

CAPTAIN BECKY'S
WINTER CRUISE



MARGARET LOVE SANDERSON



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The Captain Becky Series

CAPTAIN BECKY'S WINTER CRUISE



“THIS IS MY FATHER,” SAID LEWIS, AT LAST.

Captain Becky's Winter Cruise

BY

Margaret Love Sanderson



The Reilly & Britton Co.
Chicago

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CAPTAIN BECKY'S WINTER CRUISE

CHAPTER I

“PERSONAL MENTION”

Marjorie Beckwith had always been known as “Becky.” She did not come to be known as “*Captain* Becky” until after the time this story begins. And it began on a morning in March in the little town of Melbourne, in Florida.

Breakfast was just over in the little hotel on the high bank of the wide, silvery Indian River. Becky, having reached the Southland only the night before, caught her first glimpse of the river when she arose. With her aunt on the hotel gallery calling to her, the excited girl, hatless and coatless, fled along the bluff path to the river below.

“I’m going to see the boats,” she answered, her hair flying in the breeze.

“But don’t run,” repeated her aunt. “Remember!”

Whatever the meaning of this, the girl paused,

nodded, and then, drawing the collar of her sailor blouse closer to a slender, round throat, turned and walked sedately down the path.

At its end she came out where the one street of the village merged into a long pier. Opposite this stood a frame building, partly over the water—the general store of the town. A man was sprinkling the worn board walk about the store.

“Do they let folks go out there?” asked Becky.

“Sure,” answered the sprinkler. “That’s what it’s for. But keep a lookout. Some o’ the boards is missin’.”

“Is this your store?” asked the girl, thanking the man, who had already noticed the lint-like tangle of Becky’s hair.

“Yes’m,” he answered. “You must o’ just come, I reckon. Where are you stoppin’?”

“Up there,” smiled the girl, pointing to the hotel. “Mrs. Fairfield is my aunt.”

“Oh, Mrs. Fairfield!” exclaimed the store owner. “Sure. She’s been comin’ here reg’lar a good many years. She trades with me considerable.”

With a longing look at the deserted pier and another toward the store, in front of which were anchors, seines, boat oars, cables, and boxes of pineapples, cocoanuts and oranges, Becky exclaimed:

“Do you mind if I look in your shop?”

“Help yourself,” the man answered good-naturedly. “I seen about your comin’, in the *Times*.”

“Me? In the newspaper?”

“Sure. Mebbe I can find it an’ show you. I mos’ gen’rally save the *Times*.”

The girl looked at the storekeeper in a half frightened way.

“Me?” she repeated.

Without answering, the man started toward the store door. Becky hesitated and then, her temples suddenly red, threw back her shoulders and followed. In the doorway her courage failed her.

“What are these?” she exclaimed suddenly, pointing to a pile of pink-hearted conch shells.

“Them?” replied the merchant. “Oh, that’s junk—Bahama curios—some o’ Cap O’Connor’s rubbish. Here it is,” he added, coming from behind the counter. “I thought I’d find it. Here’s the piece.”

Becky set her lips and grew busy with her collar. The color on her temples was spreading to her cheeks. She wanted to run away.

“I’d buy one of these shells,” she said, as if she hadn’t heard, “but I haven’t my purse. I’ll come again——”

“Take a shell for a suv’neer,” exclaimed the

storekeeper, absently; "they ain't no sale for 'em. Here it is. Ain't you Miss Marjorie Beckwith o' Chicago?"

"Yes," almost mumbled the girl. Then she reached for the folded paper—a little country sheet—and read, under the heading of "Personal Mention":

"Miss Marjorie Beckwith, the daughter of a millionaire manufacturer of Chicago, will arrive in Melbourne next week, the guest of her aunt, Mrs. J. B. Fairfield, who is a regular winter guest at the Coquina Hotel. Miss Beckwith is one of the society beauties of the Windy City, and her arrival in the queen of Indian River resorts will be followed by a round of social festivities in honor of the beautiful guest."

Calmly as Becky tried to read these lines, her courage oozed from her. With hands suddenly cold, she thrust the paper back and tried to laugh, but her lips only trembled.

"Mr. ——" she said at last, her throat swelling.

"Carlson, Pete Carlson," exclaimed the storekeeper.

"Well, I'm much obliged, Mr. Carlson," went on Becky. "You see, it's all a joke. Some one is making fun of me."

"How's that?" asked Mr. Carlson. "They give parties for all o' the young ladies."

“I don’t mean that,” went on Becky, “but the rest. My father isn’t a millionaire.”

“Oh, well,” conceded the storekeeper. “I reckon the newspapers always exaggerate a little.”

“Exaggerate!” exclaimed Becky, trying to laugh. “It’s worse than that. Do I look like a ‘society beauty’?”

“Mebbe you *are* a little young,” chuckled the man.

“A little young?” repeated Becky, frightened anew as she thought of her chums. “I’m not sixteen. We’re not in society. We couldn’t be. I——” Then she turned away in absolute confusion.

“You can have the paper, miss,” called the shopkeeper.

“It’s all a story,” exclaimed the girl, her feelings overcoming her. “I don’t want it, thank you.” Then she almost ran from the store.

Her first thought was of her aunt. Then she felt a tear on her cheek, and she fled to the pier. Here, ashamed and mortified, she let the tears come, sobbing now and then.

Storekeeper Carlson watched Becky with a wondering gaze. He could understand how the item might be wrong, but he could not understand why the girl should be so upset by it. “Mebbe,” he

thought, "she's too young. But she's got earmarks o' settin' 'em goin' a little later."

Becky was not beautiful, but she certainly had what Mr. Carlson called "earmarks." She was not taller than girls of her own age, but she had the appearance of being so because of her slim form. While her face was not pinched, there was a narrowness to it that gave the girl a delicate look, although not of ill health. This was accentuated by cheek bones somewhat higher than the ordinary and yet, in themselves, not pronounced.

When she smiled Becky had a way of compressing her lips in a straight line. Then when her smile ended in a laugh, she had a childish habit of covering her mouth with her fingers. When the laugh became hilarious she had another habit of crossing her arms on her chest in a French shrug of the shoulders—an infectious mannerism that her mother had long tried to correct.

"She's sure got a strikin' face," concluded Mr. Carlson. "Kind o' like one o' them beauties o' the Orient."

By this the merchant evidently referred to Becky's eyes. She had good eyebrows which did not droop. These and her eyes and high cheeks gave her always an eager, wistful look. Mr. Carlson certainly did not refer to her hair, which was not at all in keeping with her dark eyes. This

was of a tint that should have made her a blond. Her mother called it golden. Some of her chums said it was yellow. In reality it was so lint-like in texture that in the sunlight its light brown strands took on some of the glow of amber.

A few hundred feet out on the pier the sobbing girl almost stumbled over a little tram car. Arousing herself, Becky sat down on the edge of the car. Then she looked about, got a view of the water, drank in consciously for the first time the invigorating salt air—the sea itself was only beyond the far bank of the river—and then again caught sight of the schooner that had set her on her morning adventure.

This seemed to calm her. She dried her eyes upon her skirt, tucked in her loose hair, choked once more, and her cry was done. Then she began to wonder why she had been crying. She understood at once. It was because other people had probably seen the little item.

“They’ll know it isn’t true when they see me,” said Becky to herself, “and I don’t care about that. But they won’t know what my coming meant to father and mother. It sounds as if I were pretending and ashamed because I *had* to come, and we had to rake and scrape so that I could.”

Becky sat upright, her eyes wide now and the

color gone out of her temples. Then she sprang to her feet, smoothed the straight folds of her new sailor suit, and walked briskly back along the runway. She gave little heed to her loosened collar, her clinging skirts or her wind-swept hair. Mr. Carlson, now busy plying his broom, was startled when Becky's voice again made him turn.

"If you don't mind, Mr. Carlson, I'd like to have the paper," said the girl.

"Sure, miss," exclaimed the surprised sweeper. "You're welcome. If it was me, I'd cut the piece out an' put it in my scrapbook, only I ain't got none. Advertisin' don't hurt no one. When I get anything in the *Times* it costs me ten cents a line, cash, an' that's too high——"

"I haven't any scrapbook, either, Mr. Carlson," interrupted Becky. "But I'd like to have the paper. I'll bring it back——"

"Don't you do it," chuckled the storekeeper. "I been savin' a file o' that paper a long time, hopin' it would come in handy, an' this is the first time it ever did, exceptin' for cleanin' lamp chimbleys."

As Mr. Carlson handed her the paper, Becky folded it, the "Personal Mention" column outside.

"Where's the place they print it?" she asked.

"It's up the street three doors this side o' the depot," Mr. Carlson answered, slowly. "But say,

miss, you ain't goin' to horsewhip the editor?”

“Oh, no,” Becky laughed. “Chicago *society beauties* don't do that. I just want to ask the man about it.”

“I'll have him come down here,” volunteered the storekeeper. “He'll think I want to give him an ad.”

“I won't bother you,” laughed Becky again. “But”—and she hesitated—“you said I might have one of those shells.”

“Sure,” exclaimed the amused Mr. Carlson. “Many as you like. I think them shells is holdin' back trade. They ain't nothin' doin' in shells this year, anyway,” he went on, with pretended soberness. “Conchs are Jonahs, an' them are the last 'at ol' Cap O'Connor is goin' to stick me with. These ain't even good singers——”

“Singers?” repeated the innocent Becky, forgetting her mission to the *Times*. “What are ‘singers’?”

“Listen,” explained the curio dealer, selecting a large, pink-hearted conch that he held to Becky's ear. “Hear it?”

“I hear a little humming noise.”

“You ought to hear a reg'lar song—‘the song o' the coral deeps,’ accordin' to the books. Somethin' o' that kind is in all conchs. But

Cap O'Connor's shells can't do no better'n buzz like a sick fly. When I get a reg'lar full-toned singin' shell, I'll show you the differ'nce. Why, I've heard 'em almost talk. But you got to pick 'em right. I had four of 'em once that was purty near a reg'lar quartette——”

“Mr. Carlson, you're making fun of me!”

“Well,” smiled the man, “mebbe I'm a little like that fellow 'at runs the *Times*.”

“What do you mean?”

“I reckon we're both just exercisin' our imaginations a little—not meanin' no harm.”

Becky's eyes closed a trifle, but she could not resist one of her straight-lipped smiles. She stopped short of a laugh, however.

“You've been awfully good to me, Mr. Carlson. I'm coming again, when I have my purse.”

“Your credit at Carlson's is what you might call A-1,” answered the merchant, with a grin.

“Thank you,” replied the girl.

As the curio vender took Becky's hand he said, with only a faint smile this time:

“Hadn't you better take your shell to the hotel now?”

“I've got business first,” exclaimed Becky. And without more words she set off up the street, the folded *Times* in her hand and the big conch shell under her arm.

CHAPTER II

BECKY VISITS A NEWSPAPER OFFICE

As Becky made her way up the board walk, the conch shell under her arm and the newspaper swinging like a danger signal, she took time to look about.

Midway to the depot and across the street she caught sight of a one-story building with a triangular sign: "The Daubigny Sisters." The hurrying girl paused, and then tiptoed quickly through the dust to the other side of the street.

One window was vacant. In the other lay a heap of embroidered pieces—napkins, doilies, and hanging above them, a shirt waist of lawn.

"French seamstresses," thought Becky, her eyes on the shirt waist. "I wonder what it's worth?"

She flattened her nose against the pane, while the dust-laden window sill drew a bar across her chest. Even the *Times* slipped into the background for the moment. Her eyes caught a sign written on pasteboard: "Dressmaking, Pies and Cakes."

Near this, on a white platter, were a dozen brown patties of sugary stuff, thick with pecan nuts. Becky darted to the door and threw it open. Instantly there was the loud jangle of a bell. The girl was ready to retreat, when a voice sounded in the rear.

"Come in," exclaimed a little woman with gray hair.

"I am in," replied Becky, with a relieved laugh. "I wanted to know what those are," and she pointed to the patties.

"The pralines?" asked the little woman.

"It's candy, isn't it?" continued Becky.

"Pecan pralines," explained the woman; "a dozen fo' two bits or one fo' nothin'." (She pronounced them "pucawn prawlines.")

"That's two for five cents, isn't it?" asked the girl, making a quick calculation.

As the woman nodded she handed a sugary disk to the hungry Becky.

"I'll take two of them, thank you," began the girl, as she slipped the copy of the *Times* to her left hand. Then, with the candy halfway to her open mouth, Becky's hand fell.

"Oh, I forgot! I haven't any money," she exclaimed.

Without comment, the little woman took Becky's hand in hers and lifted the praline to the startled

girl's mouth. With a relieved laugh, Becky sank her teeth into the candy. She nibbled about to get a good mouthful, and then there was a gurgle of delight.

"Oh, it's just grand!" she mumbled, her mouth full of crumbling sweetness.

Becky's eyes made a survey of the shop. At this stage, with the praline on a second trip to her mouth, Becky's hand stopped and she sprang forward for a view out of the other window. Diagonally across the street was a two-story building, with a big window below. On this were the words: "Melbourne Weekly Times." A man who had his back to the street, and who seemed to be locking the door, was just leaving the place.

With a swish of her skirts that startled the shopkeeper, Becky sprang toward the door. Laden with the shell, her newspaper and the half-eaten praline, the girl dashed across the street. The person locking the door proved to be a boy, scarcely older than Becky.

"I want to go in there!" announced the girl, readjusting the shell and newspaper and making a stab at her hair with the back of the hand holding the candy.

"Yes'm," responded the boy, apparently startled, as he turned again to the door. Before he unlocked the door he turned for another look at

the girl. One glance and all his fingers became thumbs. In spite of her perspiring face and the dust on her dress and new toe slippers, Becky was enough to upset any boy of sixteen or seventeen. She was not the first northern girl this boy had seen, but she was the first one that had swooped down and spoken to him.

"I want to see the editor of this paper," went on Becky, emphatically, as she examined the boy. His face was scarlet, but the girl saw that he was not bad looking. In spite of his country-cut clothes, a blue necktie in a flowing bow and a soft white shirt gave him a touch out of the commonplace. But his hands and wrists were black, as if unwashed.

"The owner ain't here, miss," explained the boy.

"Maybe he isn't the one I've come to see," answered the girl. The other, pausing in unlocking the door, tried to pull down his too short sleeves. "Do you work here?" continued Becky.

"Yes'm," answered the boy. "I'm the compositor."

Becky, seeing the boy much embarrassed, took a bite of her praline. The boy's eyes followed the movement of her arm.

"Purty good?" he asked, with a sudden grin.

Then, as if frightened, he drew out a handkerchief and mopped his face.

Ignoring the familiarity, Becky remarked:

“Compositor? Do you compose the pieces in the *Times*.”

“I mean I’m the typesetter. But, sometimes,” the boy added, “I report, too.”

“Report what?”

“I get local ads and items about new arrivals.”

“‘Personal Mention’ items?” exclaimed Becky, quickly. The boy opened the door and the girl swept into the office.

“Yes, personals and sometimes reg’lar pieces.”

For a moment Becky seemed not to hear his answer. She was examining the room. Her gaze had rested on an advertisement hanging on the wall—the picture of a girl standing by the steering wheel of a yacht. The picture girl was in reefer and cap. Below were the words: “The Queen of the Fleet.” There was a longing look of admiration in Becky’s face. Then she recalled her errand. Placing the shell and the remnant of praline on the table, she straightened out her copy of the *Times*.

“Oh, do you? Did you write that?”

The boy hesitated, as if afraid to come closer to the girl.

"This," persisted Becky, jabbing her sugary finger on the item.

"Is that the *Times*?" mumbled the boy.

"Of course it's the *Times*. Did you write that?"

"Why, yes," he managed to answer, after a look. "I fixed it up. What's the matter with it?" he added, with more boldness.

"Matter?" snapped Becky. "Huh! I wish you'd tell me who told you all that! That's me!"

"You!" exclaimed the boy.

"Yes, me! It's a story. Every word of it's wrong!" And she slapped the paper on the table.

"Are you Miss Beckwith?" asked the boy, suddenly.

"I'm Marjorie Beckwith. Just tell me why you put that in the paper."

"Mrs. Fairfield told me."

"All that?" exclaimed the girl, as she slapped her hand on the paper. "Did she say my father was a millionaire?"

"I thought she did," answered the *Times* representative, wetting his lips.

"But did she? She couldn't. He isn't."

"That's what St. Augustine papers always say about the guests at the Ponce de Leon."

"Oh, they do!" almost sneered the girl. "I

suppose they always say their daughters are 'society beauties'?"

"Most gener'ly, if they're young ladies."

"Well, why did you say *I* was a 'society beauty'?"

"I was up to the hotel last week pickin' up items," faltered the boy, "an' she told me her niece was comin', an' she told me your name."

"But why did you put it in that I was a 'society beauty'?" insisted Becky, punctuating the words with finger stabs on the table. "And make me foolish," she added, as a clinching rebuke.

"Well, she showed me your picture."

For a moment the positive girl stood open-mouthed.

"My picture?"

"Yes, sir—yes'm, I mean."

"She hasn't got my picture!"

"She said it was you; that's all I know." For the first time the boy seemed relieved.

"Pshaw!" came from the girl, who was now confused herself. "I know that old thing. That's when I was the queen in our school play. Was it *that* picture that made you say it?"

"Well," retorted the boy, "she didn't tell me nothin' about that. It looked to me like a picture o' some one dressed up for a swell ball."

Becky's mouth twitched. Some of her worked-up

indignation suddenly escaped her and her temples flushed.

“Look at me,” she exclaimed at last, as if to prove the enormity of the *Times* error. As she did so herself and caught sight of the still prominent bar of dust on her waist, her dust-covered slippers and candy-spotted fingers, she made several quick dabs at her breast. “I’m not sixteen, nobody calls me ‘miss,’ and there’s no excuse to make a fool of me by printing anything that will make folks think I’m what you said—or ever going to be. So there!”

“I wrote it like it’s in the big papers.”

“Well, you unwrite it,” ordered Becky, shifting her position to hide her dusty slippers, and growing positive again.

“You mean you want a correction?”

“What’s that?”

“It’s another item sayin’ the first one was wrong. It’s where the reg’lar editor says ‘owin’ to a mistake o’ the compositor the paper said something it hadn’t ought. But say,” went on the boy, with his first indication of composure, “there’s another kind of item we print sometimes.”

The boy disappeared and presently returned with a bit of cardboard on which were pasted various sized clippings from newspapers.”

“If you care to set down,” he said, as he wheeled a chair to where the girl stood, “I’ll fix it.”

“Thank you,” answered Becky. As the boy went to the littered-up desk, the girl deftly brushed her slippers on her stockings.

“I don’t know if this’ll suit you,” said the boy at last, as he handed the girl a bit of paper. He noticed Becky examining again the picture of the “Queen of the Fleet.”

“That’s a dandy picture,” was Becky’s comment.

“We got some clean ones, if you want one,” ventured the boy, with alacrity.

“I *would* like one, if you can spare it.”

While the somewhat relieved *Times* representative began rummaging in a drawer, Becky took the paper and read:

“*Personal Mention.*—As foretold in these columns last week, Miss Marjorie Beckwith of Chicago arrived in Melbourne this week on an indefinite stay. This charming and accomplished girl bids fair to add much to the gayety of the season’s program.”

“How’s that? It’s from a Jacksonville paper. It sounds swell to me,” exclaimed the boy, as he produced a clean copy of the “Queen of the Fleet.”

"It won't do at all," Becky answered instantly, shaking her head. "Oh, thank you," she added, as the black-fingered boy laid the colored print before her. "I love girl pictures. Here," she switched to the writing again, "you don't think I'd say 'charming and accomplished,' do you?"

"You ain't sayin' it. They always say that in the city papers."

"Well, it *seems* like I'm saying it."

"But you ain't. It's the *Times*."

"It sounds foolish," commented the girl, after a pause, as if in doubt.

"I tell you," insisted the boy, "you don't need to take it personal if you don't want to. But if society items don't say somethin' like that, people'd think somethin' was the matter. That ain't nothin' to what you could say!"

"Well," Becky conceded at last, "rub out that 'Miss.' When will it be printed?"

"Wednesday."

"What's your name?" she asked abruptly as she gathered up her shell and the picture.

"Lewis Ahlswede."

"I'm much obliged, Mr. Ahlsweet," continued Becky.

"Ahlswede," corrected the boy, in confusion.

"Ahlswede," she replied, with a laugh. "Good-bye!"

CHAPTER III

LEWIS AHLSEWEDE BECOMES A HERO

Becky still had before her the original program of a visit to the end of the long wharf. For a moment she thought of reporting her early adventures to her aunt. Then she concluded not to take the chance of delay by long explanations. She could report to her aunt later.

Her train of thought was interrupted by footsteps close behind. The *Times* reporter had at last locked the office and was overtaking the girl. When Becky turned and noted the boy it was as if she had met an old friend.

“Hello!” she exclaimed, waving her picture. The assurance of the smart-looking city girl seemed to frighten Lewis. He tried to speak, but his mouth only twisted and his face flamed again. Then he tried to respond to Becky’s greeting by lifting his hat. He slackened his pace until his feet came together, intending a bow. His legs clashed into what was nearly a stumble, his soiled hand wiggled the rim of his cap, and the boy hurried on.

When the confused lad reached Carlson's store, the girl saw him hurry within. Before she came to the same place he was out again. As he emerged the girl waved her picture again with a smile. But the boy pretended not to see, and walked briskly out on the pier.

"Well, did you clean 'em out?"

It was the voice of the romantic-minded Mr. Carlson.

"I saw *him*," answered Becky. "He did it," she added, "but he didn't mean anything. He's a kind of nice boy, too, if he'd only wash his hands."

"Sure. It's a pity he ain't got a chance."

"Chance for what? Can't he get a cake of soap? There's plenty of water," Becky replied, tartly.

"Them hands ain't hurtin' him," continued Mr. Carlson, soberly. "I reckon he's clean enough inside. If he hadn't been born with a good-for-nothin' river tramp of a father, mebbe he'd 'a' got some schoolin'. Fur as I can see, he'll never be nothin' but a type-sticker."

"He's almost a reporter," protested Becky. "He writes pieces."

"Huh!" grunted the storekeeper. "Reporter nothin'! All Lewis can do is to copy things."

“Isn’t there a school here?” Becky asked, abruptly. “Can’t he go to night school?”

“No more schoolin’ for him,” answered the man. “All he can earn goes to his mother. O’ course he’s doin’ better’n if he was oyster tongin’.”

“You say he gives all his wages to his folks?”

“He sleeps up there in the *Times* office and eats at old Owens’ for part o’ his wages. An’ for me,” answered Mr. Carlson, emitting a puff of smoke, “that’d mean about a dollar a week or less.”

“Then his folks don’t live here?”

“His mother lives at Sebastian, twenty mile down the river. Where old Ahlswede is, I reckon nobody knows. The gov’ment agents used to keep track o’ him—when they was more smug-glin’ than they is now. The last I heard o’ him he was down Fort Pierce way.”

It seemed like a story to Becky. She put her shell on the ground and sat down.

“’Fore his father left, Lewis got some schoolin’. When the old man run away the boy had to keep his mother goin’. They had a grove o’ trees, a patch o’ garden an’ a shack. The kid come up here an’ hired out as devil to the *Times*.”

“Do you mean they had a grove of orange trees?” interrupted the girl.

"Sure. But the boy don't neglect 'em. Old Owens lets him off at noon on Saturdays. The only thing his pap left the family that he could 'a' carried away was the *Red Bird*." The storekeeper pointed to a little red boat moored just beyond the store. "That's Lewis' boat. Ever' Saturday noon he lights out for Sebastian."

"He goes home every week, then?" asked his listener.

"An' gets there in time to work on the garden an' trees. An' he's always tyin' up here by the time I open up Monday mornin's."

"Anyway," Becky exclaimed, as if answering something in her mind, "I think he ought to wash his hands."

"Fur as that goes," responded the storekeeper, "like as not we all got somethin' stickin' to us we ought to get rid of. But the marks o' type an' printer's ink'll prob'ly stick to Lewis all his life."

Catching up her spoils of the morning, Becky rose and once more started for the pier.

"Good morning, Mr. Carlson," she exclaimed.

"Watch out for them loose boards, child!" was the man's only response.

Becky thought the boy had already reached the far end of the pier, for he was now out of sight. She had walked but a few yards, however, when she saw Lewis get up from his knees out where the

little tram car stood. As she hesitated, Mr. Carlson remarked:

“He’s havin’ trouble with the car. It’s allus off the track. Hurry ’long an’ he’ll give you a lift out to the shelter. He’s goin’ out for a bundle o’ paper.”

There was no reason to come back. Becky caught sight of the old schooner, its big gray, patched sails flying loosely in the pleasant breeze, and all her curiosity returned.

“An’ if you get out as fur as the *Olivette* I wish’t you’d tell Cap O’Connor them pineapple crates is ready to be took over to Hafner’s.”

“You mean the boat out there?” Becky called back, eagerly.

“Cap O’Connor’s *Olivette* — doin’ nothin’, as usual.”

“The man who sold you bad shells?” laughed the girl.

“For the last time,” called the storekeeper. “If that girl’s an invalid,” continued the man to himself, “she’s about the liveliest miss ’at ever brought up around here.”

When Becky had nearly reached the boy and the refractory car, she could see Lewis making desperate efforts to start the latter.

“Let me have a ride,” called Becky, as the car started. “Mr. Carlson told me to ask you.”

The boy ran ahead to overtake the car, and then pushed it back toward the girl.

"It's his; I borrowed it," explained Lewis. "I'm goin' out to git some freight."

"I've got to take a message to the *Olivette*," responded the girl, as some excuse for her self-invitation. "I'm much obliged——"

"Look out there!" yelled the boy, suddenly.

But he was too late. Becky had started alongside the car to get to the front. The boy saw a missing plank that the girl did not notice, but before he finished his warning Becky was off the pier.

She had not even time to scream. In the splash her skirt caught and held the air for a second, and then the floundering girl pulled it under the water. Lewis acted so quickly that, while Becky's treasured conch shell rolled along and before it fell from the pier, the boy was in the water.

This was not over three feet deep, but to Becky it might as well have been forty. Unconsciously she closed her mouth. Her hands touched bottom and the rebound turned her over. Before the shock forced her mouth open, the boy caught her arm and she was on her feet, her head so heavy that it fell forward.

"You're all right," she heard the boy shout.

Gasping, her hair bound around her face, she

tried to catch her dress. By this time the boy had hold of both arms.

"It ain't deep," he shouted. "You're all right!"

With an explosion of coughs Becky now found herself on her feet, and her rescuer released her arms. The girl pushed the hair from her eyes and mouth and pulled at her sticking waist. Once a little swell caught her, and Lewis steadied her.

"Take hold of the pile," he exclaimed.

Struggling with her skirts, Becky did so. Then she began to shiver.

"I didn't see it," she finally panted, her face very white.

"Wade out," exclaimed the boy. "It ain't deep." He reached out his hands to guide her.

"My new slippers," was Becky's only reply, "they're gone!"

"I can get 'em," responded Lewis, reassuringly, "but wade out first."

"My aunt!" broke out the girl.

"You'll catch cold here. Come on out!" urged the boy.

"My slippers!" wailed Becky, now in a downright cry. "They're gone!"

"I'll get 'em," almost shouted the boy. "They're right here—somewhere. Come on."

As if she heard her rescuer for the first time,

the excited girl raised her head and looked about. Another little swell struck her, and she caught the barnacle-encrusted post with a scream.

"That's nothin'," insisted Lewis. "It ain't goin' to hurt you."

With another effort the bedraggled girl raised her head again. She looked at the boy, at the pier above, and then, loosening her arms from the pile, stepped from it.

"Isn't this the limit?" she exclaimed suddenly, in a new voice. "Did I lose my picture?"

Lewis looked about. Just on the other side of the pier floated the picture. With four or five swashing steps, the boy rescued it.

"Thank you," exclaimed Becky, still shaking. "I hope it isn't spoiled."

For answer Lewis took the girl by the arm and started shoreward. Becky's first step, in her stocking feet, on the shells and stones of the river bottom, brought a new stumble. She had no sooner been put on her feet again than she had a new trouble.

"My shell!" she exclaimed, suddenly.

"I can get that, too; it's right here," announced the boy. "I can find ever'thing, I guess. Don't bother."

Submissively Becky moved forward another step.

"It hurts," she protested.

"Wait till I get my boat!"

"I'll wait," began Becky. Just then another wash of water swept against her, and she screamed anew.

"I'm afraid——" she cried. The look that came into her companion's face seemed to arouse the girl. "I'm not," she added suddenly, in a tone that startled the boy. "I'm *not* afraid, and you needn't be pitying me. I can walk——"

"What's the matter with you folks?" called a voice far down the pier at that moment.

The girl and boy looked, and saw Mr. Carlson hurrying toward them.

"I fell in and can't get out," Becky shouted.

"Lift her up here, Lewis," ordered the hard-breathing storekeeper. "Don't stand there lettin' the child shiver like a jellyfish."

Before Becky had time to assert her growing independence the boy clasped her about the waist and lifted her pierward. The storekeeper caught her and in a moment the dripping girl was seated on the little car.

"I didn't see it," she began, plaintively, her teeth chattering. Meanwhile Mr. Carlson had helped the boy to the dock.

"You better put on my coat," suggested Lewis. "The top's dry."

The girl thanked him and let him slip the coat on her shivering arms. Then she thrust her head out of the coat for a look about. The car was rumbling along under Mr. Carlson's strong hands and Becky did her best to smile.

"I'm sure I'm much obliged——" she began; then she stopped and faced the other way. "I haven't said thank you to you yet, Mr. Ahlswede. I hope you aren't very wet." The answer to this was the sound of Lewis' heavy, swishing trousers and of the water squirting from his shoes at every step. "I'm sorry you had to do it. Don't mind about my slippers," she added.

Still the boy made no response. At the shore end of the pier Mr. Carlson lifted Becky in his arms and carried her into the store. A few minutes later the girl was encased in a long yellow slicker, or fisherman's raincoat, and a new pair of green and red carpet slippers, much too large for her. As she and Mr. Carlson started up the path to the hotel, Becky saw the Ahlswede boy out on the pier, kicking the car forward with his feet. She waved one of the wide, yellow slicker arms at him, but if he saw he gave no sign.

CHAPTER IV

THE REWARD OF INDISCRETION

When Becky reported to Mrs. Fairfield, the consternation of that lady was only equaled by her solicitude. Becky was instantly whisked upstairs. Rather than take time to rebuke the girl, Mrs. Fairfield, ordering hot water and mustard, assisted Becky to undress. Towels and alcohol followed, and then the girl was buried under blankets.

“Young lady,” exclaimed Mrs. Fairfield at last with positiveness, “like as not you’re going to be sick. You may as well get ready for the doctor.”

“I don’t want a doctor,” protested Becky, “I——”

“Be quiet. You’ll have a hot lemonade in a few minutes.”

For answer Becky sprang up in bed excitedly.

“I lost my slippers too! The new ones!”

“That’s the least you can lose,” answered her aunt sharply as she again buried the girl beneath the bedclothes. The lemonade and a mustard foot bath made Becky even more uncomfortable, but in ten minutes the perspiring girl was asleep.

When she awoke the room was shaded and still. At first Becky did not recall what had happened. Then, as everything came back, she rolled over softly, wondering if her aunt were in the room. Mrs. Fairfield was not there. On the window sill stood two shrunken slippers. With a sigh of relief Becky smiled.

“He did it anyway,” she said to herself. “He’s a dandy even if he has dirty hands.”

Like a sleepy kitten the girl stole from beneath the blankets and tiptoed to the window. The slippers were damp and stuffed with paper, but they had been carefully cleaned. On the roof outside was her dress skirt, not yet wholly dry. Then Becky realized that she was very hot. She bathed her face and rubbed it dry with a big towel. That done, she put on her new dressing gown and sat on the floor to think.

All of Becky’s troubles disappeared in a new glow of delight. Many things had to be thought of. All her wet clothing, excepting her skirt and blouse, had been carried away. Then she caught the sound of dishes and concluded all were at dinner. If she was not dressed before her aunt reappeared there was a chance of being put to bed again.

When Mrs. Fairfield left the dining room later with a cup of tea she caught her breath at the

sight of a figure descending the stairs. Becky, a fresh handkerchief in one hand and her new bag purse in the other, her still heavy hair in brownish red twists under a white "turn down" hat, a white summer dress with a black sailor knot at the throat and newly varnished shoes, was before her ready for a new excursion.

"Hello, aunty," exclaimed the girl laughingly.

"You go upstairs this minute!"

"Why, aunty! Can't I have my dinner?"

"I'll see to your dinner."

"Please, aunty!"

But Mrs. Fairfield's severe look was too much. Becky retreated. When they reached their apartment Mrs. Fairfield had considerable to say. The girl tried to stem the torrent of criticism by explaining how well she felt, how hungry she was and how delightful it was out of doors. But the verdict was: Becky's luncheon was to consist of tea and toast, after which she was to disrobe, put on her dressing gown, unpack her trunk and put away her clothes. Then she was to descend to the laundry and press her dress skirt. These duties concluded, she was to write a letter to her mother. After this, Mrs. Fairfield would accompany her in quest of Lewis Ahlswede to thank him formally.

At the first mention of Lewis' name Becky started.

"Did he bring anything but my slippers?" she interrupted. "He promised to get my shell too, and I left my picture on the pier."

"There's an old shell and a water soaked chromo down on the gallery. We all thought they belonged to some child," Mrs. Fairfield replied with set lips. "I've half a mind to put you to bed till to-morrow. The idea of your asking that young man to risk his life a second time to find that rubbish."

"I told him *not* to," protested Becky, alarmed.

"Then what made you think he would?"

"Oh, I don't know. Maybe because I didn't ask him to get me out either. But I can have them, can't I?"

Mrs. Fairfield sighed.

Becky's sentence having been waived for a few moments, she hurried down to the gallery and recovered her trophies. As she did so she was conscious that many hotel guests were watching her. She wondered, first, if there was anything wrong with her dress. Then it came to her that it might be her accident and rescue. She was glad that her dressing gown was fresh and clean.

"Isn't this Miss Beckwith?" suddenly asked a woman.

“Marjorie Beckwith, yes’m,” replied the girl, catching the shell to her breast.

“How are you feeling after your accident?” continued the woman sympathetically.

“I’m feeling fine,” responded the girl. “It wasn’t much.”

“Your aunt was so worried about you,” volunteered another. “I’m so glad nothing came of it.”

“Thank you,” exclaimed Becky. She made a fuller sweep of her eyes about the gallery. There wasn’t a boy of her own age in sight.

“We’re going sailing this afternoon,” resumed Becky’s second questioner. “If you have quite recovered we would be glad to have you and Mrs. Fairfield go with us.”

“Oh, thank you!” exclaimed the startled girl. “I’ll see.”

With elastic bounds the slender figure flew from the gallery. As she threw open the door of her aunt’s room she was stopped by a despairing cry.

“Becky!” exclaimed Mrs. Fairfield. “What’s the matter with your waist?”

The girl gave it an alarmed glance. The front was a soggy gray. Water inside the shell had trickled out and saturated it.

“I thought it felt kind of coolish like——”

Becky began, trying to laugh. "It'll dry soon, aunty," she continued. "And say, aunty——"

"Take off your waist instantly."

"Some ladies downstairs want to know——"

"Take off your waist!"

"Want to know if you and I would like to go sailing this afternoon."

For answer Mrs. Fairfield, as if not hearing, arose with determination and undid the girl's tie, Becky reluctantly unbuckling her belt.

"Don't you want to?" she asked with her best smile.

In silence the waist came off and Mrs. Fairfield hurried to the alcohol bottle. With a heavy towel poor Becky's chest got a fresh massage.

"We ought to send them word, oughtn't we?"

"I'll attend to that, young lady. Now don't you leave this room till I return. And when I do, I want to see that trunk unpacked. Put all your clothes on the bed where I can look them over."

As the door closed, Becky, half dressed and a prisoner, fell on her knees by the trunk.

"I guess we're not going," she said to herself. Then she seemed to forgot all her troubles as she opened her new trunk and began to revel in the sight and odor of her prettiest things. She was refolding a favorite hair ribbon when she sank

back on her heels, slapped her hands on her knees and then jumped to her feet and hurried to the window. Far out at the end of the long pier a growing breath of breeze was now moving the loose sails of the old schooner.

“I’ll bet they’re going on the *Olivette*,” she said, almost aloud. “Oh, my!” she added in a tone that almost meant despair. For several minutes she kneeled at the open window. She had never sailed on a boat in her life. She knew she wanted to, but she could only measure the joy of it by what she had read. To her the river, margined by the tropic green, seemed a path leading to wonders of which she had never even read.

She recalled that somewhere, far below, lay Sebastian, the town where Lewis’ mother lived. Then, with a sigh, she wished she were a boy, so that she, like Lewis, might own a *Red Bird* and sail all alone in it to where coughs and soiled dresses and admonitions were unknown. She turned her head, resting on her thin, bare arms, toward Mr. Carlson’s store, near which she knew the *Red Bird* was moored. And there, almost beneath her shifting eyes, she caught sight of the *Red Bird*’s owner. Lewis, the representative of the *Times*, was making his way toward the hotel—a notebook in his hand.

Becky sank to the floor and the dream ended.

She crawled back to her trunk and continued her delayed duties. Tray after tray she managed to get to the floor—river, boats and dreams out of her head as she reveled in the joy of looking over the things her mother had so carefully prepared for her. She reached at last, daintily folded, her best dress, the one she had never worn.

She carefully held it up against herself before the mirror—a filmy white lawn with a little blue figure and clinging to the short sleeves and the square neck odorous little rolls of lace, her mother's own. There was a temptation to slip it on that she might fasten about herself the sash of blue satin. Then, as if some discovery had shocked her, Becky ran to the bed and laid the frock upon it. The girl had suddenly recalled that it was her unlucky day with dresses.

“Marjorie,” exclaimed a voice as Mrs. Fairfield opened the door. “Lewis Ahlswede is downstairs. I think you had better slip your dress on again and go down and thank him properly.”

“I did that, aunty, this morning. Here's my new dress. Mother made it.”

Mrs. Fairfield gave it close scrutiny and asked to see the sash. She took the dress to the window to better examine the lace and nodded approval. Becky was already brushing her hair. Being

downstairs was certainly nearer the sailing trip than being upstairs half dressed.

“I’ll go down and take him into the parlor,” suggested Mrs. Fairfield. “Hurry,” she added, “and Becky, please don’t upset the water pitcher on yourself before coming down.”

When the girl was again dressed she folded her “middy” hat and slipped it inside her waist. Then she ran downstairs.

“Hello!” she cried, as she caught sight of Lewis, where Mrs. Fairfield had him in a one-sided conversation. Becky noticed that his hands gave signs of a hard scrubbing, but they were yet dark. She extended one of her hands, which the boy took with an awkward bow. “I got everything,” exclaimed Becky, “the slippers, and shell, and picture. But the picture is all swelled up and spoiled.”

The boy made no answer beyond removing his cap and smoothing his hair.

“Marjorie is going to write to her parents telling them all about how you helped her,” explained Mrs. Fairfield.

“Yes’m,” said the boy.

“It was dandy of you to go and get my things,” added Becky, “but I’m sorry I let you.”

“I didn’t get ’em,” answered Lewis slowly. “You said for me not to.”

“Who did?” asked Becky, her eyes open with surprise.

“Mr. Carlson done it. He took a fish pole an’ dug ’em out. That is, the slippers.”

“Oh,” exclaimed Becky. “But the shell?”

“Well, I got that when I come back with my freight—he said it wasn’t worth troublin’ about. Then I brung ’em here.”

“Thank you,” broke in Becky. “It was just dandy of you and Mr. Carlson too, wasn’t it, aunty?”

“We are both greatly obliged, Lewis,” remarked Mrs. Fairfield.

“Thank you, ma’am,” answered the boy hurriedly. “I guess I got to be goin’.”

For the first time he seemed to let his eyes rest on the girl. “I reckon your dress ain’t dry yet?” he added.

“Yes, it’s dry now,” said Becky with a smile, “but it’s all out of shape. I’ve got to press it.”

Lewis gave a quick glance at his baggy trousers. “Well,” he said hurriedly, “I’ll have to say good day, folks.”

He wriggled his loose cap on his heavy hair and walked stiffly out, with no further effort to get an item.

CHAPTER V

A NEW HAND AT THE WHEEL

“Why, here is Miss Marjorie now!” exclaimed a lady as Becky and her aunt reached the gallery. “Aren’t you coming with us?”

“Why don’t *you* go, aunty?” asked Becky. “I’ll stay and see to things. Are you going to sail across the river with Captain O’Connor?” added the girl with a little sigh.

“Oh, of course. We always go on the *Olivette*. I hope you can both come.”

“Really, I can’t,” protested Becky demurely. “I’ve an awful lot to do, unpacking and writing letters. But I hope aunty will,” she added, looking wistfully over the river.

The cicerone of the expedition laughed and whispered to Mrs. Fairfield.

“Do go, aunty,” repeated Becky persuasively. “I know it will be grand. Anyway, I think I’d better get at my work. What does a pineapple tree look like?” she continued, turning to Mrs. Fairfield’s companion.

"Get ready," laughed the latter. "Your aunt is coming and you too."

"That is the way it always is," Mrs. Fairfield remarked. "Marjorie, get your hat."

"Here it is," exclaimed the girl as she drew out the crumpled headgear. "I'll hurry on and thank Mr. Carlson for rescuing my slippers."

Before she could escape Mrs. Fairfield had her by the arm.

"That is just what you will not do, young lady. You will not get out of my reach this afternoon. We have had enough adventures for one day."

Restraining herself, Becky withdrew to a chair and happy thoughts. These were all of the old schooner and Captain O'Connor. The thought of at last being on a sea boat, a craft that had tossed on stormy waves and pushed its way into tropic waters among coral islands, threw an air of romance about the vessel she had not yet seen.

"I'd be satisfied," she said to herself, "just to be with the captain and his wife for a time; just to eat and sleep on a real ship that wasn't a steamboat. And if I were a boy I'd be a sailor and help work it——"

"All ready," broke in some one, and a white-skirted cavalcade drifted riverward. Close by her aunt, Becky was among the last to reach the pier.

Her eyes and mind were on the *Olivette*—the old craft that was to mean so much to her.

His stern face unmarked by even a smile, Captain O'Connor stood by the schooner's side to do the honors of his ship. He was an average man in stature, but a little squatty, as if a weight had crushed him together somewhat. Without coat or vest, a belt left his gray-and-black checked flannel, collarless shirt hanging on him like a woman's full blouse. The captain's trousers were of seaman's blue, neatly patched in several places and with wide, flapping pockets. His face, clean shaven and compressed like his body, had many wrinkles near his eyes, while his mouth came nearer pointing in than out, owing to a generous lack of teeth.

As the ladies passed aboard, the *Olivette's* owner and skipper lifted a brown cap, but he neither spoke nor smiled. A special mark of consideration was, in several cases, the removal of a short clay pipe from between his inward-set lips.

Becky did not mean to be passed by with only a touch of the cap.

“Is this Captain O'Connor?” she asked promptly.

“Yes, miss.”

"Mr. Carlson told me to tell you about some pineapple crates."

"Ye're a slow missinger, miss," answered the captain. "Thim crates be safe aboard by this long time. The b'y brung the word." Then he added, "Are yez the gurrl that wuz afther havin' the dookin' this marnin'?" Becky nodded. The captain took her hand and assisted her to the deck. "I'll ricommind to yez, miss," he continued dryly, "that the wather's tin feet dape bechune the boat an' the pier, and there's no Lewis here standin' by to heave ye a line."

"I know it," answered Becky instantly, "so I'm going to look out for myself. Have I time to go downstairs before you start?"

"Downstairs?" repeated the skipper, his mouth opening so wide that he barely rescued his pipe. "Will ye mind that! Yis, plenty o' time. The basement is open. Just spake to the janitor. Ye'll find her waitin' to resave ye."

The name of the vessel was the "Olivette of St. Augustine" and this appeared in white on the round stern. The schooner registered twenty-five tons—too big a boat to be sailed by one man except on protected water. Even in such places Captain O'Connor used only the mainsail and jib. In "coming about" his wife was called to

let go the jib and haul away while the captain attended the tiller and mainsail sheets.

The "janitor" spoken of by the captain was Mrs. Nora O'Connor, first mate, stewardess, cook and, often enough, the real director of the *Olivette*. Mrs. Nora was neither red-faced nor fat. She was black of hair, keen of eye and brown of skin. She wore a flowered shirt waist, a yellow gold breastpin and a black skirt. Later she donned a very good Panama hat ornamented with a red band.

"In the basement, is it?" she began, when Becky reached the companionway, in which Mrs. Nora was standing. "Sure, miss, and it's no dacint place at prisint what wid crates an' the loike."

"Where do you sleep?" began Becky at once. She had expected to find herself in a long hall with little rooms opening off it. Instead, she was in a large compartment. Just off the steps to the left was a little closet only large enough to hold a narrow bunk. On the other side was another room, a little larger, but still very small.

"This is our cabin," explained Mrs. Nora, following Becky. "'Tis moine, at laste," she went on with a laugh. "Captain O'Connor is like to slape any place where the boards is soft."

"It's like a sleeping car, isn't it!" commented

the girl as she peered within. There was a little dresser with signs of a woman's trinkets and a miniature mirror. There was one chair. But it was the long, wide hold forward that interested the girl most.

"Isn't it dandy?" she cried, as they turned from the little cabins. "All those windows for air and light! This is where I'd stay!"

"Ye'd hardly be doin' that, miss," answered Mrs. O'Connor. "This be where we carry the freight, an' the big windies is for takin' it in an' out. I'll be scrubbin' it the first chance I get; but like enough our next load'll be charcoal, an' there ye are."

At this time the hold was nearly free of freight. On one side was a quantity of pineapple crate material. Otherwise the long interior was broken only by two masts with a narrow centerboard box between them.

"A lot of people could camp out in here," exclaimed Becky enthusiastically. "Where do you cook? You eat on the boat, too, of course?"

"Ask Captain Sam," replied Mrs. Nora, laughing. "We cook in the galley."

"The galley? What's that?"

"A galley on a ship is the kitchen. On the *Olivette* it's the dinin' room too, exciptin' when we spread the cloth out here in the hold. But

that ain't often, the captain an' me bein' alone most o' the time."

"Don't you have anyone to help you work the boat?" asked Becky. "A great big boat like this?"

"Av coorse, miss; wan man always; two if we go to sea."

"How I'd like to help you!" chuckled Becky, after examining the little cooking and eating room.

The galley was almost triangular, a little room made by a partition just forward of the foremast. Against the mast was a folding table. On each side of the room were shelves holding dishes and stores. In the narrow part of the room was a gasoline stove. On each side of this were cooking utensils. On the floor by the stove were other stores. A generous window gave Mrs. Nora a fine lookout, while side openings afforded plenty of light and air.

"Mrs. Captain," began the eager girl, catching her guide's arm, "I've been crazy to cook something in one of those little places on the railroad train, but I'd just give anything to try to cook in your kitchen."

Just then a movement of the schooner made her look up. Through the open skylight she saw her aunt looking anxiously about.

“Hoo-hoo, aunty,” she shouted.

A folded camp stool stood near the little table. Throwing it open, the girl placed it under a window and sprang upon it.

“Hello, aunty! I’m here.” Both arms were waving at the ladies on the forward deck. Just then Captain O’Connor, who had been easing the schooner off the pier, took a hitch on the main sheet and the *Olivette* keeled lightly. The stool wobbled and its occupant lunged at the porthole frame.

“Oh, we’re going!” exclaimed Becky, as she clung to the window frame while the stool danced about. “Give me a boost, please, Mrs. Captain, I want to see the captain make the boat go.”

“A boost, is it?” almost shouted Becky’s hostess. “A boost through the windy wid that clane dress?”

Instead of further comment she lifted Becky from the stool and put her down outside the galley.

“The captain’s aft. You hurry along an’ kape him company while I drop the centerboard.”

With a quick glance to see that nothing had happened to her dress Becky hurried sternward.

“Did ye have a look at the basement?” asked Captain O’Connor as the girl appeared on the steps.

“Yes, sir, thank you,” responded Becky. “Mrs. O’Connor told me to come and see you make the boat go. May I?”

By way of reply the veteran boatman motioned Becky toward him. Silently he placed her hands on the wooden tiller. With a flush of joy she grasped it.

“What do I do?” she whispered.

“Hold her steady,” was the answer, “while I fill me poipe.”

At a bound Becky had reached the zenith of her new ambition. She leaned forward, her slender form hard against the magic shaft and her white fingers gripping it as if the fate of the *Olivette* were in her keeping. The captain slowly refilled his pipe.

“What’s your name?” began Captain O’Connor, his pipe going again, as he took his place behind the steersman and altered the tiller a trifle.

“Marjorie Beckwith. Mrs. Fairfield is my aunt.”

“Your folks ain’t with you then?”

“We couldn’t afford to come—all of us—but they thought I had to come.”

“What’s the matter with you?” asked the captain.

“Decline,” responded Becky seriously, “whatever that is. I guess it’s weak lungs. The doctor

said I had to quit studying and reading and get out of doors. So they sent me down here."

"Well, you ain't kickin', be you?"

"Oh, it's fine, of course! But, you see, we aren't rich. Why, we didn't even keep a maid till I got the 'decline.'" She smiled again. "We live in a flat. And such a lot of money as we have to spend."

The captain was nodding his head.

"Ye're lucky to have it to spind," he commented at last with a long draw on his pipe. "If the freightin' business on the river don't pick up soon, I'm thinking' o' partin' with the schooner. Business is rotten."

"Oh, I'm so sorry," broke in Becky.

"How long'll ye be stayin' in these parts?" went on the captain.

"That's it," sighed Becky. "Don't you think it's a lot to charge for board—fifteen dollars a week? And it cost over fifty dollars to get here and five dollars for sleeping car and goodness me such prices as you have to pay to eat on the train——"

"Well, anyway," broke in the captain with his first smile, "I reckon me and the wife has got somethin' to be thankful for—no house rint, no coal bills, an' mighty few clothes; a few potatoes an' pork with an egg now an' thin——"

“We had to worry a lot,” Becky interrupted, continuing with her confessions. “When I was a little girl I began to save my pennies for a ‘rainy day.’ I had one hundred and twenty-five dollars and so I just figured I had struck my ‘rainy day.’ I had enough to pay my own way down here and back and a little more—all father has to do is to pay my board. But that is a lot.”

“Then you ain’t livin’ with your aunt?”

“Oh, my, no! She’s a widow. She is like we are.”

“ ’Tis a great wurld,” mused the captain. “I’d ’a’ picked yez all out for bein’ rich as crame. Well, anyway, Sam O’Connor an’ Nora has their hilth an’ three males a day——”

“And the *Olivette*,” added Becky enviously as she eyed the big, patched sails. “I think you’re mighty lucky!”

CHAPTER VI

CAPTAIN O'CONNOR'S STRANGE CONTRACT

Captain O'Connor laid the *Olivette* across the river like a duck adrift. When he made a landing Becky was the first ashore and Mrs. Fairfield gasped when she saw her niece struggling with the schooner's bowline.

"Becky," she cried, "drop that dirty rope!"

Becky did so, but she dropped it over a pile.

"Your niece has the makin's of a foine sailor, Mrs. Fairfield," Captain Sam said soberly.

"She will do anything," answered Mrs. Fairfield. "In half an hour I suppose she will be wanting to start a pineapple plantation."

"Aunty," put in Becky, "I don't care about the pineapples, just now. Can't I stay here till you come back?"

"To get into some new mischief?"

"Captain O'Connor is telling me about the boat and I want to go downstairs again."

"She's perfectly safe, ma'am," volunteered Mrs. O'Connor.

"You'll keep an eye on her?"

“Sure, ma'am, an' glad to have her!”

No sooner had the party disappeared than Becky seemed to change to another girl. What had been only childish curiosity suddenly turned to a definite purpose. While the captain was yet busy taking up the slack in his lines Becky sprang aboard the schooner and vanished below. Mrs. O'Connor followed.

“You don't care if I look everywhere, do you?” asked the girl. “I'm thinking of something.”

“Ye'll find a power o' scrubbin' naded,” replied Mrs. O'Connor.

Then Captain Sam came below, threw open a port, and began passing pineapple crate lumber out on the dock.

“Let me help,” volunteered Becky.

“Help?” grunted the captain. “Didn't ye wurrk all the way over? Ye'd better be after goin' ashore with the ladies. Ye'll soon get enough o' this old scow.”

“Enough?” repeated Becky, running to the sour-faced skipper and thrusting her smiling face close to his. “I should say not; nor of you nor of Mrs. O'Connor. You just wait—I'm thinking.”

“Wait?” he repeated. “You're thinkin'? Thinkin' o' what?”

For answer, Becky drew him to the companion-

way steps where his wife was already busy with her needle.

"Mrs. O'Connor," began Becky, "do you suppose a girl of my age could ever have a real idea?"

"Faith, miss," came the instant reply, "I had more sinse at your age than I had later!"

"Manin' when she married a seafarin' man," explained her husband.

"I'm sure she don't mean that," laughed Becky. "But listen! You said business was bad—that there is no freight?"

"That's right," confirmed the captain. "A few more months o' this an' I reckon we'll both be back steamboatin' out o' Palm Beach—me in the wheelhouse an' Mrs. O'Connor dancin' attendance on the women passengers."

"Let's take some passengers on the *Olivette*," broke in Becky. "Listen! I've thought it out; that is, I've thought about it. Tell me—would you rent me the boat? That is, would you let me boss it and would you run it if I could pay you?"

Mrs. O'Connor's eyes contracted and the captain's expanded.

"You?" they said, almost together.

"I mean," went on Becky, her face flushed under the pressure of her first business idea. "I

am poor and I would like to do something to make some money. When I saw the *Olivette* I just loved it right away. There are others who would love it, too, if they knew about it. Let's take some folks on it to live. I'll get the folks, and we'll take them sailing while they are boarding with us."

"Take boarders, is it?" exclaimed Mrs. O'Connor. "That'll be meaning new sails an' a coat o' paint."

"Oh, no!" protested Becky. "Not that—I wouldn't change a thing on the *Olivette*. We could fix up the big room——"

"A good scrubbin', to be sure. An' then——"

"I mean let's make little rooms in it. We can make them with calico curtains——"

"An' turn the old barge into a boardin' house?" the puzzled skipper asked.

"That's it," replied Becky eagerly. "Just think! See this little room," and she opened the door to one of the miniature cabins, "two children could sleep there. Two people, if they weren't awfully big, could sleep in the other one."

"That's where the crew bunks," broke in the captain. "We'd have a crew o' one at least."

"Wouldn't I do?" asked Becky.

"You might stand by the jib or the centerboard, in a pinch," smiled the captain, "but——"

“Well, I’ll just do what you say about keeping close to the jib and the other thing. Leave out the ‘buts’ till I get through.”

“If we had Jupiter Jim,” suggested Mrs. O’Connor, “he could sleep under a bit o’ canvas. An’ Jim never does eat off a table. But go on, miss.”

“Then,” resumed Becky, “there’s your own room. A man and his wife could sleep there—leaving their trunks outside.”

“An’ the O’Connors’ll be after bunkin’ with Jupiter Jim?” asked the captain.

“You and Mrs. O’Connor and I,” went on Becky calmly, “will sleep on cots in little calico cabins. They would be over there. We’ll put a table here and some rocking chairs——”

“For what’s all this?” broke in Captain O’Connor, who began to be dazed. “A picnic?”

“Partly,” explained Becky, “only a long one. And the picknickers are to pay us and live on the *Olivette*.”

“Oh,” replied Captain O’Connor, his mouth in a pucker. His wife was already looking over the hold and shaking her head.

“Furniture an’ cots an’ dishes an’ provisions,” she was saying to herself. “An’ who’s to furnish the money?” she added in a louder voice.

“I will,” announced Becky stoutly, “I’ve got

sixty-five dollars and I can get credit at Mr. Carlson's. I'll take all the risk. You are wondering why, aren't you?" went on the girl. "I want to rent the *Olivette*."

"You mean, charter the craft?" exclaimed Captain Sam.

"If we can arrange it," responded Becky. "If I can find a man and his wife, with three or four children, or several ladies who would make up a party, we would take them down the river and show them the sights. I would charge them board and passage, and out of that I would pay for fixing up the schooner. And you for cooking," she added, putting her arm about the puzzled Mrs. O'Connor. "And you for being the captain," she concluded, smiling at the skipper.

"I'm thinkin' *you'd* be the captain," was Captain O'Connor's reply.

"How much will you charge me for the *Olivette*?" asked Becky suddenly. The veteran river man looked at her helplessly.

"I get seven dollars a day—sometimes," he said at last.

"Yis," exclaimed his wife, "'sometimes.' More often it's five. And then a wake o' nuthin' but rubbin' ag'in the pier. If ye could manage the thing, miss, and, bechune us, if the *Olivette*

got her twenty-five dollars a wake, 'tis a sight more than she's made this many a day."

"A hundred dollars a month?" said Becky, as if calculating and addressing the captain. The skipper said nothing, only waving his hand in the direction of his wife.

"And how about the cooking?" went on Becky.

"I'm the cook and stewardess o' the *Olivette*," responded Mrs. O'Connor promptly. "What pays for the schooner and its crew, pays the cook. But where'd you get these notions, child?"

"When I saw your kitchen," answered Becky.

"I don't know where you're goin' to get your passengers," broke in Captain Sam. "You can't count on any o' the folks up to the Coquina. You know what they pay me for this trip? Twenty-five cents a head. You got to give 'em a lot for their money, too."

"I'll advertise," announced Becky, that idea popping into her head.

"In the Melbourne *Times*?" queried Captain O'Connor. "Ye might as well stick up a sign at Carlson's store."

"In the St. Augustine papers," declared Becky. "There are a lot of rich people in the big hotels. There are some who would know this was a fine chance," she concluded, addressing Mrs. O'Connor.

"I don't know," answered that lady slowly. "Most o' the tourists go to Palm Beach."

"Anyway, we can try it, can't we?" asked Becky. "I'll begin to-night."

"God bless ye," exclaimed Mrs. O'Connor as she seized the girl's face and gave her an impulsive kiss. "I'm sure hopin' it's no drame. What do ye think about it, Sam?"

"Oh," mumbled the captain, "I reckon they's all kinds o' suckers in this wurld."

"But *we* aren't," came the quick comment from Becky. "I'm going to surprise you."

The girl sprang up the companionway to have another look at the schooner. Many years before, the little vessel had begun to push the waters of the river ahead of her. Like a human being she had grown old and fashions had changed. The railroad had stolen from her the produce of gardens and groves. Her sails were gray with patches, and her rigging was thin and sleek with many a strain.

"Ye'll never get anyone to go croosin' in this ol' tub," called Captain Sam, "let alone payin' money to slape an' ate aboard her."

"You wait and see," answered the girl, her hands on her slender hips. "Mrs. O'Connor and I mean business."

It was well along in the afternoon when the

shore party returned. Mrs. Fairfield found Becky in Mrs. O'Connor's galley, busy with a pencil.

"I'm glad you didn't go, Becky," began her aunt. "It was a tiresome walk. How are you feeling?"

"I'm feeling fine. Aunty, I'm going into business."

"Has Captain O'Connor given you a job?" laughed Mrs. Fairfield.

"No. I'm going to charter the *Olivette* and advertise for folks to take a cruise, charge them and make some money—enough to pay for my own board."

"Nora," laughed Mrs. Fairfield, turning to Mrs. O'Connor, "you and Becky must have been amusing yourselves!"

"Law, ma'am," exclaimed Mrs. O'Connor, "'tis no joke. She's figured it all out, an' I do belave she'll do it."

The look that Mrs. Fairfield gave her niece was a decided damper to Becky's enthusiasm. But in a tone her aunt had never heard before, Becky explained her sudden idea, its development and the faith she had in her plan.

"And now I'll tell you why I'm doing it," concluded Becky. "I told father I would get something to do down here if I could. I didn't know

the town was so small. I just can't stay here till spring if it costs me fifteen dollars a week."

"We'll find a cheaper place then. This scheme is ridiculous," Mrs. Fairfield announced.

"No, aunty, it isn't. Mother said I could do something."

"Do you think she would let you run an excursion boat?"

"If she knew everything she would," smiled Becky.

"Well, I don't. I never heard of a thing so preposterous."

"It's too late, aunty," responded Becky. "Here is our contract all written out and signed by Captain O'Connor and me. I couldn't back out now if I wanted to."

CHAPTER VII

A NOVEL WINTER CRUISE

Mrs. Fairfield's resentment even included the innocent Captain O'Connor and his wife. Becky used all her artifices on the homeward sail without avail. That evening two letters were written to Mr. Beckwith. Then Becky opened up the subject once more as she went about her delayed tasks.

"You say you are going to pay Mr. and Mrs. O'Connor one hundred dollars a month?"

"Don't you think that is awfully cheap—only a little over three dollars a day?"

"What will your provisions cost?"

"The captain says we can get all the fish we want for almost nothing—besides oranges and pineapples. We can buy oysters for thirty cents a bushel. That will help a lot, don't you think?"

"Have you figured the cost of bedclothes? And napkins and towels, extra dishes, cots, and furniture and curtains?"

"Mrs. O'Connor has some bedclothes—more'n you'd think."

“Do you expect to use the money you’ve been saving?”

“Of course. Mrs. O’Connor says she will take some of the things off my hands at the end of the season.”

“All right,” exclaimed Mrs. Fairfield, exulting. “But suppose you spend your seventy dollars and pay out your one hundred dollars for the boat. How are you going to get it back?”

“That is just what I have figured out,” laughed Becky. “That makes one hundred and seventy dollars. I am going to get four passengers. They would have to pay the Coquina fifteen dollars a week apiece. That is what I am going to charge them. I would get two hundred and forty dollars a month. When I had paid for everything I would have some bedclothes and dishes left, seventy dollars, and my own board for nothing. Don’t you see? That is how I explained it to father and mother,” she went on, “and I do wish you wouldn’t act so cross about it.”

“And you down here to get strong!” protested Mrs. Fairfield. “You’re apt to catch cold and it’s certain you’ll overexert yourself.”

“Aunty,” replied Becky in her softest tone, “the doctor told me to keep out in the air and take plenty of exercise. And he said it ought to be something I’m interested in. I’m so eager

about this that I know it'll make me well. Think of what happened to me to-day—I never felt so well and happy in my life. Please don't be so cross."

Mrs. Fairfield could not escape the kiss Becky gave her.

"Becky," she declared finally, "no one ever heard of a girl of your age doing such a thing."

"That's why I want to do it, aunty. And I'm *going* to," she added, pillowing her head on her aunt's breast, "because you've *got* to let me!"

"You'll have to wait till you hear from your parents," Mrs. Fairfield conceded at last.

"Then that settles it!" shouted Becky. "Father always does what I ask. You must help me."

"I?" exclaimed the astounded woman. "What am I to do?"

"Oh, lots of things," explained the jubilant girl. "Buying dishes and things, and planning. Please. You know it's the first time I ever tried to do anything."

"Well, but I——"

"You always carry a few sheets and blankets and pillows with you, don't you, aunty?" went on the excited girl. "I have been kind of counting on some of those——"

"Why, Marjorie, I——"

“And think what a lot that’ll save me!”

“Marjorie, I’ll do no such thing. I’m not going to let any person that comes along use my bed linen.”

“But, aunty! What if they’re nice folks? And that’s what they’re going to be. It’ll be a lot of fun to plan it all, won’t it?”

“Perhaps you’d like to have me go along as chambermaid?” Mrs. Fairfield managed to say at last.

Becky, who had begun to fold up her best dress, stopped short with open mouth. Then she sprang to her agitated relative and threw herself into that lady’s lap.

“Oh, aunty, why didn’t I think of it! We’ll make another little room for you. You can come as my guest. And it shan’t cost you a cent. Won’t that be fine?”

“Becky,” gasped Mrs. Fairfield as she stood the girl on her feet, “I’m going down on the gallery to compose myself. When I come back I want to find you in bed.”

When Mrs. Fairfield tiptoed into the room again—fearing to awaken her niece to a new attack—Becky was asleep. She awoke the next morning showing no ill effects from her previous day’s fall into the river.

“Now, aunty,” announced the girl, “I’ve got

to get my advertisement ready. I'm going to send it to St. Augustine."

"I think you'd better wait, Marjorie. What if some one *does* want to go with you and you find your father objects?"

"Oh, Mrs. O'Connor can take them. There won't be any trouble about that."

"How will you get a paper to print your advertisement? It may cost a lot of money."

"I have a plan," laughed Becky. "I'll be back soon."

With Mrs. Fairfield still protesting, the girl was off down the slope and a few minutes later was at Mr. Carlson's store. To him she related every detail of her idea.

"Well, miss, I try to do a cash business. I'd be sort o' breakin' my rule if I give you credit, unless I went into a kind o' partnership with you."

"Will you?" asked Becky. "Please do!"

"Rather looks like I'd have to," answered Mr. Carlson.

Becky was off up the street. At the *Times* office she found Lewis Ahlswede before a type case.

"Hello!" she shouted, as if she and Lewis had been friends for years. The boy did not seem so agitated over Becky's 'hello' this time.

“Mr. Ahlswede,” began the girl, “I want to send an advertisement to some paper in St. Augustine. Will you tell me what to do?”

“Why don’t you print it in the *Times*?” was the boy’s thrifty answer.

“It’s for rich people. I don’t think there is any one around here who’d be interested in what I’m advertising. But I don’t know how much it’ll cost.”

Lewis laid down his composing stick, took off his black apron and tried to look gracious. But he was far from being at ease. Becky had on her blue sailor suit, and the black-banded, white “middy” hat gave her a new touch of smartness.

“I’ll do what I can,” Lewis answered. “Mr. Owens’s the agent o’ the St. Augustine *Record*, but he ain’t comin’ back till to-morrow. What kind of ad is it?”

“Here,” explained Becky, “I’ll read it to you. I have put this at the top of it: ‘A Novel Winter Cruise.’ Then it says: ‘A select party of four will be received as guests on the schooner *Olivette* for a cruise on the Indian River. Home cooking will be supplied, with fresh vegetables and fruit. Arrangements must be made for a four weeks’ trip. For particulars address Miss Marjorie Beckwith, Melbourne, Florida.’ ”

“That you?” was Lewis’ instant inquiry.

"I'm to be the manager."

"You ain't bought the *Olivette*?"

"Gracious, no, silly! I've leased it, or rented it, or something like that."

"Lookin' for some o' them northern fishermen?"

"Say," snapped Becky, "how'd I manage a crowd of four men?"

"Ain't nothin' 'bout that here," retorted Lewis. "That ain't no real, up-to-date ad. I got a book about ad writin'. It says 'say what you mean.' What you wrote don't mean much to me."

"Perhaps you can do better," almost sneered Becky.

"If it was an ad for certain things I could," announced Lewis frankly. "But there ain't nothin' in my book about a young lady charterin' a schooner for a party o' four people to go a-sailin' for four weeks."

"You goose," retorted Becky, smiling now. "Of course there isn't."

"Maybe we could write a better piece together," Becky added suddenly. "That is, if you have the time."

"You tell me what you're tryin' to do," he said at last. "Mebbe I'll have an idea then."

For some minutes the girl explained the particulars of her plans. In the telling of the story

the boy got a part of the tale of the girl's life itself. When she had finished Lewis laid before Becky a pad of paper.

“You can write an' spell,” he began. “Put down what I say an' then we can fix it up.”

Becky tossed her hat on the big table with happy expectancy.

“If a mother and three children,” began Lewis, to Becky's astonishment, “now in Florida for health or recreation want to enjoy a pleasure they can't get again——”

“‘May never be able to duplicate,’ ” suggested Becky, substituting the words.

“——why not take a cruise in the safe and comfortable schooner *Olivette*? A young woman from the north has chartered this schooner, Captain Sam O'Connor master, and means to explore each bay and inlet of the lake-like Indian River. The table will be supplied with fish and oysters from the river; with oranges, pineapples and fresh vegetables from the semi-tropic gardens always within reach. Those who want to camp out on the water for a month, within the sound of the ocean swell but safely drifting upon the stormless, verdure-bordered river, may do so at a cost far below the ordinary hotel rate. The *Olivette* sails from Melbourne in about a week. For terms

and particulars address Miss Marjorie Beckwith, care Coquina Hotel."

The composition of this was not the work of a few minutes. But, completed at last, Becky's face showed approval. Not so that of Lewis.

"It's too long," he announced positively.

"It isn't—not a bit," insisted Becky. "If anything, it ought to be longer."

"Yes," objected Lewis, "but the *Record's* purty stiff in its rates. Mebbe it'll cost more'n you want to pay."

"How much? A dollar?" asked Becky.

"A dollar?" repeated Lewis. "Why, we charge ten cents a line for local ads, an' for readin' notices, fifteen cents. Lemme see." He counted the words. "They's a hundred and fifty-four words there, an' countin' eight words to a line, that's about nineteen lines. I reckon Mr. Owens would make you a low rate considerin' that it's a big ad. But if he charged you 'readin' notice' rates it'd be two dollars an' eighty-five cents. I'll bet the *Record* won't charge you a cent less'n five dollars."

Becky bit her pencil in alarm.

"Well, anyway we have got to do it. There isn't any other way, is there?"

"Did you try all the folks at the hotel?" asked Lewis.

“Say,” replied the girl quickly, “I didn’t. And you know why? They’re a lot of stingy things. I want folks who like adventures. Children,” she added, “and, if I could, girls.”

“Who’s goin’ to help Cap O’Connor run the boat?” Lewis asked as the girl paused.

“Jupiter Jim,” she answered, “whoever he is. Now, what shall we do about getting our notice in the *Record*? Shall I send five dollars with it?”

“I’ll send the ad,” volunteered the boy, “an’ they’ll send the bill to Mr. Owens. Does it read right, now?”

“It’s dandy,” chuckled the girl. “How many letters do you think I’ll get?”

“I don’t know,” replied Lewis. “There ain’t nothin’ like this in my book. But that Jupiter Jim ain’t been around here for a long time.”

CHAPTER VIII

FITTING UP THE OLIVETTE

Mrs. Fairfield found it hard to hold out against her niece after the girl had agreed that no money should be spent until passengers had been secured.

“Of course,” assented Becky. “You don’t suppose I’ll spend my money until I know I’m goin’ to get it back, do you? But we can plan, can’t we? We’ve got to figure out every little thing and put down how much it’s going to cost. And it’s a big job to figure out the rooms on the *Olivette*, and where I’m going to sleep and Mrs. Nora and Captain Sam. We’ve got to put that on paper. That won’t cost anything. But we must begin right away; folks might telegraph and come to-morrow.”

Still protesting, Mrs. Fairfield was led to Carlson’s store, where she sat in distressed silence while Becky moved about examining calicoes, curtains, towels, blankets and toilet articles. Some things the girl put aside conditionally; among these a dozen bottles of Louisiana cane-syrup, so generously rich in sugar that a core of rock candy

had formed in each. Her aunt finally bought outright, at thirty cents each, five old, dust-covered Seminole Indian baskets that Becky unearthed from beneath a counter.

"They're flat and the two big ones'll be fine for oranges," explained Becky. "I'll borrow them to use on the voyage."

At last Mrs. Fairfield's shopping instincts got the better of her reserve and she began to assist Becky. After a while she and the girl went to the *Olivette*, Becky insisting that she must re-measure and replot the entire schooner.

"Bless the heart o' her," exclaimed Mrs. O'Connor, who was peeling potatoes. "Sam," she said, over her shoulder, "here comes the new boss; Cap'n Becky's headin' this way."

"Cap'n Becky'?" exclaimed the skipper from the dingy stern, where he was retouching with black paint the schooner's name. "Cap'n o' what?"

"Cap'n o' what?" repeated Mrs. O'Connor. "Why, the cap'n o' this schooner. She's to be the boss, ain't she? All signed an' agreed."

"Cap'n Becky, is it?" mumbled the mariner. "Well, that ain't steppin' on my toes, begorry. If Captain Nora can stand for it I'll be losin' no slape. I'd as lave be bossed by a gurrl as a woman——"

“Come aboard, ye loafer, and resave the ladies,” interrupted his wife. “Up wid ye and show you’re a better gintleman than ye are a painter.”

As the skipper assisted Mrs. Fairfield to the deck both visitors saw that the *Olivette* was changed; all the sails were neatly furled, the hal-yards and sheets coiled and made fast. The fore and aft decks and the top of the elevated cabin had been scrubbed, and now Captain Sam appeared in a faded but fresh blue suit.

“Will ye be goin’ into the basement?” he asked soberly.

“We’re going *below*,” answered Becky, her eyes twinkling. “I’m going into the hold and then to the galley,” she added, laughing, proud of her new knowledge.

“Very good, sir,” responded the skipper, raising his finger to his cap.

“Sir?” repeated Becky.

“Ain’t ye the cap’n?” grinned Captain Sam.

“Captain?” continued Becky.

“Mrs. O’Connor says ye are the boss, an’ the boss o’ any vessel is the captain, an’ the captain is always ‘sir.’ She’s callin’ ye ‘Captain Becky’ already.”

“Oh, you get out!” flashed the girl, as she

sprang below. But she was so pleased that she was red at the temples.

“Marnin’ to ye, Mrs. Fairfield!” sounded in the empty hold as Mrs. Nora came forward, tying an apron. “An’ marnin’ to Cap’n Becky.”

Becky’s only answer was to throw her arms about Mrs. O’Connor’s shoulders and plant a kiss on that lady’s brown cheek.

“I’ve been clanin’ up a bit,” explained Mrs. O’Connor. “Seein’ as we’re to be turnin’ the ol’ scow intil a yacht, I made Sam dump all his rubbish ashore. We’re goin’ to put on a bit o’ white-wash this afternoon an’ it’ll make the place swater to the smell an’ better lookin’ to the eye.”

“Oh, Mrs. O’Connor,” protested Becky, “it doesn’t smell bad; it just smells a little shippy. I love it.”

“Ye’ll not be knowin’ the place to-morrow, child. Have ye the passengers yet?”

As Mrs. O’Connor and Mrs. Fairfield seated themselves, Becky explained what she had done, and then moved here and there, chattering, finding new possibilities and only pausing now and then to study out some new problem.

“I’ve been thinkin’,” put in Mrs. O’Connor, at last, “there’ll be sivin of us. They’ll never be atin’ in the galley, I mane even the five o’ you. An’ as for slapin’, where’ll you stow ’em? An’

them swell folks like as not who must have their bedroom an' drissin' room an' bathroom aich."

"Oh, don't worry about those things," laughed Becky. "Folks never used to have bathtubs; they used to have just tubs. Look!" and she ran to the little washroom to the left of the companionway. "It's dreadfully small, but we can put a tub in here. I don't know whether I can get a *tin* tub, but we can get a *washtub*. And there's no end of water."

"But the atin', miss?" went on Mrs. O'Connor.

"We will not eat in the galley," answered Becky. "That is the kitchen. You have got to have plenty of room to cook for seven people."

"Eight," corrected Mrs. O'Connor. "We forgot Jupiter Jim. He's got to be fed—something."

"Of course," answered Becky. "That's why the galley's going to be the kitchen. You're to have the old table for your kitchen table. We'll eat out here. On one side we're going to have little staterooms and on the other side it's to be all open, with a big table and chairs and maybe a lounge."

"And you're expecting Mrs. O'Connor to see to all these things?" interrupted Mrs. Fairfield.

"Dear me, no!" replied Becky. "That's what *we* have to do, aunty. You saw the cretonne at the store—the piece with the green palm leaves?"

When it's all white in here, I can just see the green leaves standing out. We'll make a centerpiece out of it for the table. And we'll get a big green bowl, and chairs with cretonne covers."

"We'll have to have a sewing machine to do that," asserted Mrs. Fairfield suddenly, forgetting herself.

"Certainly," answered Becky. "The Daubigny sisters have one. We can work there——"

"In a shop?" broke in her aunt. "Certainly not. Besides," she qualified, as she recalled her opposition to the plan, "I think it foolish to be spending money before you have some excuse for it."

"I'll spend mine first, aunty," laughed Becky.

"And if your father doesn't consent?"

"He must! The doctors told me to keep outdoors and *on the water*. There, I forgot all about the water. I guess that settles it, aunty."

"Mrs. Fairfield," suggested Mrs. O'Connor, slowly, "let the child go ahead. It'll be no great expinse, an' if the worst comes, me an' the captain'll try to make it good to ye. I've a bit put by."

"Becky," exclaimed Mrs. Fairfield, "I will come out to the *Olivette* and help you——"

Becky's arms shut off her aunt's breath and the kiss Mrs. Fairfield got stopped her speech.

Not to be partial, the girl flew to Mrs. Nora's side and gave her a squeeze. Then, with a rush of words, she began explaining her plans.

On the right of the companionway and opposite the washroom, Captain O'Connor and his wife were to sleep in the little cabin.

"Sam!" called out Mrs. O'Connor at once, "drop that paint brush and go right up to Carlson's for a bucket of lime. You got to whitewash ever'thing this afternoon. Here's the money."

The obedient husband having been dispatched on this errand, Mrs. O'Connor resumed her chair. "We'll make out with the little room all right," she declared. "I've a locker under the for'ard deck an' I'll keep most o' my things in that."

"Now," resumed Becky, her eyes radiant, "the cabin for our passengers is to be here." She stepped to the port side of the hold. "It's nineteen feet from the galley to the washroom, and at the widest place seven and a half feet. The curtain will shut off a room that size. We can put four cots, a dressing stand and a trunk in it."

"And where are *you* to sleep?" asked her aunt.

"On a couch out here. All my things will be inside it," replied Becky, proudly.

When Captain Becky and her aunt left the *Olivette* it was noon. After dinner Mrs. Fairfield made good her promise by visiting the little

shop and renting a sewing machine. Becky went with her to pay for her pralines and to feast her eyes again on the shirt waist.

“Now we’re coming to the best part,” Becky almost shouted, grasping her aunt’s arm, as they reached the street again; “buying things. We’ll get everything to-day, aunty, and send them right out to the boat.”

“Don’t you think it hasty to get the cretonne and wire and rings to-day? You know nothing’s settled as yet.”

Instead of replying, Becky directed her hesitating relative to Mr. Carlson’s store.

“Mr. Carlson,” she began, “if we get all the things I’ve been talking about and then we find we don’t need them, may we send them back—that is, things that we haven’t cut?”

“Why, sure!” replied the philosophic storekeeper. “They ain’t gettin’ no older in your care than they are in mine. An’ it’s a cinch they ain’t gettin’ shopworn.”

CHAPTER IX

ANOTHER BOY APPEARS

The following day Mrs. Fairfield completely surrendered, so far as assisting in the *Olivette's* decoration. The sewing machine was delivered, the curtain material purchased, and with Mrs. Fairfield and Mrs. O'Connor buzzing away on one side of the hold and Captain Sam and Captain Becky tacking and twisting screw-eyes on the other side, the actual work began.

"Some one might telegraph, you know," explained Becky to Lewis Ahlswede, having gone out of her way at noon to consult her friend. "I would if I had money and such a splendid chance."

"O' course," Lewis replied. "But a lot o' folks like steamboats an' them wheel chairs down to Palm Beach. I wouldn't count too much on gettin' a nibble from that ad."

"Oh, but I must," insisted Becky. "If some one doesn't answer—and come—I'll lose a lot of money."

The evening mail brought no letters. But the St. Augustine paper arrived and Becky, with an

attempt at composure, read her first printed composition. Lewis was not less proud of their joint work, although he made some professional complaint concerning its location in the paper.

“It should ‘a’ been right on this page, near the ‘Arrivals Yesterday’ or the ‘Guests at the Big Hotels,’ ” he commented critically, “instead o’ bein’ among the ‘Houses to Rent.’ ”

“You know an awful lot about newspapers, Mr. —Mr. Ahlswede. I suppose, some day, you will own one,” replied Becky, admiringly.

“I’m goin’ to be a reporter, anyway,” answered Lewis, “but mebbe it’ll be a long time. What d’you know about schools that learn you by correspondin’?”

“I don’t really know anything about them,” replied Becky, with interest. “But I’ll find out. Perhaps we could find out right away if we wrote to an editor.”

“Ain’t no use, just now,” declared Lewis. “I ain’t got no money.”

This did not seem to depress him greatly, and as Becky had no other suggestion, she left.

No telegrams arrived that day, but Becky was full of hope for the next, which she figured was about as soon as she could expect to receive an inquiry. The next day passed, however, without response, and as she had arranged for but one

insertion of the advertisement, the disappearance of it from that day's paper made her regret that she had been so short-sighted.

Becky visited the *Times* office the next morning to take counsel with her friend. The boy was not in sight, but Mr. Owens, the proprietor of the paper, sat at the desk. Somewhat alarmed, the girl was about to ask for the young man, when she realized that her business dealing had really been with the *Times* office, and not with Lewis.

"How do you do, sir?" began the girl.

"Good morning," replied the man, curtly. "Can I do anything for you?"

"Mr. Ahlswede sent an advertisement to the St. Augustine paper for me," Becky answered. "I've come to pay for it."

Mr. Owens turned to his desk and picked up a piece of paper.

"An advertisement about a schooner cruise on the river?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," answered Becky, her lips set to keep them from trembling, and her hand clutching her pocket-book.

"Six dollars," remarked the man, abruptly.

Becky gasped inwardly at the thought of paying out that much money for nothing. She opened her purse and was overjoyed to see a new five-dollar bill and two silver half-dollars among the

small change. Careful that the man should not see how little was left in the purse, she took out the six dollars.

“Here it is, sir.”

As the editor’s scratchy pen crawled over the paper, writing a receipt, Lewis Ahlswede entered the office with a page of “copy” in his discolored hand. Mr. Owens handed the paper to Becky and she laid the six dollars on the desk. She had not spoken to the boy, but was folding the receipt. Nor was Lewis looking at the girl. His eyes were on the money.

“I’m obliged to you,” was all Becky could say. And then, her temples burning with chagrin, she left the office. Her first business venture had been a failure. It seemed the end of everything. That morning she went about her work on the schooner without her usual spirits. But she did not complain to Mrs. O’Connor any more than she complained to the editor of the *Times*. She was disappointed in Lewis Ahlswede.

“But I might have known,” she said to herself. “He hasn’t had any experience. He made me spend my six dollars for nothing. Well, there is no use crying over spilled milk, as my father would say. I’ve got to get busy myself now, or everything is going to be a muss and my money lost.”

Becky remained on the *Olivette* for luncheon. Her method of "starting something" was, later, to sit on the big bowsprit and think. The harder she thought, the more completely she abandoned hope of securing passengers from St. Augustine.

"Of course, my advertisement might bring results yet," she argued. "Perhaps the people there are too rich to care for such a thing, and if that is so, then the idea was not a good one. But I think it is. I wonder if I could afford to go to St. Augustine or Palm Beach and look around for myself?" she continued. Then the thought of the big, fashionable hotels scared her. "It would be worse than being a book agent," she concluded. Perhaps she could make the venture a local one. A very low rate might attract the regular visitors of the *Coquina*. If that failed, she speculated on making trips of two or three days' duration with an increased number of passengers. Finally, she determined to reduce her rate as low as possible and make an attempt to get four ladies from the hotel.

Late in the afternoon Becky heard the south-bound train come in. It warned her that it was time to return to the hotel, but it did not suggest "letters" to her. For the first time in three days she was not concerned over the mail. It was growing dusk when she reached the shore end of the

pier. As she was about to hasten to the hotel, Lewis Ahlswede stepped from the platform in front of Carlson's store.

"You hadn't ought to 'a' paid six dollars," was his salutation. "The bill for that ad was only three dollars. I told Mr. Owens we done all the work, an' I thought he was chargin' too much."

Becky was already a little sorry that she had blamed the boy so hastily. "It's all right," she answered. "I reckon Mr. Owens can charge what he pleases."

"It's wrong," exclaimed Lewis. "But I didn't get no chance. I'm sorry——"

"I guess it was all a mistake," broke in Becky. "But you weren't to blame. You can't help what Mr. Owens does."

"You didn't get any answers," continued Lewis, as if hardly hearing the girl's excuse for him, "but it wasn't a mistake. We've got to keep at it. Now we know what it costs an' we can do it ourselves. I've been waitin' to tell you. Let's send it by the morning train and have it printed again. It'll only cost three dollars."

"Three dollars!" cried Becky. "Why, that will be nine dollars altogether. You must think I have got a lot of money."

"I'll lend you a dollar and a half," answered Lewis, quickly. Then, seeing the girl's flush, he

added, "you can pay me back when ever'thing's all right."

"That is fine of you, Mr. Ahlswede," replied Becky, "but I couldn't do that. I guess you are right about sending it in again, but if we do I will furnish the money. Don't you feel sorry about what Mr. Owens did. And please don't say anything to him; he might not like it. You have done a lot of nice things for me——"

"Do you want to get it in to-night's mail?" the boy interrupted.

"Yes," replied the girl, decisively. "Come up to the hotel after supper and we'll fix it."

Becky held out her hand and with a reassuring smile tripped up the path. Before she could mount the gallery steps, she came upon her aunt.

Halting her niece with outstretched arms, Mrs. Fairfield exclaimed in a frightened undertone:

"Well, you have done it. They're here!"

"Who is here?"

"A whole family from St. Augustine to see about your foolish idea."

"Here! Nobody wrote. How did they know?" Becky's face was white.

"They just arrived on the evening train. They are all in there. Go right up and change your dress, and fix your hair."

“What do they look like?” went on the girl, unmindful of her dress and hair.

“Look like?” repeated Mrs. Fairfield. “Well, they will never go on that old boat—they are from New York. I think they are disgusted.”

“How many?” asked the girl, releasing herself and peering into the office.

“Four of them,” answered her aunt in a whisper. “A woman, two girls and a boy.”

“A boy?” repeated Becky. “How old is he?”

“About as old as you are,” said Mrs. Fairfield.

“But the advertisement read ‘children.’ ”

“That’s just it,” continued Mrs. Fairfield; “you can’t take a *boy*, of course.”

“Why can’t I?” asked Becky suddenly, as she faced her aunt, her busy brain already whirling her plans about. It’s just another passenger, and that’s good luck. What kind of a boy is he?”

“They will not go at all,” announced Mrs. Fairfield, decisively. “Not when they see how things are. And I don’t see that it matters what the boy looks like.”

“There he is now,” interrupted Becky, as the young gentleman in question stepped from the office onto the gallery. “Looks as if his folks had plenty of money.”

Becky paused for only a moment longer to make a quick survey of the youth, who was humming

an air that was new to her, then with decisive steps crossed the gallery and walked briskly into the office.

Although she gave no sign of having seen the boy, she knew he was tall and thin, wore his hair "brush back," and was garbed in a fresh outing suit of blue. He ceased his humming instantly, gazed at Becky intently and then, at a little distance, followed her into the hotel.

Near the desk, with articles of travel piled about them, were a woman and two girls. The woman sat very erect, her face showing the fatigue of travel and a trace of annoyance. One girl, about Becky's age, smartly dressed and wearing a limp straw hat with a wealth of creamy veiling, was a likeness of her mother in expression. An immediate glow of satisfaction swept over Becky. The hat was almost a duplicate of the one she had worn on her trip to the south. The other girl, a child perhaps eight years old, was stretched far out in her chair, rocking contentedly and apparently enjoying herself. As Becky entered, the proprietor of the hotel spoke to the woman, the latter turning toward the approaching girl.

"This lady wishes to see you, Miss Beckwith," the proprietor called to Becky as she was, apparently, about to pass.

Becky, who was again in her sailor suit with

the low collar and black tie, and hatless as usual, stopped. Alarmed inwardly, for every garment on the woman and the two girls indicated exclusiveness and good taste, Becky summoned her courage to put on her best smile—the one in which her straight, set lips wandered off in little curves of half merriment.

“Is this Miss Beckwith?”

Becky bowed, and before she could speak the woman added:

“You had an advertisement in the *St. Augustine Record*?”

“Yes! Did you come to see about it?”

The woman, before replying, drew her upper lip over the lower and seemed to be making an inventory of the girl.

“I was rather interested in the idea,” she said at last in a noncommittal way. “We have been at the ‘Ponce’ for a few weeks. I thought such a cruise might prove a diversion, if nothing more. We have heard a great deal about the Indian River.”

“Is it a regular sailors’ boat?” broke in a voice behind Becky. “How fast can it go?”

“Schuyler!” exclaimed the woman, with a nod toward the boy, “we will come to that in time.”

“Oh, it’s beautiful,” announced Becky, ignoring the boy and referring to the river. “I’m

sure you'd like it and the boat. It's a lovely old thing."

"It's a yacht, isn't it?" inquired the elder girl, with a first show of interest.

"Dear me, no!" answered Becky. "It's an old freight boat. But it's lovely."

"A freight boat!" exclaimed the woman, straightening. The elder daughter looked at her mother and sank back in her chair wearily.

"Yes," answered Becky, with dignity. "Would you like to know about it?"

"You bet!" exclaimed the suppressed boy; "tell us."

CHAPTER X

ORANGE BLOSSOM DIPLOMACY

Becky's visitor now introduced herself as Mrs. Egbert Hatton of New York, explaining that she was in the south for the benefit of her children's health, and then introduced these as Lucile, Ruth, and Schuyler. Lucile was about Becky's age, the boy a little older, and Ruth not more than eight.

Two girls could hardly have been more dissimilar than Miss Hatton and Becky. Lucile was plainly bored by everything about her and, not least, by the talk about the *Olivette*. On this subject Ruth was all interest when she was not dozing. The boy, if not interested in the schooner, gave plain signs of having an interest in his new surroundings. When Becky invited Mrs. Hatton and her family into the parlor of the hotel for a further conference, Mrs. Hatton turned to her son.

"Schuyler," she said, "you can stay here and look after our things."

"Why don't they take them to our rooms?" asked the boy. "I'm tired of standing around doing nothing."

"I must see what our plans are to be, first," responded his mother.

"It doesn't make much difference, mother," put in Lucile, wearily, as she took off her hat. "There is no other train to-day. We can't leave—whatever the name of this place is—to-night. You might have written a letter and saved all this bother."

"Mother," interrupted the younger girl, "when are we going to have tea?"

"Tea!" repeated her indifferent sister. "I'm past tea long ago. All I hope for is a decent bed."

"We will have supper in a half hour," explained Becky. "But we can have some tea in the parlor now if you like."

"Thank you," answered Mrs. Hatton, politely. "We won't bother you. Schuyler, please look after the things."

As Mrs. Hatton roused the youngest child and led her into the parlor, Lucile languidly announced that she would go out on the gallery, while the boy dropped into a chair and began another song. But he kept his eyes on Becky.

The conference began with Mrs. Hatton's asking Becky what her advertisement meant and how she, a young girl, happened to be in charge of such a project.

“Do you expect to take your son?” was Becky’s reply. “You know I said ‘mother and children.’ ”

“Oh,” replied Mrs. Hatton, “I did not suppose that would make any difference. If there is any objection, perhaps we may as well call the matter closed.”

“I’m not objecting,” put in Becky, instantly. “But it’s easier to fix things if we are all women; a boy is so in the way, you know. I just don’t see where we will put him.”

“Haven’t you staterooms?” asked Mrs. Hatton, in some alarm.

“Good gracious, no!” answered Becky. “I haven’t had time to explain. We’re just going to have curtains and we have an awful little place for cots.”

“Cots!” exclaimed the other. Then a smile came over her face. “In that event I’m really afraid we have made quite a useless journey. I should have written.”

“I am dreadfully sorry,” broke in Becky at once. “It’s going to be just like camping out, and I’m sure you would be pleased. I’ve tried to make everything comfortable, and I know you would like Mrs. O’Connor’s cooking. Maybe, if you’d look at the schooner you might try it.”

But Mrs. Hatton was shaking her head. Then, as if to absolutely satisfy herself, she asked:

“You have bathing facilities, of course?”

“Only a little bit of a washroom and a new tin tub. But we have beautiful water, and down at the ocean inlet we'll have real surf bathing.”

“Lucile will hardly care for that, I am afraid,” smiled Mrs. Hatton. “She is rather delicate, and must have a warm bath to put her to sleep.”

“They say I'm delicate, too,” spoke up Becky. “But after I got busy fixing the *Olivette*, I began to feel strong right away. It doesn't take anything now to make *me* sleep. Maybe it would do your daughter good! I'd love to have you, and I've been thinking we might curtain off a little corner for your son.”

Mrs. Hatton was too polite to show annoyance, but it was plain that she saw few possibilities in Becky's cruise.

“I haven't really told you anything about it yet,” Becky went on, desperately. “Can't I go and find your daughter and explain everything to both of you. I'd like to.”

“If you wish,” answered the visitor.

As Becky dashed out of the living room, Mrs. Hatton leaned back in her chair and gazed in an amused way about the rather garish apartment.

During the little talk between Mrs. Hatton and Becky, events were transpiring out in the office. Schuyler Hatton, his heels clicking together in

time to his subdued song, and his eyes following each movement of Becky's head in the room, did not notice a boy who entered. This was Lewis Ahlswede, notebook in hand.

"Who's the folks 'at just come?" asked Lewis of the proprietor.

"You got me," answered the latter. "They haven't registered, an' if they do I can't accommodate all of 'em. The woman was in a terrible rush to see Miss Beckwith."

Word of the new guests had reached Lewis and he had hurried to the hotel to get the "arrivals." Learning that the boy in the rocking-chair was one of the "arrivals," Lewis hastened to him.

"How d'you do?" he began. "Just get in? I'm a reporter for the Melbourne *Times*. If you're visitin' our city I'd like to have the names o' your party for the paper."

The boy withdrew his gaze from the next room to look Lewis over. Then a thought seemed to flash upon him. "Say, do you live here?" he asked.

"Most o' the time."

"D'you know that red-headed girl in there," the boy continued, nodding toward the parlor. Lewis' eyes followed the motion.

"That's Miss Beckwith."

"Yes, I know," answered the boy, "but what do they call her?"

"Becky, I think."

"Pretty swell girl for a crossroads like this," commented the stranger, as he resumed his rocking.

"She don't live here. She's from Chicago."

"Looks like a Jap to me," resumed the new arrival, as if he did not want to be suspected of undue interest.

"If you mean her," replied the reporter, "she don't look red-headed to me, or like no Jap, neither."

"Oh, I see!" chuckled the other. "I got you located."

As Lewis did not understand the meaning of this remark, he made no answer, and it was at this point that Becky rushed into the hall.

"Where's your sister?" she exclaimed, hurrying to young Hatton's chair. "Mrs. Hatton wants her and I've come to find her." Then, noticing Lewis, Becky nodded and turned toward the door.

"She's out there. I'll help you find her," answered the boy, with alacrity. Springing up, he and Becky hurried out onto the gallery. The proprietor also having disappeared, Lewis was about to leave, when he noticed Mrs. Hatton in the par-

lor. His reportorial instincts returned, and grasping his notebook, he made his way into the room.

“Good evening,” he began. “I’m a reporter of the Melbourne *Times*. If you’re visiting our city, I’d like to have the names of your party for the paper.”

“Thank you,” responded Mrs. Hatton, coldly, but with a smile of amusement. “My *party* is my family, and I believe we do not care for public mention. My son is in the office. Will you be good enough to ask him to come to me?”

“Him and Miss Beckwith have gone out looking for your daughter,” explained Lewis.

“Thank you,” rejoined Mrs. Hatton. “Good evening.”

Lewis closed his notebook and withdrew. Arousing the sleepy girl on her knee, Mrs. Hatton, with unconcealed annoyance, followed the reporter into the office and thence to the desk. The proprietor had returned.

“I would like to have three rooms for the night,” she began, a little curtly. “Something with bath.”

“I’m sorry, ma’am, but we haven’t but one room left, an’ that’s got only one bed in it. I could put a cot in it——”

“But my two daughters and my son are with

me. We must have accommodation. I believe there is no train leaving this evening?"

The man shook his head, and then added:

"I can get the young man a room at a boardin'-house."

The woman compressed her lips.

"We can procure food, I presume?"

"Oh, yes, plenty o' that," the proprietor assured her. "Supper'll be ready in a few minutes. I'll try to fix you up to-morrow."

"Thank you, but I fancy we will be leaving in the morning."

"Like to register?" asked the hotel owner.

"Mrs. Egbert Hatton and family of New York," said the lady, in an icy tone, as she turned away, and, with her youngest child at her side, again entered the parlor.

An examination of the gallery revealed to Becky that Miss Hatton was not there. The moon was already tracing a line of silver across the black of the river.

"Maybe she's gone to look at the river," suggested Becky.

"Where?" asked the young man. Without answering, Becky hurried forward, Schuyler following. On a little rise at the left, where a rustic settee afforded a view of the river, Becky discerned the figure of the missing girl.

“Did you ever see the river before?” asked Becky, as she and the boy advanced.

“What river? Where?”

“Why, the Indian River,” laughed Becky.

“Oh, yes, sure. Where is it?”

“Keep on the path or you’ll be in it,” exclaimed Becky, as she caught the boy by the arm and gave him a jerk. “It’s right down there where you can’t see. Can you swim?”

“Yes—no—that is, a little,” answered Schuyler. “Where is the path?”

“Just follow me,” exclaimed Becky, and she hurried toward the settee.

“Miss Hatton, your mother says if you’ll come in we’ll talk over the cruise.”

“I don’t want to talk it over. I don’t care about it.”

“Hey, sis!” cried the brother, now arriving. “Just cut that out; don’t knock everything. Besides, you’d better be going in. You’re always staying out at night—because the doctor says you mustn’t, I reckon.”

“It isn’t going to hurt her,” interposed Becky, stoutly. “That’s what they told me, too. But I do everything I want to, and I’m feeling a lot better than I did when I came.”

“Don’t you live here?” asked Miss Lucile.

"She lives in Chicago," explained Schuyler. "You'd better hustle in. Mother sent for you."

Lucile arose and stepped to Schuyler's side.

"Don't you think it's nice out here?" asked Becky, as she again glanced at the moonlight and sniffed anew the wild honeysuckle lining the top of the bluff.

"It's great," answered the boy. "Smells like a flower shop."

"It's so still it gives me the creeps," declared his sister, "and I'm getting cold." The hotel rose before them, its dark porch showing a few winking lights. "Isn't much like the Ponce," the girl added, in some disgust.

"You bet it isn't," answered the boy instantly; "not if you are referring to marble floors and a lot of lazy people, and oceans of fancy work for sale, and stacks of postcards. Say," he went on, catching his sister by the arm, "see all that black down there that the moonlight's plastered on? Well, that's the Indian River. That's where we are going in Becky's boat."

"Becky?" exclaimed the precise Lucile.

"Sure! Isn't your name Becky?" asked the boy.

"My friends call me Becky," laughed the girl. "There is the bell. Supper is ready."

The three hurried forward. At the gallery

steps Miss Lucile passed up without further word or look for Becky. Just then Becky noticed Lewis Ahlswede sitting on the edge of the gallery.

“Hello!” she exclaimed, jovially, waving her hand at the reporter. “Had your supper?”

Lewis made no response, nor did Becky wait for one. She had forgotten all about the work they were to do together. As Schuyler and Lucile joined their mother in the parlor, Mrs. Fairfield took charge of her niece.”

“You see what you’ve done?” began Becky’s aunt at once. “You’ve gotten those people down here and they’re not going with you. The mother is angry and is sorry she came. Besides, there isn’t room enough in the hotel to keep them overnight. The boy will have to go to a boarding house. You should have thought of these things.”

“I’m thinking now,” exclaimed Becky, with a smile. “They’ll stay and they’ll go with me—when they understand.”

With a cluck of disgust, Mrs. Fairfield rose to go in to supper.

“I’ll be in in a minute,” explained Becky, and before her aunt could stop her she was out on the gallery. “Lewis!” she called as she hurried to where the reporter still sat. “Will you do something for me?”

“Sure,” answered the boy. “What’s doin’?”

“I want you to go down to Mr. Carlson’s and get two dozen of his best Indian River oranges. Slip up on the bluff and gather a lot of honeysuckle. Then go out in the Coquina’s grove and get some orange branches and blossoms, and take everything out to the *Olivette* right away. Tell Mrs. O’Connor we are going to have fashionable company about eight o’clock, and ask her to fix up the boat.”

CHAPTER XI

MRS. O'CONNOR SERVES COFFEE

Becky could see that the meal that followed was not putting the visitors in better humor. She shivered with alarm when she found the oysters served on warm plates and a taste of her own coffee was enough to convince her that one night and two meals might easily send her desired guests back to St. Augustine.

After supper, without further word to Becky, Mrs. Hatton and her family at once disappeared upstairs. The opportunity for a talk with the lady and Lucile seemed lost, but the determined girl seated herself in the office. She was discouraged, but she had not given up.

About twenty minutes later Mrs. Hatton and her son reappeared, the boy with a bag, as if prepared for his night in the boarding-house. His mother, a little more genial, smiled and nodded at Becky.

"I hoped Miss Lucile would come down, too," said Becky, hurrying to Mrs. Hatton's side. "You

know I haven't really told you about the cruise yet."

"She is too tired," answered the lady. "And, besides, I think it hardly worth while. We have agreed to back to St. Augustine to-morrow."

"Oh, I'm sorry!" exclaimed Becky. "I think, if you just saw my boat——"

"Sis will go, mother," interrupted the boy. "She's only got one of her grouches to-night. She wasn't so sore when she was out on the bench. You're all mad about the eats."

Mrs. Hatton smiled and Mrs. Fairfield came up. While the two were exchanging formalities, Becky turned to the boy.

"Is it all settled?" she asked, her lips set.

"Not on your life!" answered Schuyler in an undertone. "Stick to it, and I'll help you."

"You can help me right now," answered Becky, hastily and nervously. "I want to go out to the schooner this evening, and I want you and your mother to go with me. It will be grand out there. The breeze is coming in from the ocean and the moon is making it light as day. Do get her to come."

Schuyler sprang to his mother's side. There was a lifting of eyebrows, looks of protest, questions, and a shaking of the head. Mrs. Fairfield seemed not less surprised. Becky broke in.

“Aunty, Mrs. O'Connor is expecting us to come out to the boat to-night. The air is fine and the moon is lovely—just look!” She pointed through the door. The black river was spangled with silver. “It's not far. I wish Mrs. Hatton and you would come with me.”

Mrs. Hatton looked at Becky curiously. “How far is it?” she asked, cautiously.

“Oh, just at the end of the pier,” explained Becky, not mentioning that the pier was three hundred yards long. “And I'd so like to have you see the boat. Maybe you could tell your friends about it,” added Becky, her straight smile showing, although her clenched fingers did not.

“Why, of course,” answered Mrs. Hatton, with a gracious smile. “Since you put it that way, I'll be glad to accept your invitation—that is, if Mrs. Fairfield cares to join us.”

Mrs. Fairfield did not really care to, for it meant a long walk, but it flashed over her that there was some kind of a crisis in Becky's program, and she hesitated to refuse.

“Shall I get Lucile?” volunteered the energetic Schuyler.

“She had better stay with Ruth,” answered Mrs. Hatton. “Lucile is putting her to bed now. The girls are very poor travelers,” she added. “Get my coat, Schuyler.”

"I'll get yours, aunty," exclaimed Becky, jubilantly, and she and the boy sprang for the stairs. On the upper landing Schuyler turned to Becky.

"Say," he panted, "couldn't we pull off a moonlight sail out there?"

"Certainly," responded Becky, promptly, not hesitating to promise anything that might create interest. The boy had not returned when Becky joined Mrs. Hatton and her aunt, but a moment later he came clattering downstairs.

"Sis and the kid want to go, too, mother," he announced. "And they'll be ready in a minute." Mrs. Hatton's eyes opened with surprise. "I thought Ruth was in bed," she exclaimed.

"She's getting up. She heard me telling sis about it. She got right up and said she was going sailing, too."

"Sailing?" repeated Mrs. Hatton, astonished. "You are not going sailing, are you? At night?"

"Not unless you like," responded Becky.

"And Lucile?" went on Mrs. Hatton. "I thought she was tired."

"Well, I told her about it, and she's afraid she will miss something."

Mrs. Hatton shook her head with a weary smile, while Becky told her how glad they would be to have the girls in the party. Finally, as if resign-

ing herself, she went upstairs to take charge of the preparations.

About eight o'clock, with the frogs croaking in the bayou under the distant railway bridge, the odor of the honeysuckles sweet in the air, Becky's party set out for the *Olivette*. When the shaky pier was reached, Mrs. Hatton was too polite to hold back, and Mrs. Fairfield reassured her. Then the fascination of the wide river, swelling like waving velvet covered with silver spangles, began to steal over the strangers.

Much to Becky's joy, just before they reached the bad places in the pier the party came upon the little tram and, to her greater delight, Lewis Ahlswede was seated upon it.

"Of all things," cried the happy girl, "here is our private train and engineer waiting for us." She caught Lewis by the arm and made a quick and whispered inquiry as to whether he had executed her errands.

"Yes," answered the boy in a similar whisper. "I reckoned what was up, an' I told Mrs. O'Connor." As he wiped his perspiring brow with one hand he swung around against Becky a small covered tin pail. "I just been out to ol' Mrs. Marshall's, back in the pines, to git a pint o' cream."

Becky's quick wits made her understand plainly.

Mrs. O'Connor was proud of her coffee. The girl's heart thumped with new pleasure, and before she could restrain herself she had squeezed the willing reporter's thick arm. Then she slipped the pail out of Lewis' hand and concealed it behind her.

"Now we're going to ride," she explained with fervor to the Hattons and her aunt. "And Mr. Schuyler will help run the engine."

To Ruth the novel vehicle was a chariot of glory. The little girl's activity was of service in drawing attention from Becky's efforts to conceal the cream pail. Lucile divided her time between sighs over the sharp jars and in keeping as far as possible from Lewis' bobbing head.

"Jump on and kick," commanded Becky, noting this. "It will go fast enough."

Schuyler's back being then toward her, the girl could more easily conceal her pail. Thus, more at ease, Becky began pointing out their novel surroundings. She called attention to the riding light of the *Olivette*, pointing to the fading lights on shore, and explained to Ruth that the silvery explosions in the water now and then were not fireworks, but dashing schools of mullet fish.

"It really *is* restful, isn't it, Lucile?" remarked Mrs. Hatton, anxious to arouse some interest in her indifferent daughter.

“But such a rickety old landing,” was Lucile’s only concession.

“A touring car for you every time,” grunted her brother. “It’s all you say, mother,” he went on, “and then some.”

“The old boat is somewhat rickety, too, but it won’t jolt,” volunteered Becky. “Stand by to come about!” she added quickly as the swaying car rolled up toward the schooner. “Half speed there,” she commanded, with a laugh; “we’re comin’ abeam!” Then, as Lewis jumped off and began to slow up the car, she called out excitedly: “Schooner ahoy!”

“The *Olivette* o’ St. Augustine!” came a quick response out of the darkness, in the full voice of Mrs. O’Connor. Then the same voice added: “Captain Becky in command. Drop anchor an’ come aboard.”

“Say,” exclaimed the excited Schuyler, as he got on his knees to look ahead, “that’s the stuff! Here we are, sis! Get a move on.” And without further delay the boy was off toward the dark shape lying by the pier.

“Put this by the galley window, Lewis,” whispered Becky, as she slipped the cream pail into Lewis’ hand and then busied herself with her guests. A lantern flared and Captain O’Connor was seen at the gangplank. The captain had put

his pipe aside and wore a coat, buttoned snugly. His wife, her hair smooth and shiny, a white collar and a bit of Irish lace at her throat, stood with dignity at the companionway.

Crowded on the little deck astern, one introduction did for all. The captain took off his cap and held it as if in the presence of royalty. Mrs. O'Connor made a courtesy, and motioned her husband to bring the lantern.

"We're plazed to have ye aboard," she exclaimed. "Will ye go below?"

Becky felt that she was at a crisis. She helped each of her visitors to the steps and then climbed on the low roof of the cabin and tiptoed forward to the galley. Lewis was there with the cream. All was dark in the little cooking apartment, but the window was open. Becky knew every inch of the little room and, whispering to Lewis, she scrambled through the window and dropped to the floor.

"Wait," she whispered to the boy, as she relieved him of the cream pail; "we're goin' to take a sail. I want you to tend the jib and fore-sail. Can you?"

"Huh!" was Lewis' only answer, an amused grunt.

"Well, then," went on Becky, in an undertone, "you get Captain O'Connor aside and tell him

I want to get under way while these folks are in the cabin. It's a surprise."

"Aye, aye," answered the boy, with a grin. "There's a good breeze."

Smoothing her dress, Becky slipped into the cabin just as her aunt missed her. Her nervousness disappeared at once. The appearance of the "living saloon" and, better yet, the faces of all the Hattons made her catch her breath for joy. There could be no mistake about the impression made on the visitors.

Mrs. Hatton, her eyes yet sweeping the apartment, was seated in one of the new canvas easy-chairs. Lucile was standing at one side of the long room, her face buried in a bowl of honeysuckle blossoms that stood on a shelf, and Ruth was at the table, already in possession of a fragrant orange. Schuyler's attention was fixed on the steel centerboard.

The big kerosene lamp, with its yellow shade, sent a golden radiance throughout the room. At one end of the table was a group of white candlesticks, glowing like candelabra. Near these, in a wide Seminole basket, were heaped the oranges Lewis had brought. On a shelf just above Becky's couch lay a heap of fragrant orange leaves and blossoms.

“Miss Beckwith,” Mrs. Hatton exclaimed, “are you responsible for this?”

“Gracious, no!” protested Becky. “It’s Mrs. O’Connor’s home. She——”

“It’s the child’s own work, Mrs. Hatton, every scrap an’ idea! ’Tis the likes o’ these notions that makes us afther callin’ her ‘Captain.’ ”

“Captain?” exclaimed Lucile, showing unexpected interest.

“Sure, miss! ‘Captain Becky,’ an’ a fine little boss she’s been for us these past few days.”

“We all made the curtains,” interrupted Becky, moving to the side where the room for the guests was to be located; “white and yellow and green palm leaves, just like the white sand, the sunshine and the palmettos. There is the washroom and the green bathtub, and over here is the dressing table and looking glass. We close it this way.” She ran the curtains out on the wire holding them and the improvised room was enclosed with its sightly wall of cretonne. “We’re going to live and eat out here. Our kitchen is up forward. There’s a little deck in the stern where we can take our chairs in the day and, if it rains or a norther comes, we have two stoves to heat our living room.”

“Really,” exclaimed Mrs. Hatton, “it’s all very

clever." She reached over and patted Becky's hand. "You deserve a lot of credit, Miss—I mean Captain Becky!"

"Isn't it?" added Lucile graciously. "It's just dandy."

"Thank you," answered Becky, trembling with eagerness. "There's another thing I like best of all, though. That's Mrs. O'Connor's cooking. I'm sorry we hadn't time to prepare some refreshments for you."

"My dear child," broke in Mrs. Hatton, "you are really too good!"

"Oh, Mrs. O'Connor," exclaimed Becky, as if the thought had just occurred to her, "couldn't you make some coffee?"

"'Twill be a rare pleasure!" answered Mrs. O'Connor, with a smile.

"Mrs. O'Connor," exclaimed Mrs. Hatton, "I must protest——"

"'Tis the captain's orders," interrupted Mrs. O'Connor. A moment later a light flared up in the galley. Schuyler, who had been a witness of the brief colloquy, sprang toward the companionway.

"What's doing?" he exclaimed. "We're moving!"

"Yes," explained Becky, "we're sailing."

“Sailing!” came a gasp from several.

“Yes,” laughed Becky. “I want to see the river by moonlight. I’ve wanted all my life to take a moonlight sail, and this is my first chance. It’ll make the coffee taste better.”

CHAPTER XII

BECKY'S PLOT THICKENS

Under a head breeze, the *Olivette*, heeling slightly, was tacking up the river. With no sound except the ripple of water washing sternward, the sails stood out like sheets of metal.

"Can't you go any faster?" exclaimed Becky to Captain O'Connor, in the joy of having the boat in motion at last.

"Comin' home, miss," answered the skipper, "we'll kick up a wake."

Becky whirled to assist her aunt and Mrs. Hatton to the deck, and Schuyler began the old song: "Sailing, sailing, over the bounding main." No one knew the rest of it, but Becky joined in, and the group on the little deck was at once a babble of exclamations of delight.

Chairs were brought, but as there was no rail Mrs. Hatton, Mrs. Fairfield and Lucile preferred to sit on the top step of the companionway, and Schuyler brought cushions.

"Ready about!" shouted Captain O'Connor suddenly, as he loosened the mainsheet.

“Ready about!” repeated a familiar voice forward.

“Duck!” shouted Becky, catching Schuyler’s arm, and as she forced that young gentleman to his knees Captain Sam threw over the tiller. The *Olivette* straightened in the wind, hung for a moment and then the big main boom swung over with a crash. There was a creak of pulleys and a bang forward as the foresail followed.

“Haul in on your jib!” roared the captain, as he took a new turn of the mainsheets. Amid the snapping of sails and the wild flapping of the loose jib there was the sound of heavy feet on the cabin roof.

“All fast for’ard, sir!”

It was Lewis. Every word went through Becky with a thrill. For the moment she even forgot her guests.

“Isn’t it great?” she exclaimed to Schuyler, as the two scrambled to their feet.

“Great?” replied the boy. “You bet your life!”

The black line of palmettos masking the shore had disappeared. Here and there a yellow point of light showed, but all about the schooner stretched a seeming sea of water. The track of the moon lay on it, but, even outside this silver road, the freshening breeze was beginning to break the soft swells into little whitecaps that

dissolved in phosphorescent glows. Overhead each star seemed turned into a pot of gold.

"How d'you like it, mother?" continued Schuyler. "Poor, eh?"

"It is certainly delightful," Mrs. Hatton answered, and then, more guardedly, "There isn't any danger, is there, Captain?"

"Danger?" echoed Captain Sam. "'Bout as much as ridin' on Carlson's truck. Here, Miss Becky," he went on, turning to Becky, "take the tiller while I'm afther fillin' me pipe. Kape her on the p'int beyant."

As eagerly as she would have reached for pearls or gold, Becky grasped the tiller. Even in the night, one could almost see her flush of pride. Lucile, seated on the edge of the cabin deck, made a careful survey of the girl. Finally she whispered to her brother, who had sprung to a seat beside her:

"How old is she?"

"Well," responded Schuyler, "I don't know; but I'll bet she ain't a day older'n *you* are."

No one saw the slight sneer in Lucile's face, but her brother knew how she felt when she said:

"She acts like a boy."

"Oh, I don't know," Schuyler answered. "I guess she'll pass for a girl with most people."

"Oh, I forgot!" exclaimed Becky suddenly. "Captain, I've got to see Mrs. O'Connor."

The captain took the tiller and Becky headed for the companionway. The boy straightened up as if to follow her. Lucile caught him by the arm and held him back.

"Just wait. You've been tagging after her all evening. You've not been invited."

Properly rebuked, Schuyler pounded the side of the cabin with his heels for a moment, and then jumped down to talk with Captain O'Connor.

"Captain," he began, "how far could you sail in this boat?"

"Well, lad," responded the skipper, "with a new set o' sails an' a good caulkin' an' scrapin', allowin' ye weren't in a sweat for speed, I calc'late the *Olivette* could round the Horn in time."

"Phew!" whistled the boy. "But you don't ever go to sea, do you?"

"'Bout twice a summer we make the Bahamas."

"How long have you been a sailor?"

"Well, man an' boy," answered the captain, after a long draw on his pipe, "it'll be fifty-two year come next St. Patrick's day since I signed out o' Queenstown for the Spice Islands—galley boy."

"Did you ever see any pirates?" broke in Lucile.

“Miss,” replied the captain, removing his pipe as if in respect to the other sex, “it’ll be soundin’ strange for me to say it, but, east or west—an’ I’ve sailed in all trades—I’ve seen no pirates as the books has ’em pictered—with high boots an’ turbans, big mustaches an’ gold rings into their ears.”

“You haven’t?” exclaimed Schuyler, as if part of his interest had suddenly cooled.

“Not pirates as I reckon you-all mean. But,” and the captain chuckled, “when it comes to plain, ordinary thieves on the water, I’ve seen a-plenty. I’ll not be termin’ a thief by no such great name as a pirate because he sneaks on you in a boat.”

“Then there aren’t any pirates on the Indian River,” commented Lucile.

“No pirates at all, miss. But you’ll find plenty o’ thieves, both land and water.”

“On this river?” broke in Schuyler, as if a new hope had risen.

“Smugglers!” answered Captain Sam.

“What are smugglers?” demanded Lucile.

“Hereabouts,” replied the captain, “smugglers are all sorts. Sometimes they call themselves fishermen. Sometimes they set up to be in the Bahama trade. But, more like, their ol’ tubs are full o’ cigars an’ rum an’ hats or even sugar an’ coffee from the West Injies. When the gov’ment

agents ain't lookin' they come a-sneakin' in one o' the ocean cuts an' then anchor for 'repairs.' But what they're there for is to git ashore what they ain't goin' to pay no duty on."

"They're almost like pirates, aren't they?" commented Schuyler, with growing satisfaction. "What do they look like? Long, low, rakish craft?"

Captain O'Connor snorted. "Lad," he answered, "you're as bad as Miss Becky. I told her 'bout the big schooner that's been lyin' in the Indian River Inlet for two months. It's a plain smuggler. But she's possessed 'at it's a pirate. An' ye can't hardly contain her, she's so anxious to git down there an' see it."

"Where's that?" exclaimed Schuyler, his interest in pirates now wholly restored.

"The Inlet? Oh, that's 'bout fifty mile down the river, off Fort Pierce."

"Fort Pierce?" exclaimed Mrs. Hatton, who had also heard the captain's talk. "Why, I've friends who go there. That can't be a bad place."

"Bad?" said the captain, instantly. "Not by no means. I'll not be slurrin' Fort Pierce. What I'm talkin' about ain't the doin's o' them livin' there. 'Tis the gran' place in the way o' trees an' gardens, not to mention the slathers o' oysters an' fish in the river near by. Oysters thirty cents

a bushel in the shell an' pompano fish ye'll not be buyin' in the swellest ristrants in New Yark. I'm speakin' o' what comes an' goes by night in the dark o' the moon. If I'd half o' the valey o' the West Injy stuff 'at slips by that place unobsarved, the *Olivette*'d 'a' been laid up this many a year."

"Then there's no danger in going there?" asked Mrs. Hatton.

"Danger?" laughed Captain Sam. "Belave me, ma'am, ye'll never see hide nor hair o' them smuggling gents if they've got the luck to set eyes on ye first."

For some time the faint odor of fragrant coffee had been stealing deckward and just now Becky's voice sounded.

"Will you all come down? Mrs. O'Connor's coffee is ready. And, Captain, please call Lewis too, if you can spare him."

There was almost a scramble to get into the cabin. Cups and saucers for all were in place. There was also a clear glass pitcher of yellow cream. But the coffee had not yet appeared. In its place stood a white bowl of oranges prepared in West India style, Becky's work (learned from Mrs. O'Connor) and the thing she had almost "forgotten."

Two dozen golden globes of juice lay in a fra-

grant mass. From half a dozen protruded forks, ready handles inviting to a luscious feast. Each orange had been peeled so that not a vestige of white fiber remained—the style in which a West Indian partakes of three or four without soiling a finger.

“It’s only three swallows of nothing but juice,” explained Becky with a smile as she placed a fork in Mrs. Hatton’s hand, “and then you’re ready for another.” As she handed a fork to Lucile, she added: “And these oranges didn’t get ripe on their way north. They are ripened in the sun and they were picked to-day.”

“It’s worth a trip to Florida to get this,” exclaimed Mrs. Hatton as her first mouthful melted away. “Did you ever taste an orange like this, Lucile?”

“It’s all juice and—talk about sugar!” answered the girl without reserve.

“It’s the real Indian River orange,” explained Becky, taking advantage of the prevailing enthusiasm. “What d’you suppose oranges like that cost down here? I can get a big coffee bag full of them for a dollar!”

“These?”

“Mrs. O’Connor loves them,” answered Becky. “She has ’em all the time. But,” and she drew

down her mouth, "we don't seem to have 'em at the Coquina."

At this moment Mrs. O'Connor appeared with the long-awaited coffee.

"And cream!" exclaimed Mrs. Hatton. Lucile even ran to the table, took up the pitcher and examined its contents as if she could not believe her eyes.

"You always have real cream, don't you, Mrs. O'Connor?" asked Becky innocently.

The coffee maker, busy filling cups, looked up in some astonishment. Then her eyes caught Becky's and she answered:

"Yis, miss, we try to have it all the time. Most generally we can git it—when we want it."

"Mrs. Marshall says she——"

"Lewis!" exclaimed Becky as that young man began to speak. "Here, have another orange. You're a good boy to help us to-night," she went on in a loud voice as she pushed an orange into the reporter's hand. "Eat this!" Then in a whisper, "Shut your mouth about Mrs. Marshall!"

What Lewis meant to say about Mrs. Marshall, the cream seller, was not finished. Probably no one would have given him attention anyway, for the coffee was now being served. Even Ruth was allowed a few spoonfuls and Becky (who seldom

drank the beverage) took a full cup rather than make a break in the general endorsement.

Under the influence of the oranges and coffee, to say nothing of the sugar cakes Mrs. O'Connor had hurriedly prepared, the little party became hilarious. Schuyler began to sing and even Lucile admitted she wished there were a piano aboard.

In the midst of the gayety Captain Sam, having had his coffee while Lewis and Schuyler relieved him at the tiller, headed the schooner shoreward.

"I'm awfully sorry," exclaimed Mrs. Hatton, "for it has been most enjoyable. I don't know how we can return your kindness. May I call in the morning, Mrs. O'Connor?"

"'Twill be a great honor, ma'am."

"Say, mother!" shouted Schuyler, springing down the steps at this moment, followed more sedately by Becky. "What d'you think? Miss Becky says I ain't goin' to sleep in the boardin'-house to-night. Look!"

Becky slipped to the stateroom curtain and drew it back. In the curtained apartment stood one of the cots, made up as fresh and white as any bed in Mrs. Hatton's home.

"There's no reason why he should," explained Becky. "There's oceans of room here. And for breakfast, Mrs. O'Connor'll give him more oranges and coffee and real cream."

CHAPTER XIII

THE STRATAGEM OF THE LOST LETTERS

The reasonableness of Becky's suggestion overwhelmed Mrs. Hatton's protests and Schuyler was at last assigned to the hastily prepared apartment. The joy of the boy was almost boundless.

"Lewis will bring your bag down," suggested Becky, "and you won't have to come back alone in the dark."

Schuyler's look of indignation was lost on Becky, who was already assisting Mrs. O'Connor with the dishes, while the others were getting on coats and arousing Ruth.

"Well, dearie," whispered Mrs. O'Connor on one of her trips to the galley with Becky, "ye haven't said as much, but I'm thinkin' these folks'll be goin' on your cruise."

Becky's courage almost left her. With a stifled sob she rested her whirling little head for a moment on Mrs. O'Connor's breast. Then she straightened herself with new determination and brushed away her tears.

"No, Mrs. Nora," she answered at last.

“They’re not going. Miss Lucile don’t like us. They’re goin’ away in the mornin’.”

“Goin’ away, child!” exclaimed Mrs. O’Connor so loudly that Becky had to press a hand on her mouth. “Thin why’ll ye be afther makin’ such a fuss over ’em?”

“I couldn’t help it. I just couldn’t help showin’ them what they’re going to miss. I’ll pay you for all your trouble and for Mr. Schuyler’s sleeping here to-night. Give him the best breakfast you can.”

“Ye’ll pay me?” snorted Mrs. O’Connor, in spite of Becky’s renewed warning signs. “It’ll be naught but one o’ your own swate kisses that’ll settle that account. And, dearie, mind; don’t give up; good luck often comes by the back door.”

“It was a close shave, anyway,” whispered Becky, another tear starting despite the girl’s brave attempt at a smile. “I’m going to start in again to-morrow. I’ll send a new advertisement to St. Augustine by Mrs. Hatton herself.”

“You’re a plucky girl, Becky,” Mrs. O’Connor hastened to say as she gave her young friend a quick hug. “Now run along home. Get a good night’s slape an’ I’ll ’tend to the lad.”

There was less gayety on the little tram car as Schuyler and Lewis hurried it shoreward. Lucile

was not talkative. At the shore, all fell into file and hurried toward the hotel.

“Lewis,” exclaimed Becky, pausing a moment, “it was fine of you to get all those things. Good night,” she added and then hurried toward the hotel. There were more expressions of gratitude, formal “good nights” and then the Hattons disappeared. Mrs. Fairfield and Becky followed in a few minutes. They heard Schuyler hurry down the hall on his return to the *Olivette*. It was too much for the overwrought girl. Becky burst into tears and threw herself on the bed, shaking with sobs.

Mrs. Fairfield knew what it meant and, for a time, she made no attempt to soothe the child. Finally, when the sobs grew less, she said:

“Don’t worry, Becky. We all make mistakes.”

“Mistake?” repeated the girl. “It isn’t *my* mistake. *They* made the mistake. And I don’t care, now.” She sprang up and sat on the edge of the bed. “It’s all that Lucile. She——”

A knock on the door interrupted Becky. While she sat with her face in her hands and the tears moistening her fingers her aunt hastened to the door.

“I hope you’ll excuse this late visit,” Mrs. Hatton began, as she entered the room, “but I thought I ought not wait till morning. I’m so excited over

the *Olivette* and Miss Becky that I want to ask her to take us on her cruise." Becky began to tremble. "I may have been a little rude this evening, Miss Becky," continued Mrs. Hatton, "but I was tired and everything seemed wrong. You put everything right so easily that we don't want to leave you. Will you take us with you?"

"If you're sure——" began Becky.

"I'll be greatly disappointed if you don't," answered Mrs. Hatton.

"And Miss Lucile?" asked Becky doubtfully.

"She's quite willing to go."

"And you really want to?"

"We *must* go!"

"But we haven't talked about how much I'll have to charge you," put in Becky with some alarm.

"Don't bother about that," rejoined Mrs. Hatton. "Only be sure you charge enough. I'm only worrying about when we can start."

"To-morrow?" ventured Becky with suddenly returning excitement.

"The day after, I suggest," put in Mrs. Fairfield.

"The day after, then, or when you are ready," said Mrs. Hatton.

"I hope Lucile will like it as well as I know I'm goin' to, and—and I thank you," answered Becky.

“I thank *you*, and very much,” protested Mrs. Hatton as she said good night.

The full range of Becky’s thoughts before she went to sleep would require pages to set forth. But now that she had triumphed, one thing arose to newly disturb her. Five days before, she had written to her father on the matter of her big project. As yet, she had received no reply. What if a letter came the next day putting an end to her plans?

Becky was awake early and she ran at once to have a look at the river to make sure her precious schooner was still safe at her moorings. The girl knew it was to be a busy day and she began it by laying out fresh clothes. When Mrs. Fairfield awoke, Becky, her thin face alive with eagerness and her temples colored with joy, was on her knees in her bathrobe sorting wearing apparel.

“I’m only going to take my suit case,” she cried with animation.

“Your suit case?” repeated Mrs. Fairfield. “I thought you were planning to be gone two or three weeks?”

“Weeks?” exclaimed the girl, whirling her slender hands about in the lightness of her heart. “Months, if they’ll stay!”

“Well, you can’t live in a suit case a month.”

“You don’t understand,” protested Becky.

We're going to wash our things. That's the way they do at sea—Mrs. O'Connor told me—and hang 'em on the ropes—I mean the sheets and booms."

"Oh, she did!" remarked Mrs. Fairfield, preparing to rise. "Well, on this ship you'll carry your trunk and some decent clothes. And when you come to a good stopping place you'll go ashore and employ a laundress."

"*All* my things?" Becky asked. It'll crowd things on the boat."

"Boats are always crowded," was her aunt's only comment.

At that particular moment it came to Becky that Mrs. O'Connor was in ignorance of the important news. She sprang to her feet and began to dress feverishly.

"Is there a fire somewhere?" asked her aunt with a smile.

"Fire! Where?" exclaimed the busy Becky, stumbling toward the window and tripping over a half-drawn-on stocking. "'Tisn't the schooner, aunty!"

Reassured, Becky, with a relieved laugh, hopped over to her aunt and gave her a morning kiss. "I'm just in a big hurry," she explained, "because I've got to go and tell Mrs. O'Connor and Mr. Schuyler. He'll be glad to know," she added.

"Becky," exclaimed her aunt soberly, "I don't

like to speak of this, but you know you haven't heard from your father yet."

"Oh, aunty! Wouldn't it be awful?"

Mrs. Fairfield had almost reached the point where she hoped the letter would not come. Becky, as if to escape every thought of the horrible contingency, ran from the room. As she reached the front gallery she heard the hotel proprietor calling her. His face wore a broad grin.

"I missed you last night," he explained to her across the office. "I've got something for you and your aunt. I guess you must 'a' been excited. Ain't these yours?"

He held out two dusty letters, both addressed to Mr. Beckwith in Chicago. In her excitement Becky did not notice this.

"When did they come?" she asked, her cold fingers gripping the two envelopes.

"Come?" repeated the proprietor. "Why, they ain't never come; they ain't never went!"

"Never been mailed?" Becky exclaimed.

"I found 'em last night," laughed the man, "stuffed into that box hangin' to catch nickels for the Turkey Crick Colored M. E. Sunday School. I reckon that's one on you, Miss Becky."

The girl stared at him.

"Didn't they never go at all?"

"If you mean to Chicago, you got the proof

they didn't," and the proprietor cackled over his joke. Still trembling and without a thought, Becky walked out on the gallery. For several minutes she sat shifting the unmailed but stamped letters and alternately looking out over the river. At last, her face very white, she arose and hurried into the office.

"I guess that's a pretty good joke on me," she said to the proprietor. "I wouldn't want Mrs. Fairfield to know about it."

"She'd give you the laugh, eh?"

Becky hesitated. "Anyway, I wouldn't like her to know about it."

"I understand," replied the man. Then he winked knowingly. "Leave it to me."

"You won't speak of it? Not to anyone?"

The proprietor pursed his lips and shook his head.

"You go to the post office every morning, don't you?"

"If you want to mail 'em, just put 'em on the counter. I'll take 'em over."

"No," answered Becky, hesitating again, "some one might see them. Won't you put them in your pocket and drop them in the office yourself?"

"Maybe that's better."

As the man held out his hand, Becky's face

turned from white to red; she gripped the two letters and then, almost desperately, thrust them into the proprietor's hand and ran from the room.

"She's certainly a touchy young lady," mused the man. "But, like as not, she's got her reasons."

Although she knew she had done wrong, Becky had weighed all the advantages to be derived from her decision. She had seen health returning and the financial gain that meant so much. She had put these against the possibility of her parents' thoughtless refusal, had counted all the costs, and then plunged openly into her duplicity. Before an answer could now come she would be beyond the reach of the mails.

She stayed on the *Olivette* for breakfast and to discuss a world of details with the O'Connors. They would sail not later than the next morning. As the guests of the *Coquina* heard the news, everyone seemed to join in the activity. By noon the many things proffered Becky—tins of biscuits, boxes of chocolate, fruit, sofa pillows, hammocks, fishing material, even tennis shoes and outing hats, made a section of the gallery look like a fancy goods store. And, in a corner of Mr. Carlson's store, Mrs. Hatton's purchases seemed limited only by the proprietor's stock.

The only shadow on the pleasure of these preparations came when Captain Sam sought out Becky.

“I’m sorry, indade, Miss Becky, to be tellin’ ye our nigger ain’t to be found.”

He had found the girl in the little book store, where she had been making a most extravagant purchase of low-priced fiction and magazines. As she showed her consternation, he hastened to add:

“But he’s down Saint Sebastian way, I reckon. We’ll prob’ly make that by to-morrow night. So I’ve sent him a message an’ we’ll pick him up there. I’ll run the schooner myself till we get there—you an’ me.”

CHAPTER XIV

LEWIS DOES SOME FIGURING

Shortly before noon Lewis Ahlswede went to the hotel to see Becky. He knew nothing of the turn affairs had taken. In addition to his ordinary duties his working hours had been marked with an important event. But the result of this was not yet apparent. He reached the hotel with his advertising form book, ready to coöperate in the writing of a new advertisement. Everything had turned out so beautifully that Becky had not thought to send word of her good luck to the boy. But, when she saw him coming up the path, she hurried to meet him.

“I reckon I got in bad this mornin’,” Lewis began. “I guess I oughtn’t have done it, but I tol’ Mr. Owens he hadn’t give you a square deal when he swelled that bill.”

“Oh, Lewis,” protested Becky. “I told you not to do that. It wasn’t your fault.”

“Well, I got it out o’ my system anyway,” said the boy with a half smile.

“What did he say?” returned Becky anxiously.

“Not much, 'cept he was sore an' said I'd never be a newspaper man.”

“Well, you just will!” asserted Becky. “And I'll bet you have a bigger paper than he has.”

But the boy was shaking his head. “I'm a bum reporter,” he said at last. “You'd ought to seen me tryin' to interview Mrs. Hatton an' that kid last night. But how about the ad?”

“They're going,” exclaimed Becky. “Didn't you hear?”

“Goin'?” shouted the boy and then checked himself as the girl raised a warning finger. “Well, say, ain't that great? The whole outfit?”

Becky related what had taken place. The boy's face was all smiles. Then, ignoring Becky's many details, he grew sober.

“She told you to fix your own price? Well, what are you goin' to charge 'em?”

“About fifteen dollars a week each, I thought,” ventured Becky.

“Like smoke!” ejaculated Lewis. “Why, the folks here pay that an' more, some o' 'em. Say, Ol' Cap Wilde used to run a steam launch out o' Rockledge that just had room on her for four to barely eat an' sleep. Ever' season he had New York swells down here fishin' an' duck shootin' for weeks at a time.”

“What did he charge?” asked Becky, eagerly.

“Nothin’ but just five dollars a day, that’s all—five dollars a head, too,” he added conclusively.

“That would be six hundred dollars a month,” laughed Becky. “I couldn’t think of that. Imagine all of them crowded up together and such common things around.”

“Ain’t that what they’re lookin’ for?” argued the boy.

Becky stared at him for a moment and then began checking on her fingers.

“One hundred dollars a month for the boat,” she repeated half aloud. “We think our groceries and things’ll cost twenty-five dollars a week; that’s two hundred dollars. And what we’ve bought comes to sixty-six dollars, though I won’t count but about half that, say thirty-three, and that’s two hundred and thirty-three dollars. Then I’ve got to count in my own board an’ lodging _____”

“Count in nothin’!” protested Lewis. “You’re the boss an’ captain. You got to make a profit. You ain’t got no right to charge less ’an one hundred per cent on your investment. If you ain’t foolish you’ll make it twice two hundred and thirty-three dollars, an’ that’ll be dirt cheap. Don’t forget that! I’ve read books on ‘Merchandisin’ an’ Profit.’ That’s a low profit, considerin’ the risk you’re takin’.”

"I couldn't think of it," and Becky's eyes opened wide.

"You'd better think of it," went on the aroused reporter, stoutly. Then he pursed his lips as if making a struggle with himself. "O' course," he continued, "considerin' it's a kind o' family party an' partly for your own pleasure, you might take a little off, but if you an' Captain O'Connor an' Nora haul them folks all up an' down the Indian River for a cent less'n one hundred and twenty-five dollars a week, you all ought to go hungry for your meals."

An hour later, Mrs. Hatton and Becky being on perhaps the twentieth trip to Carlson's store, the former said:

"I can see you have been to considerable expense, Miss Becky, in all these preparations. Would you like to have some money in advance?"

"Oh, thank you, no!" exclaimed Becky. "Everything is arranged." She hesitated and then swallowed hard. "I want to tell you what I'll have to charge you, Mrs. Hatton; that is, I mean, what I'll have to ask you to pay me; I didn't mean to ask so much; it's a lot."

"I told you to fix your own rate," smiled Mrs. Hatton.

"I've figured it out, and I think I'll have to

ask you to pay me a hundred and twenty-five dollars a week.”

Becky gripped her fingers. She felt as if she had wrecked her entire enterprise. She was even shocked when she heard no explosive protest.

“Let me see,” was all Mrs. Hatton returned, in an undisturbed, pleasant tone. “That is about eighteen dollars a day—less than five dollars for each of us. We are paying ten dollars a day to sit on the veranda at the Ponce. If you think that is enough, it is wholly satisfactory to me.”

In the store Becky was so agitated that the storekeeper noticed it. When Mrs. Hatton had gone Becky could no longer restrain herself. She told Mr. Carlson about her talk with Lewis, about what she had planned to charge and her final contract with Mrs. Hatton. The storekeeper slapped his knee.

“You couldn’t ’a’ told me nothin’ I’m gladder to hear ’an that,” he declared. “I always been predictin’ that boy’s got sense an’ this proves it. That boy’s a-goin’ to make his mark an’ don’t you forget it.”

“I *know* he is,” put in Becky soberly, “and I’m goin’ to help him if I can.”

“In that case,” returned Mr. Carlson, “I’ll tell you one way you can help him.”

“How?” asked Becky, eagerly.

“Well, you was goin’ to make these folks a rate of sixty dollars a week, an’ because o’ Lewis you’re goin’ to get a hundred an’ twenty-five.”

“Yes.”

“He made you just sixty-five dollars a week, which is a lot in this part o’ the world.”

“Oh, I see!” exclaimed Becky, her temples flaming. “I ought to give him a present! Is that what you mean?”

Mr. Carlson nodded his head. “If your cruise lasts a month, he’s made over two hundred and fifty dollars for you clean as a whistle. He don’t make that much for himself in six months.”

Becky grew more embarrassed. “What do you suppose he’d like?”

“’Tain’t a question o’ what he likes,” smiled the man. “I reckon he’d *like* some new fangled cyclopedy about ‘Lives o’ Great Journalists.’ What he’d ought to have is a good suit o’ clothes.”

“And a pair of new shoes,” added Becky, exuberantly, “and a new hat and—and everything to make him look right.”

“Now you’re talkin’,” broke in Mr. Carlson. “An’ if you say so, I’ll see that he gets all of ’em. Is that a go?”

“Of course,” urged the delighted girl. “Even if it costs a hundred dollars. Only,” and her smile fled, “I haven’t a hundred dollars, not now.”

“It won’t be that much,” explained the other. “Not over twenty-five. You can pay me when you come back. You’re gettin’ in purty deep, but that’s my lookout. My motto in business is, ‘Take a chance when you know you ain’t takin’ none.’”

“You’re just the grandest man!” exclaimed the girl. “And you’ve been so good to me——”

“Well, why wouldn’t I? You’re a big customer; I got to treat my customers right. An’ I can tend to Lewis better’n you could.”

That evening the restless girl utilized the last hours before sailing in showing her passengers maps covering the course of the proposed outing. These she had borrowed from Mr. Carlson. They were coast charts, each one covering a section of the long river.

“Who’s goin’ to be navigatin’ officer?” asked Schuyler at one time.

“Captain O’Connor, of course,” replied Becky.

“Will he keep the log?” went on the boy, ready to show off his nautical knowledge.

“What’s that?” asked the girl.

“That’s the record of what takes place aboard each day, like when you see whales and icebergs, how many miles you travel and all about the winds and whether they’re ‘nor’nor’west’ or ‘east by nor’east,’ and things like that.”

“You be it,” ordered Becky.

“Be what?”

“The log.”

“I’ll be the ‘log’ all right,” laughed the boy, “but you can bet I won’t be a ‘stick’ on the *Olivette*.”

Becky had become so used to Lewis’ help that she rather counted on him to assist in transporting the baggage. When he did not appear the next morning, she recalled that the boy was employed and no doubt busy. Schuyler, the Coquina porter and the obliging Mr. Carlson finally got everything out to the *Olivette* by nine o’clock. Becky thought of going to the *Times* office to see Lewis and tell him good-bye, but suddenly, everything appearing to be ready to start, she compromised by leaving a message with Mr. Carlson for the boy.

The little tram car had made its last trip with crates and parcels. These had been stacked on the fore and aft decks, to be stowed away later. Mrs. Hatton and her daughters were aboard and sitting anxiously on camp stools astern, their arms laden with wraps, coats and parasols. Schuyler, coatless and in new tennis shoes, was hurrying from pier to boat and pattering back and forth on the cabin roof as if every important duty was his.

There was no carelessness about Becky’s costume that day. Over a week in the sun had given

her narrow face a healthy tan. The serge suit she wore had been freshly pressed. The wide, open collar had been discarded and a black tie, knotted in sailor style, held the blue waist snugly about her slender neck. She wore new, wide tan shoes purchased from Mr. Carlson. On her head Becky wore a natty, blue yachting cap, flat and bordered with a silk band. Nearly a dozen guests from the hotel were grouped on the pier, including Mrs. Fairfield. Two of them were adjusting cameras.

“You and the captain stand together,” asked one of the photographers, addressing Becky. “And raise your cap a little.” The wearing of the cap itself had been some strain on Becky’s modesty, but posing in it brought on positive confusion. Just then she saw a smile on Lucile’s face and, forgetting her modesty, she not only posed in several attitudes, but at last sprang aboard and took a position at the tiller.

“That’s the stuff,” cried Schuyler.

“Aunty,” called Becky to Mrs. Fairfield, “get a picture and mail it to father.”

Captain O’Connor was forward, having cast off the schooner’s lines and thrown the gangplank on the dock. He was hauling away on the foresail halyards and the schooner was already drifting away. As the foresail peak straightened aloft,

the old skipper made fast the halyards and caught the sheets. The first heave on the boom gave life to the schooner. Then, as the sail came in, the apparently unwieldy boat keeled over and gave a lunge forward.

“Port your helm,” grunted the captain to Becky.

The girl guessed right. As she threw her lithe, blue-clad form against the tiller the *Olivette* lunged again, the ripple of the cutwater sounded against the bow, and Captain Becky's cruise had begun.

CHAPTER XV

A SAIL AT LAST

The morning was mild and sunny, with a southwest breeze. Out on the wide river Captain O'Connor laid the course of the *Olivette* until the government channel was reached, the dredge-deepened channel whose course could only be followed by beacons planted every few miles. In this narrow path the old schooner drifted forward, now and then stealing beyond the canal banks, where the water permitted, on a longer and faster tack. As if on a lake, the distant shores of the river rose vaguely in a wall of green.

While all but Captain O'Connor were busy below, the schooner passed several villages. Schuyler joined the skipper just as Captain O'Connor pointed out a wooded point with a white landing reaching into an adjoining bay.

"That's the first stop," the skipper explained to the boy. "When I come alongside the landin', go for'ard to cast off the foresail halyard, d'y' understand? We're goin' to fill our water barrel at Malabar."

"I'm expecting to help, right along," announced Schuyler, enthusiastically.

"An' I'm expectin' it, till we run across Jim," replied Captain O'Connor.

By the time Schuyler had assisted Captain O'Connor in making fast at the Malabar dock, Lucile and Becky had made a whirlwind rush to the deck. With a long garden hose Captain O'Connor prepared to fill the washroom and kitchen water barrels. Led by Becky, Lucile and Schuyler hurried ashore.

Becky's real commission was to make inquiries concerning Jupiter Jim. It required only a few moments to ascertain that the colored boatman had not been seen for several weeks. Then the youngsters, soon joined by Mrs. Hatton and Ruth, fell to buying and mailing postcards.

Mrs. Hatton seemed to revel in slowly examining the town's only shop. From picking over ancient picture postals, she tried to interest the younger persons in many of the other articles for sale—sunbonnets, straw hats, additional provisions in jars and tins, and confections no longer fresh. She finally bought some cocoanuts, a new supply of oranges and a box of cigars for Captain O'Connor.

Becky mailed three postal cards; one to her mother, another to her aunt and a third to Lewis

Ahlswede. For the latter she selected a picture of tall and green trees labeled "Palms on the Indian River," and wrote on it:

"DEAR LEWIS:

"Sorry I didn't get to tell you good-bye. Took water and went ashore at this place. Expect to visit the Lodge you told us about this afternoon. Will be in St. Sebastian to-morrow. Am going to call on your mother. Left a message for you with Mr. Carlson. Your friend,

"MARJORIE BECKWITH."

Meanwhile Captain O'Connor visited the village and confirmed Becky's news about Jupiter Jim.

"It'll be all right long as we've no wind," he explained to the girl in an aside. "If we do, we'll have to tie up and wait. The *Olivette* ain't no one-man boat."

"How about me?" demanded Becky. "And Mr. Hatton?"

"Meanin' no offense," replied the skipper, "I'd rather have Jupiter Jim."

"Couldn't we get along in a pinch?" asked the girl. "That is, unless it gets stormy. And it don't look as if it was ever stormy here."

"Looks are deceivin', sometimes," grunted

Captain Sam. "It's mighty seldom we can't scare up a norther for a few hours. As for gettin' along in a 'pinch,' we can always get along with a fair wind. If it happens to come head on down there in the Narrows the only way to get ahead is by tackin'—and purty sharp work at that. If Jim don't show up at Sebastian we'll tie up till we get some one."

"What do you mean by a 'norther'?" asked Becky.

"A norther don't need to be no storm," explained the captain. "It's when the warm wind goes 'round to the north and brings a touch o' Chicago blizzard. Then you feel like puttin' on a coat an' gettin' indoors. That's all, exceptin' when it's a little strong, there's sometimes a run o' sea an' the whitecaps are apt to come a-splashin' aboard. An'," he added in a lower voice, "the wind's been movin' round that way all mornin'. We may get a touch o' weather to-night."

"Do you think we'd better wait here?" asked Becky.

"Wait?" returned the Captain. "O' course not. Don't you be afraid o' nothin'. If you've planned to go ashore at Oak Lodge we'll make sail right away. If it turns cool, all you got to do is shut the windows an', if it comes to the worst,

light your oil stoves. You'll be as snug in there as a bug in a rug."

"You're sure there isn't any danger?"

The skipper smiled and pointed to the schooner, now bumping softly against the pier. "You folks pile in there an' get your dinner while I get under sail. If the breeze freshens I'll put ye into St. Sebastian to-night."

The low-lying schooner began to push herself through the water while Captain Becky and her guests sat down to Mrs. O'Connor's dinner. The moment Mrs. O'Connor appeared with a big plate heaped with oysters baked on the shell, the look on the face of each diner was quick assurance that this first meal was to be a success.

Becky served the oysters, the contents of each big shell browned and steaming with fragrance. Mrs. Hatton insisted at once that she must have the recipe. Like the cook she was, Mrs. O'Connor insisted that she used anything that came handy for seasoning, and her other directions were fully as vague.

Following the oysters came salt-water red snapper—evidently Mrs. O'Connor's pride, for she carved it herself. The proud cook laid the fish on the table in the pan in which it had been baked, the savory brown fish, surrounded with the tomatoes, herbs and sauce of its Creole dressing.

With this came mashed potatoes and new green beans boiled with bacon. The reception of this course was not less enthusiastic. Then came a lettuce salad, after which Becky assisted Mrs. O'Connor in arranging the table for the sweets and coffee.

While this was being done all the Hattons went on deck to get a sight of the new river picture. Captain O'Connor, his pipe supplanted by one of Mrs. Hatton's cigars, pointed out new views, and, far ahead, a patch of green in the center of the river.

"Grant's Farm," he explained. "We'll reach it about three o'clock."

"A farm in the middle of the river?" exclaimed Schuyler.

"They call it a farm because it ain't one and never could be," explained the skipper. "It's nothin' but a marsh. That's where we'll anchor while you-all go ashore an' do your visitin'."

"Isn't it getting cooler?" asked Mrs. Hatton.

"It is, ma'am; the breeze is bearin' a little to the north'ard."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Lucile. "It's been so sunny and summery."

"Well, miss," went on the skipper, "we got considerable climate down here, an', in the main, it's gilt-edged 'long about this time o' year. But

we can't guarantee sunshine al'ays; we on'y guarantee ye won't have no fros' bite. An' if we got any bad weather ahead we ought to be glad to have it now an' get it off the program."

"Coffee's ready," called Becky, and there was a new stampede. Becky's contribution to the last course was pineapple à la Melbourne. This was the sensation of the meal.

When her guests reached the table, at each plate sat a dish that saturated the cabin with a pungent, sugary odor. Three large pineapples had been quartered, leaving the rind and a section of the waxen leaves attached to each part. Then a sharp knife had separated the golden, juicy fruit from the rind, the spicy meat being replaced on the rind. Following this the knife had been drawn through the fruit lengthwise, making two long pieces. The knife had then been drawn across the strips, separating all into little cakes of syrupy sweetness. This done, all the pieces were arranged in their original positions.

"That's something new, mother," exclaimed Schuyler. "You take it like a slice of watermelon."

Before Becky could stop him, the hungry boy caught up his section of fruit and lifted it to his mouth. Instantly, the carefully cut bits began to roll onto the table in a rain of fragrant cubes.

“Look!” explained Becky, as Schuyler hastily returned the pine to the table. Then, taking a fork, she lifted a bit of the fruit to her mouth. “It keeps in all the juice. Up north we could have a little plate of sugar to dip each piece in. But this,” and she closed her eyes in unctuous pleasure, “don’t need sugar.”

Then came the coffee, after which Becky, soon joined by Schuyler, hurried on deck and took the tiller, while Captain O’Connor and his wife ate their own dinner in the galley.

“It’s coolin’ up a bit,” he stated, “and we may have a little sniff o’ breeze this evenin’—mebbe rain.”

But these indications were not such that Becky and Schuyler were alarmed. Alone for almost the first time, the two young people dropped all restraint and discussed the river, the boat, the many joys awaiting them, talking as rapturously as children. And, finally, Becky, sitting cross-legged on the deck near the boy, who now held the tiller with no little pride, told the story of the great river as it had been related to her.

It was glorious, her dream at last realized, to breathe in the balmy air, watch great herons drifting across the blue sky and hear the water gurgling below. Above all, the subject that appealed to both was the romance of the smugglers

at the ocean inlet, or pirates, as Becky preferred to call them.

There they meant to stay for days, with trips ashore, explorations, picnics, fishing, making pictures, and always the good cheer of the *Olivette* to await them at night. It was an endless program of pleasure that stretched before them, a joyous idling in a semi-tropic land where picturesque and romance lurked in every corner. When Captain O'Connor reappeared he shook his head.

"We're goin' to have some sea to-night," he began; "but we can make St. Sebastian by dark if you don't stop to visit Oak Lodge. What'll it be?"

"It's safe here, isn't it?" asked Becky. "We don't want to go scooting along. I want the folks to see Mullet Creek and the Lodge and the walk to the ocean. You know what you told me—'what we don't do to-day we can do to-morrow.'"

"Make it so," laughed the captain. "Here's Grant Farm. We'll lay up in a mangrove bend in the east channel. All look alive an' I'll take you ashore in the dingy."

"Oh, I can row; I've done that often. I'll take 'em," insisted Schuyler.

Then came a protracted debate in the cabin. But, finally, with extra wraps, and the camera, at

three o'clock Schuyler assumed charge of the little rowboat, and Mrs. Hatton, her daughters, Becky and the boy pulled away from the schooner's side. It was a half mile or more, over a gentle swell, to the mouth of Mullet Creek. There were many little gasps of apprehension as now and then the low swell splashed against the side of the boat, but Becky, in the bow, reassured the passengers, affirming that the water was but a few feet deep. At last, much to Schuyler's relief, as he was perspiring and breathing hard, the dingy rounded a mangrove and marsh island and entered the creek-mouth.

"Oh, look!" exclaimed Lucile at once. "It's all birds!" As the boat pushed its way gently through a bay, duck and coot winged a sudden flight overhead. Herons were feeding in the tall grass where the water disappeared between the skeleton roots of the spreading mangroves. On the far side of the creek-mouth, moving alone in the shorter grass, its gracile neck swaying to its dainty steps, moved the royal bird of the river, the white ibis.

"And say," broke in Becky, as all were trying to catch every detail of the view, "I'll tell you a secret: When we get to Fort Pierce, Captain O'Connor knows where there's some beautiful egrets."

“Real egrets? Where?” demanded Lucile, whirling about. “Like you pay oceans of money for?”

“From some Indians—Seminoles,” almost whispered Becky. “I’m goin’ to buy a lot—if they’re cheap enough!”

CHAPTER XVI

THE FRENCH KING'S TREASURE

With even Lucile exuberant over the sight of the dark, winding creek, the grotesque mangroves, tufted palms, and flocks of clattering birds, it was a jolly party that Schuyler pulled up the little stream. Around a bend, a pier jutted out from the shore. In a grove of oaks stood a house—a plain one-story building draped with strands of Spanish moss whose gray lay on oaks and palmettos alike.

“Looks like a stage where they have old southern plays,” exclaimed Lucile, enthusiastically.

“Doesn't it?” answered her mother. “Your cruise is certainly a great success, Miss Becky. How did you discover this place?”

“It's the home of a friend of Mrs. O'Connor's,” explained the girl. “We can go in; Mrs. O'Connor gave me a note of introduction.”

From the pier a walk of crushed oyster shells led to the house. The path was bordered with conch shells, bleached a snowy white on the outside, but warm with a pink glow inside. At inter-

vals were seats made of pliant palm leaves and palmetto trunks. Becky and Schuyler hurried ahead to the house.

A knock was not necessary, for a woman who had been kindling a fire in a big smoke-colored fireplace met them at the door. With every sign of cordiality, she invited the visitors to enter.

Through a rear window could be made out a shaded walk leading back to the sea, bordered every few feet with twin sentinels of cabbage palms. Red flowers came out of the white sand to decorate the path.

"You'll let us use your path to the beach, I hope?" asked Becky, when formalities were over.

"If you'll stop for a cup of tea on your way back," answered the mistress of the lodge.

"And if I ever come to Florida again," added Mrs. Hatton, "I'd like to stay with you a few weeks."

"We'll stop on our way up the river," put in Becky. "We can rest here a few days."

"I want to stay on the boat," exclaimed Ruth, "and sleep in the tent."

Halfway through the umbrageous tunnel to the sea, Becky and Lucile came upon a venerable negro, raking and weeding the path that stood out in lime-like contrast with the green vegetation bordering it.

“How do you do?” smiled Becky.

The bent figure wobbled in acknowledgment of the greeting. Then, soberly and without a smile, the man lifted his white-topped old head and drew off a brimless straw hat.

“Yaas'm——” he began. Then his eyes caught sight of Becky's blue cap. The fingers of his right hand flew up in instant salute.

“Is this the way to the beach?” went on the girl.

“Yaas'm. Ef yo'-all's gwine to the beach, Ah'll step 'long an' p'int out de seats an' de shell places. Ah reckon yo'-all's gwine fur to fin' shells, is yo'?”

“Sure,” answered Schuyler. “Do you live here?”

“Ah's Miss Andros' gardnah an' oystahman; dat is, in de season.”

Walking slowly ahead, Lucile soon made out a strip of blue through the arched opening, and with a cry of “The ocean!” was off, with her mother and Ruth close behind.

When they arrived at the beach there was a new chorus of enthusiasm. The hard, white sand stretched north and south as far as the eye could reach. On its inner edge, almost under the overhanging hedge of squat fan palmettos, lay deep ridges of shells, strange growths of tropical seas,

corals, the deep red and black of ocean beans, sand-heavy sponges, broken cocoanuts, the cast-off covering of the prismatic sea lobster, strange shapes in pebbles and stones, and dead branches from far-away and unknown trees.

Between these enticing deposits and the alluring foam-crested eddies of the spent waves, for a time the entire party hurried back and forth. The old negro, alone, devoted himself to the shells, choice specimens of which he seemed to find with frequency and ease. In vain the old gardener and oysterman directed the visitors to a couple of rustic settees beyond the sand. Mrs. Hatton alone took advantage of these. Ruth, abandoning herself to the shell treasure bed of color and form, followed the colored man. Becky, hardly less enthusiastic than the little girl, was too energetic to do her searching in one place, but ran up and down the beach with cries of delight at each new discovery.

“It’s almost like searching for buried treasure, isn’t it?” she exclaimed to Schuyler.

“Only you find something here,” answered the boy, with a smile, “and you never find anything when you dig for buried treasure.”

The colored man grunted. “Ah reckon you done fin’ dat treasure right hyar like as not ef yo’ dig deep ’nough,” he muttered, still without a smile.

“Here?” exclaimed Becky. “What treasure?”

“Yo’ ain’t hear ’bout dat French money?” asked the old man, soberly.

“No,” answered Becky breathlessly, with a quick look at Schuyler. “The French money?”

“Yo’ ain’t knowin’ much ’bout de history ob yo’ own lan’,” replied the colored man, rather contemptuously, continuing his search meanwhile. “Ah done hear when Ah was a chile ’bout dat French money. Mah gran’mammy she knowed ’bout it ’fore dey was hist’ries wrote. It’s buried some’ere on dis beach, an’ Miss Andros she ’lows it’s in de hist’ry books. Yo’-all ain’t hear ’bout dat?”

Becky, somewhat abashed, shook her head. Lucile answered promptly:

“I never read about it, and I am through history.”

The old man shook his head as if in pity. “Ah dunno how comes it yo’-all ain’t hear ’bout dat French money. Dey’s holes in de groun’ all ’long dis coas’ whar folks has been s’archin’ fo’ dat gole. But ain’t no one knows yit whar dat money is.”

“What money?” persisted Becky, breathing fast and dropping her collection of shells.

“De French money! Yo’ shorely all know ’bout dat French money!”

Schuyler had arisen from the excavation he had been making in the sand, and now confronted the colored man.

“Do they search for buried treasure around here?” he broke in.

“Not 'roun' right hyar perzackly,” answered the old man. “All the way from Mullet Crick to de Inlet dey been diggin' fur back as Ah ricollec'. In de full ob de moon de colored folks comes like 'twas a oyster bake or a dance. Back dar in de ma'sh whar de oaks is, dey's holes like a cementery.”

“And no one ever found anything?” cried Becky. “Did you ever look?”

The old man straightened and, for the first time, smiled.

“Dey ain't gwine to fin' no money back in de swamp,” he explained, in a confidential tone. “Whar dat money is, is whar de Inlet is. Dem gov'ment men ain't gwine stroll 'roun' in de ma'sh. Dey's gwine put dat money in de handies' place dey kin fin', and dat's boun' to be right at de Inlet, 'cause o' course dat's whar dey was comin' into de river when de boat bruk up on de bar.”

“What boat?” again pleaded Becky, “and what government men? And why were they coming in through the Inlet?”

"Dey's on dey way to New Orleans," soberly answered the colored man.

"Going to New Orleans on the Indian River?" commented Schuyler, with a laugh.

The colored man looked at him with a frown. "Ah reckon any way's de bestest way when pirates is chasin' yo'," he remarked, sarcastically.

"Oh!" remarked Schuyler, and he shrank back a little.

"An' if yo' hist'ry can't tell yo' dat," the gardener continued, speaking to Becky, "dat's de foah millium dollars de gov'ment sendin' in bags to de French King in New Orleans."

"The French King in New Orleans?" cried Schuyler, recovering his courage. "There never was a French King in New Orleans."

The old man turned his back on Schuyler and faced the two girls.

"Dey was a French King down hyar in dis lan' long time ago, an' Ah reckon he done got homesick or sum'pin. Leastways, he bargain' fo' to sell out an' de gov'ment men in Wash'ton bargain' fo' to buy him out an' get all de lan'. Dat's in de hist'ry books, 'cause miss Andros done read it. An' when dey both bargain dat way de gov'ment men sont a big ship fo' to fetch de foah millium dollars in bags to de Frenchman. Das how come it."

“And pirates chased the treasure ship and it tried to escape by running through the Inlet?” asked Schuyler.

“Some folks dat thinks dey knows a lot usen to laugh an’ say ain’t no big ship could git by de bar down dar. Das’ dey own ignomince. When dem days was, dey wa’n’t no bar at de Inlet; de big ribber gwine out to sea itself right dar.”

“Why didn’t the treasure ship escape, then?” insisted Schuyler.

The old man gave the boy no heed, but continued: “How come it de ship was wrecked, ain’t nobody knows. But mah gran’mammy she ’lowed mebbe dey was a big oystah bank in de ribber—oystahs was mighty big in dem days, an’ de way Ah figger, Ah reckon dem times was most two hundred years ago.”

“Then what?” urged Lucile, her eyes glistening.

“Dat’s it! Den what?” asked the colored man. “Dey say dem gov’ment men take all de money bags an’ tote ’em ashore an’ bury ’em an’ scoot fo’ to save demselves from de pirates.”

“I know what he means,” whispered Becky, excitedly, as she drew Lucile and Schuyler closer to her. “He means the money the United States paid Napoleon for Louisiana; that was a lot, you know—millions.”

“Pshaw!” retorted the boy. “Napoleon was never in this country. That money couldn’t have been lost. I’ll bet it was all sent to France. And they wouldn’t send gold in bags—likely it was a draft.”

“Why, of course,” laughed Becky. “But what’s that got to do with what these old colored folks believe? Maybe there was *something*, though—some ship that was really chased in there by real pirates. They used to bury the money, you know—lots of times.”

“And it used to be right down here near the West Indies, too,” added Lucile, soberly and thoughtfully.

“Mr.—Mr.—” resumed Becky, her temples hot with excitement.

“Bevans, miss—Spencah Bevans—though fo’ sho’t, dey mos’ly calls me Spence Andros.”

“Mr. Bevans,” continued Becky, excitedly, “do the people ’round here believe that this money is somewhere near the Inlet?”

“Mos’ ob de cullud folks sholy does, an’ dey mos’ly figgers it was hid right whar dey lives. But dat can’t be. When *Ah* goes diggin’, *Ah* got to dig whar *Ah am*. But,” and he closed one eye significantly, while he moved his head wisely from side to side, “dat ain’t no use. Dat foah millium

dollars ain't really 'roun' dis beach; it's right dar in totin' distance ob de Inlet."

"How do you know?" gasped Becky, stepping to old Spence's side and grasping his arm, "Tell us!"

"How does Ah know? 'Cause Ah does. Has dey foun' it 'roun' hyar?"

This seemed logical, but it did not wholly satisfy the adventure-loving girl. "Mr. Bevans," she went on, persuasively, "we're going down to the Inlet and we've got a lot of time to look around. If you'll tell us where you'd look for the money, we'll look, and if we find it, we'll give you some—a lot of it—half."

The imaginative historian looked at the girl long and carefully, smoothed out a little hillock of shells with his rake, and then said, with a glance of suspicion toward Schuyler:

"Miss, dey ain't no reg'lar way fo' to seek fo' buried treasure. Some folks goes in de full ob de moon an' some w'en de lightin' storm is rumblin' an' crashin'. Some ignomint folks goes by de sign ob de gole stick an' some goes just lickety-split. But dem folks ain't got no treasure yit."

"And you?" pleaded Lucile, joining Becky at the darky's side.

"Ef folks is buryin' gole," began the man, argumentatively, "is dey gwine root up trees to get

a hole?" No one answered, and the man shook his head. "Is dey gwine to put it under a rock? Ain't no rocks, 'roun' hyar," he went on with a smile. "Is dey gwine put it in de groun' on de beach an' by de bayou whar de water gwine wash it away?"

"I wouldn't think so," answered Becky, politely.

"An' whar dey put it, is trees gwine grow outen dem gole bags?" The speaker paused, as if he had made his point. Then, proudly, he concluded:

"W'en old Spence Andros goes treasurin', he don' want no moon an' he don' want no dark. An' he ain't lookin' in de aidge ob de water nur in de roots ob de trees. He's gwine right out in de sun whar dey ain't no trees, nur bushes, nur grass, an' *dig*."

Schuyler had squatted on the loose shells again and was watching the two girls, with a growing smile. They in turn were hanging on the old man's words with rapt attention.

"Mr. Bevans," Becky appealed, her grip tightening on the colored man's sleeve, "we can't tell by that. How'll we know?"

"Well," answered the confidential Spence, stroking his chin and looking thoughtfully down the cement-like beach. "Ah nebber has no time to go treasurin' down dar whar de gole sure is; Miss Andros done keep me busy tendin' de shell walk

an' clippin' de plants. W'en Ah's got de time, Ah's gwine dar an' take mah stan' whar de ship sink. Den Ah's gwine to say to mahse'f: 'Spence Andros, how fur can a man tote a big bag ob gole?' Ah's gwine shet mah eyes an' say: 'Spence Andros, dat bag ob gole is on yo' haid.' Den Ah's gwine start, sweatin' and groanin' an' sayin', 'My! but dat bag of gole is pow-ful hebby.' An' w'en Ah can't tote de bag no furder, Ah's gwine fling it on de groun' whar dey ain't no trees, nur plants, nur grass. An' dar's whar dat gole's boun' to be."

"Fine!" shouted the boy, throwing himself on his back. "That makes it easy."

Neither girl gave him the slightest consideration. "May we look in your place?" pleaded Becky. "I'm sure we'll find something."

"Yaas'm," consented the colored man, "seein' as how Ah am too busy to go mahse'f; but don' take nobody 'long as don' belieb dar's treasure in de groun'. Dem who don' belieb is Jonahs." He gave Schuyler a defiant look that stopped the boy's laughter.

"We won't," exclaimed Becky, with decision, glaring at Schuyler, "and we'll not forget to bring you your part."

"His part of what?" asked Mrs. Hatton, who was just rejoining the group.

“His part of four million dollars, buried treasure,” responded Lucile, gleefully, her eyes sparkling.

“What? You, Lucile?” laughed her mother, astounded to witness the indifferent girl’s strange fervor.

“Yes, at the Inlet, and Captain Becky and I are going to find it.”

CHAPTER XVII

A PERIL AND A RESCUE

The repetition of the treasure story, the return over the shell walk, a cup of tea with Mrs. Andros and the making of an arrangement for a later return to the place, consumed nearly three hours. When the visitors finally returned to the pier it had grown much cooler and there was a stiff breeze coming out of the north.

“If the *Olivette* is anchored near the ‘Farm,’ ” suggested Mrs. Andros, “you may find some whitecaps out in the river. Perhaps Spencer had better go back with you.”

“I can make it,” protested Schuyler instantly. “I know how to row. There’s hardly a ripple on the creek.”

“No,” smiled Mrs. Andros, “but out on the river it may be different. There’s quite a breeze.”

“I can make it,” persisted Schuyler. “It isn’t far.”

“Are you sure, son?” asked his mother. The boy’s reply was a look of half scorn. “It really doesn’t look bad,” explained Mrs. Hatton, “I think we’ll try it.”

When the *Olivette's* dingy left the pier, the colored man got into a light skiff and also put out. With powerful strokes his little boat shot down the creek and was soon opposite the dingy.

"Hello, Mr. Bevans," yelled Schuyler, feathering his oars proudly in a way he had learned at school, "where are you going—after the French King's gold?"

"Ah's gwine whar Ah's gwine—dat's whar Ah's gwine," called back the black man, no longer trying to conceal his ill feeling for the skeptical Schuyler. Becky flushed with embarrassment.

"Oh, Spencer," she added, in her softest tones, "your boat's a beauty."

The old man did not smile, but he called back at once:

"Ah's jus' gwine down to de mouth ob de crick to get a mess ob oystahs. Yo'-all bettah take de no'th channel," he added quickly, "and drap down to de schoonah on de win'."

There were two mouths to the creek. Between these lay the marsh island of mangroves where the ducks and herons abounded. Becky and her companions had come in by the lower or southern opening. Schuyler was now headed for this channel.

"He says to go the other way," explained Becky to the boy.

“We know this way,” replied Schuyler, laying to his oars as if irritated at the ease with which the old man had passed the dingy. “It’s lots longer by the other channel. I guess the old man likes to keep his mouth working.”

Becky subsided, but Mrs. Hatton rebuked the boy.

“Don’t bother me,” laughed Schuyler. “I’m the captain of this craft. I’ll get out to the schooner all right; don’t you worry.”

As the boats neared the mouth of the river, the colored man bore in toward the mangrove island. Becky, in the bow of the dingy, kept a lookout. Suddenly, as the dingy entered the last bend, she saw, dead ahead, a scurry of white-capped swells. As far as she could see, the river was alive with dangerous waves.

“Stop! Turn around!” she cried with alarm, forgetting her nautical knowledge. “We can’t go out that way.”

“Pshaw!” exclaimed Schuyler, with a quick glance over his shoulder. “That’s nothing. We can make it like a top,” and he lay back on his oars with new vigor.

“Stop, I tell you!” shouted Becky anew. “I’m running this boat. We’re not going this way. Pull toward Mr. Bevans.”

A glare of defiance shot out of the boy’s eyes.

His mother cried out, and Lucile, dropping on her knees, caught her brother by the shoulders. The boat careened and a splash of water drenched Ruth's legs.

"If you folks'll quit yelling and jumping around, there won't be any danger. I know how to handle a boat. Sit down!" Schuyler exclaimed, as Mrs. Hatton leaned forward.

"Schuyler——" began his mother, but she was interrupted.

"You pull toward the other boat, or I will," broke in Becky, as she slipped from her place in the bow to the seat occupied by Lucile.

"All right—you do it," cried the boy, angrily. With four sweeps of the oars he headed the boat toward the island and, his mother pleading with him and Lucile in tears, the dingy was shoved out of the creek current and into the island grass and weeds just within the opening of the white-crested river.

"Child," protested Mrs. Hatton, as Becky, white-faced and trembling, sprang into Schuyler's place at the oars, "you can't do that. You can't row a boat."

"I've rowed them in the park," stoutly replied the angry Becky. "I know how it's done."

"You're not strong enough," broke in Lucile. "Schuyler!" she exclaimed, turning toward the

sulking boy. Schuyler had already repented of his anger. One sight of the slender Becky had shamed him back to his senses.

“You’re right,” he exclaimed, in a low tone. “Give me the oars! I’ll go the other way. We’ll go through the other channel and cross with the wind.”

By this time Mrs. Hatton was almost panic-stricken and Lucile was in open tears. Ruth was sobbing, her head in her mother’s lap. Becky was trying to back the dingy out of the grass and weeds by means of an oar. The wind was tossing her hair and skirts. But one thought was keeping the girl in her senses: if anything should happen now, her cruise might come to a sudden end, and with it all her plans and hopes. The girl who a few days before had shivered and moaned when she fell into a few feet of water was now battling with her timidity to reassure her patrons.

“That’s fine!” Becky exclaimed, with assumed confidence, at the sound of the boy’s words. “That’ll fix everything. I wish some one could take a snap shot of us.”

The boy joined her, took the other oar and began to push with Becky. Mrs. Hatton and her daughters sat gripping the sides of the dingy, trembling and with white lips. The sight of this

sent a chill through Becky. Would Mrs. Hatton give up the trip?

"I'm sorry," whispered Schuyler to Becky, but the girl gave him no answer.

"Isn't it fine?" she shouted, instead. "Sailing, sailing——"

"Over the bounding main," added the boy.

"This'll be something to tell about, won't it?" laughed Becky, as she pushed with all her might against the muck of the creek bottom. As the dingy moved slightly, the girl stumbled but recovered herself. Yet a new chill of fear swept over Becky that nearly paralyzed her. She wanted to bury her face in her hands and sob, but the face of Mrs. Hatton was before her. She must save the day.

"We'll get our stoves going and it'll be warm and cozy to-night," she laughed aloud, "and, m-m-m! think of the supper waiting for us!"

"Fish?" asked Ruth, forgetting her tears, "and the funny pineapple?"

"Yes, indeed," cried Becky, gayly, her throat choking as Schuyler gave the dingy a new rock, "fish—fried fish—and oyster soup and big juicy oranges. They'll all be waiting for us. There she goes!"

As the dingy found its way clear of the weeds,

Schuyler, thoroughly repentant, dropped to the oars and headed up the creek close in to the island.

“Sailing, sailing——” began Becky again, as she dropped into the seat alongside Lucile and put her arm around the alarmed girl. “I wonder if anyone in the world knows all that song? I never heard but two lines of it.” Then she stopped, recalling that they yet had the river to cross. “I’m glad our trouble is all over,” she added, with pretended cheerfulness. “I can hardly wait for that hot oyster stew.” Then she wondered what had become of the colored man, and peered ahead. There he was, vague in the gloom of a big mangrove, sitting in his motionless skiff and holding to one of the drooping branches of the tree.

By this time some of Becky’s personal fear had lessened. She was yet alarmed, however, over the thought that Mrs. Hatton might take new fright. What that might mean appalled the girl. The sight of the colored man gave her an idea. To ask him to help them through the whitecaps to the *Olivette* was certain to start a new panic among her passengers. She thought quickly, and as the dingy came abreast the silent boatman, she called:

“Hello, Mr. Bevans; we’ve changed our minds. We’re going out by the other channel.”

"Yaas'm," was the only response.

"It's too hard rowing the other way," added Schuyler, stubbornly.

The negro made no reply to this.

"Oh, Mr. Bevans," added Becky, as if an idea had just occurred to her, "have you time to come over to the schooner with us? I want to send something to Mrs. Andros."

Several sweeps of the oars and the little skiff shot alongside the dingy. The old man seemed to understand. As one of his big hands grasped the gunwale of the boat, he said:

"Come in de skiff, young man," with a look at Schuyler, "an' take de painter ob yo' boat. Ah'll gib yo' a lif' to de schoonah."

Without a word of protest, the boy shipped the dingy's oars and joined the colored man. Becky handed him the rope at the bow of the dingy and the skiff moved ahead.

For some minutes, with no sound but the creaking of old Bevans' oarlocks, the two boats moved forward in the shadows of the mangroves. Then, as a chill breeze struck the little party in the rear boat, the colored man reached the north channel of the creek and headed across. He did not make directly into the river, but struck it diagonally and pointed against the tide current, almost into the wind. The instant the dingy

rounded the north bank of the creek, two swells struck its bow; the flat-bottomed boat rose and fell back on the water with a loud smack and then the third whitecap broke over the bow. As the spray showered Lucile and Becky in the mid-ship seat, there were new screams. But not from Becky.

“Sailing, sailing——” rose Becky’s voice, as if this were the merriest moment in her life. “Don’t it feel fine?” she shouted, her throat dry and her arms trembling. “Let’s turn and get it in our faces. It’s like a tonic.”

“Don’t move!” shouted Mrs. Hatton. “We’ll be swamped.”

“Swamped?” cried Becky, in apparent derision. “Why, this is nothing. You couldn’t upset this old flatbottom. I love it.” Before Mrs. Hatton could speak again, the daring girl had turned and, setting her teeth, sprung into the forward seat, where every new breaker sent its salt foam over her face and breast. And here, her legs shaking, her hands cold with fear, Becky sat, gasping with each new break of foam, singing, joking and calling to those in the other boat, while Mrs. Hatton, Ruth and Lucile crouched silently in the stern.

When the shore had almost disappeared from sight and even Becky had, for a few moments,

grown silent, as the whitecaps seemed to grow bigger, there was a sudden cry of "All steady aft!" from the colored man's skiff, and then the dingy careened sharply. The nervous tension of all instantly snapped into a chorus of screams, but the next moment the dingy righted and settled as if it had slid into a mill pond. Old Spencer had brought the two boats before the wind and was now running with the swell. A few minutes later, without the break of another whitecap, the colored pilot swung the dingy alongside the *Olivette*, and Captain O'Connor's strong hands assisted the frightened travelers aboard.

For a moment the colored pilot and rescuer was forgotten. Becky was drenched; the others chilled and frightened. But Mrs. O'Connor's activity soon changed all. She had the lamps lit, the oil stoves heating, and the cheerfulness of the cozy apartment was a wonderful panacea. As Becky, now genuinely happy, was about to join Lucile in Mrs. Hatton's apartment to change her damp dress, she recalled the colored man. There was nothing she could think of to send Mrs. Andros but a few recent magazines. For Spencer she found one of her fast disappearing dollar bills and a handshake that seemed to please the colored man even more.

If Mrs. Hatton was discouraged over this inci-

dent, she gave no immediate signs of it. All the members of the party were dosed by Mrs. Nora, rubbed into a glow, and put into dry clothes. And the *Olivette* being safely moored, Captain O'Connor sat with the others when supper was served. The captain, impressed by the dignity of acting as host, did what he could to make conversation.

“The breeze'll shift to-night and then we'll see a bit o' dacent weather. It'll go out in a rain, like as not. In the mornin' 'tis sure the sun'll come up like gold, an' you'll need no more coats this v'yage.”

Mrs. Hatton looked at him. “I hope so,” she said, slowly.

Becky tried to say something, but her throat filled, the tears beat at her eyes, and without a word she arose and rushed on deck. Here, alone in the dark, there was one quick gush of tears, the relieving luxury of several real sobs, and then, drying her eyes and thrusting her hot little face into the cool breeze for a few moments, she sprang nimbly back into the cabin.

“It's beginning to rain,” she laughed, nervously. “I thought I heard it. It'll be a fine night to stay indoors.”

Later, when Mrs. O'Connor's coffee had woven its spell on all, and Ruth had been tucked away

in her cot, while the patter of the rain grew heavier on the roof of the cabin and the solid *Olivette* rose and fell gently on the still running swells, the wind making music in the rigging, and the storm shut safely out, Becky and her fellow adventurers made cheer within the cabin.

Captain O'Connor sat stiffly in a corner, where, finally, at Mrs. Hatton's urging, he smoked with great satisfaction one of the cigars that lady had given him. After a look without, the wind still rising and the rain falling heavier, he remarked: "We'll take no more chances on this v'yage. If we're not after findin' Jupiter Jim at Sebastian in the mornin', we'll ship another hand. Then you'll all come an' go as ye please."

At last the little party broke up. As Lucile prepared to withdraw to her cabin she hesitated. Then, following Becky into the galley, she said:

"Becky, don't you worry. I know why you left the table—but it's all right. I think it was grand, and old Spencer's story was just like something out of a book. To-morrow I'm going to write all about it to Helen Wallace. And that ride in the boat! I think it was lovely—now! Don't you worry, Becky."

By half past ten all were abed. On deck, Captain O'Connor, clad in oilskins, smoked his pipe and kept lonesome watch.

CHAPTER XVIII

JUPITER JIM'S TREASURE

When Becky awoke it was daylight. It did not seem possible that so fair a day could follow such a stormy night. The wind was in the south again, and not a ripple broke the placid river. Mrs. Hatton soon followed Becky on deck. One view seemed to blot out the pictures of the previous evening's discomfiture.

The shore trees stood as if newly washed with an enameled tint. On the near-by island, pelicans were sounding their raucous cries. The sails and deck of the *Olivette* were already steaming into dryness and the smell of cooking was in the air.

"Where next, Captain?" laughed Mrs. Hatton.

Becky pointed to the south, a throb of joy rising in her throat.

"We're going to St. Sebastian now, to find Jupiter Jim," she explained, with a smile. "Then we'll have no more trouble. You're not discouraged, are you?"

"My child," answered Mrs. Hatton, "I believe, after all, I enjoyed it. It was quite a lesson for Schuyler."

Mrs. Hatton, Ruth and Schuyler went ashore again to confer further with Mrs. Andros. Lucile and Becky were busy all morning unpacking. When Mrs. Hatton returned, bearing several cabbage palmetto hearts for salads, she found the two girls in summer garb of white with middy hats. Lucile, with her camera, was snapping everything in sight. The indifference of the young woman was fast disappearing, if it had not wholly taken flight the previous afternoon when old Spence Andros told the story of the French king's money.

"Hurry along!" she shouted to Schuyler, as he shot the dingy forward. "We're waiting to set sail for Sebastian to get some deerskins."

"And Jupiter Jim," added Becky.

A sample of the delights to come on the lazy cruise was had while all awaited luncheon. Rugs had been thrown on the cabin roof and the little deck aft. On these, in flannels, duck and tennis shoes, Mrs. Hatton wearing a wide palmetto hat given her by Mrs. Andros at the Lodge, the cruisers began to taste the joys of real idling.

"And the best of all is," Becky ventured, "that we don't have to do anything at any particular time. We'll sail when we like and stop when we like."

“But we’ve got to get to the Inlet,” broke in Lucile. “That’s where the bags of gold are.”

“I reckon so,” laughed Schuyler. “Say,” he added, “aren’t you girls going to let me in on this? Can’t I dig?”

“Not if you don’t believe,” answered Lucile, her eyes snapping. “We won’t have any Jonahs.”

“You’ll *have* to take me,” smiled the boy; “you girls can’t dig.”

“Jupiter Jim can,” exclaimed Becky; “and, besides, he may have a plan of his own.”

“To be sure, he has,” interrupted Captain O’Connor, whose idle legs were hanging over the schooner’s side. “’Tis old Spence Andros’ yarn you’ll be speakin’ of?”

“Oh, yes,” exclaimed Lucile; “do you know about it?”

The captain grunted. “None in these parts who don’t,” he answered.

“And haven’t you ever looked for it?” asked Becky, crawling quickly to the captain’s side.

“Well,” answered the grizzled skipper, “I never wint so far as to take spade an’ pick to it,” and he dropped his voice, “though Nora was often in a mind to do that same. But, at that, it’d ’a’ been money in me pocket if I had—bad luck to me.” Lucile drew herself to Becky’s side

and then the skeptical Schuyler also edged from the cabin roof to join the group.

"Tell us," coaxed the two eager girls, almost together, moving as close as they could to the captain.

"Nora'll tell it ye, with many details," smiled the skipper, "an' none o' them sparin' me. But the short of it is that Jupiter Jim got the treasure that me wife allows was by rights ours. Jim, ye'll know, sailed with the *Olivette*, off an' on, this many a year. 'Twas a summer night, five or six years ago, he helped me bring the schooner through the Inlet on a cruise from Nassau. In the bayou just inside, we dropped anchor for the night. With nothin' better to do, I told the nigger a fine tale o' where the French gold was hid, pretendin' I had it from a secret chart I'd found.

"'Twas all out o' me empty head, o' course, but I marked the place with me finger on the deck, lyin' there in the moonlight, an' told Jim just how many paces south the treasure lay from a certain oak. Ye can see the same now beyant the Shelter House standin' below the Inlet. When I turned into me bunk, Jim's eyes was yet rollin' big an' white, an' when I turned out in the mornin' Jim an' the dingy was gone."

"Oh!" murmured Becky, nervously.

“And then?” added Lucile, breathlessly.

“What’d he find?” asked Schuyler, impulsively.

“Well,” answered Captain O’Connor, meditatively and rather sorrowfully, “he didn’t find the French King’s money, and he didn’t find any buried treasure, unless you call things hid in the palmetto scrub buried. All he stumbled on was a box o’ two thousan’ Havana seegars, sealed in tin, an’ a bale o’ Panama hats worth four hundred dollars.”

“And ran away with all of it?” exclaimed Schuyler, while the two girls, their eyes bulging, scrambled to their knees.

“Tis what he done,” answered the captain.

“And got all the money for the things?” cried Becky.

The captain’s mouth puckered. “Well, he might ’a’ done it, only I caught him hidin’ down in Wild Cat Cove. The spalpeen was afraid to cross the river.”

“And then?” gasped Lucile.

“I was fair with him,” answered the captain, slowly. “I give him half.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Schuyler, while Mrs. Hatton betrayed her own interest in the tale with a laugh.

“If ye don’t mind,” added the captain, looking forward over his shoulder, “I hope none o’ ye’ll be speakin’ o’ this to Mrs. O’Connor. ’Tis her

way o' lookin' at it that Jim robbed us. But I've never had it in me heart to blame the boy."

"Weren't those smuggled goods?" asked Schuyler, abruptly. If the captain made any answer it was lost in the sound of Mrs. O'Connor's call to luncheon.

Tacking lazily in the soft breeze, the *Olivette* made its way slowly across Sebastian Bay that afternoon. Just before the little town of St. Sebastian was reached, about four o'clock, Becky served tea and cakes on deck. "They always do it in yachting stories," she explained.

"But in yachting stories," continued Lucile, "the young ladies always recline on long willow chairs with white parasols by their sides. And young men in flannels pass the cups. That's what we need—some young men," she added.

"What's the matter with me?" exclaimed Schuyler. "These are flannels!"

"You don't count," replied Lucile; "you're a brother. Still, you might pass the tea."

Schuyler, who really was entitled to pose in such a picture, having made an elaborate change of costume after luncheon, made haste to accept the banter. He had not been in the best standing since his stubborn conduct the previous afternoon, and he was eager to get back into the good graces of the girls.

“How’d you like to have me telegraph to Jimmy Russell to come down and help,” laughed Schuyler, as he took the tray from Becky’s hands. Lucile’s face grew red. “He’d swallow your treasure story, if you asked him to,” went on Schuyler.

“And so will you, before we get through. Won’t he, Captain Becky?” was Lucile’s embarrassed reply.

Becky glanced at the boy mischievously. “He’d better, or he can’t go with us,” she said, laughing. “We’ll take Jupiter Jim.”

“I vote for Jim, anyway, if we have to go in a boat,” exclaimed Lucile.

“Oh, I’m not afraid of Schuyler,” put in Becky, “but I do think he’s kind of stubborn. I don’t mean yesterday—that’s all right now,” she added, hastily. “Come on; we’re almost at the pier. We’ll all go ashore. We’ve got to get cream and post cards and—Jupiter Jim.” And, although she said nothing about it, Becky had another mission. St. Sebastian was Lewis Ahlswede’s home, and the grateful girl meant to find where the boy’s mother lived, and call on her.

Captain O’Connor had made the *Olivette* fast to the pier and was on the dock almost as soon as the others of the party. While Becky and her friends entered the general store, Captain O’Con-

nor hurried to the post office. A moment later he rejoined the others. His rueful face told the story. His letter to Jupiter Jim had not been delivered. Jim had long since gone to Palm Beach, where he was a porter in a hotel. The captain left the party to scour the town for a substitute, announcing as he did so:

“The *Olivette*’ll have to tie up here till we get a hand. ’Tain’t a one-man job navigatin’ them Narrows down below.”

“We’ll get some one,” Becky assured the others.

“And if we don’t,” remarked Mrs. Hatton, “lying out there in the bay isn’t the worst thing that can happen. It’ll give us a fine opportunity to see the town.”

Since the town might be “seen” in five minutes, this remark showed Mrs. Hatton’s present peace of mind. Inquiries having been made, Schuyler was sent toward a possible supply of cream. When he had departed and the storekeeper later referred to the owner of the cow as “Mrs. Ahlswede,” Becky exclaimed: “Oh, that’s where I wanted to go,” and, Mrs. Hatton and Lucile gazing at her in astonishment, the girl ran after Schuyler, without further word of explanation.

When Schuyler heard Becky’s feet pattering behind, and her “Wait—I’m going with you,” he

became a little embarrassed. Becky had not shown any special preference for his company, but he was not displeased to act as her escort.

"The cream woman is Lewis' mother," explained Becky, out of breath, as she joined the boy.

"Lewis?" Schuyler repeated. "Lewis who?"

"Why, Lewis Ahlswede," explained Becky. "You know, he's been awfully good to me. I told him I'd go to see his mother if we stopped here."

"Oh, I see," said Schuyler, without much interest. "The young fellow seems quite a friend of yours."

"He hasn't got much education," answered Becky, ignoring Schuyler's remark. "I'd like to help him if I could. He's nice," she added. Then she smiled: "Only he's so awkward and has such black hands."

"Why didn't you give him a job on the boat?" asked the boy, with some irony in his tone.

"He had a job already," answered Becky, simply. "He could do it, though," she went on. Schuyler gave her a quick look and said no more.

Mrs. Ahlswede lived in a cabin just beyond the settlement. Perhaps twenty acres of ground surrounded the house, part of it devoted to vegetables and the remainder to an orange grove. In

the grassless yard there were oleanders, and vines covered the paintless sides of the house. Mrs. Ahlswede, when she appeared, showed signs of many years of hard work. The room into which Becky found quick admittance was clean, but bare with poverty.

The matter of the cream was soon adjusted. Then, with all her enthusiasm, Becky told Lewis' mother of her acquaintance with her son. In turn the mother told a part of her own story.

"I've wanted Lewis to try to make his own way," Mrs. Ahlswede explained, "but he says he has to stay where he can help me. I've offered to sell the place—it's a pretty good patch of trees—but he won't hear to it. If his father would only come back, it'd be different. But he don't come, an' Lewis stays."

Becky did what she could to console the woman, but she had few words and fewer ideas—only a heart full of sympathy.

"Lewis is a fine boy, Mrs. Ahlswede, and he's sure to succeed," was all she could think to say. "I'm sure it'll come out all right some time."

"Some time," said the mother; "yes, some time. An' it might be now if his father hadn't left us. But Lewis is a good son; I don't complain; it's only for him I feel sorry."

There was a lump in Becky's throat all the

way back to the store. Schuyler asked no questions. They found Mrs. Hatton still shopping, being at the moment engaged in examining several deerskins, fine specimens of the skill of the Seminole Indians in curing and tanning. Several purchases having been made, and the usual post cards mailed, the shore party returned to the schooner.

Becky hurried ahead, anxious to see Captain O'Connor. That gentleman shook his head. "They ain't a hand in town," he reported, disconsolately, "but I've sent out word. We'll have to wait." Since not one of the Hattons seemed to care whether the *Olivette* swung at anchor off Sebastian or proceeded at once on her way down the river, Becky decided that her concern should not be revealed to her guests. Therefore, she threw off the disappointment of not finding Jupiter Jim and the little cloud of melancholy that the visit to Mrs. Ahlswede had put upon her, and became frivolously gay.

Although the evening meal was prolonged, a moonlight trip ashore was proposed, and Lucile, Becky and Schuyler again prepared to set out. As they came from the cabin, a dark object cut across the moon's path in the river and a small boat rounded up and dropped its leg-of-mutton

sail some distance down the pier. The young people hurried forward.

The occupant of the boat took a turn of line about a pier piling, threw a box and a package on the landing, and then scrambled onto the runway. Becky suddenly rushed ahead to the lone boatman. An instant later she shouted:

“Why, hello, Lewis Ahlswede! What are you doing here? Did you come in that?” pointing to what was scarcely more than a skiff.

“Yes,” answered the boy, laboriously gathering up his box and bundle.

“I thought you only came home on Saturday,” continued Becky.

“I lost my job,” answered the boy, bluntly. “I’ve come home to stay.”

CHAPTER XIX

WAITING FOR A FAIR WIND

“You lost your job?” repeated Becky.

“Yes. Fired yesterday.”

“What was the matter?” Just then a disquieting thought struck the girl. “It wasn’t because you told Mr. Owens he cheated me?”

“He and me never did get along,” answered Lewis, evasively.

“Aren’t you going to try to do anything?” Becky asked, with lips compressed.

“Yes, of course,” the boy replied; “I got to do something, but——”

“I saw your mother to-day,” interrupted Becky. “She’d like you to go away.”

“How can I?” asked the boy.

“Your father ought to be here,” announced the girl. “Can’t you make him come home?”

“I don’t know where he is, and I don’t care,” answered the boy, with some bitterness. “Anyway, I’ll not ask him to come back. He never did anything for *me*.”

For a few moments nothing was said. Becky

called to her friends, now far ahead, and then turned to Lewis again.

“Did Mr. Carlson give you anything?” she asked.

“I didn’t see him—yes, I did, yesterday. He told me he had something for me; I reckoned it was an ad.”

“Why didn’t you go back?” asked the girl.

“I was goin’ to, but I didn’t feel like talkin’ to no one.”

“I’m sorry,” exclaimed Becky. “You know you did a lot to help me. He was going to give you some clothes and shoes and things. I——”

“I’m much obliged,” broke in the boy. “I reckon I needed ’em bad enough.”

“Oh, I didn’t mean that,” urged the girl, “but I wish you had gone. Can’t you go back and get the things?”

“I didn’t do nothin’,” Lewis answered finally. “It’s all right.”

“You mean you don’t like to take my present?”

“I guess I won’t need much, down here,” the boy continued, after a pause. “There ain’t nothin’ to do but work in the garden or go oysterin’. I’m much obliged, though.”

“I understand,” answered Becky, growing red and remembering how she had left Melbourne

without even a final word of thanks or a good-bye for the boy. "But I wish you had gone."

The boy gathered up his bundles and Becky walked with him toward her friends. After a few paces the girl stopped suddenly and laid a hand on one of Lewis' packages.

"Say, Lewis!" she began, in a new tone, "you know if I tried to give you those things, I wanted to."

The boy made no answer.

"Of course I did. I told Mr. Carlson I wanted to give you twenty-five dollars' worth of things. Now I'm unhappy because you didn't get them."

"Twenty-five dollars? Me?" Lewis managed to say.

"Pshaw!" answered Becky, gayly. "You made a heap more than that for me."

"We didn't have no talk about payin'."

"Now listen!" went on the animated Becky. "You've lost one job because of me. I can give you a new one. Will you take it?" Lewis put down his bundles and wiped his face. "We've got to have a hand on the *Olivette*." Becky struck her palms together in the joy of her sudden inspiration. "Let me hire you to help us. I'll pay you twenty-five dollars to help us a week. Then you can come home on the train."

"Miss Becky," exclaimed Lewis, "I'll do what-

ever you want, and go wherever you like, but I never made more'n a dollar a day in my life."

"Will you go?" persisted Becky.

"I'll go," replied Lewis, "but not for no twenty-five a week."

"I'll attend to that," laughed Becky. "Is it a bargain?"

"For a dollar a day."

"And extras," added the girl. "Shake hands on it!"

"Did you ask him if *he* knows about the French king's money, and if he believes it's buried where we're going?" asked Lucile, when Lewis had passed on and Becky had told her friends of the new member of the crew.

"I forgot," laughed Becky. "But he will, I'm sure."

"I bet he will, if you ask him," commented Schuyler.

"I'd rather have Jupiter Jim," exclaimed his sister.

"You forget that Mr. Ahlswede knows a lot about boats," suggested the boy. "You can go out rowing now without takin' any risks."

"That's right," broke in Becky, who, for the moment, forgot Schuyler's misadventure. "Won't that be fine?"

Captain O'Connor was elated over the news.

When Lewis appeared in the morning it was as if the cruise were about to begin anew. Lewis himself was a surprise. His trousers were undoubtedly long saved, and his best. He had on a new shirt, rubber-soled shoes and a white hat.

Before him he pushed a wheelbarrow containing a suit case and a crate of vegetables and fruit. While the boy and Captain Sam were busy together, Becky related Lewis' story to Mrs. Hatton. Later, when Lewis explained that he was about to sail the *Red Bird* around to his mother's pier on an errand and that he would bring Mrs. O'Connor some milk and cream on his return, both Lucile and Becky sprang up, ready to be invited to go along.

"If you young ladies don't mind," declared Mrs. Hatton, "Ruth and I will go with Mr. Ahlswede."

"Why can't we all go?" asked Lucile. "The *Red Bird's* big enough!"

"I'd rather go alone," insisted Mrs. Hatton. When the boat had rounded the pier on its voyage, Lucile was inclined to pout a little, but Becky's brain was too busy to make a disappointment out of the incident. She at once took up the matter of where Lewis was to sleep.

"Jupiter Jim could sleep in that stuffy little

bow," the girl began, "but we oughtn't ask Lewis to do that. As for sleeping on the deck——"

"There'll be no need of either," explained the captain. "The b'y is goin' to take his boat with him, an' he has a bit o' tent the size o' yer hand that he sets up in a jiffy. When the night lantern's set an' all's snug aboard, ye'll see him make for the land. A couple o' blankets'll give him a bed fit for a king."

Becky was a little skeptical at first, but when Schuyler announced that he was anxious to join the boy when he could, the camp ashore was wholly approved. Within a quarter of an hour the two girls and Schuyler were off again for the "city," visited the depot and waved in pity at the tourists on the platform of a passing train.

"Just think," exclaimed Lucile, "we'll have to be going back home some day."

"Not for a month, anyway," asserted Schuyler. "When do we leave here, Captain Becky?"

"Oh, some time—any time," laughed Becky.

"What if we get tired in less than a month?" went on the boy.

"Oh, you won't," insisted Becky. "It's going to be like a moving-picture show; there'll be a complete change of program every day."

"There hasn't been any special change to-day," remarked the boy.

“It’s coming, though,” smiled Becky. “We’re going fishing.”

Unable to resist Becky’s spirits, Schuyler and Lucile set off with her for the river. When they reached the schooner, Mrs. Hatton had returned.

“I did what I could to assist Mrs. Ahlswede in a small way,” she explained. “I think the boy is deserving, and I’d like to help him. But he’s like his mother.”

The fishing party that afternoon returned with few fish—several lake trout constituting the catch—but the girls and Schuyler had a pleasant enough time eating luncheon in the shade of some palmettos on a point of Coquina Rock. That evening all went ashore to a church festival. Lewis spent the night at his own home, and brought his mother to the church, where both she and the boy looked very uncomfortable.

Nor was the voyage resumed the next day, as the breeze got held out of the south. This day was Sunday. The Hattons and Becky attended church in the morning, Mrs. O’Connor had a chicken dinner at noon and there was much reading in the afternoon. By four o’clock the young people had grown restless and they started ashore.

“I wonder if Lewis wouldn’t like to go with us?” Lucile suggested.

“I wonder?” repeated Becky. “Ask him.”

Both girls smiled, but neither spoke.

"Hey there, Ahlswede," called Schuyler. "The girls want to know if you'd like to go with us."

Lewis, leaning against the capstan, with his legs propped up to hold a book, lifted his eyes, saw the smiling group, and, with a leap, was on the pier.

"Did you want me to do something?" he asked, addressing Becky.

"No," laughed the girl. "We thought you might like to go with us."

"You're going for something?"

"Only for a walk," explained Lucile. "Don't come if you want to read your book."

Lewis held up "Treasure Island." He reopened it to the page where he had been reading. "I just got to the boy in the apple barrel, listenin' to John Silver," he explained.

"We'll excuse you," announced Lucile, somewhat hastily.

"I'll go if you want me," volunteered Lewis.

"We don't need you," added Becky, rather sharply, and the two girls walked away. Lewis instantly resumed his position on the deck. Schuyler walked a few moments with a sober face. Then he began laughing.

"What's the matter with you, silly?" exclaimed Lucile.

“Say, girls,” the boy responded, “don’t feel badly; you ought to be glad!”

“Glad?” repeated Becky. “Glad of what?”

“Even if he don’t care to walk with you, he’ll take Jupiter Jim’s place, all right. By the time the kid reads all that book, he’ll be ‘buried treasure’ crazy. He’ll dig through to China for you, if you ask him.”

“He’d better be reading a book on politeness,” answered Lucile, tossing her head.

“Oh, don’t mind that,” protested Becky, beginning to be amused. “He just happened to tell the truth. I wouldn’t be surprised if it would be a good thing for him—in the long run.”

When the party returned, Lewis was still poring over his book.

“Hello!” Becky called; “don’t you want to come down in the cabin? We’re going to make some candy.”

The boy sprang up, seemed to notice the gathering gloom for the first time, and then said:

“I’m much obliged. I’d rather go home and finish my book.”

It was now Becky’s turn to toss her head.

“Well! What do you think of *that*?” she exclaimed, turning to Lucile.

“Oh, don’t mind that,” laughed the latter. “He just happened to tell the truth!”

“But I do mind it,” said Becky. “I suppose if he ever got hold of ‘Robinson Crusoe,’ he wouldn’t know there was a girl on the boat!”

“Seems to shock both of you!” remarked Schuyler, with a grin.

CHAPTER XX

THROUGH THE NARROWS

In the morning the wind was fair. At nine o'clock the red roof of the Sebastian store began to fade among the green palmetto tops, and the *Olivette* moved on her course toward the mouth of the Narrows. At noon these were entered.

During three days the schooner crept on down the river. Idle for hours where little bays invited, at anchor while improvised excursions entered into the mouths of creeks for fish, now and then a trip across the peninsula beach and once a glorious visit to a little ranch where avocado pears were among the spoils of a hospitable reception, were incidents that crowded one upon another.

Mrs. Hatton was turning brown and placid. Lucile had not only lost all her indifference, but she had dropped every social barrier. Both Lucile and Becky had been accustomed to considerable attention from young men of their own age, but, when Lewis was not tending the foresail, the jib, the centerboard or the tiller, he seemed to be busy devising entertainments for Ruth. By rea-

son of this, the two girls almost gasped with surprise when, late one afternoon—the *Olivette* moored behind a point of rocks—the boy remarked:

“There’s a purty good path through the woods over there. If you-all’d like to walk to the beach I’ll show yo’ the way.”

“Fine,” exclaimed Becky. “We’ll take our supper with us and picnic out on the beach.”

“The beach is damp,” volunteered Lewis, prosaically. “But there’s a better place; they call it the ‘Lovers’ Chair.’”

“Oh,” laughed Lucile, “let’s go! ‘Lovers’ Chair!’ I didn’t know there were such things down here.”

“It ain’t nothin’,” returned Lewis. “They just call it that.”

“Do lovers sit there?” asked Becky, eagerly.

“I don’t know,” answered the boy. “I’ve set there to watch for turtles. It’s a good place for that.”

“I’ll go you,” broke in Schuyler. “I knew somethin’ like this was comin’! I reckon there ain’t a square mile o’ land in the world that ain’t got a ‘Lovers’ Lane’ or a ‘Lovers’ Leap.’ ‘Lovers’ Chair’ ain’t so common. Get the camera, sis.”

The picnickers set out about five o’clock, Lewis

in the lead with a jug of lemonade and the lunch basket. The path was narrow, but not so much so that two persons could not walk abreast. In a few moments Becky ran ahead and joined their guide.

“Don’t you want me to help carry the basket?” she began.

“It ain’t heavy,” answered the boy. “It’s easier this way.”

“Well, you don’t mind if I walk with you, I suppose,” continued Becky.

“You’d better walk behind,” replied the boy. “There might be a snake, mebber.”

“I’m not afraid of snakes,” retorted Becky, indignantly. Then her smile broadened into a laugh. “I want to ask you something. Do you believe the French king’s money is buried down at the Inlet?”

Lewis’ usually stolid face turned toward Becky and his lips parted in a half smile.

“I reckon you-all are makin’ fun o’ me for readin’ that book,” he said.

“No, no!” exclaimed Becky. “I mean it. Do you believe what they say?”

“Yo’ mean ol’ Spence Andros’ sayin’s?”

“Yes,” answered the girl. “Miss Hatton and I are going to find it.” This she said very soberly. Then, responding to Lewis’ smile, she added, “if

we can." The boy's grin broadened. "But we've got to have some one to help us, and the old colored man said it could only be some one who believes the treasure is there—like we do," continued the girl eagerly. "The old man said if you don't believe it you're a Jonah. You know what that means?"

"No," answered Lewis, shaking his head.

"Well, I don't either, exactly," exclaimed Becky. "But, of course, it's something you oughtn't be. *You* believe, don't you?" The girl looked up at Lewis so wistfully that Schuyler caught his sister by the arm and pointed to the two ahead.

"She's puttin' somethin' over on the kid, all right," he chuckled.

"Well," began Lewis after a silence, "there's a lot o' folks 'at *has* believed——"

"But *you*?" repeated Becky, catching the basket and shaking it. "You can't help us unless you think it's there."

"But no one never found nothin'——"

"Stop right there," commanded Becky. "I thought you said you'd go wherever I said and do whatever I wanted?"

"Sure," answered Lewis, his smile fading. "I'm workin' for you, a dollar a day."

"Then you believe it," ordered Becky. "And

if you are goin' to do what I want, you *tell* folks you believe it. I don't see why you make such a fuss about it; I *like* to believe it."

"Well," answered Lewis, slowly, "I kind o' used to believe all them tales. An' readin' about ol' John Silver an' Ben Gunn in that 'Treasure Island' book does seem to make it kind o' easy to believe 'em again. Figgerin' it all over, I reckon there *ain't* no special reason why it *ain't* so. I *can* believe it," he went on; "leastways as long as I'm workin' on the *Olivette*."

"There," exclaimed the girl, jubilantly. "I knew you believed it! Now you may come with us. Say," and her voice dropped, "I wish we had a chart or map or something!"

"Chart o' what?" asked the boy.

"A map of where the money is hid, you silly," went on Becky with assumed indignation.

"Where's that?"

"Oh, pshaw!" exclaimed the girl. "Don't you ever 'pretend' anything?"

"Oh, I see!" replied the boy. "You mean a chart like that in the front of 'Treasure Island.'"

"Of course. It'd be a lot more fun."

"A map of the land south of the Inlet?" Becky nodded, vigorously. "Sure," went on Lewis. "I can make one o' them. I'll put down all the

lagoons an' cuts an' the swamp land an' sand ridges."

"And don't forget the red cross to show where the money's hid," whispered Becky.

"And," added Lewis, with strange animation, "that ought to be in blood."

"That'll be fine!" whispered Becky. "I'd help, only I don't want to see it till it's done." At that moment a great idea flashed upon her. "Say," and again her voice dropped, "when the chart's done, hide it somewhere in the sand and we'll find it."

When they arrived at the beach, new sights demanded attention. The picture of the sea, with its swishing breakers; the low smoke of steamers out of sight below the horizon, the blue bowl of the sky spilling from its depths balls of cottony clouds, the shrill cry of the seabirds as they dropped waveward in search of food, were not to be ignored.

"Now," interrupted Lucile at last, "it's getting late. Where's that 'Lovers' Chair'? Besides, it's time to eat."

Lewis led the way to a rise on the edge of the palmetto wood. The elevation was a broken ridge of solidified shell and sand known as "coquina." Its flat top, perhaps ten feet square, rose about fifteen feet above the sand. Just behind it grew

two cabbage palmetto trees, crowding each other and bending forward until their glossy tops overspread a part of the upper surface of the rocks like a green umbrella.

“This is where we’ll eat,” announced Becky. “Can’t we get on it?”

Lewis led his companions to the rear of the white pile. At one time some one had made a ladder by nailing driftwood from tree to tree. All these supports had now fallen away but one.

“I’ll make a new ladder,” volunteered the boy. He collected a dozen pieces of boards and sticks of varying sizes. Suitable lengths he set between the trunks and pounded the pieces into place. Then the girls mounted the rock. Here, while the sun sank and the ocean turned opalescent, Becky and Lucile served the picnic supper.

Even the skeptical and prosaic Schuyler grew poetical. Stretched on the rock, the palmetto leaves whispering just over his head, he went so far as to declare the place was almost like “fairyland.”

“Almost?” exclaimed Becky. “It is fairyland! I’m sure the sea fairies come ashore here at night to be under the moon and dance on the white sand.”

“Anyway,” remarked Lewis, “this is a fine turtle beach. I’ve laid here many a night in the

moonlight waitin' for turtles to come out an' lay their eggs in the sand. But I never saw no fairies."

"Then we might as well start home," laughed Lucile, "as it's getting late and I don't believe we care for turtle eggs."

Lewis descended with the basket and Becky followed. Lucile came next. On the bottom rung of the tree ladder her foot slipped. There was a cry and then a moan of pain.

"My foot's caught," Lucile exclaimed, as she clasped a tree trunk.

"Between the trees?" called Schuyler. "Pull it out."

"I can't," moaned Lucile. "It's stuck. I can't move it." From the tremor in her voice it was plain that the girl was suffering.

"Wiggle it," shouted Schuyler.

"It hurts! I can't!" protested Lucile, with a new sob.

Lewis was already on his knees. In the dark he found the girl's foot, and, with his big hands, took hold of her wedged shoe, trying to extricate it.

"Oh, don't!" cried the suffering girl. "You hurt me!"

By this time Schuyler was on the beach, looking for a match.

"Let me have your knife, Lewis. I'll cut the

shoe out," exclaimed Becky, who was also on her knees at the foot of the tree. But Lewis, reaching to the top of Lucile's shoe, took the button flap between his strong fingers and quickly unbuttoned it. Without trouble the girl now extracted her foot, and, while Lewis worked the shoe loose, she limped a few feet and then dropped on the sand.

"Put your shoe on before your foot swells," advised Lewis and this Becky proceeded to do for her friend. Lucile, having composed herself, found she could hobble along, and the return trip began. They reached the schooner long after dark.

On the morning of the fourth day after leaving Sebastian the expedition set out to make the south end of the Narrows. Three government staked canals, like the letter Z, lay before the schooner. With shortened sail Captain O'Connor entered the first of these. The craft crept at last into the shallow river and, by luck or by chance, threaded her way past oyster knobs, sand banks and mud flats until four o'clock. Then luck deserted the expedition—the *Olivette* was aground.

For two hours the captain and the two boys labored to free the stranded craft. While they worked, the clear waters nearer the shore began to darken. Then the moon floated above the darkening eastern river growths. Above the black

green of the palmettos there was a web-like tangle of pink and fading blue clouds.

In the west, the sun had left a red glow upon the water that disappeared slowly as if being soaked up by the myriad-rooted shore trees. Then the river turned to an ashy blue. The glistening swells showed for a few moments in drops of gold and silver. At last the lights died wholly in the palmettos and the phosphor glow of night came with the stars.

Just then, and without a sound, the fickle schooner slid into the water, white and still in the moonbeams. Two bedraggled boys scrambled aboard and, a sudden breeze coming fair, the boat moved down the last canal without a tack. At eight o'clock, clear of the tortuous canals at last, the *Olivette* cast anchor off Crawford's Point.

In the moonlight, fowl and fish made sounds strange to northern ears. The cry of the loon, the caw of hawks, the faint plash of herons in their night rookery, the loud puff of porpoises and the resonant sound of the drumfish beneath the schooner were all music in the hollow night. That night, because of the distant and swampy shores, Lewis remained aboard. And, while Becky and her guests sat in the moonlight, the boy busied himself mysteriously in the *Olivette's* kitchen.

CHAPTER XXI

THE STRANDED SCHOONER

There are three ways by which a boat may approach the Indian River Inlet, and, through it, the sea. Coming from the north, there is a devious and shallow channel known as Blue Hole Cut. Those bound up the river can reach the Inlet by way of Wild Cat Cove. Directly west of the sea-gap lies Nigger Cut. All these openings finally join at the Inlet in one swift tide-racing channel.

The day's sailing that was to bring the *Olivette* to Nigger Cut began auspiciously. Although the cruise was now ten days old, the joy of it did not pall. And this day, to Becky and Lucile at least, was the day for which they had been longing. From where the *Olivette* finally anchored only a distant view of the Inlet could be had.

Through Nigger Cut the tide was making out, washing over the mud flats and scouring the crumbling banks of little islands until its current entered the narrower water dashing seaward through the shore drifts of heaped up sand. To the right and left of the mouth of this canal

stretched white wastes of sand, palmetto scrub and swamp oaks.

On the southern side, a mile below the Inlet and facing the beach, stood a low and strong building—a life-saving “House of Refuge.” This was untenanted, but contained provisions for the possible survivors of shipwrecks. To the north, where Blue Hole Cut emptied itself into the Inlet, a large three-masted schooner lay in the shallows, partly careened.

About two o'clock, with Captain Sam and Lewis in charge of the dingy and the *Red Bird*, all but Mrs. O'Connor set out to explore the Inlet. Captain O'Connor busied himself expatiating on the wonderful fishing possibilities of each bay and bayou. But Becky and Lucile, who were with Lewis in the *Red Bird*, had little interest in all this.

“The big boat looks like a regular ship,” insisted Becky. “Maybe it's wrecked!”

“That ain't no wreck,” explained Lewis. “Her sails are furled. At high tide she'll be floatin'. She's been here a long time.”

Lewis finally beached the *Red Bird* on the far side of the Blue Hole Cut, while Captain Sam landed on the south bank of the Inlet, apparently to inspect the House of Refuge. The schooner appeared to be deserted. But, as the boy and the

two girls approached it, a man walked from under its lee side, a black hat well down over his eyes, his hands lazily deep in his pockets and a cigar in his mouth.

“That ain’t no fisherman,” cautioned Lewis at once.

“And he don’t look like a pirate either,” whispered Becky.

“Maybe he’s a smuggler, though,” ventured Lucile.

Upon approaching, the man lifted his hat. Then Lewis caught sight of a star almost hidden beneath the man’s coat.

“We’ve come to see the schooner,” began Becky politely. “Are you the captain?”

“Howdy do,” responded the man with a smile. “They ain’t no captain. I’m in charge.”

“You’re a special agent, ain’t you?” broke in Lewis. The man nodded “yes,” apparently with some pride. The boy added: “Was she a smuggler?” The man merely closed his eyes and widened his smile, flicking the ash from his cigar.

“What d’you mean?” exclaimed Becky.

“We made a pinch two days ago, miss,” explained the man, “and I’m here guardin’ the boat. There’s been a lot o’ slick work a-goin’ on hereabouts an’ night before last we closed in on ’em. The gang’s on its way to Jacksonville now.”

"I thought the schooner was from New England," put in Lewis in surprise. "They said it was. They said they were saltin' redfish."

"They were saltin' West Injy truck of all kinds," explained the special agent, "mainly cigars and rum. We took six boat loads out o' her yesterday an' there's more there yet, hid under false bottoms. Have a cigar?" he continued, as he produced one from his pocket. "O' course we ain't supposed to use 'em, but a box broke."

Lewis declined, not having as yet reached the Havana cigar stage of his career.

"Is that cigar one of the things they make so much fuss about?" asked Becky curiously. "A little thing like that!"

"If you got enough of 'em, they're worth botherin' about," explained the man. "This one sells for about thirty cents, I reckon, an' a good part o' that is duty 'at Uncle Sam puts on 'em." Becky took the cigar in her fingers. It was set off by a crimson and gold band. The man, with a gesture of attempted graciousness, exclaimed, "Keep it as a souv'neur. Did you want to look at the boat?"

"Thank you, yes!" responded the girl with delight.

As they turned toward the schooner Lewis asked: "How many of 'em were there?"

"Only four; but there's more of 'em around—we're satisfied o' that. An' some o' the stuff's been planted. I reckon you could stumble on 'most anything back there in the marsh if you went far enough."

"What's their names?" continued the boy with curious eagerness.

"Well, there's the skipper; his papers says he's Captain Douglas Malloch an' that the schooner cleared from Boston last June—she's the *Belle of Ipswich* in her clearance, but she ain't proud o' the name. Anyway, she don't carry it nowhere. Two o' the men called themselves Sam Brooks and Joe Briscoe, and then there was the nigger, Jupiter Jim."

"Jupiter Jim!" exclaimed Lewis, while the girls gasped.

"You know him?" laughed the agent.

"We were lookin' for him," answered Becky hastily. "They told us he was at Palm Beach working as a porter in a hotel."

"He was," said the man. "That's how we located the gang. Jim was porter an' dealer in fine cigars. I just trailed him up here and now he's quit the cigar business. We think he was the real brains o' the gang."

For some moments the three visitors could only look at each other in amazement. Then the agent, escorting the girls and Lewis aboard the schooner, told the story of the arrests.

"Our men'll be back about day after to-morrow," finished the garrulous agent, "and then we'll rake this region with a gover'ment fine comb."

Both girls lost something of their gayety and when they thanked their talkative host and finally took their leave it was rather a depressed party. Lewis did not voice his own thoughts, but Becky and Lucile felt sorry for Jupiter Jim. Lewis pulled the *Red Bird* across the Inlet and the two girls hurried away to relate their discovery to Mrs. Hatton.

Lewis, lingering behind, drew the *Red Bird* on the sand and then disappeared in the scrub bordering Wild Cat Cove. When the sober-faced boy rejoined the excursionists, they were sitting on the steps of the Shelter House far down the beach, all watching Ruth attacking dead jellyfish with an improvised spear. Lewis came out of the underbrush behind the house and without speaking waited until Becky chanced to turn her head. A warning finger pressed his lips and he pointed to Lucile.

"Lucile," remarked Becky a few moments later

when Lewis had vanished, "we haven't been down that path back of the house. Let's have a look at everything."

"They ain't nothing there," grunted Schuyler who was still irritated over having missed the adventure of the stranded schooner. "It only runs down to the bayou. I guess I'll start back. Where's Lewis?"

"We left him at the boats," answered Becky truthfully enough. When the disgruntled Schuyler had started along the beach toward the Inlet, Becky, after some persuasion, induced Lucile to go with her to see the bayou. As soon as they were beyond Mrs. Hatton's hearing Becky whispered:

"Lewis is back there!" No other invitation was needed. The two girls dashed into the shrubbery.

Within a hundred yards the sand disappeared in damp ground that was covered with oaks from which hanging strands of Spanish moss partly blocked the way. Shoe-cutting oyster shells afforded an excuse for a path through the oozy ground, but the excited girls did not hesitate. Then, at its worst, the shells wound through a thick hedge of low palmettos, and Becky and Lucile, with wet feet and tendrils of dislodged moss

clinging to their hair and faces, stumbled out on the edge of a winding, tropic-like bayou.

There, seated contentedly on the edge of a rickety pier at the side of which lay a leaky and patched old skiff, was Lewis.

"Why didn't you wait for us?" demanded Lucile in panting rebuke.

"You couldn't miss the path," answered Lewis. "Besides, I didn't want 'em to see me."

"My shoes are cut to pieces!" went on the girl. "It's awful creepy here. Are those regular oysters?" For answer Lewis, with a deft movement of his knife, shucked one of a heap of oysters by his side and offered it to the girl. "Ugh," she exclaimed with a shudder as she waved it away. Without a word, Becky caught the half-shell and dropped the oyster into her own mouth.

"Now," she said, "what's the mystery?"

"I don't know as there *is* a mystery," began Lewis slowly, "but I've seen certain things that are *kind* o' mysterious. I couldn't figger 'em out an' I thought mebbe you-all could."

"What sort of things?" demanded Becky blankly. The boy only smiled.

"Tell us," commanded Lucile. "Don't look so foolish!"

"Well," went on Lewis, "when yo' left me I come down along the bayou, because they's nearly

always oysters here. 'Bout halfway to the head o' the cove I come acrost a cur'ous thing." Becky stepped to his side. "They's a rock up there, purt' nigh buried in the sand. An' on it's a reg'lar cross."

"A cross?" exploded Becky.

"A big cross, all faded, like it was mighty old," said Lewis gravely.

"What's that mean?" exclaimed Lucile.

"That's what I don't know," continued Lewis, lowering his voice. "But it's a sign—that's certain. An' signs ain't made for nothin'."

"Maybe something's buried there!" gasped Becky. "Did you look?"

"I didn't think o' that," replied the boy, "but mebbe you're right."

"Well, why didn't you look?" put in Lucile. "Isn't this where the French king's gold is hid?"

"'Round here somewhere," answered Lewis. "I'll go back an' look if I can find the place again."

"And you got us in this wet place just to tell us how stupid you were?" persisted Lucile.

"Well," answered Lewis, as if at a loss for an answer, "after I got here I seen I made a mistake not diggin' right away an' I thought I'd consult you-all."

Becky had been listening, her eyebrows drawn.

Now she turned to Lucile and winked slowly. Then she whispered to her companion. Lucile gave one look at the solemn-faced Lewis and broke out in a peal of laughter that Becky quickly silenced by clapping a hand over the girl's mouth.

"We're going back with you," announced Becky. "Can we get there without wading?"

Lewis' only answer was to take the skiff by the gunwales and draw it up on the pier. Then he turned it on edge and drained out the water. In another moment he had slipped the battered craft back into the bayou.

"Hop in," he ordered, and with Becky in the bow and Lucile in the stern—the skirts of each young lady suffering from the water-soaked seats and bottom—the boy, with a piece of board, began paddling Indian fashion. They were in Wild Cat Cove, and within a few moments the water narrowed into a channel between oaks almost meeting overhead.

The channel bore off to the west immediately and seemed at an end, but Lewis drove his craft ahead and, after a struggle with reeds, pond lilies and water hyacinths, shoved the boat under a fallen oak and finally into a wider opening comparatively free of growth. In a corner of a pool the paddler drove the skiff onto a beach of white

shells. From this he assisted his passengers up a bank of sand.

As they left the pool the shore vegetation thinned. The feet of both girls were wet and their skirts were bedraggled. Lewis gazed about as if not sure of his bearings. At last, as he came upon a half-moon-like ridge of sand, his face lighted.

“It’s west o’ here,” he exclaimed, “at the edge o’ them oaks.”

Exhausted from the half run, their skirts growing heavier, and Lucile wiggling one foot as she advanced, in an effort to dislodge the sand that entered the holes in her shoe, the two girls reached the oaks in sad disorder. When Lewis decided that the marked rock was further to the right Lucile protested.

“I’m not going a step farther,” she declared, as she seated herself on the roots of an oak. “I can’t—my shoes are full of sand.”

“So are mine,” added Becky. “What difference does that make?”

“It hurts,” answered Lucile.

“Take off your shoes,” suggested Lewis. “The niggers do.”

Lucile was too tired to take offense. “I wish I could!” was her only reply, as she closed her eyes. Becky looked at her and then she, too,

dropped on the sand. "I'm tired, too," she groaned. "Let's rest."

Lewis walked away a few paces and also squatted on the sand. After a few moments he returned to the dispirited girls. "O' course," he began, "I don't know what that rock means, but it ain't far away. You wait here an' I'll see if anything's buried under it. If they is," and he smiled, "I reckon I can bring it to you."

CHAPTER XXII

SCHUYLER HATTON TAKES AN OATH

When, after ten minutes, Lewis was seen on his way to rejoin the girls, Becky called in alarm:

“Hey! Don’t come back—yet!”

“I found somethin’,” yelled the boy, quickening his pace.

“Stop, I tell you!” shouted Becky. “Wait a minute!”

“It’s a tin box, all sealed up!”

“Don’t come any closer,” commanded the girl excitedly, “we’ve got our shoes off!”

“And stockings,” added Lucile.

A hundred yards away the boy paused and held up a little cylinder. “It was under the stone,” he continued in a loud voice, “and here’s the stone.” From under his arm he took a flat rock shaped like a thick pancake. “Ain’t you goin’ to open the box?”

The girls were in a lively conference. On a scrub palmetto just behind them hung four black stockings. For some time, their damp skirts turned up to the breeze, they had been drying

their wet feet in the warm sand. But Lucile only pointed to the swinging black stockings and the boy's suggestion was abandoned with a gasp.

"Go away and we'll come in a minute," called Becky at last. "But don't lose us!"

As the boy obediently turned his back, there was a sound of crunching sand behind the bare-footed girls. It was Schuyler.

"What's up?" the new arrival exclaimed. "Goin' swimmin'?"

There was a new panic, especially on Becky's part. "No, we're not goin' swimmin' and it's none of your business what we're doing," answered his sister, as she dropped her skirts and made a dash for the drying stockings. "You go about your business!"

"What's the kid doin' over there in the bushes?" went on Schuyler, not moving. "Looked as if he meant to throw a rock at you."

"Please go away," pleaded Becky, as she snuggled her skirts about her feet. "We're goin' to the boat, that's all; Lewis is showin' us the way."

"Oh, he is?" smiled Schuyler. "Well, the best way to the boat's along the beach." He shook his head. "There's somethin' doin' and I want in on it. Tried to shake me, eh?"

"Please go," repeated Becky, her temples growing redder. "It ain't anything—much."

“Much?” laughed the boy. “Then it is something. I ain’t goin’ to mosey till you tell.”

Lucile was already shaking the sand from between her toes. “These stockings aren’t dry yet and you’re just makin’ us put them on, and like as not we’ll catch cold and it’ll be your fault, too,” she announced indignantly.

“I don’t care whether you put ’em on,” exclaimed Schuyler, throwing himself on the sand. “Tell me what you’ve been up to and I’ll duck.”

“And how can Becky do anything with you here?” persisted Lucile.

“If you’ve got to know,” broke in Becky at last, and laughing in spite of her embarrassment, “we’ll tell, if you’ll keep it a secret.”

“Haven’t been lookin’ for old Spence Andros’ money, have you?”

“We have not,” answered Lucile defiantly. “We weren’t lookin’ for anything. But Lewis *found* something.”

Schuyler was instantly in a sitting posture.

“But what’s the use of telling you,” added Becky. “You don’t believe anything.”

“What’d he find?” asked the boy eagerly.

“It was buried in the sand,” went on Becky with a tone of mystery. “And it was under a big stone with curious marks on it”—then she al-

tered her voice a little—"anyway, with a cross on it."

"A chest?" inquired the doubter, getting to his feet at last. "An iron chest?"

Lucile opened her mouth, but Becky stopped her with a warning look.

"You aren't goin' to know a thing unless you go away. And that ain't all," went on Becky in apparent soberness. "You've got to promise something. Will you promise not to tell anyone and not to make fun?"

The boy nodded his head in sudden acquiescence.

"That won't do at all," objected Becky. "We don't know what this is, but it was buried right out here in the sand where pirates used to be and where the French king's money bags are hid. Maybe it might be a map or chart or something telling about everything." Schuyler, who had been listening soberly, now smiled. "And if it is," went on Becky with vigor, "I reckon it'd spoil everything, just like the old colored man said, to have somebody mixed up with it who don't believe anything. It'd Jonah everything, maybe." In her excitement Becky's bare feet had escaped from beneath her skirts.

"I'll promise," said Schuyler, his smile broadening into a grin.

“No, no,” protested the girl, arising quickly. “Cross your heart you won’t tell and won’t make fun and that you’ll *believe*.”

“But what if I won’t?” ventured the boy provokingly. “The kid’ll tell me anyway.”

“He will *not*,” retorted Lucile defiantly.

“And we won’t open whatever it is while you’re around,” added Becky as a clincher.

“Just tell me what it looks like,” begged Schuyler.

“It’s a metal thing, round, and all sealed up,” announced Becky promptly. “Are you goin’ to promise?”

“I reckon I’ll have to,” Schuyler answered slowly and as if making a great concession. “I promise,” he added at last, crossing his chest with an elaborate motion. “I’ll find the kid.”

As he turned away Lucile tossed Becky her stockings. Then Becky realized that she had been standing barefooted for some minutes.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” she exclaimed, her temples flaring red again.

“Oh, he’s nobody,” answered Lucile. “Besides, you don’t need to care; your feet are small enough.”

Stockings and skirts were at least dry enough to make the two girls feel more comfortable, and in a few minutes they were ready for new adven-

tures. Schuyler had found Lewis and the two boys were discovered in animated talk, Schuyler laughing and Lewis very sober.

“Well,” exclaimed Schuyler as the girls pulled themselves through the soft sand to where Lewis was waiting, “here’s the pile of rocks it was under.” He pointed to the little slab of the coquina that had plainly been carved from some near-by formation. “And here’s the carvin’; looks like it was done with a dagger, don’t it?”

Both girls puckered their mouths solemnly and Lucile said:

“Or, maybe, with a pirate cutlass!”

“Or a nail,” added her brother. “And here’s your treasure chest.”

Becky grasped the little cylinder. The receptacle was coated with rust. A lid was made fast with sealing wax and the same material covered a seam on one side. There was also a smear of pitch well rubbed into the rust.

“It looks awful old,” commented Becky. “How deep was it?”

“Purty deep,” answered the boy, noncommittally. “There ain’t any reason why it couldn’t ‘a’ been buried a hundred years.”

“If they made bakin’ powder cans a hundred years ago,” suggested Schuyler.

Both girls turned upon the scoffer with rebuke in their eyes.

“You remember what you promised?” cautioned Becky.

“It don’t feel heavy enough to be silver,” observed Lewis. “But, whatever it is, what’s in it must be important. See how it’s sealed? Mebbe we ought to have a fire to melt the top loose.”

“Fire nothin’!” exclaimed Schuyler. “Gi’ me the tin.” Before he could be stopped the faithless Schuyler grabbed the tin can from Lewis’ hand and twisted the top loose. “Nothin’ but a piece o’ paper,” he exclaimed, laughing.

“A piece of paper!” shouted Becky, drawing forth the contents of the can. “It’s a map—a chart! Oh, *look!* Maybe it’s a treasure chart!”

Schuyler looked at Lewis and winked. But Lewis gave no sign of levity. He took the folded sheet as soberly as if the ghost of Captain Kidd had handed him a blood-inscribed parchment.

“It certainly looks like a map,” he commented gravely. “And if I ain’t mistaken it’s a chart o’ this very place. Yes, sir, it is,” he declared, as if the full significance of the sheet had just dawned upon him. “It’s sure a map o’ this land. Now what’d you reckon that means?”

Becky was crowding close on one side of Lewis and Lucile on the other. Schuyler, a meaning

smile on his face, was trying to get the paper. "I guess it ain't so very old," he commented. "It looks like cheap foolscap paper."

"That's when they made foolscap paper," retorted Lucile, "years and years ago." Then, on an inspiration, she added: "Hundreds of years ago when there were kings everywhere and they all had court fools and fools' caps." Properly rebuked, Schuyler subsided for the moment.

"It must be awful old," Becky commented. "See how frazzled and brown the edges are. Maybe there was a quarrel and some one tried to burn it."

"It does look scorched," added Lewis.

"Say!" shouted Schuyler, as Becky, Lucile and Lewis dropped their heads together over the charred sheet. "Unless you're goin' to swallow it, tell a fellow what's on your map!"

"There ain't much," answered Lewis. "I guess pirates an' such were never much for writin'. But it's a map sure enough. Here's the Inlet," he went on, fixing a finger on the paper, "an' here's what we call Jack Island——"

"And look!" broke in Becky excitedly, "what's that, way down at the bottom?" Again the heads went down, this time Schuyler's included. "It's a ring with a cross in it and some printing."

“‘Where treasure is hid,’” shouted Lucile breathlessly.

“Only it ain’t spelled right,” added Schuyler. “There’s an ‘a’ in treasure and an ‘e’ on the end.”

Lewis glanced up in confusion. “Is that right?” he asked. Then he went on as quickly: “O’ course, they was purty poor spellers back in them times.”

“And what a peculiar color,” put in Becky. “That cross and writing aren’t a bit like the rest.”

“Mebbe it’s blood, turned brown,” suggested Lewis, gruesomely. “Sometimes the old buccaneers signed their names in blood.”

“Say,” exclaimed Schuyler. “Do you folks figure that this chart’s goin’ to show you where the French king’s money bags are hid?”

“Of course,” answered Becky. “Look, down in this corner.” There, in crude printing, were the words “French King’s money” and under them a rough drawing of a skull and cross bones. Beneath these were the words “Brethren of the Coast.”

“What’s that mean?” cried Becky, as she made out these words, looking inquiringly at Lewis.

“That’s the name the old buccaneers an’ pirates went by,” explained Lewis proudly.

“That’s right!” added Schuyler with a new smile. “But the French king’s gold didn’t belong to pirates. Old Andros says the President sent it down here. That’d mean a man o’ war, not a pirate ship. What’s pirates got to do with it?”

“There’s a thousand ways they could ‘a’ got it,” answered Becky. “Maybe the old colored man didn’t know and the pirates got it after all. How about that?”

Schuyler having no answer for this, other than a grin, Becky folded the chart and concealed it in her waist. “We don’t care what you think,” she concluded defiantly, “but you crossed your heart not to tell.”

It was not far from where the chart was found to the boats. When the adventurers made their appearance at the landing Mrs. Hatton awaited them. With great skill Lucile managed to conceal the gaps in her shoe. The return to the *Olivette* followed and was made on the ebb tide.

Schuyler respected his pledge and no word of the secret leaked out. That evening Becky whispered to Lewis: “It was fine. It was just like real; I thought you couldn’t *pretend!*”

After a moment the boy replied, “I guess mebbe that’s the way the man made up the story about ‘Treasure Island’; just pretendin’.”

“Of course,” answered Becky. “Didn’t you know that?”

“I always thought stories was partly true, anyway,” replied the boy. “Do you want me to pretend any more?”

“We don’t have to, now,” exclaimed Becky. “All we’ve got to do is to dig up the treasure.” Her eyes sparkled with merriment. “We know where it is, because we found the chart. Lucile and you and I are goin’ to find it the first chance we get. And we won’t take Schuyler, he’s a Jonah.”

The next morning Schuyler had plans for an excursion to the beach to look for sharks behind the reefs and to visit the stranded schooner. There was counter talk of a fishing trip behind Jack Island, but Mrs. Hatton elected the schooner visit, and about ten o’clock, with Schuyler, Ruth and Captain O’Connor, she set out.

No sooner had the dingy disappeared than the two girls and Lewis hurried to the cabin. For ten minutes there was a subdued conference. Captain O’Connor’s big “coast survey chart” was spread out and the locations on the treasure chart were compared and checked off.

Below Wild Cat Cove came a bulge to the west, Cook Point; then a cape extending south, the Boot Toe; then a wide bay, unnamed but con-

taining within it Coon Island. Northeast of this island, on the peninsula, was the cross and the fascinating "Where tresur is hid."

"How far is this below the House of Refuge?" asked Lucile.

With the map scale Lewis soberly measured the distance.

"One an' five-eighth miles," he answered.

"We'll get some lunch," announced Becky, "and you find a shovel and pick."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE ISLAND IN THE MARSH

There was neither pick nor shovel on the schooner, a fact quickly announced by Lewis, who suggested a hatchet as a substitute. This, Becky thought, with the addition of an iron spoon, might be sufficient. Lewis gravely acquiesced.

Therefore, while Becky and Lucile selected their heaviest shoes and most substantial skirts, and Mrs. O'Connor prepared luncheon, Lewis made the boat ready. By this time Becky found cause for some apprehension. The excursionists to the smugglers' schooner might now be on their way back. If the treasure seekers proceeded directly down the cut to the Inlet they might be discovered.

"Schuyler'll make a fuss," she explained, "and he'll insist on going with us. That'll spoil everything."

"He certainly is a Jonah, or whatever you call them," agreed Lucile.

"Can't we sneak across into the Fort Pierce channel?" Becky asked Lewis.

"We don't need to do that," explained their escort. "We can sail right down the river inside o' Jack Island till we come to Coon Island Bay and then cross to the peninsula just where we want to land."

This was agreed upon and the *Red Bird* was headed south. Lewis stood well over toward the west shore until nearly noon, when he made a tack for Coon Island. The bay into which the *Red Bird* soon made its way was thick with great vegetable islands of entangled water hyacinths and Coon Island itself was but a footless marsh of straggling mangrove trees. Rounding this, an arm of the bay bent about Boot Toe Point and disappeared within the peninsula. Directly east lay the solid land of the peninsula itself.

"It's the narrowest point on the coast," explained Lewis, "only a few hundred yards from the river to the ocean."

"And our place is up there where the bay bends, isn't it?" asked Becky.

Lewis smiled. "That's what the chart says," he qualified, "northeast o' Coon Island."

"It looks awfully swampy," suggested Lucile.

"Hadn't we better land first and eat?" asked Becky.

Without response Lewis headed the boat toward the sandy ridge opposite. Just as the *Red*

Bird's bow ran on a beach of sand a familiar voice startled the conspirators.

"I thought you'd be here. I just took a little run down the beach to meet you. Thought you'd put somethin' over on me, eh?" and Schuyler appeared among the shore palmettos. "This is where your chart said you'd find it," he went on with a grin, "and I knew you wouldn't lose any time. Got plenty to eat?"

"You're a Jonah," called out Lucile. "Go away!"

"Remember what you promised," added Becky, warningly.

"I'll help," answered Schuyler in a burst of assumed enthusiasm. "Why not?" he added. "Didn't I see the chart? It's right over there," he continued, pointing toward the arm of the bay, "and if you'll furnish the eats I'll believe the place is paved with gold dollars an' pieces of eight."

"No, sir," persisted Lucile. "You're just sayin' that to get your dinner and make fun. You can have your lunch and then you've got to leave. We won't do a thing while you're hanging around to—to——"

"Jonah us," finished Becky.

Although Schuyler did his best to placate the girls, they held out against him and, the luncheon

over, they ordered him to leave. When he laughingly refused, they hurried into the boat and shoved off without him. Lewis, refusing to interest himself in Schuyler's cause, headed the *Red Bird* toward the bend and left the boy protesting indignation. That this was assumed was indicated by the fact that Schuyler, after pretending to start for the beach, really followed the boat by dodging along the shore among the palmettos, oaks, and, finally, marshy mangroves and tall grass.

When his advance became almost impossible, Schuyler headed toward the higher part of the peninsula, determined to make a detour and possibly join the occupants of the *Red Bird* at the head of the bay arm.

Lewis soon found trouble. The boy was on water he had never visited. Not only was the winding estuary thick with obstructing lilies, hyacinths and weeds, but it was shallow. Progress could only be made between broad and unseen mud flats. But the keen-eyed pilot soon discovered bunches of dead palmetto leaves stuck here and there by which he knew some one used the bay. By following these signs he advanced finally into a narrow overhung tunnel of oaks and mangroves.

Then, the same observing eyes made out, start-

ing under a specially low-hanging mangrove tree, a canal, not more than four feet wide. Lewis could make out a boat within the opening, unmasted and almost concealed beneath palmetto branches. Eager to give some zest to the expedition, he unstepped his own mast and pushed the *Red Bird* into the hidden harbor. There was just room for the two boats.

The boy was rejoiced to discover what he hoped to find. At the side of the hidden boat was a packed mass of broken oyster shells affording a footing in the swamp. Leading from this were palmetto tree trunks on which there was a possibility of getting forward with dry feet. Somewhere, he concluded, a path must be found back in the swamp leading to the ridge beyond. And there Lewis was prepared to at last select a convenient spot in which to search for the French king's money.

If the treasure seekers had followed their chart with precision, the cross indicating the treasure would have been found several hundred yards south of this little canal and not far from the shore of the bayou. Lewis had marked this point when the *Red Bird* passed Coon Island, using Captain O'Connor's compass and locating the spot by a dead oak.

"But," he explained, "since there ain't any-

thing there but water, it stands to reason we've got to follow the line northeast till it strikes dry ground."

"Do we have to walk on these logs to get there?" asked Lucile hesitatingly.

"Start ahead," was Becky's prompt suggestion, and Lewis prepared to lead the girls over the half stagnant water and oozy ground. Before he had gone ten feet, a sound stopped all instantly. A gruff voice, in evident anger, sounded not far away. Almost with it came a sharp rejoinder. At first, none of the treasure seekers could distinguish the words.

"I tell yo' to git"—now the gruff voice was more audible—"or I'll make yo'!"

"Keep your shirt on," was the clearer answer. "I ain't botherin' you."

"It's Schuyler," exclaimed Lucile. "What can he——"

"This ain't no place fer sneaks. Mosey out o' here er I'll give yo' a taste o' bird shot. What yo' lookin' fer?"

"I'm lookin' for my friends," replied the other voice.

"Well, yo' ain't got no friends 'round here. This is private. Now git!"

"My friends are down there on the bay," per-

sisted the second voice, "in a boat; I'm lookin' for 'em."

"Yo' git back the way yo' come," exclaimed the deeper voice with an oath, "an' fergit the path. Ef I see yo' sneakin' this way agin I'll fill yo' full o' lead. Understand?"

At these words Lewis, pale of face and listening intently, sprang forward. The two girls grasped each other.

"It's Schuyler, I tell you," panted Lucile. "Something's happened."

Becky gasped with excitement. "I hope he's gone," was all she could think to say and then, also trembling from fright, she closed her eyes like one preparing for the explosion of a near-by firearm. In a few moments came another voice.

"Put that gun down!" It was Lewis. "Stop, or you'll be sorry."

There was an instant exclamation ending in another oath. "Where'd yo' come from?"

"Don't matter where I come from. You drop that gun."

"Oh," sounded the deep voice in an attempt at a laugh. "Come to spy on the old man, did you?"

The two girls faced each other in paralyzed surprise.

"So you've took to smugglin'?" were the next

words—Lewis speaking in new anger. “No wonder we didn’t know where you were——”

Before the sentence was completed there was the sound of a scuffle, a jumble of half-spoken words, all preceded by a cry of “look out!” from Schuyler, and finally Becky and Lucile, crouching against an oak, heard a new interchange of words that were indistinguishable. Lucile was crying.

“Some one’s hurt, I know it,” she sobbed. Becky could no longer restrain herself. “I’ll see,” she panted, and loosening herself from Lucile’s grasp crept forward on the treacherous footway.

When the trembling girl at last made her way into the depth of the swamp to where a wall of palmettos, water oaks, Spanish moss and tangled vines almost stopped her, the sound of voices led her to the right. A log, half submerged, spanned a currentless stretch of stagnant water. She crossed, not stopping to reason, and found herself in the edge of a new thicket of gigantic grasses—higher than her head.

But she found herself on solid ground. In fact, she was standing on one of those curiosities of southern swamps—a firm island of small shells. This, at the moment, she did not note, for the bent grasses showed a dim path before her and, heed-

less of her footing or her clothes, she plunged into the opening. Within five yards the wall of grass ended.

“Go back,” exclaimed a voice and, almost before she could examine the circular opening, the girl saw Schuyler running toward her. But instead of going back, Becky ran toward the boy.

“What’s happened?” she whimpered.

“Nothing much,” panted Schuyler, his face white. “It’s all over now; it’s all right.”

Reassured by Schuyler’s presence, the girl looked about. In a grass-entangled enclosure, not over thirty feet across and dark within the shadow of a wall of trees, gloomy beneath clouds of swaying moss, stood a low hut. It was wholly of palmetto branches, withered and brown, the latania cabin of the swamps. In front, where the white shells were begrimed with the black of half-burned firewood, a pot steamed on a smoldering fire.

In the open front of the cabin sat a man, his knees drawn under his chin. Near by stood Lewis with a sawed-off shotgun in his hands. The man looked at Becky but he said nothing. Schuyler, trembling with excitement, spoke first.

“I was trying to find you folks,” he managed to explain, “and I wandered into the swamp and got lost. Then I saw smoke and waded over here.

He," and he indicated the man, "got mad and threatened to shoot me."

"There's a log right there," answered Becky, recovering herself, "and some others leading toward the bay. Lucile's back there. You go and stay with her."

"I'll bring her here," suggested Schuyler.

"No," exclaimed Lewis. "You wait there. We'll be along in a few minutes."

When the rasping grasses shut Schuyler's form from sight, Becky, already suspecting the truth, advanced toward the cabin. The man scrambled slowly to his feet. He seemed stiffened with rheumatism. He wore an old shooting coat and trousers, both revoltingly greasy. A beard hung down over a soiled red undershirt but it was too thin to conceal this defect in costume. A heavy palmetto hat, sun-baked to chocolate color and with its limp brim turned up all around, completed his garb.

"This is my father," said Lewis at last, showing no emotion.

The girl hesitated while the man turned suddenly toward Lewis in a startled manner. Then, Becky, hardly knowing what she was doing, advanced and held out her hand. The old man moved back.

"I know Lewis," faltered the girl, "and he's

been very kind to me. I'm glad to know you." She held out her hand again. The man seemed frightened but this time he could not escape. "I'm Marjorie Beckwith," went on the girl, smiling because she did not know what else to do; "we're on a pleasure cruise and our schooner's up at the Inlet."

The man, with one eye still on Lewis, took the girl's hand and instantly released it.

"I thought you was workin' in the printin' office," he mumbled at last, still watching Lewis. The boy, his face cold and hard, did not answer.

"What are you doing here?" asked Becky innocently. Then, in sudden alarm, she added: "It's a nice little place for a camp."

"What's he doin'?" repeated Lewis, instantly. "I'll tell you what he's doin', since I reckon he won't—preferrin' to shoot people. He's just smugglin', that's all."

"I ain't," broke in the man in a trembling voice. "I ain't no smuggler."

"No, I reckon not," exclaimed Lewis in new anger. "You're just hidin' stuff. Smugglin's too dangerous, I reckon. He's just a watchman for smugglers—layin' in the grass to shoot people in the back."

The old man made a feeble effort to resent the charge but the result was without effect, for

Lewis walked toward him, his eyes flaming and his lips drawn.

"Look!" exclaimed the boy, pointing within the hut, "This is why my mother has to work alone; this is how some folks make a livin', guardin' contraband for law breakers an' niggers."

"Niggers?" wheezed his father.

"Yes, niggers," repeated Lewis. "But you'll get no pay for layin' out here in the swamp. Jupiter Jim's pinched. Your boss'll not come for his stuff. The gang's all arrested. And you'll be, too, before dark to-morrow."

Becky had given the interior of the cabin one sweeping, curious glance. She made out vaguely an old blanket on the shells and, piled about it, bales, small crates, casks and tins. At her feet she saw a bit of gold and crimson paper. It was a cigar band such as the revenue officer's cigars bore. These, then, were goods from the smuggler's schooner, hid in the marsh to be carried secretly across the river and down to Palm Beach. And Lewis' father was a smuggler, guilty with the others, who must soon be found and carried away like Jupiter Jim and his pals.

The old man's face was distorted with fear and anger.

"Jim's been arrested?" he stammered chokingly.

“And half a dozen revenue men will be scourin’ these holes to-morrow,” went on Lewis. “They’ll find you, don’t be afeard, if you stick to your job o’ bein’ watchman for a nigger.”

Lewis’ father seemed to lose what courage he may have had up to that moment.

“Where can I go?” he whined, “I ain’t got no money. I ain’t got decent clothes to go nowhere but in the swamps,” and he stepped back and glanced about as if escape might be through the grass and vines.

“Don’t look at me,” answered Lewis bitterly. “I haven’t any money to help you.”

Becky, her slender throat swelling and her temples red, tried to speak. But her mouth seemed parched. Tears were in her eyes. Was Lewis as heartless as he seemed? Did he mean to drive his own father into the swamps—the pathless Everglades—as a fugitive from justice, that the old man might escape arrest and prison? The girl glanced from the fear-infested man to the white-faced son.

“Oh, Mr. Ahlswede,” she cried at last, as an idea gave her voice, “it’s all true, just as Lewis says. I heard it all; they’re coming to-morrow and they’ll find you. You mustn’t stay here; you’ve got to leave right away!” The disconsolate smuggler seemed to shrink with helpless fear.

"But you don't need to run away; they don't know you."

"Jupiter Jim'll tell 'em, never fear," announced Lewis.

"Never," exclaimed the grizzled man, with his first show of spirit. "Jim'll rot in jail first."

"Do you want to get away?" went on Becky, her eyes flaming and her fists clenched.

"What's the use?" mumbled the man. "I ain't no place to go. They'll be watchin' the fishin' grounds."

"Father," broke in Lewis, and, for the first time, there was a little kindness in his voice. "I know what Miss Becky means. You ain't been much like a father to me, but if she wants to help you I reckon I ought. If you don't clean out o' this place to-day, you ain't never goin' to have a chance to do better. If you don't——" and the boy's face grew hard again.

"Yes," exclaimed Becky, breathing fast, "that's it. Lewis is the only one who can help you now. And you can help him," she added, with a gulp.

"I ain't no place to hide," repeated the man, disconsolately.

"You don't need to hide," the girl went on, her voice strained. "Lewis and I and my friends came here to-day pretending we were looking for something that was lost. Haven't you been lost?"

she asked, a little piteously and with a quaver in her voice, "and haven't you been lost long enough? Please, Mr. Ahlswede, I'm awfully sorry for you, and I know Lewis is, too, in his heart. Let's pretend we found you. Let us take you away from where you've been buried."

The bewildered man may not have understood wholly. He turned his old hat in his hands, without speaking.

"She means you're to go home, and stay," explained Lewis, coldly.

"Yes," hastily added Becky, "that's it. Will you?"

"I reckon I'd ought to," answered the man finally, without emotion.

"I'll come for you at sundown," announced Lewis, and Becky's search for buried treasure was at an end.

At three o'clock the *Olivette* made sail down the river for Fort Pierce. Before dusk Lewis, in the *Red Bird*, set out up the river again and, in the shadow of night, headed in for Coon Island and the tangled estuary behind it. Five days later the boy came down the river again and, sober of face as of old, resumed his work on the schooner.

Living part of the time ashore in the little hotel at Fort Pierce, Mrs. Hatton seemed to grow fonder of her novel outing as the days slipped by.

At the end of a week she gave a party at the hotel. At the end of another week the *Olivette* turned homeward. But the Lodge was not forgotten. Here the sunburned travelers stopped nearly a week.

But, five weeks from the day she set forth, the homelike schooner sighted the Melbourne pier once more. Becky's letters to her aunt had not prepared that doubting lady for the change she was to find in the girl. When the joy in Mrs. Fairfield's face showed this—they were holding a little reception in the reading room of the *Coquina* and incidentally settling accounts with Captain Sam and his wife—Mrs. Hatton spoke up.

“Don't believe your niece was the only one who profited. I'm so proud of my new daughter that I can scarcely wait to show Lucile to her father.”

“And where do I come in?” laughed Schuyler, big and bronzed.

“You've learned how to take orders,” said his mother, with emphasis. “Miss Becky has done more with you than your father and I ever could.”

“An' she's comin' to visit us, too, this summer,” spoke up Ruth.

A little later Becky, by arrangement, met Lewis Ahlswede in Mr. Carlson's store.

“Well,” exclaimed the girl, cheerfully, as she broke into a conversation between Lewis and his

friend the storekeeper. "What'd you find? How about it?"

Mr. Carlson turned spokesman. "I reckon it's all right," he began. "The old man's settled down an' workin' in the grove an' garden like he was glad to get back. Your friend here," and he nodded toward Lewis, "never come for the things you told me to give him, so, about a week ago, I switched the contrac' to his father, knowin' you wouldn't care."

Becky clapped her hands for joy. Lewis turned and looked out of the window.

"The old man looked purty spruce," went on Mr. Carlson, with a chuckle. Then his face sobered. "Lewis has been tellin' me what yo'-all have fixed up for him. Miss Becky, he added, with apparent pride, "if yo' ain't a captain, they never was one."

The girl flushed. "Mrs. Hatton will arrange for him to go north," she explained, "and perhaps go to school next year. Your father's back now," she went on, dropping her voice; "you're goin', aren't you?"

"Well," answered the boy, nervously, "I ain't takin' orders from you no more, but I reckon I ought to go, Captain Becky!"

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