was done off Vinalhaven.”

“ When do you want us to get under way? ” Ezra asked, as if convinced by the argument, and eager to have done with a disagreeable task as soon as possible.

“ At once; my motor boat isn’t far away, and I’ll go on board her at once. Make it appear as if you had forgotten to put out a riding light, and there is little chance of arousing any suspicion.”

“ Very well, we’ll start,” and Ezra arose to his feet, while Tommy remained staring at the food be-

fore him as if uncertain what part he would play in this game.

Mr. Carter went on deck, and an instant later the sound of oars could be heard, telling that he was pulling rapidly away, whereupon Dick asked sharply of Master Downing:

“Well, why don’t you get a move on? Surely there’s no one on this coast more afraid of Eliphalet Barnes than you, an’ I wonder you’re not drivin’ us to the last notch for fear he’ll slip off before we can make the island.”

“Look here,” and now Tommy spoke sharply, as if he was displeased. “I ain’t willin’ to say right out that I’m afraid of the smuggler; but all the same I’ll feel a deal better when he’s out of this part of the country. For the government officers to take him is somethin’ that don’t concern us; but when it comes to stickin’ our noses in, that’s another matter. ’Cordin’ to the way I’m lookin’ at this ’ere trick, we’ll be makin’ fools of ourselves.”

“Do you refuse to have any share in it?” Dick asked in surprise.

“I’ll do my part toward runnin’ the smack over there, though I’d a good deal rather not, an’ after that I set back in the harness, no matter how much Mr. Carter coaxes, or how many threats he makes,” and Tommy walked slowly out of the cuddy to the deck.

CHAPTER XVII

A WARNING

Ezra made no move toward leaving the cuddy when Tommy went on deck, although it was necessary all hands turn to and raise the anchors before the Phœbe could be gotten under way, and Dick looked at him inquiringly.

“Well,” he asked after a pause, “what are you goin’ to do about it? We are bound to play the game as Mr. Carter proposes, I suppose?”

“It’s a mighty mean trick, to do Barnes what harm we can when but for him our smack would be still on the reef, an’ all our business schemes be at an end,” Ezra said bitterly. “Because of havin’ so lately lent a hand, the smuggler won’t have any suspicion that we are workin’ against him, an’ yet when he is taken we’ll be the ones who have really done it!”

“Why didn’t you tell Mr. Carter that you wouldn’t take any part in his plan?”

“Because I believe he could make a lot of trouble for us if we refused to lend a hand. I’ve heard somethin’ about an officer of the law havin’ the right to call upon anybody for help at such a time as this, an’ if a feller don’t do as he says, it’s possible to arrest him,” Ezra replied gloomily.

“Then if the thing has got to be done, there isn’t

any sense in hangin' back, particularly after havin' said that we'd do it," and Dick spoke impatiently, whereupon Ezra went slowly on deck, saying as he did so:

"I don't suppose there's any way out of it; but I shall always feel that I've done the meanest kind of a trick."

The anchors were brought inboard; Master Downing took the helm without speaking, and Dick went below to start the motor and overhaul the lanterns, that the agreed-upon signal might be made when information had been obtained.

Slowly, as if realizing that this was a poor way to repay Mr. Barnes for having aided in hauling her off the rocks, the Phœbe came around in obedience to the helm, and Ezra fancied that she moved sluggishly, rather than at her usual speed.

"Who's goin' ashore to do Carter's dirty work?" Tommy asked, five minutes later, and Ezra replied curtly:

"I won't go alone!"

"Then I reckon it'll be a case of all hands tacklin' the job, for I don't have any idee of strikin' out by my lonesome. To tell the truth, I'd be afraid to go where Barnes was, even though he did do us a mighty good turn."

"Perhaps Dick will be willin'; I'll find out," and Ezra went below, but returned very shortly, saying moodily as he came to the door of the pilot-house:

"Dick ain't willin' to do it all; but says he'll go with us."

“An’ are we to leave the Phœbe at anchor with no one to look after her?”

“There’s no other way.”

“S’posen Barnes should come aboard an’ run her off while we’re ashore?”

“There isn’t much chance of his doin’ that when he’s got a faster craft near at hand.”

Then the conversation ceased entirely until the smack was come as near the eastern shore of Marshalls island as Tommy dared to run, and he gave the word to let go the anchor, after signaling Dick to stop the motor.

“Now, then,” Ezra cried, as he pulled the dory alongside, and speaking in the tone of one who is eager to perform a most disagreeable task as quickly as possible, “let’s have this thing settled at once, so we can pull out of here. We don’t know where to go after gettin’ ashore, therefore I propose that each sets off in a different direction, and he who gets information concerning Barnes, is to come back to the smack an’ set the signals.”

“Are we to wander like a lot of foolish sheep straight across the island?” Dick asked.

“No; you shall go to that house under the hill, where we stopped last when we landed here; Tommy is to make for the shanties near the head of the cove, an’ I’ll go around the point to the westerly harbor.”

Tommy made no objection to this plan, for he believed Ezra had marked out for himself the course which was most likely to result in success, if the finding of Mr. Barnes could be so considered. Dick

was indifferent as to where he went so that the task was not prolonged.

The arrangement as made by Ezra was carried out immediately the dory reached the shore, the boys separating without further conversation, and in a twinkling all three were swallowed up by the darkness.

Ezra walked rapidly, for it was in his mind that the smuggler would be found by Tommy, if indeed Barnes was on the island, and he had no desire to be near at hand when the discovery was made, but hoped the signals would be displayed before he returned from the western cove.

Because of his belief that he was going directly away from what was to him the danger point, he gave little heed to his surroundings, but pushed straight on until he had nearly stumbled upon two men who, as it seemed, had suddenly come out of the ground.

Leaping back with a cry of mingled surprise and alarm, he half-turned as if to beat a retreat, when one of the strangers seized him roughly by the arm, and he was dragged from out the shadow of the bushes toward the water's edge.

"Hello, it's one of my young lobster buyers!" a familiar voice cried, and, looking up into the face which was peering down upon him, Ezra saw Mr. Barnes.

By the irony of fate he himself had chosen the very course which led to the end of the search, and he it was who must give the signal which, as he

really believed, would betoken the meanest act of his life.

“What are you doin’ here?” the smuggler asked suspiciously. “Didn’t you land on this island just after noon?”

“Yes, an’ now we’ve come back.”

“What for?”

“That’s what I can’t tell you,” and, acting upon the impulse of the moment, Ezra resolved to so frame his replies that Barnes could not fail to understand the officers were near at hand.

“Can’t, eh?” the smuggler cried roughly, as he tightened his grasp on the boy’s arm, only to release it entirely an instant later, as he asked with a laugh, “Perhaps you think it wouldn’t be jest the square thing to lend a hand at Carter’s orders agin me, after our work on the reef, eh? You needn’t be afraid to speak up, lad, for I know full well that the officer went aboard your smack less’n an hour ago,” Barnes added as Ezra remained silent. “I ain’t quite the chump he takes me for, an’ can tell you mighty near where he is this very minute.”

“It was a mean thing to come here after all you’d done for us,” Master Upton said hesitatingly. “You had a chance to get square with us for sendin’ after the officers, though we only did it to protect ourselves, an’ instead, you helped save the Phœbe.”

“Look here, lad, I ain’t goin’ to ask any more questions, for from what I saw of Carter’s movements, an’ by comin’ across you here, I can figger out the trick as plain as if it was writ down. Do you

think I'd be hangin' 'round this island if I wasn't ready to meet your friend. Go ahead an' carry out your part of the work — I won't lay it up agin you — an' then, if you like a bit of fun, keep an eye out when that bloomin' inspector comes ashore."

"But you're not goin' to stay here?" Ezra asked.

"That's jest what I am goin' to do, my son. Are you to go back to Long Island?"

Ezra shook his head.

"Got some other way to send him word, eh? All right, the sooner he comes the better, an' if it's any favor to you I won't tell him we happened to come together, for I'm allowin' you don't feel like confessin' you ain't so terrible keen to play the spy on a man you was friendly with last night."

Ezra was bewildered. He could not understand why the smuggler had so little care as to his own safety, nor why he was willing that information regarding himself should be given to the officers of the law. The lad turned as if to retrace his steps, and then halted to say:

"Ain't you goin' to get away?"

"Not a bit of it, my son; what I'm wantin' is to see Carter, for I'm good an' ready to meet him. Go ahead with your job, an' don't pay any attention to me, though it'll be worth your while to keep an eye out on what happens."

Having said this, Mr. Barnes and his companion disappeared amid the bushes, and Ezra slowly retraced his steps in a maze of wonder and perplexity.

On arriving at the point where the dory had been

drawn up on the shore, neither of his partners were to be seen, therefore he shoved the boat into deep water, and went aboard the Phœbe.

The signal lanterns were in the cuddy where Dick had left them, and Ezra hoisted the white one, after lighting it, to the masthead of the only spar. Then came the question as to whether the green or the red should be shown on the pilot-house, and, unable to decide, because the smuggler had been found midway the two coves, he trusted to chance by shutting his eyes and groping around until his hands came in contact with one of the lanterns.

It was the green one which had thus been blindly chosen, and, lighting the wick, he placed it on top of the pilot-house, after which he seated himself on the starboard rail waiting for the hail which would tell that one or both of his partners were ready to come on board.

Never had the lad been in such a painful state of perplexity. He had much the same as warned Mr. Barnes of what was being done against him, and by so doing been false to the trust reposed in him by the officer. Then again, he knew beyond a peradventure that the smuggler intended to make an attack upon Mr. Carter — already had his plans laid — and it was his duty to tell the inspector of what was in store for him. If he did this last he would have played the traitor to both, without having been true even to himself.

By turning the matter over in his mind carefully, Ezra succeeded in making himself as uncomfortable

as a lad well could be, and an exclamation of relief burst from his lips when he heard Tommy Downing's voice:

"Hello, Ezra! Come ashore after us!"

Master Upton hung in the wind while one might have counted twenty, trying to decide whether or no he should give his partners a correct account of what had been said or done since his parting with them, and Tommy called impatiently:

"Are you there, Ezra?"

"Of course I am," was the curt reply.

"Then why don't you come ashore after us? It won't pay to stay here too long!"

"I'm comin' as soon as I can cast off this painter, an' reckon you won't come to any harm even if it happens to take me two or three minutes to do the job," and Ezra leaped into the dory, a mirthless smile coming to his face as he heard Tommy say in a cautious tone:

"Somethin' has gone wrong with him, an' that's a fact. He's as ugly as a bear with a sore head, an' yet he couldn't have had as much of a tramp as we took, seein's how he got back so quickly."

"Well, it seems that you was the lucky one," Dick said as his partner ran the dory's bow up on the shore near where he was standing, and Ezra asked with no little show of ill temper:

"What do you mean by that?"

"Why, you run across the smuggler, of course, else why are your lanterns out?"

"Yes, I found him," Ezra muttered. "Why don't

you get in, or are you countin' on standin' there all night?"

"Feelin' mighty fine, ain't you?" Dick said with a laugh, as he clambered into the dory, leaving Tommy the work of pushing her off into deep water.

The senior partner made no reply to this ironical remark; but settled down to the oars as soon as the dory was afloat, and refused to answer any of the many questions which were put to him by his partners until the three were in the cuddy of the Phœbe. Then Dick said in a tone of one who gives a command rather than asks a favor:

"Now, then! Tell us what has gone wrong with you, for it's certain that somethin' has happened to put you out of tune?"

"Isn't it enough to make any fellow cross-grained to hunt down a man who has just done him a big favor?"

"It was the same man who would have sent you to jail, if things had gone his way," Tommy cried as if trying to reconcile himself to what had been done.

"You can't say that, because there's no knowing whether he would have dared make a charge against us for smugglin' that stuff down Eastport way."

"But it's sure he put the Chinaman on board, which trick is likely to cost us a good deal of money," Dick added, and Ezra replied sadly:

"But after all that he turned to an' helped save the Phœbe from being wrecked."

"I'll agree it was a mighty mean trick in us to do what we have — but you found him, an' put up the signals?"

“Yes,” Ezra said slowly. “I found him, or perhaps I should say, he found me, an’ seemed to have a pretty good idee of why we had come back here, for — I might just as well tell the truth, because I have succeeded in playing false all the way round. When Barnes asked why we had come back I refused to answer, and he, knowing that Mr. Carter was close at hand, tumbled to the whole business.”

“Then he has run away?” Tommy asked breathlessly.

“That’s exactly what he hasn’t done. He claims that he don’t want to slip off, for some reason best known to himself. I’m thinkin’ there’ll be a pretty row on shore between now an’ mornin’; but whether there is or not, it seems as if I had shown myself to be the biggest kind of a fool.”

“I don’t know about that,” Tommy said decidedly. “I’ve got no love for Eliphalet Barnes, an’ ought’er be feelin’ pretty good towards Mr. Carter, for he got us out of the scrape down to Quoddy Head; but at the same time it made me feel mighty mean to help track down the man who had the same as saved this ’ere smack.”

“Then you would have done just as I did?” Ezra asked eagerly, and Master Downing replied with a laugh:

“I don’t know what I’d done, an’ there’s no need of tryin’ to figger it out since you settled the matter. The question is, what will be done ashore, an’ I’d like to be there when the inspector an’ the smuggler come together.”

“You’d better stay where you are,” Dick said em-

phatically. "I ain't blamin' Ezra for doin' what he did; but at the same time we'd best keep our noses out of the muddle from this on, if so be we can."

"There's no reason why we can't go on deck, an' perhaps we'll hear somethin' of what's goin' on," Master Downing said as he arose to his feet, and without waiting for a reply went up the companion-way, his comrades following.

The three lads entered the pilot-house, where they stood peering out into the darkness, listening intently for the slightest sound which would betoken the movements of either the pursuer or the pursued, and before having remained there very long the faint chug-chug-chugging of a screw in the water far to the eastward, told that Mr. Carter had begun his portion of the work.

"He's seen the green light," Dick whispered, "an' has gone 'round to the west cove. Now watch out, an' you'll hear Barnes puttin' off from this side the island."

"You won't hear anythin' of the kind," Ezra said stoutly. "Barnes has got a plan which I'm afraid means considerable mischief for the inspector, an' if any injury is done Mr. Carter this night I shall be responsible for it."

"Now don't stew over that any longer. What's been done can't be undone, an' there's no need any one should know you the same as gave warnin', unless Barnes himself tells the story."

Five, ten, fifteen, twenty minutes passed, and still no sound could be heard from the island. It was as if a most profound peace reigned, and the boys

were beginning to think they had been mistaken in fancying a power boat had passed them to eastward, when the chug-chug-chugging came once more over the waters, sounding nearer and nearer each moment.

“Here comes the inspector, an’ he must have Barnes with him, else he wouldn’t have put off so soon,” Tommy cried excitedly. “If Eliphalet had any plan for doin’ up Mr. Carter, it failed to work, an’ now I’m allowin’ there won’t be much smugglin’ done around here for quite a spell.”

Nearer and nearer came the power boat until it was possible for the lads to distinguish her outlines amid the gloom, and Dick whispered nervously:

“He’s bringin’ Barnes over here, an’ if that precious smuggler comes face to face with us, I’m thinkin’ he’ll tell what you did, Ezra.”

Master Upton was so anxious and excited that he could not make reply, and while the three stood in the pilot-house motionless and silent, the swiftly advancing boat swept past the Phœbe within twenty yards; but without slackening speed.

When she was directly opposite, the crew of the smack were at the same time electrified and mystified by hearing the voice of Mr. Barnes as he shouted:

“So long, lads! When your friend the inspector comes up this way, tell him I’m headed for the Provinces!”

The swift craft was lost to view in the darkness even while the smuggler was speaking, and the crew of the Phœbe stood gazing at each other in bewil-

derment and amazement, until Dick said emphatically:

“That must have been the boat Mr. Carter came here in! Do you suppose Mr. Barnes is runnin’ away with the inspector?”

“It looks like it,” Ezra replied thoughtfully; “but yet Mr. Carter must have had his eyes open for trouble, an’ how could Barnes have got hold of him without some kind of a row such as we must have heard?”

It was useless for the boys to stand there speculating without any means of arriving at a definite conclusion. From the island no sound could be heard, nor even a light seen. It was as if the fishermen who made a home there had suddenly abandoned it. The very silence was oppressive to the lads, who felt that, because of the part they had played, the inspector’s plans had been overthrown, and after perhaps ten minutes had passed, Tommy said nervously, speaking in a low tone as if fearing his words might be overheard:

“Say, fellers, let’s get out’er here. It’s like bein’ in a graveyard, an’ I’m afraid somethin’ terrible will happen.”

“How can it if Barnes has carried Mr. Carter off?” Dick asked irritably.

“I don’t know,” Tommy wailed; “but I do wish somebody would make a noise!”

And somebody did “make a noise” just then, for the boys were startled by hearing the voice of the inspector from the shore, as he shouted loudly:

“Ahoy on the smack! Come ashore! Come ashore an’ take me off!”

“Well, I’ll be jiggered!” Tommy exclaimed, without making any move toward obeying the command. “How did he get there?”

“Ahoy on the smack!” came again from the shore, and this time Ezra answered the hail in a hesitating voice, as if uncertain whether he ought to make reply.

“Come ashore and take me off!” Mr. Carter cried impatiently. “Have you heard a boat go past you?”

“Ay, sir; we thought it was your craft that went by quite a spell ago, an’ Eliphalet Barnes hailed us as he passed.”

“One of you put ashore and take me off! The others stand by to get the smack under way!”

By this time the crew of the Phœbe had gathered their senses sufficiently to act, and Tommy leaped into the dory, making very much unnecessary noise in order that the inspector might know his commands were being obeyed, as he said to his partners:

“You can be weighin’ anchor; but if Mr. Carter thinks our craft will make any fist at chasin’ the one Eliphalet’s in, he’s mightily mistaken.”

Then Master Downing pulled hurriedly to the shore where the inspector stood impatiently awaiting him, and in a twinkling the boat was headed for the smack once more, Mr. Carter in his eagerness having waded out knee-deep to clamber over the bow that no time might be lost.

"How did you get here?" Tommy asked innocently.

"Get here!" Mr. Carter cried angrily. "I walked across the island, of course, and that miserable smuggler played me a scurvy trick."

"Did he steal your boat?"

"Didn't you say you heard him go past the smack?"

"Yes, sir; but how did it happen that you let him get on board your craft?"

"We went around into the west cove after seeing your green light, and there lay what, in the darkness, looked to be Barnes' power boat. We anchored our craft alongside of his, after which my partner and I landed. We had hardly got amid the underbrush on our way to the shanty where I counted he would be found, when we heard our boat steaming out of the cove. Of course I knew it was one of Barnes' tricks, and hurried over here to get your smack."

"Where's your partner?"

"I left him on the island to stand watch in case Barnes should double back after finding that I have set off with you."

"An' do you think he can tackle Eliphalet Barnes alone?" Tommy asked, without any idea of giving offense, whereupon Mr. Carter cried angrily:

"You seem to think that man is a match for a dozen others! My partner will take the scoundrel, or cripple him for life!"

"I don't know 'bout that," Tommy replied reflectively. "You've had three or four chances your-

self, an' seem to have got the worst of it every time."

Such a remark was not well calculated to soothe the inspector's ill temper, and the chances are he would have made an intemperate reply but for the fact that by this time they were alongside the Phœbe.

"Get under way at once!" he shouted peremptorily, while leaping over the rail, and Dick ran into the cuddy to start the motor, for the anchor had already been weighed, when Ezra asked in surprise:

"Do you count on catchin' that boat with this smack?"

"We'll make a try for it," Mr. Carter cried in a rage.

"But you said she was the smartest craft on the coast, an' you must know that a lobster smack, with a well full of water, doesn't move very quickly."

"What course shall I steer?" Tommy shouted from the pilot-house as the Phœbe began to forge ahead.

"Head her in the same direction you saw Barnes go," Mr. Carter replied, and then it was as if he began to realize how useless it would be to chase the power boat, which had evidently been built especially for speed, in such a craft as the Phœbe, for he muttered half to himself, yet sufficiently loud for Ezra to hear:

"I suppose it's a fool trick, and I might as well admit at the beginning that I've been done up; but it goes mightily against the grain to lay idle."

"Mr. Barnes must have come to the island in a power boat of some kind. Where is she?" Ezra asked.

“ I am allowing that he sent her away by one of his partners, for the craft which we took to be her was a water-logged dory, with a lobster pot set up in the stern to represent a motor. What puzzles me is, how he knew I was anywhere around? He must have had an inkling of it in order to have laid his plans so well. Where was he when you saw him? ”

This was the question Ezra had been fearing to hear, and his voice trembled despite all his efforts to render it steady, as he replied:

“ He and another man were walking round the point about half way between the two harbors. ”

“ But you showed the green light? ”

“ Yes, sir; I had to get out one or the other, an', not seeing any craft around here, counted that his boat must be in the west cove. ”

“ What was he doing when you saw him? ”

“ Just walkin' along, sir. ”

“ Then you came aboard and made the signal? ”

“ Yes, sir. ”

Mr. Carter went forward to the wheel-house hurriedly, like a man who feels the necessity of action and yet is unable to advance matters ever so slightly, while Ezra ran into the cuddy where he said to Dick, who had overheard this brief conversation:

“ It was a mighty lucky thing for me he didn't ask any more questions. I'd made up my mind the time had come to make a clean breast of it, for I wouldn't have lied to him. ”

“ Well, what are we to do now? ” Dick asked in perplexity, and Ezra replied with a mirthless laugh:

"It strikes me we'll come pretty near doing whatever Mr. Carter orders, an' the chances are this cruise won't be a profitable one, for we can't run back and forth along the coast without takin' the chances of spoilin' the few lobsters we've got in the well."

"That's what shan't be done," Dick said angrily. "If the inspector insists on our carryin' him back an' forth, we'll either make him give us a writin' to show that the government will pay for the cargo, or else he must let us put into some port from which the lobsters can be shipped."

"Accordin' to appearances now, we're as likely to have our business broken up by the inspector, as we were by Eliphalet Barnes. Go into the pilot-house, an' see if you can get some inklin' of what he counts on doin'. Surely he must come to his senses pretty soon, for he knows how swift his own boat is."

"I guess I'll look after the motor while you go an' talk with him. He may begin to ask questions about what happened when I saw Barnes, an' I'd rather not be obliged to say too much."

Dick hurried out of the cuddy determined to assert his rights as one of the owners, for there was a well defined idea in his mind that this Mr. Inspector Carter, however much authority he might have, could not cause them such a loss as must surely ensue if they were forced to cruise back and forth without opportunity of landing their perishable cargo.

Very little of satisfaction was had from the of-

ficer. He was pacing to and fro just outside the pilot-house, asking now and then in quick, impatient tones if the Phœbe was going at her best speed, and when Dick ventured to suggest that this was a hopeless chase, he gave the lad to understand he was not to be interfered with, by saying:

“I’m running this boat now, and when I want advice from you, will ask it.”

“That’s all very well, sir,” Dick said stoutly, now sufficiently irritated to stand up for what he believed was his rights. “But you must remember we’ve got a thousand lobsters in the well that cost us eight cents a pound, an’ it don’t stand to reason we should lose good money, when you know as well as I that nothin’ can come of runnin’ after a boat that is able to make two miles to our one.”

“You will keep on as you are going,” Mr. Carter replied sharply, and turning on his heel he continued to pace to and fro, while Dick, the sense of wrong in his mind growing greater each moment, stood irresolutely near the starboard rail, watching his every movement.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE AGREEMENT

When the Phœbe had been running a full half hour at her best speed, but with no possibility of overtaking the inspector's power boat unless it pleased Mr. Eliphalet Barnes to allow her to do so, Master Downing suddenly remembered that as yet he had had no supper. The visit of the officer at the very time when the crew of the smack would have partaken of the evening meal, caused the boys to forget even that they were hungry, and now when Tommy remembered the fact, it really seemed as if he was famishing.

"See here, Mr. Carter," he said suddenly, leaning out of the pilot-house window to touch the inspector on the shoulder. "This is jest a case of bummin' ahead in the darkness, an' anybody can look after the wheel. We fellows haven't finished our supper yet, an' if you'll take the helm we'll go below now, for you can't expect us to run all night without any linin' to our stomachs."

The officer came into the wheel-house mechanically, as if his thoughts were anywhere rather than on the task in hand, and Tommy, pinching Dick to let him understand he had better follow, went hurriedly into the cuddy.

"Now what's up?" Ezra asked in surprise.

“Has Mr. Carter come to understand that chasin’ his boat is nothin’ more’n a waste of time?”

“Understand nothin’!” Master Downing cried in a tone of contempt. “He’s so sore because of bein’ done up by Eliphalet Barnes that he can’t think of anythin’ else, an’ till he gets over the fit I’m allowin’ we’ll have to keep the Phœbe humpin’ herself. I told him we’d got to have our supper, an’ he’s at the helm now.”

“Do you suppose he understands how to run a craft like this?” Ezra asked in a tone of anxiety.

“He ought’er, else how did it happen that he had sich a dandy boat as Eliphalet has skipped with? Besides, there ain’t nothin’ within ten miles that can bother him. I took good care to put well out to sea when we started, an’ it’s so dark he couldn’t tell whether we were followin’ the coast or runnin’ dead to the suthard. What about somethin’ to eat?”

“Bear a hand, an’ it won’t take long to fix up the supper again. It wasn’t more’n half eaten when Mr. Carter came aboard to tell us we must play the spy for him. What’s gone wrong with Dick?” and Ezra looked anxiously at his partner.

“I’m sick of bein’ mixed up with this smugglin’ business, that’s what’s the matter with me,” Master Marshall replied curtly. “I’d made up my mind to tell Mr. Carter that we wouldn’t keep on with this fool work any longer, usin’ up our gasoline, wastin’ the time, an’ takin’ the chances of losin’ what lobsters we’ve got in the well.”

“Why didn’t you do it?”

“He shut me up so quick that somehow I didn’t

dare, for it may be he's got the right to make us obey his orders."

"An' that's what I reckon he has," Tommy said quickly, as he set about frying some stale bread in a generous allowance of bacon fat. "Of course we can try to make the government pay us for the use of the smack; but Abel Saunders says you'll grow gray headed before gettin' a cent out of the swells in Washington, an' he ought'er know, seein's how he's been tryin' these three years to collect twenty dollars for pilotin' the Revenue cutter."

"If there was the least little bit of a chance that Mr. Carter could get his boat, I wouldn't kick so hard," Dick said gloomily; "but the longer we run the further ahead is Eliphalet Barnes, an' the inspector ought'er know that even better than we. After supper I'm goin' to have a plain talk with him, an' find out if we're playin' this fool game for nothin'."

"I wouldn't do it, Dick," Ezra said soothingly. "We can afford to run till daylight, an' by that time he'll tumble to himself, I reckon. Let him take his full allowance at the wheel, an' we'll get along with some show of comfort, while Tommy don't dare to drive us."

"I don't count on doin' anythin' of the kind," Master Downing said placidly. "As soon as I get my share of this fried bread an' boiled potatoes, I'm goin' to turn in for a snooze."

"But suppose he runs the smack on a rock?" Ezra asked with considerable show of alarm.

"There ain't any near enough for him to strike,

an' even if there was, we couldn't stop him once he'd got his mind set on holdin' any one course, so let him go his own gait, I say," and Master Downing re-arranged the dishes on the table to make it look as if this was a fresh meal instead of the continuation of an old one.

As a matter of fact, all three lads were in a better temper after having thoroughly satisfied their hunger; but Tommy insisted on carrying out his intention of "taking a snooze," as was seen when he turned in all standing, and Ezra believed it his duty to speak with the inspector.

"I've got through wantin' to hear him talk, till to-morrow mornin', an' then I'm goin' to give him a piece of my mind, if he hasn't turned the smack over to us," Dick said when his partner suggested that they go forward, and Master Upton went alone to the wheel-house.

"We've just been finishin' our supper, sir," he said in a respectful tone. "Is there anythin' I can get for you?"

"You may bring me a cup of coffee, and then all I'll ask is that you keep the smack moving at her best pace," Mr. Carter replied, without turning his head.

"She's doin' her best now, sir. A craft of this kind can't make very great speed, an' that boat of yours should be able to run a full two miles to our one."

"All the same I shall keep on till we have come off Quoddy Head, and then we'll decide what is best to be done."

“Quoddy Head!” Master Downing exclaimed, when Ezra repeated the inspector’s words to his partners. “He’d better keep away from there, for Barnes has got too many friends in that section. Anyhow, if he’ll give up this fool chase then, I won’t feel so bad, for we can pick up a cargo on the way back, an’ won’t have wasted sich a terrible long time.”

Four or five times during the night did Ezra go to the pilot-house to ask if the officer needed any assistance; but was told that the crew of the smack need not concern themselves about anything save the running of the motor.

When day dawned, however, the three lobster buyers were on deck straining their eyes for some signs of the smuggler; but feeling confident that he could not be in the vicinity. The smack was then off Cross island, at the entrance to Machias bay, running within two miles or more of the coast, and even as Dick said confidently that there was no one nearabout with whom they were concerned, a dory, in the bow of which was an upraised oar with a white cloth fluttering from the top, put off from the shore, heading as if to intercept the Phœbe.

“Do you see that craft?” Ezra cried as he ran toward the pilot-house. “It looks as if she wanted to speak us!”

Mr. Carter gazed in every direction to make certain there was no other boat in sight, and then said hesitatingly, as if doubting the wisdom of his own judgment:

“Perhaps we had better hold up a bit, though

I'm thinking it is some fisherman who has lobsters to sell, and time is too precious just now to spend many minutes on such people."

"He can waste a whole month without lessenin' his chances of catchin' Eliphalet Barnes," Tommy muttered as Ezra ran below to stop the motor. "The smuggler is so far away by this time that we couldn't catch him with the swiftest craft in Uncle Sam's navy."

The speed of the Phœbe decreased until she finally lay motionless, save for the movement caused by the gentle swell, and the inspector fumed and chafed because the man in the dory did not row faster, much as if Mr. Barnes was so close aboard that a detention of five or ten minutes would enable him to escape.

"Well, what's the matter?" Mr. Carter hailed impatiently as soon as it seemed possible he could make himself heard by the stranger. "We're in a hurry, and can't spend much time here!"

"Is that the smack Phœbe?" the man in the dory cried, and Mr. Carter shouted angrily:

"It's just as I thought — he has got lobsters to sell! Send her ahead at full speed, an' see if you can make up for the time we've fooled away!"

Instead of obeying this command, Ezra hung in the wind, and Tommy cried at the full strength of his lungs:

"This is the Phœbe, all right. What do you want?"

"Go ahead, I tell you!" Mr. Carter screamed,

and the man in the dory replied to Tommy's question by asking:

"Have you got one of them 'ere government inspectors aboard?"

Now Mr. Carter began to understand that perhaps it would be as well to learn what the stranger wanted, and he answered the question by saying:

"I'm a government inspector!"

"The one who's been chasin' Eliphalet Barnes?"

"Yes; do you know where he is?"

"It's hard to guess that when he's been out'er your sight five minutes; but he wanted me to tell you that your power boat was anchored in the cove yonder. He's got through usin' it, an' allows that you'd better have an eye on her."

Mr. Carter stood silent and motionless while one might have counted twenty, and then he cried sharply, his face crimsoned with rage:

"Send her ahead, you fellows!" and he swung the helm hard down.

"Look here!" Ezra cried, now showing a bit of temper to match that displayed by the inspector. "This craft draws more water than yours, an' it ain't no ways certain we can get in there without comin' to grief. You may have the right to call on us to do your biddin' when a criminal is to be taken; but you can't force us to run the risk of wreckin' our own boat. You can go ashore with the man who knows where she is!"

Just for an instant it seemed very much as if Mr. Carter intended to inflict severe punishment

upon the lad who had dared to speak so freely, for he came aft rapidly, looking anything rather than friendly, but before it was possible to reach the boys, who stepped closely together as if for mutual protection, the man in the dory shouted:

“I’ll take the inspector ashore, ’cause the water ain’t any of the deepest off the cove.”

This had the effect of halting the officer, and while he stood by the port rail as if undecided what it was best to do, Tommy asked shrilly:

“Who’s to pay us for the use of this ’ere smack? I don’t reckon you allow to use other people’s boats in a chase that nobody but a dumb man would have started on, without payin’ for ’em, eh?”

Again it was the man in the boat who averted the inspector’s anger, for at that instant he pulled alongside, saying as his dory grazed the smack’s hull:

“Better jump aboard lively, if you’re comin’ with me, for I haven’t got any time to fool away with them as makes a business of chasin’ Eliphalet Barnes.”

At the same instant he held up his hand as if expecting one of the lads to seize it in order to check the headway of the boat, and when Ezra clutched it, he felt in his palm what seemed to be a bit of paper.

“Take it,” the man said in a half whisper just as Mr. Carter was clambering aboard, and in another instant the dory was off again, while Ezra held a missive of some kind in his hand.

“Get below quick an’ start the motor, else he may be orderin’ one of us to help him run his boat

back to Marshall's island," Tommy whispered as he ran swiftly to the pilot-house, and Dick obeyed with such promptness that the Phœbe darted ahead as if with a leap.

"What did that man give up?" Dick asked curiously when the smack was under way and Ezra had followed him into the cuddy lest Mr. Carter should hail, remembering that he could not run the motor boat alone save at the expense of considerable trouble and labor.

Ezra unfolded the paper, and, with Dick looking over his shoulder, read the following which had been written in scrawly characters:

"I'm willin' to cry quits from this out with you chaps, an' if you want to run the lobster business down this way, I'll see to it that you don't have any trouble in gettin' a cargo whenever it's wanted. You needn't be afraid I'll ever again try to play any low-down tricks on you fellows.

"E. Barnes."

"Well, say, what do you think of that?" Dick cried excitedly as he seized the missive from Ezra's hand and ran at full speed to the pilot-house, regardless of the fact that the inspector might see and hail him.

"Give me the wheel while you read that!" Master Marshall cried when he was with the junior partner, and had literally thrust the lad aside, forcing him to take the letter.

Master Downing was so thoroughly surprised at what seemed little less than a direct assault, that he obeyed meekly, exclaiming in bewilderment after

having deciphered the none too legible penmanship:

“Well, I’ll be jiggered! Now what game do you reckon Eliphalet’s up to this time?”

“It don’t look to me like any game,” Ezra, who had hurriedly followed Dick, said as he entered the pilot-house. “I believe the smuggler thinks we gave him a fair deal at Marshalls island, an’ counts on makin’ it up to us —”

“Ahoy! Ahoy on the Phœbe!” came from over the water, and when Ezra would have turned to learn who was hailing, Tommy seized him by the shoulder as he cried excitedly:

“Don’t look out! On your life don’t look out! It’s that bloomin’ inspector, an’ he’s jest come to his senses enough to understand that it won’t be very much fun to run his power boat alone, so he’s goin’ to order one of us back.”

“But we won’t go!” Dick cried angrily.

“Of course we won’t,” Tommy said soothingly; “but it’s a heap better to make him believe we didn’t hear the hail, than get ourselves in a muss by tellin’ him plain out that we’ve fooled ’round enough with sich a chump as he’s shown himself to be. Don’t look out of the window, an’ if that blessed motor will keep on workin’ as it ought’er, we’ll soon be where we can’t hear his screeches.”

“Ahoy on the Phœbe!” came less distinctly than before, and Master Downing said as he hung over the wheel in a paroxysm of mirth:

“Keep it up, you fool inspector! Keep it up, an’ in a couple of minutes we won’t be able to hear you, more’s the pity.” Then to his com-

rades he added, as soon as it was possible to check his laughter, "If he'd gone to work right in the first place, he might'er taken Eliphalet home with him from Eastport; but he must crawl 'round Quoddy Head till he can get a fast motor boat, an' then comes foolin' up this way thinkin' Barnes is a blind man! I've got no use for them kind of inspectors. But what about that letter?"

"I think he's tryin' to work another game on us," Ezra replied stoutly, and Tommy cried emphatically:

"He ain't fool enough to go about it in such a bald-headed way! It won't take us long to find out, though, for we'll be inside of Quoddy Head by noon, an' then if Barnes is playin' square we'll get a cargo aboard."

To this Dick and Ezra could do no less than agree, since it seemed necessary they should continue on a northeasterly course unless willing to take the chances of coming across Mr. Carter again, when they might be forced to lend more assistance to the detriment of their own business.

It was a full hour, however, before they had come to an end of discussing the matter, and then Ezra went below to prepare the long-delayed breakfast, while Tommy indulged in a yet greater display of mirth as he thought of Mr. Carter's vain efforts to stop the Phœbe.

Before the day was come to an end the young lobster buyers had good proof that Mr. Barnes had written the letter in good faith. Within half an hour after they had come to anchor, at the very

place where the smack lay while disabled, two dories, each carrying a single man, came alongside, loaded nearly gunwale deep with lobsters.

"We're allowin' that you're tryin' to pick up a cargo," one of the men said as he made fast to the rail. "Eliphalet allows we ought'er swing our trade your way, seein's you're willin' to pay as much as the others, an' I reckon it won't take sich a dreadful long while to fill that 'ere well, for lobsters have been crawlin' mighty lively these last few days."

"We're payin' eight cents, an' allowin' that they'll run a pound an' a half apiece," Tommy began, and before he could say any more the fisherman replied:

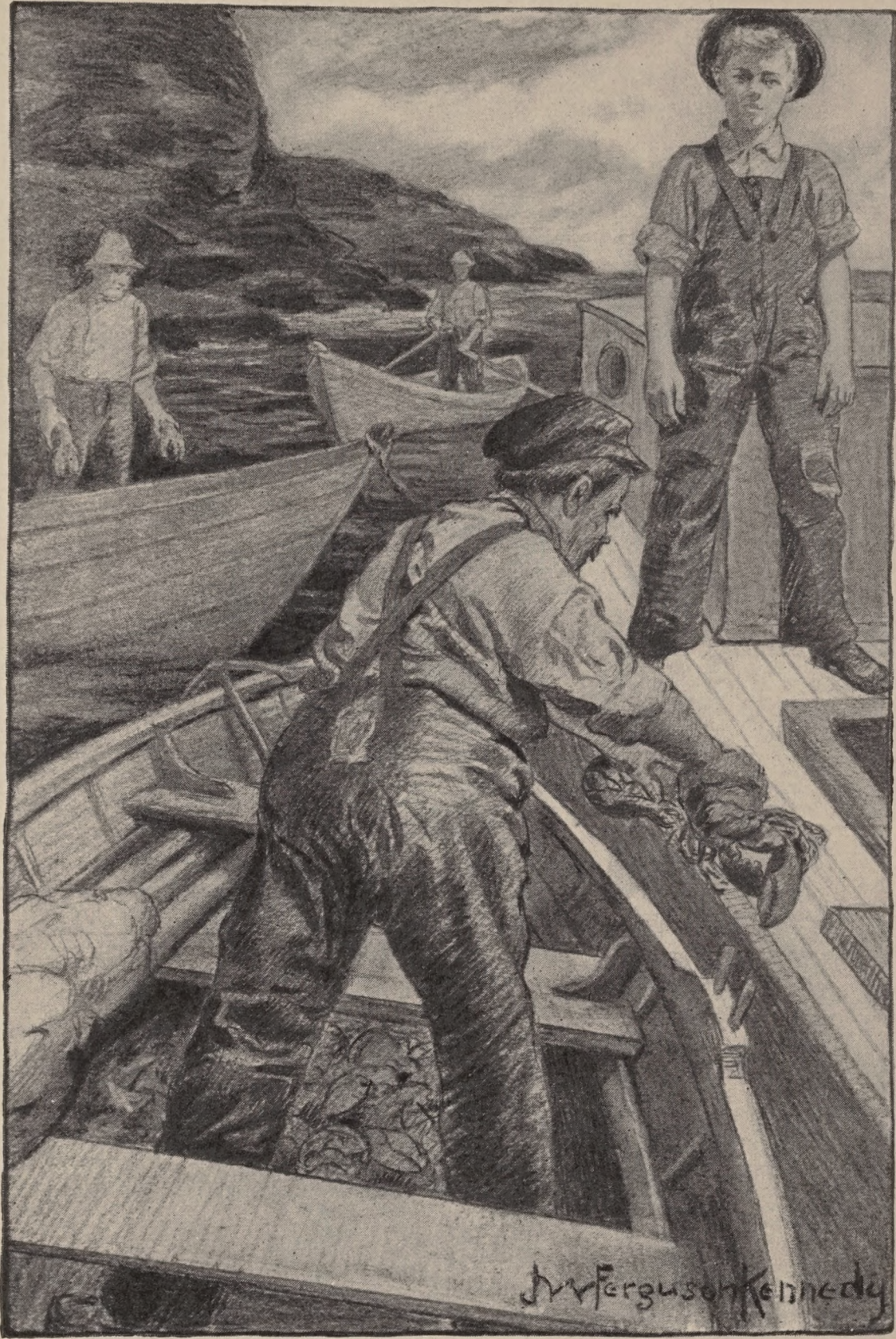
"Set your own price; but tell us where you left that inspector."

"He went ashore at Cross island to get his power boat which Mr. Barnes had left for him," Ezra replied.

"Eliphalet sent it back from here; he wasn't sich a fool as to leave a good craft till he'd got to the end of his cruise."

"Has he been here lately?" Tommy asked curiously, and the fisherman replied with a grin:

"I reckon you lads better not try to know too much. He thinks you are on the square, even though you did bring the inspector down on him, an' what he says goes with a good many of us down this way, which is why we're ready to let you have our catch whenever you come for it. Barnes is a mighty decent neighbor, an' when it comes to



“THREE MORE DORIES . . . EACH LOADED DEEP WITH LOBSTERS.”

smugglin', why he ain't the only one that's in the business, though some of them fool inspectors seem to think he's the whole show. Eliphalet gets a good deal laid to his door that don't belong there, as you'll find out in time."

Then, as if believing he had wasted too much time in talking, the fisherman began unloading his boat, and before the boys could pay for all that had been put on board, three more dories came in sight, each loaded deep with lobsters.

Before sunset the Phœbe's well was so full that the partners did not think it advisable to take on any more, although they might have purchased five or six hundred additional.

"We'll be back in less'n a week," Tommy said to a fisherman who announced that he was willing to clean out his cars if they wanted more. "Then we'll be glad to get hold of twenty-five hundred."

"You shall have 'em, lad. All we're askin' is that you'll give us as nigh the market price as will give you a fair profit, an' you take what we get, for Eliphalet puts it as a favor to him that we deal with you."

"*Now* what do you think about the letter?" Master Downing asked triumphantly when they were alone once more with a full cargo aboard. "This is the biggest lot we've ever got, an' we didn't spend any more time takin' 'em aboard, with all Mr. Carter's foolin', than if we'd had to dodge in here or there pickin' up forty or fifty at a lick."

"It seems like big luck," Ezra replied thoughtfully, "an' I'll be ready to crow if Dick's father,

after he has heard the whole story, thinks I didn't do anythin' so terrible crooked when I let Mr. Barnes understand why we had landed on Marshalls island."

"The best way to find that out is to go to Westbay," Tommy suggested.

"Of course it is," Ezra said in surprise.

"Then weigh anchor, an' we'll soon be there."

"Want to run all night?" Dick asked sharply, and Tommy replied placidly:

"That's my idee. In the first place, we'll get there quicker, an' then Ezra won't have so long to worry over whether he was right or wrong in givin' Eliphalet an inklin' of what was on foot. In the second place, I'm allowin' that it'll be a bit more pleasant for us if we run up the coast while it's dark, for then there won't be so much of a chance that we'll come across the inspector."

This last argument was all he needed to reconcile Dick to a night's run, and five minutes later the Phœbe was under way, bound for the home port.

And now, because so many words have been used in telling how the firm of Upton, Marshall & Co. came into existence, it is necessary to bring this story to a close, for both the reader and the writer would grow weary long before all the transactions of that concern could be set down and read.

When the boys arrived at Westbay it was to find that the price of lobsters had advanced one cent per pound, which added very materially to their profits, and, what caused yet greater satisfaction, was the fact that the government officials had de-

cided it would be useless to make any charges against the crew of the Phœbe because of having brought the Chinaman to Portland. It was evident they had done so believing it was a sick man who asked only the privilege of dying at home, which Mr. Barnes had put aboard the smack, and when such evidence had been given it was not possible the boys could be held.

The attorney whom Mr. Marshall had engaged, sent in a bill for twenty-five dollars, which was so much less than the boys had expected they would be called upon to pay, that it seemed the merest trifle.

At least once every two weeks the Phœbe anchored inside of Quoddy Head, and others engaged in the lobster-buying business failed to understand why it was Messrs. Upton, Marshall & Company always succeeded in getting a cargo there, even when they tried to prevent it by offering to pay more than the market price would warrant.

Throughout the season, until Dick was forced to go to college, Master Downing "drove" his partners to the limit of their ability, with the result that when the Phœbe was laid up for the winter the three lads had paid the full price for her, while Ezra and Tommy had as their share of the profits a sum of money sufficient to pay all expenses of living while they attended school at Westbay.

It goes without saying that the smack was put in most thorough repair during the winter, and next spring, so Tommy declares, he and his partners intend to show the other lobster buyers on the coast of Maine, what can be done in the way of business.

“An’ then,” Master Downing said emphatically to the author, “I’m hopin’ we’ll run across Eliphalet Barnes jest once, for I want to have the chance of tellin’ him that if he hadn’t done us sich a good turn I wouldn’t be wearin’ store clothes this very minute, with good money rattlin’ in the trousers pocket.”

THE END

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