

Rod of the Lone Patrol eBook

Rod of the Lone Patrol

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ROD OF THE LONE PATROL

CHAPTER I

A WAIF OF THE NIGHT

Parson Dan chuckled several times as he sipped his hot cocoa before the fire. It was an open fire, and the flames licked around an old dry root which had been brought with

other driftwood up from the shore. This brightly-lighted room was a pleasing contrast to the roughness of the night outside, for a strong late October wind was careening over the land. It swirled about the snug Hillcrest rectory, rattling any window which happened to be a little loose, and drawing the forked-tongued flames writhing up the large commodious chimney.

When the third chuckle had been emitted, Mrs. Royal laid aside the paper she had been reading and looked somewhat curiously at her husband.

"The missionary meeting must have been very amusing to-night, Daniel," she remarked. "It is too bad that I didn't go."

"Oh, no, it wasn't the meeting which was amusing," was the reply. "But I must say it was the best one I ever attended. That missionary had a great story to tell and he told it well. There was a good attendance, too, especially for such a cold night. But you can't guess, my dear, who was there."

"The Bishop?"

"No, no," and the parson rubbed his hands in glee and gave another boyish chuckle. "Give it up, eh?" and his eyes sparkled as he turned them upon his wife's puzzled face.

"Yes."

"I thought so. You could never guess, for you would never think of Captain Josh."

"No, surely not, Daniel!" and Mrs. Royal, now all attention, drew her chair a little closer to the fire. "What in the world took him there to-night? I never knew him to go to church, let alone to a missionary meeting."

"Oh, that is easily explained, dear. His only son, you know, is in the Yukon, and he was anxious to hear about that country. He was certainly the most interested person there, and after the meeting was over, he walked right up to Mr. Dicer and asked him if he had met his son."

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"And had he?" Mrs. Royal inquired.

"Yes; knew him well. Now, the way those two men did talk would have done your heart good. To think of Captain Josh chatting with a missionary, when for years he has been so much down on missions and missionaries. That is one on the old captain, and I shall not forget it when I see him again, ho, ho," and Parson Dan leaned back in his comfortable chair and fairly shook with merriment.

"I hope that his interest will keep up," was Mrs. Royal's comment, as she picked up the paper she had laid aside. "Perhaps he will learn that missionaries are of some use in the world after all."

"I am afraid not, Martha," the parson returned, as he reached for his pipe and tobacco lying on a little stand by his side. "It is only his son which made him interested to-night, and that is as far as it goes."

"It might be the beginning, though, Daniel, who can tell? I always liked Jimmy. He and Alec got on so well together. Do you know what day this is?"

"Ay, ay, Martha," and the clergyman's face grew grave, and a slight mistiness dimmed his eyes. "I haven't forgotten it."

"He would have been twenty-five to-day, Daniel."

"I know it, and it seems only yesterday that I went for old Doctor Paddock. It was a night something like this, and I was so afraid that we would not get back in time."

The fire danced cheerily before them, and the clock on the mantel ticked steadily as the two sat for some time in silence, gazing thoughtfully upon the blazing sticks.

"I dreamed last night that I saw him," Mrs. Royal at length remarked. "He was a baby, and had on his little white dress. He looked up into my face and smiled, just like he used to do. I gave a cry of joy and put out my arms to take him. At that I awoke, and he disappeared. Oh, Daniel, we didn't value him enough when we had him—and now he's gone."

"And do you remember, Martha, what plans we made for his future? Our hopes have been sadly shattered."

"We have only his memory with us now, Daniel," was the quiet reply. "I always think of him as a baby, or as a strong manly boy coming home from school. But for that precious recollection I hardly know how I could bear up at all."

Scarcely had she finished speaking, when a faint knock sounded upon the front door. They both started and listened attentively, thinking that perhaps it was only the wind.



But when the knock was repeated, Parson Dan rose quickly to his feet, crossed the room and entered the outer hall. As he unlocked and opened the front door, a shaving of cold wind whipped into the room, while the inky night rose suddenly before him like a great perpendicular wall. For a few seconds he could see nothing, but as his eyes became accustomed to the blackness, he beheld a dim form standing before him. Then a large bundle was thrust suddenly into his arms, and the figure disappeared.

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He thought he heard a sob borne on the night air as he stood in the door-way clutching the burden imposed upon him. But perhaps it was only the wailing of the wind he heard. He was too dazed to be sure of himself as he stood there peering forth into the night, expecting some one to enter, or at least to speak and explain the meaning of this strange behaviour. But none of these things happened, so, still bewildered, he closed the door with his foot and made his way back into the living-room.

"Daniel, Daniel! what are you standing there in the draught for?" his wife remonstrated. "You will get your death of cold."

She ceased abruptly, however, when she saw her husband enter with the strange bundle in his arms.

"What is it?" she gasped, rising quickly to her feet.

"Don't know," was the reply. "It's alive, anyway, whatever it is, for it's beginning to wriggle. Here, take it."

But Mrs. Royal shrank back, and raised her hands as if to protect herself.

"It won't hurt you, dear. What are you afraid of?"

"But it's alive, you say. It might not be safe to have it in the house. Where did it come from?"

Before a reply could be given, the bundle gave a vigorous twist, while a muffled squeal came from beneath the clothes, which almost caused the parson to drop his burden upon the floor. But that sound stirred Mrs. Royal to immediate action. No longer did she hesitate, but stepping forward relieved her husband of his charge.

"It is a baby!" she cried, at the same time drawing aside the shawl and exposing the chubby face of a child nestling within. A pair of bright blue eyes looked up into hers, and a queer little chuckle of delight came from the small rose-bud of a mouth. So pleased was it to have its face uncovered, that it performed the rest of the job itself, and by means of a few strenuous kicks disengaged its feet from their covering and stuck them straight up into the air.

"Bless its little heart!" was Mrs. Royal's motherly comment. "It is going to make itself at home, anyway."

Seating herself before the fire, she laid aside the shawl and straightened out the baby's mussed garments. They were clothes of the plainest, but spotlessly clean.

Parson Dan stood watching his wife with much interest. This little waif of the night appealed to him in a remarkable manner.

"Who do you suppose left it here?" he at last asked. "It is no child of this parish, I feel quite sure of that."

"Perhaps it was an angel who did it," Mrs. Royal replied. "It may be that the good Lord has taken compassion upon our loneliness since we lost Alec and has given us this in his stead."

"No, I cannot believe that, Martha. I do not for a moment doubt that such a thing is possible, oh, no. But that old shawl and those plain clothes do not look much like heavenly robes, do they? I think that the hands which made that little white dress were human hands such as ours, and the sob which I heard to-night was not the sob of an angel but of a heart-broken mother."

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"Well, she is the angel, then, whoever she is," Mrs. Royal insisted, "and perhaps she will come for the baby to-morrow."

"Oh, do you think so, Martha?" and there was a note of anxiety in the parson's voice. "How nice it would be to keep it."

"Why do you say 'it,' Daniel? Why don't you say 'her'?"

"I never knew before that it was a 'her,'" and the parson chuckled as he stroked his clean-shaven chin with the fingers of his right hand.

"You didn't?" and his wife looked her surprise. "Why, any one who has the least knowledge of babies can tell a boy from a girl at the first glance. There is always a marked difference in the way they behave."

"Ah, is that so, dear?"

"Certainly. A boy as a rule is cranky when he wakes. But do you notice how good natured this baby is? and how she lies so quietly in my lap, looking wonderingly into the fire? And notice how delicately she is formed; how perfect her face; how slight her neck, and how tiny her arms and hands. Oh, it is always easy for a woman to tell which is which."

"What shall we call her, Martha?" and Parson Dan drew up his chair and sat down.

"I have been thinking of that, Daniel, but have not decided yet. I always liked Deborah; it is such a good strong name."

"It is a good old name, anyway," was the somewhat reluctant assent. "But she is sure to get 'Debbie,' or 'Deb,' which I dislike very much."

"Oh, that all depends upon what a child is called at home, Daniel. If we begin at once to call her Deborah, people will do the same."

"Very well, Martha, if you wish to call her Deborah, I have no objection. But——"

Here the parson paused, leaned over and picked up a small piece of white paper lying upon the floor. He glanced carelessly at it at first, but as he read the words written thereon his eyes opened wide. He looked at his wife, who was intently watching the baby, and an amused expression broke over his face. Then came the inevitable chuckle.

"What is it now, Daniel?" his wife questioned. "That is the fourth time you've chuckled already to-night. It seems to take very little to amuse you."

“Suppose the baby isn’t a girl after all, dear?” the parson replied, ignoring his wife’s sarcastic remark.

“Not a girl! What do you mean?”

“Suppose she should be a boy, after all?”

“The idea is ridiculous, Daniel. Don’t you suppose I know a girl from a boy?”

“Very well, then, read that,” and the clergyman handed her the slip of paper.

“Please take care of Rodney. I will come for him some day. The Lord will reward you even if I can’t.

“His mother.”

As Mrs. Royal read this brief note, a peculiar expression overspread her face. She uttered no word, but her head drooped lower over the baby and she remained very still. Her husband at once realising how she felt, laid his hand upon hers.

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"There, there, dear," he soothed. "I didn't mean to make you feel badly. It was only a little mistake after all, and I am really glad it is a boy, for it will make us think that we have Alec with us again."

Mrs. Royal looked up and brushed away a tear. At that instant the baby gave a vigorous kick, accompanied by a peculiar gurgle of delight, at which the two attendants laughed heartily.

"That's right, little man," and the parson nodded his head approvingly. "You're pleased, too, are you, to know that we've found out that you are a boy? You didn't want to be called Deborah, Debbie, or Deb, did you? Rodney suits you better, eh? How do you like the name, Martha?"

"Very well, indeed," and Mrs. Royal gave a sigh of relief. "It removes quite a load from my mind. But, there," she added, "I must put him to bed. It isn't good for a baby to be up so late. Come, Rodney," and she lifted the little one in her arms, "kiss your——"

"Grandad," the parson assisted as his wife paused. "We shall teach him to call me that, eh? It will be better than 'daddy.'"

"You look after him, Daniel, while I make his bed ready. Don't let him fall. There, that's good," and Mrs. Royal stepped back to view the baby lying in her husband's arms.

Lighting a candle which was standing on tin mantel over the fire-place, she went upstairs and stopped before a door on the left of the hall-way. This she opened and softly entered. The room was small, but neat and cosy. Every piece of furniture was in its proper place, and the bed looked as if it had been recently made. The walls were adorned with various articles, from a number of shelves, filled with books for boys, to snow-shoes, fishing-rods, a rifle, and college colours. It had been several years since any one had slept in that room, but not a day had passed during that period that Mrs. Royal had not entered and sat for a while in the big easy chair by the side of the bed. Everything was there just as Alec had left it, though a few things had been added since.

One of these was a crib which had been his. This was standing in a corner of the room with the little pillow and white spread in perfect order. For a few moments Mrs. Royal stood looking down upon the small cot associated with such sweet memories. Then she placed the candle upon a small table and set earnestly to work. First she removed the clothes and mattress and carried the crib into her own room across the hall. Going back for the clothes, she carried them downstairs, and spread them upon the backs of several chairs for them to warm before the fire.

Parson Dan watched her intently, but made no comment. He fully realised how risky it was to speak just then. He knew how much it meant for his wife to disturb that little cot and make it ready for a strange child. Neither did he wish to say anything, for he

himself was deeply stirred as memories of other days rushed upon him. When at last Rodney was carefully covered and sound asleep in the crib upstairs, they both stood looking down upon his sweet round face.

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"Poor little waif," Mrs. Royal remarked. "He is somebody's child, and perhaps his mother is longing for him at this very moment."

"There is no doubt about it," her husband replied. "That sob which I heard to-night is still ringing in my ears, and I know it was the sob of a heart-broken mother."

CHAPTER II

GIVING AND RECEIVING

The baby awoke bright and early the next morning, in fact too early for Mr. and Mrs. Royal. The former, especially, enjoyed the hour from six to seven, when, as he once said, he obtained his "beauty sleep." But the little stranger of the night was no respecter of persons. He lifted up his voice at the unnatural hour of five, and by means of a series of gurgles, whoops, and complaints, drove all sleep from drowsy eyes. He was not in the least abashed in the presence of strangers, but standing in his crib, he rattled the side, and yelled shouts of baby defiance at the other occupants of the room.

"I didn't know that he could stand alone," the parson remarked as he first saw Rodney scramble to his feet. "How old do you suppose he is?"

"About fourteen months, I should judge, Daniel," his wife replied. "He may be older, though. One can't always tell."

"He's a stirring lad, anyway, Martha, and we shall have our hands full. Won't you need some help, dear? How would it do to get a woman in occasionally to assist with the work, as the baby will take so much of your time?"

"That will not be necessary, Daniel. By the look of things now we shall be up earlier each morning, and one hour then is worth two later in the day."

After the parson had lighted the fire in the cooking-stove, and also the one in the living-room, he went to the barn to milk. He kept one Jersey cow which supplied enough milk for the house. This was a fine animal, and the pride of the neighbourhood, as it had taken the first prize at the large Exhibition held that very fall in the city.

The rectory was situated upon land known as "The Glebe," about fifty acres in extent, which had been granted to the Church by the Crown in Loyalist days. About one-third of this was under cultivation, producing hay and oats for the horse and cow, as well as all the vegetables needed for the table. Several acres were given up to pasturage, while the remainder was wooded. The Royals were, therefore, most comfortably situated, and quite independent. A small orchard provided them with apples, the taste of which was well known to every person in the parish, especially the children, for Parson Dan seldom started forth without his pockets filled with Russets, Pippins, or Fameuse. Mrs.

Royal had her hens, and no eggs seemed as large and fresh as the ones she often sent to some sick or aged person, in the parish.

While Mrs. Royal was looking after the baby, the parson fed his horse, "Sweepstakes," and milked "Brindle," the cow. He then turned the latter loose, and drove her down the lane to the feeding-ground beyond.

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"There is a stray cow out in the pasture," the clergyman informed his wife as he sipped his coffee.

"Whose is it?" was the somewhat absent-minded reply, for Mrs. Royal's attention was upon Rodney, who was creeping gaily about the floor, examining every nook, and making himself perfectly at home.

"I don't know whose it is," the parson retorted, a little nettled at his wife's question. "I can tell you about every man, woman, and child in this parish; I know all the horses and dogs, and can give you their pedigrees. But I draw a line at cows, pigs, hens, and cats. I am fond enough of them, but there is a limit to the things I can remember. I forget too much as it is. And, by the way, that reminds me that I must go to Hazlewood to-day. Joe Bradley told me last night that his mother is ill, and wishes to see me. He came all the way to the meeting on purpose to tell me, and to think that I nearly forgot all about it! It was that young rascal, though, who did it," and the parson turned his eyes upon the baby. "Do you think that you can make out alone with him, Martha? I fear that I shall be away all day, as there are several other calls I must make at Hazlewood."

"Oh, I shall make out all right," was the reply. "But there are several things you might bring me from the store on your way home. I will make out a list for you, as you would be sure to forget them."

It was almost dusk when Parson Dan returned from his long journey, tired and hungry.

"How is the boy?" he asked as he entered the house, after having stabled Sweepstakes.

"He's as good as gold, Daniel," Mrs. Royal replied. "But I am worried about Brindle. She hasn't come in yet, and I cannot see her anywhere in the pasture."

"She's with that strange cow, no doubt, Martha, and I shall go after her at once. It will be too dark if I wait until supper is over."

Parson Dan was absent for about an hour, and it was dark when he returned to the rectory. He looked disappointed.

"Brindle is gone," was the news he imparted to his wife. "I found where the fence was broken down. That strange cow must have done it, for I never knew Brindle to do such a thing. I wonder how that cow got in there, anyway. It is a complete mystery to me. I tried to follow the cows through the woods, but it got so dark that I was forced to give up the search. I must be off early in the morning or there will be no milk for the wee lad's breakfast."

"And none for our coffee, Daniel," was his wife's reminder. "Milk will be a very poor substitute for cream, but it will be better than nothing."

“That’s quite true, Martha. It’s been a long time since we’ve been without milk or cream in the house. But we can stand it better than the baby. Poor little chap, he must not starve, even if we have to borrow some from our neighbours. I hope Rodney has not tired you too much to-day, dear. It has been years since you had the care of a baby.”

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"It has been a great joy, Daniel, to have the laddie with me. He slept several hours, and when he woke he was so good and full of fun. At times I imagined he was Alec playing on the floor with his blocks. He was very sweet when I put him to bed to-night. He never misses his mother. How soon a baby forgets."

"But I venture to say that his mother hasn't forgotten him," and the parson's face grew serious as he recalled that sob of the night before. "I have been thinking of her all through the day, and wondering who she is, and why she left her baby at our door."

"And so have I, Daniel. I had the idea that she would return, and several times I started at the least noise, expecting to see her at the door."

"I do not wish to deprive the mother of her baby," the parson thoughtfully mused, "but how I should like to keep him! He seems to belong to us. In fact, he has made himself perfectly at home already."

Parson Dan was astir unusually early the next morning. He stood before the rectory looking up and down the road, uncertain which course to take in search of the missing Brindle.

"Let me see," he considered, "that fence is down on the upper side, and most likely those cows have made their way up the road. I guess I had better hunt there first."

As he stood there his eyes roamed over the scene before him. The rectory was situated upon a gentle elevation, surrounded by tall, graceful elms, and large branching maples. Below the road was the parish church, standing where it had stood for almost one hundred years, amid its setting of elms, maples, and oaks. Nearby was the cemetery, where the numerous shafts of marble and granite could be plainly seen from the road. To the right and left were pretty cottages, for the most part closed, as they belonged to people from the city, who, like the swallows, having spent their summer in this beautiful spot, had flitted at the approach of winter. Beyond stretched the St. John River, one of the finest sheets of water in the province, or even in Eastern Canada. This morning it appeared like a magic mirror, with not a breath of wind ruffling its placid surface.

Parson Dan's heart filled with pride and peace as he gazed upon the entrancing scene. Seldom had it looked so beautiful, and he believed that the early morning hour had much to do with its attractiveness.

"Glorious, glorious!" he murmured, "and so few abroad to see it. How the spirit of peace is brooding over river and land! Marvellous are Thy works, O Lord, and Thy mercies are renewed every morning."



He was aroused from his meditation by the sound of foot-steps upon the road. Glancing quickly around, he saw a tall, powerfully-built man approaching, carrying in his right hand a large stick, which he brought down upon the ground with a resounding thump. His clothes were rough; a heavy pair of boots encased his feet, while an old soft felt hat covered a head crowned with a wealth of iron-grey hair. He seemed like a veritable patriarch of ancient Hebrew days, and this likeness was intensified by his aquiline nose, keen eagle-like eyes, and a long beard sweeping his expansive chest. A smile lightened his face as he approached.

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"Good mornin', parson," was his cheery greeting. "Ye're abroad early."

"Oh, good morning, captain," was the hearty reply. "We seem to be the only persons astir, eh?"

"More's the pity, parson. Don't see the like of that every day," and the captain waved his stick through the air. "Fine sight, that."

"It certainly is," the clergyman assented, "and how few are abroad to see it. But say, captain, you haven't seen anything of my cow, have you?"

"Ho, ho, that's a sudden jump, isn't it, parson?"

"A sudden what?"

"A sudden jump from the sublime to the ridiculous; from a scene like that to a cow."

"Not when you have no milk or cream, captain. Brindle has broken out of the pasture, and I have no idea where she can be."

"Did ye pray this mornin' that ye might find her, parson?"

"No, I can't say that I did," was the somewhat reluctant reply, for Parson Dan was well accustomed to Captain Josh's thrusts.

"Ah, that's too bad. The missionary said night before last that we must pray if we expect to receive, didn't he?"

"Yes, captain, he did."

"And he told us more'n that, parson. He said that we couldn't expect to receive unless we gave."

"Yes, he said that also."

"And by jingo, he was right, too," and the captain brought his stick down upon the road with a bang. "I've tried it, and it has turned out just as the missionary said it would."

"You have!" and the clergyman looked his astonishment. "I am so glad, captain, to know that you have come to view things in a different light. I was pleased to see you at the missionary meeting, and I am so thankful that you were benefited by what you heard. Won't you tell me how you proved Mr. Dicer's words to be true?"

"Would ye like to know, parson?" and a sly twinkle shone in the captain's eyes as he asked the question.

“Certainly. Go ahead.”

“And ye won’t feel hurt?”

“Feel hurt! Why should I?”

“Well, ye see, it concerns yer cow, and no matter how a man might feel about the welfare of others, when it comes to himself and his own personal property, it makes a great difference.”

“I do not understand your meaning, captain,” and the clergyman’s voice had a note of sharpness. “What has the missionary meeting to do with my cow?”

“Considerable, parson, considerable. When I went home from that meetin’, sez I to my wife, ‘Betsey, I have learned a new wrinkle to-night, which may be of much use to us.’ She asked me what I meant, so I up and told her what the missionary had said about givin’ and receivin’. He laid it down very plain that unless a man gave to the Lord’s work, he couldn’t expect to prosper. Now, didn’t he?”

“That’s what he said,” and the clergyman nodded his assent.

“Well, then, sez I to Betsey, ‘Betsey, we’ve never prospered, because we’ve never given anything.’

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“But what have we to give?’ sez she.

“Nothin’ much,’ sez I, ‘except our old cow Bess.’

“Oh, we can’t give her,’ sez she. ‘We’ll have no milk if we do.’

“But we’ll get more in return,’ sez I. ‘The missionary said so, and I want to prove his words.’ Well, the long and short of it is, that I took Bess early the next mornin’ and turned her into your pasture afore you were up. Betsey was lookin’ pretty glum when I got back home, but I told her to cheer up, fer the Lord would prosper us as we had given Him our cow.”

“Captain Josh Britt!” the parson exclaimed. “I am astonished at you! How could you think of doing such a thing?”

“Why, what’s wrong with that?” and the captain tried to look surprised. “Isn’t it scriptural? I thought by givin’ Bess to you, I was givin’ her to the Church, and in that way she could be used fer the Lord’s work.”

“Oh, I see,” and the clergyman stroked his chin in a thoughtful manner.

“Yes, and I tell ye it succeeded like a charm,” the captain continued. “I gave up Bess, and, lo and behold, she came back last sight bringin’ another cow with her.”

“My cow, eh?” the parson queried.

“Sure. But didn’t it prove the missionary’s words to be true: ‘Give, and ye’ll receive more in return?’ We gave up our only cow and now we have two.”

Parson Dan made no immediate reply, for he was too deeply grieved to speak. His faint hope that a change had come over Captain Josh was now dispelled. For years he had mocked at church-going, and all things connected with religion. And so this was but another of his many tricks. But he must not let this scoffer off without a word of rebuke.

“Captain Josh,” and the parson’s voice was stern, “when you put your cow into my pasture you knew that she would come back, didn’t you?”

“Why, what makes ye think so, parson?”

“Didn’t you know that she would break down almost any fence?”

“Yes, I suppose I did.”

“And that she would naturally take my cow with her?”

As the captain did not answer, the parson continued.

“You did it merely to make a scoff at religion, and have a joke to tell at the store for others to laugh at. Oh, I know your tricks well enough. I have striven to live peaceably with all men, but you have sorely tried me on various occasions. Whatever good I have done in this parish, you have endeavoured to undo it by your scoffs and actions. I often wonder why you do such things to oppose me.”

Into the captain’s face came an expression of surprise mingled with anger. He had never heard the clergyman speak to him so plainly before, and he resented it.

“You have had your say, parson, and I have the cow,” he retorted, “so we are quits. Come and take her out of my yard if ye dare.”

“I don’t intend to try, captain. If you wish to injure your own soul by stealing Brindle you may do so. I can get another, only it will be hard on the little chap not to get his milk. I see it is no use for us to continue this conversation any further,” and the clergyman turned to go.

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"Hold on, parson," the captain cried, as he took a quick step forward. "D'ye mean the wee lad which was left at yer door t'other night?"

"Why, yes," the clergyman replied, in surprise, as he turned around. "How did you hear about him?"

"H'm, ye can't keep anything in this place a secret fer twenty-four hours. Trust the women to find out, especially about a baby, ha, ha!"

"Well, what of it?" and the parson looked keenly into the captain's eyes.

"Ob, nothin', except that if the wee chap has to go without his milk because I have Brindle, it makes all the difference in the world, see?"

"And you will let me have the cow without any fuss?"

"Sure. I'll bring her right over, and milk her fer ye, too. And, see here, parson, I didn't mean to offend ye. I know that I am a queer cranky cuss, but I never meant to keep Brindle. I only wanted to have a little fun, that's all. You've gone up a peg in my estimation since I heard that ye'd taken in that poor little waif. Shake on it, and let bygones be bygones."

So there in the middle of the road on this peaceful morning, the two neighbours clasped hands, and as Parson Dan walked slowly back to his house there was a sweet peace in his heart, and his eyes were a little misty as he opened the door.

CHAPTER III

THE WIDOW'S VISIT

Parson Dan spent most of the day in visiting his people in the parish, and accordingly had little time to give to Rodney. But after supper he began to romp with the wee man much to Mrs. Royal's amusement. There was considerable excitement for a while as the clergyman, on all-fours, carried the baby through the kitchen, into the dining-room, and back again. The boy shivered with delight as he sat perched upon the broad back. Forgotten were all parish cares as the venerable man gave himself up to the little waif. He had become a child again, and had entered that kingdom where children are the uncrowned monarchs, and the strong and the aged are willing subjects, yea, even most abject slaves.

In the midst of this hilarious frolic, the door of the dining-room, leading into the hall, was suddenly opened, and a woman entered. She was dressed all in black which costume was well in keeping with her face, which bore the same expression it did the day she buried her husband two years before. Her sober face grew a shade more sober as her



eyes rested upon the undignified scene before her, and she was about to turn and hurry back out of doors, when the parson caught sight of her. His face, flushed with the excitement of the romp, took a deeper hue when he saw Mrs. Marden standing before him. He scrambled to his feet, and plunked Rodney down upon the floor, much to that young gentleman's disgust. He at once set up a dismal howl, which took Mrs. Royal some time to silence when she had him alone in the kitchen.

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"I didn't see you, Mrs. Marden," the parson gasped, as he tried to recover his breath as well as his composure.

"So I observe," was the somewhat sarcastic reply, as the visitor surveyed her rector. "I knocked long and loud, but as there was no response, I took the liberty to enter. I am sorry that I have intruded. Perhaps I had better go."

"No, no, you must not think of such a thing," the parson replied, as he handed her a chair, and then struggled quickly into his coat, which he had cast aside at the beginning of the frolic. He was annoyed at Mrs. Marden's intrusion into the privacy of his family life, especially when he was off guard. He knew that she had come on some important business, as she otherwise never darkened the rectory door.

"You've become quite a family man, so I understand," she began. "It's the first time that I've seen the baby. I suppose you'll put him in the Orphan Home in the city."

"No, I shall do nothing of the sort," was the emphatic reply. "He shall stay here until his mother comes for him."

"H'm," and the widow tossed her head in a knowing manner, "then you'll have him on your hands for a long time. Do you for a moment imagine that a mother who is heartless enough to leave her baby with total strangers, will come for him? Not a bit of it. Mark my word, she's only too glad to be rid of it, and is off somewhere now having a good time. I should be very careful, if I were you, about bringing up such a child. You can't tell who his parents are, and he may inherit all their bad qualities."

The clergyman made no reply. He merely stroked his chin, and thought of the sob he had heard at the door that dark night.

"Such a child," Mrs. Marden continued, in her most doleful voice, "is sure to bring trouble upon you sooner or later. But, then, we all have our troubles, and must expect them. Ever since poor Abner was taken from me my life has been full of trials and tribulations. He was very good to me, and we were so happy."

At this point the widow produced her handkerchief, and wiped away the tears which were flowing down her cheeks. Parson Dan knew, and all the neighbours knew, that if Mrs. Marden's life was "full of trials and tribulations" after her husband's death, Mr. Marden had more than his share of them before he died, due directly to his wife's incessant nagging.

"Yes, I have my troubles," and the widow resumed her tale of woe. "They never cease, for just as soon as one is removed another springs up."

"Why, what's wrong now?" the parson queried.

“What! haven’t you heard?” and the visitor looked sharply at the clergyman.

“No, I can’t say that I have, especially of late.”

“Dear me, and it’s the talk of the whole parish. But, then, I suppose you’ve been so taken up with this new addition to your family that you have had no time to give to the cares of the widow and the fatherless.”

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A perceptible shade of annoyance passed over Parson Dan's face, and a sharp word of retort sprang to his lips. He repressed this, however, and answered as gently as possible.

"You know, Mrs. Marden," he began, "that often I am the last person to hear what is being said throughout the parish. I try not to listen to all the gossip which takes place, as I have more important things to occupy my mind. So——"

"And you don't consider my troubles important enough to listen to, eh?" Mrs. Marden interrupted. "Well, I declare. I never heard the like of that, and you my clergyman, too."

"Let me explain, please," the parson continued. "As I said, I seldom listen to gossip, because so much of it is of such a frivolous nature. Therefore, when anything of real importance is talked about, as a rule I do not hear that, either. In that way I have missed your story, Mrs. Marden. But when you come yourself to tell me, that makes all the difference, and I am ever ready to listen."

While Parson Dan was thus enduring with considerable patience his wearisome visitor, Rodney was creeping about the kitchen floor in a most lively manner. The dining-room door was ajar, and at last when Mrs. Royal's back was turned, he reached forth a small chubby hand, opened the door and entered. The parson saw him, but paid no attention to his movements. Mrs. Marden, however, who was sitting with her back to the door, was so occupied with her load of troubles that she neither saw nor heard the baby's entrance. On all-fours Rodney glided behind the widow's chair. Here against the wall stood a tall, slender cabinet, the lower shelves of which were filled with books, while above were various knick-knacks, all neatly arranged. It took Rodney but a second to scramble to his feet, and balance himself by clutching firmly at the cabinet which was not fastened to the wall. Then the inevitable happened. The cabinet at first trembled, and then began to fall. Parson Dan saw it coming, and with a cry he leaped to his feet, and caught it as it was about to crash upon Mrs. Marden's head. He could not, however, stop the knick-knacks, and so tea-cups, saucers, work-basket, a china dog, and numerous other articles were showered upon the widow, thus adding to her woes.

With a startled cry Mrs. Marden sprang to her feet, certain that the ceiling had fallen upon her. Hearing the confusion, Mrs. Royal rushed into the room, rescued Rodney unhurt from the ruins, and carried him back into the kitchen. The clergyman at once turned his attention to his visitor.

"I trust that you are not hurt," he remarked. "I am so sorry that this accident happened."

"I'm not hurt," was the feeble response, "but I feel very faint," and the widow sank into a chair, and closed her eyes. "There, I feel better now," she continued, breathing heavily. "Oh, what a shock that gave me! My troubles never cease. Just think, I might have been killed if the good Lord had not stopped that thing from falling."

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The clergyman repressed a smile as he well knew that the Lord had nothing to do with it. He kept his thoughts to himself, however, and busied himself with picking up the various articles and broken fragments which strewed the floor.

“What an awful baby he is,” Mrs. Marden at length, exclaimed. “If he can do such a terrible thing now, what will he do when he grows up? It is not safe to have such a child in your house.”

“Why, any child would have done the same,” the parson replied. “He didn’t mean any harm.”

“He didn’t! Why, what else did he mean, then? Children should be taught to behave themselves. I never allowed a child of mine to climb up and pull things over. Poor dear Abner often said that I was the one woman in the whole parish who knew how to bring up children. But, there, I must go. My head is aching badly, and I know that I shall get no rest to-night. Oh, what troubles we poor mortals are heir to in this mundane sphere.”

“You must not walk, Mrs. Marden,” Parson Dan insisted. “I shall drive you home. It will take me only a few minutes to harness Sweepstakes.”

“But I’m afraid it will be too much trouble,” was the reply.

“Not at all, not at all, Mrs. Marden, I shall be only too glad to do it.” In fact the rector was most anxious to get his visitor out of the house before she began to pour forth her tale of woe, which he believed she had forgotten. But in this he was doomed to disappointment.

“Just a minute, parson,” the widow began. “I haven’t told you yet the object of my visit here to-night.”

“Doesn’t your head trouble you too much to bother with it now?” the clergyman asked, trying to look as sympathetic as possible. “Suppose you wait until you feel better.”

“No, I can’t do that, for it might be too late. Just think what might become of me and my poor fatherless children if I put it off until to-morrow.”

“Oh, is it as serious as that, Mrs. Marden?”

“Indeed it is, and it is but another example of how the widow is oppressed. If poor Abner was only alive! But now that he is gone, people think that they can do what they like with a lonely widow.”

“What, has any one been trying to injure you, Mrs. Marden?”

“Yes, that’s just it. Tom Dunker is the one, and he’s trying to get the lighthouse from me.”

“Ah, so that’s it?” and the parson gave a deep sigh.

“Yes. He’s had the promise of it, so I understand. I’ve looked after that lighthouse ever since Abner died, and I have never failed in my duty once. But Tom Dunker, the sneak, wants it. He’s a Government supporter, and thinks he ought to have it for what he did at the last election. Abner voted opposition, and though they let me keep it ever since he died, the Dunkers have been making such a fuss about it that something has to be done to pacify them.”

“I am very sorry to hear this, Mrs. Marden,” and Parson Dan placed his hand to his forehead. This news troubled him, for he saw breakers ahead.

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"I knew that you would be sorry," the widow replied, "and so I have come to ask you to write to headquarters. A letter from you explaining the whole matter will have much effect."

The Bunkers were members of his flock, and Parson Dan was well aware how troublesome they could become if things did not go their way. But when his duty was clear he never hesitated, and as this was a case where it was necessary to protect the weak against the strong, he promised the widow that he would write at once on her behalf.

So at last the clergyman was free from the woman of many troubles, and with a deep sigh of relief he sought the kitchen where Mrs. Royal had Rodney all ready for bed.

CHAPTER IV

RODNEY DEVELOPS

The entire parish of Hillcrest soon took much interest in Rodney the waif. Tongues became loosened and people freely expressed their opinion about Parson Dan's action in taking the child into his house. Some were most harsh in their criticism, especially Tom Dunker, who had been defeated in the lighthouse affair owing to the letter the parson had written on behalf of Widow Marden. He was very angry, and nursed his wrath against the day when he could get even with the clergyman.

"We don't want a boy like that at the rectory," he complained. "He should have been sent to the Orphanage or the Poor House. We pay the parson's salary, an' we have a right to say who is to live by means of the money we give."

Now, Tom Dunker contributed only one dollar a year to the support of the Church, and he always gave that in a most begrudging manner. He even refused to give this small amount after the parson sided with the widow.

There were others, however, who stood loyally by their rector. They praised him for what he had done, and did all they could to assist him.

Thus this discussion was general throughout the parish for several weeks. Some were sure that they saw the woman who had left the child at the rectory. She had taken the early steamer the next morning for the city, so they said. Though the stories were somewhat different yet all agreed that the woman was beautiful, though her face was very sad, as if she had been weeping bitterly, and had not slept at all during the night.

Although the Royals heard faint rumours at times of what was being said, they went on their way undisturbed, happy in the feeling that they had done their duty, and pouring out their affection upon the little lad who had become so dear to their lonely hearts.

At Christmas they were greatly surprised when a letter from Boston reached them, with a post-office order enclosed for one dollar.

“I am hungry for news of my baby,” so the letter ran, “and will you please drop me a line to let me know how he is. I hope to send more money when I can. The above address will find me.

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"Anna Layor."

Parson Dan held the post-office order in his hand for some time after he had read the letter. His eyes stared straight before him into the fire, though he saw nothing there.

"That money goes into the bank, Martha," he at length remarked. "I shall open an account in Rodney's name. I could not use that money as it would weigh too heavily upon my conscience. A sacrifice has been made, there is no doubt of that. It is the price of blood, as truly as was the water brought to David from the well of Bethlehem."

"You are quite right, Daniel," his wife replied. "Something tells me that she is a good true woman, and that Rodney need never be ashamed of her. But do you notice her name, 'Anna Layor'?"

"Don't let that worry you, dear. I have the feeling that it is not her real name. Anyway, until we are sure let the boy keep ours."

That night Parson Dan wrote a long letter in answer to the brief one he had received that day. It was all about Rodney—in fact, a complete life history of the lad from the cold night he had been left at the rectory. Far away in the big American city a few days later, in a scantily furnished room, it was read by a woman whose tears fell upon the pages as she eagerly drank in every word which told her of the welfare of her darling child.

The next year Rodney's mother wrote every month, enclosing one dollar each time. This amount was duly deposited in the bank to the child's account. This was kept up with great regularity for several years, and during that time numerous letters were exchanged. The ones from the mother were always very brief, and never once did she mention anything about herself. It was all of Rodney she wrote, for her heart seemed full of love and longing for the child.

"Your letters are all too short," she once wrote. "I read them over and over again, and as you describe my little darling, how I long to see him and clasp him in my arms. God grant I may ere long have that blessed privilege. He is enshrined in my heart, and his sweet face is ever before me. I console myself with the thought that he is safe and well provided for. Some day, I feel sure, I shall to a certain extent repay you for all that you have done for him and me."

When Rodney was five years old, the money from his mother began to increase. At first it was two dollars a month, then three, and at last five. This somewhat worried the Royals, for they believed that Rodney's mother was in better circumstances, and would soon return for her boy. Their faces always grew very grave and their hearts heavy as they discussed this with each other. They dreaded the thought of parting with the little lad who had so completely won their affection.

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Rodney was rapidly developing into a strong sturdy lad. He was the joy of the house, and though of a most loveable disposition, he was like a will-o'-the-wisp, full of fun and life. He spent most of the time out of doors in summer among the birds and flowers. There was hardly a creature in the vicinity of the rectory which he did not know. He found birds' nests in the most unlikely places, and he often caused Parson Dan many a tramp, as he eagerly pointed out his numerous treasures in tree, field, or vine-covered fence. It was often hard for the clergyman to keep up with his young guide, who sped on before, his bare, curly hair gleaming like gold in the sun. Then, when he had parted several small bushes and exposed the nest of a grey-bird or a robin, his cheeks would glow with animation, and his eyes sparkle with delight. Parson Dan found more pleasure in watching this joy-thrilled lad than in the tiny eggs which were exhibited for his benefit.

This was an almost daily occurrence through the summer. Then at night, when tired with his day's rambles, Rodney would rest his head upon the soft pillow while Mrs. Royal read him to sleep. Stories he loved, and never wearied of them. One by one the books were brought from the Room of Sacred Memories until the boy knew them all.

"Did you read all of those books when you were little, Grandma?" Rodney once asked.

"Not when I was little, dear," was the quiet reply. "But I read them to a little boy, though, who was as fond of them then as you are now."

"Whose little boy was he, Grandma?"

"He was my little boy, Rodney."

"Was he? Isn't that funny? I didn't know that. What was his name?"

"It was Alec."

"And where is he now?"

"He grew to be a big man, and one day he went away from home, and—and I never saw him again."

"What are you crying for, Grandma?" the boy, asked, suddenly noticing that tears were streaming down Mrs. Royal's cheeks.

"I was thinking of my boy Alec, dear. He went away and never came back."

"Why didn't he?"

"Because he was killed."

“Oh!” and Rodney clasped his hands together,

“How was he killed, Grandma?”

“He was on a train which ran off the track. Many people were killed, and Alec was one of them.”

“And that was his room, was it?” Rodney asked. “And those were his books which he had when he was a little boy?”

“Yes, dear. But go to sleep now, and I shall tell you more about Alec some other time.”

So free was the life which Rodney led, that some of the neighbours often shook their heads, and prophesied trouble.

“If that boy Rod Royal isn’t looked after more’n he is he will come to a bad end, mark my word,” Tom Dunker ponderously remarked to his wife one evening. “He’s runnin’ wild, that’s what he is.”

“Well, what can you expect of a pauper child?” his wife replied.

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“Oh, I know that, Jane. I’m not blamin’ him; he can’t help it. But them who has the bringin’ up of him are at fault. What do the Royals know about the trainin’ of a child? Didn’t the only chick they ever had go wild, an’ him a parson’s son, too? I went to school with Alec, an’ I tell ye they kept a tight rein on him. I was sure that he’d be a parson like his dad. But, no, sirree, jist as soon as he got his freedom, he kicked over the traces like a young colt, an’ went away.”

Rodney gave the neighbours numerous causes for criticism. Unconsciously and boy-like, he did things which were often misconstrued as downright badness, whereas the boy had not the slightest intention of doing anything wrong. He was simply natural, while many of his critical elders were most unnatural. They had their own hide-bound rules of what was proper, so they found it impossible to enter into the child’s world, and look at things from his point of view.

One Sunday Rodney took a kitten with him to church. The little pet was smuggled in beneath his coat. So dearly did he love it that he could not bear to be parted with it during church time for fear that something would happen to it. And, besides, he liked to have it with him, that he might cuddle it during the service, which to him was long and uninteresting. There would have been no trouble if the kitten had been content to remain beneath its master’s coat. But, alas, when the organ struck up for the first hymn, it began to wriggle vehemently in an effort to get its head out to see where the peculiar noise came from. Rodney tried to keep it back and soothe its fears. But all in vain, for the kitten suddenly slipped from his grasp, and sprang out into the aisle. Rodney instantly darted after his pet, and seized it just as it was about to disappear beneath the pulpit steps. Triumphantly he carried it back to the seat where Mrs. Royal was sitting.

To the latter it was only an amusing incident, as she understood the spirit in which it was done. But to many in the church it was a most disgraceful thing, and formed a choice topic of conversation for the rest of the day in various households. They could not, and in truth did not wish to remember the excellent sermon Parson Dan delivered that morning. The picture of a little curly-headed boy speeding up the aisle after the kitten obscured everything else.

It was that very week when Rodney made his next break, which branded him as a red-handed criminal to several in the parish. The Ladies’ Aid Society was meeting at the rectory on a beautiful afternoon. There was a good attendance, and the members freely discussed many questions of vital interest.

The conversation at last drifted off to the training of children. This was brought about most deftly by Mrs. Harmon, solely for Mrs. Royal’s benefit. Mrs. Harmon had no children, and, as is generally the case, she considered herself a great authority as to how children should be managed. There was no half-way measure in her system of training. She knew, and that ended it.

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Mrs. Harmon was ably supported by Miss Arabella Simpkins, a woman of uncertain age, exceedingly precise, and subject to severe attacks of “nerves.” Her thin lips remained tightly compressed as she listened for some time to the conversation. As mothers who had brought up children told how difficult a problem it was, Miss Arabella's eyes gleamed with a scornful pity, and her nose tilted higher in the air than ever. Then when at last she did open her lips, she uttered words laden with great wisdom. It was disgraceful, so she said, the way children were indulged at the present day. It was seldom that you could find parents who had any real control over their offspring. Oh, yes, she knew.

Scarcely had she finished speaking ere Rodney appeared at the door, barefooted, hatless, his blouse dirty, his cheeks aglow, and his eyes blazing with excitement. In his grimy hands he clasped some precious treasure. He hesitated for an instant when he saw so many women in the room. But nothing could restrain him. He had made a marvellous discovery, and wished to show it to others.

Miss Arabella was right before him, a few feet away. For her he darted, and dropped suddenly into her lap a big-eyed, hump-back toad. Instantly there followed a wild shriek of terror, as the spinster leaped from her chair, sending the innocent toad sprawling upon the floor. The strain was too much for Miss Arabella, and she properly collapsed, much to the consternation of the assembled women.

By the time she was revived, Rodney, the culprit, was nowhere in sight. He had rescued his precious toad, and had fled from the house, greatly puzzled over the confusion which had been made over his simple action. Little did he know, much less care, that for years to come he would be considered a “bad boy” by many of the leading people of Hillcrest, and totally unfit to associate with other children of the parish.

But Parson Dan and Mrs. Royal understood, and as they kissed him that night as he stood before them in his little nightgown, they knew that there was nothing bad about him. In truth they were somewhat pleased that Miss Arabella had at last been jarred out of her rigid self-complacency.

CHAPTER V

CAPTAIN JOSH TAKES A HAND

Rodney did not attend the country school until he was over seven years of age. It was more than a mile away, and the Royals could not bear the thought of the little lad walking the whole of that distance when he was but six. He had lost nothing, however, by not attending before. In fact he had gained much, for both Parson Dan and Mrs. Royal had carefully instructed him so that when he did go to school he was far ahead of boys and girls of his own age.

Rodney got on well with all the scholars except Sammie Dunker, who was eight years old, and a bully to all younger children. When boys of his own age and older were around, Sammie was very quiet. But when they were not present he tyrannised over the little ones to such an extent that existence, especially during the dinner hour, became almost unbearable. He had knocked out several boys younger and smaller than himself, until at last there was no one left to dispute his authority.

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Rodney Royal, accordingly, was a new and choice victim. Sammie knew all about him, as he had been freely and severely discussed at his home almost every day as far back as he could remember. Here, then, was a lawful prey, and he gloated over the stories he would have to tell to his father of what he had done to the waif.

At noon-hour, the first day, Sammie made himself very objectionable. He centred his attention upon Rod, for thus his name had now become shortened by every one except the Royals. Rod bore these attacks and insulting remarks as well as he could, and refrained from open hostility. But what Sammie had done and said rankled in his heart and mind for the rest of the day, causing him to lie awake for some time that night thinking it all over.

He confided his thoughts to no one, however, but the next morning as he left for school, there was a new look of determination in his eyes, and he trudged along the road with head held high, and his shoulders thrown back, while occasionally his hands clenched hard together.

For the first half of the noon-hour nothing happened. Whether Sammie divined Rod's purpose is hard to say. Anyway, he devoted his attention to others, especially the little girls, whom he teased unmercifully.

Rod watched this performance with interest, mingled with indignation. Twice he was tempted to interfere, but each time he hesitated and went on with his play. But when at length one little girl began to scream with pain, he could control himself no longer. With flashing eyes he sprang toward the tormentor, and demanded that he should leave Nancy alone.

For an instant only Sammie stared, amazed to think that any one would dare to be so bold with him. He then gave a laugh of contempt, and hit Rod full in the face.

"That's what ye git fer meddlin'," he cried. "Want some more, eh?"

Rod staggered back at the blow, but immediately regaining himself, he sprang swiftly upon his antagonist. So unexpected was the attack, that Sammie was caught off guard, and ere he could raise a hand he received two black eyes, while his nose began to bleed profusely. With a howl of pain and rage, he tried to defend himself, but he could do nothing against that whirlwind of fists which was swirling against him. He endeavoured to dodge and run away, but, catching his foot in the leg of a desk, he fell sprawling to the floor.

By this time some of the older boys had arrived, who cheered lustily as they saw Sammie go down before his young opponent. They looked upon Rod with much interest, and worthy of their attention. In fact, he became quite a hero for the remainder of the day, while the defeated bully, with black eyes, and swollen nose, sat sullenly in his

seat, keeping his head bent over his desk, and not daring to look any one in the face. When school was out he did not wait for his usual pranks, but hurried away home as speedily as possible.

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Rod said nothing at home about the incident at the school. He was afraid that Parson Dan and Mrs. Royal would be angry if they learned that he had been fighting, especially with Sammie Dunker. And, besides, if he told he would have to explain what had led him into the affray, and he did not wish to tell that he had taken Nancy's part. It would seem too much like boasting, and he had always disliked boasters who figured in some stories Mrs. Royal had read to him.

Next morning as he walked along the road to school carrying his lunch-basket, he was in a different mood from the previous day. Then he had the feeling of a soldier, with nerves high strung going into battle; now he was the victor, with the danger past and trouble over. He believed that Sammie would not bother him again, and that the little girls would look up to him as their natural protector.

He was thinking of these things as he drew near the store. Behind him lumbered a large wagon, drawn by two horses. Tom Dunker, big and burly, held the reins, and as he caught sight of the little boy ahead, a scowl overspread his heavy face. Sammie had given his version of the fight in which Rod was entirely in the wrong. This his parents believed, and, accordingly, were very angry. So as Tom now beheld Rod, he thought it would be a smart thing to give him a great scare.

Rod was walking at one side of the road, and just as the horses' heads were abreast of him, Tom drew them sharply to the left, at the same time yelling at the boy to get out of the way.

Taken by surprise, Rod sprang into the ditch for safety, dropping his basket in his fright, which rolled beneath the horses' feet. This so startled the nervous animals that they leaped quickly forward, and swerved to the right, thus bringing the hind wheel of the wagon against the sharp ends of a pile of cordwood near the road. There was a crash as two of the spokes were ripped from the hub by the impact, while the wood came tumbling down into the road.

With much difficulty Tom checked the horses, and then wild with rage, he turned upon the innocent lad, charging him with having frightened his team.

"I didn't," Rod sturdily replied, coming close to the wagon, his eyes flaming with indignation. "You tried to drive over me, that's what you did."

"How dare ye answer me!" Tom cried, white with wrath. "Ye young villain, ye're nothin' but a pauper, an' should be in the Poor House, instead of livin' with decent people. Ye don't know who yer father an' mother are, do ye? An' no one else does, fer that matter. Ye wouldn't own 'em if ye did."



Rod stood for an instant as if turned to stone. The flush left his cheeks, and his face grew very white. Then his small brown hands clenched hard, and he took a step closer to the wagon.

“You lie!” he shouted. “How dare you say that!”

With a roar Tom clutched the handle of his whip, and the lash suddenly cut the air with a swish. It circled Rod’s shoulders, sharply flicking his face, leaving a crimson streak upon the white left cheek.

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The lash had scarcely fallen ere a big form hurled itself from the store platform, and bounded along the road. It was Captain Josh who had been an interested spectator of all that had taken place. His eyes gleamed with a dangerous light, and the heavy stick in his right hand struck the ground harder than usual as he strode up to the wagon.

"Ye coward!" he roared, coming between Rod and the irate teamster. "How dare ye strike a little lad like that!"

"He scared me horses on purpose, an' then sassed me," was the surly answer.

"None of yer lyin', Tom Dunker," said the captain laid his left hand upon the top of the side-board, and shook it vehemently. "I saw the whole affair, and don't ye try any of yer lies on me."

"What business is it of yourn, anyway, Josh Britt? It ain't your funeral, is it? You git out of this, an' leave me alone!"

"Not my funeral, eh? It might have been one fer the lad here, though, if you had yer way. I saw ye pull yer horses over to scare him, and when he spoke up to ye like a man, ye slashed him with yer whip. He didn't sass ye, not a bit of it."

"Well, you'll git the same, then, ye old fool," and once more Tom raised his whip to strike.

He was not dealing with a boy now, however, but with the strongest man in Hillcrest. Tom knew this, but in his rage he had thrown reason to the wind. With lightning rapidity Captain Josh reached up, caught Tom by the arm, and in a twinkling brought him sprawling upon the side of the road. With an ugly oath, the teamster tried to regain his feet, but he was helpless in the grip of the captain's powerful arm. He writhed and cursed, but all in vain, and at length was forced to give up the struggle, and sat panting upon the road completely cowed.

By this time several men from the store surrounded the contestants, who watched with much interest the subjection of Tom Dunker. To them Captain Josh paid no heed, but stood glowering over his victim. When he saw that he was subdued he let go his grip, and stepped back a couple of paces.

"Now, git up!" he demanded.

As Tom made no effort to obey, the captain leaned forward, caught him once more in his mighty grip, and lifted him to his feet.

"Stand there, ye wobbly-kneed cur!" he cried.

"I'll have the law of ye," Tom wailed. "If there's B-b-british justice, you'll git it!"

“H’m,” the captain snorted. “Ye talk about British justice. Ye may thank yer stars at this very minute that the law hasn’t its grip upon ye fer tryin’ to kill a harmless boy. But I’ll do it instead. I’ll be the British justice, judge, lawyers, jury, and the whole dang concern combined. Now, look here, Tom Bunker, you apologise to that youngster fer what ye did to him this mornin’.”

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Tom's face, livid with rage, took a darker tinge at this command. More on-lookers had now arrived, who jeered and hooted the unfortunate man. It was a great joke to see the boaster at length brought low by quaint old Captain Josh. Such a thing didn't happen every day, and they could well afford to lose any amount of time to see the fun. But it was far from fun for the victim of their sport. He made one more effort to assert himself, and turned furiously upon his captor with words and fists. But two hands gripped him now instead of one, and he was brought down upon the road with such a bang that he yelled with pain, and pleaded for mercy.

"Mercy, d'ye ask?" the captain growled. "There'll be no mercy shown to the like of you till ye do what I say. Yer son got settled yesterday fer actin' the bully, and you'll git far worse to-day if ye don't hurry and do as I tell ye."

"What d'ye want me to say?" Tom moaned.

"Say? Say what ye like, only let it be a decent apology. Tell the boy that ye're sorry, and that sich a thing won't happen again, that's all."

Rod had been a silent and interested spectator of all that had taken place. At first he could not understand the meaning of the captain's words. But when it suddenly dawned upon his mind, he sprang quickly forward.

"I don't want him to do it!" he cried.

"Don't want him to do what?" exclaimed the astonished captain.

"Pologise. I don't want him to say he's sorry."

"Why not, lad?"

"Cause he isn't."

"How d'ye know that?"

"His face and eyes say he isn't. If I was sorry for anything, you wouldn't have to make me 'pologise. I'd be only too glad to do it."

There was a dead silence when Rod finished speaking, for all were now anxiously waiting to see what would follow. Even Captain Josh, always so ready with his tongue, was at a loss for words. He stared first at Rod and then at Tom.

"Well, I never!" he at length ejaculated. "What d'ye want me to do with him, then?" and he pointed to the man upon the ground.

“Let him go,” Rod quickly replied, “He doesn’t want to ’pologise, and I don’t want him to do it, so there.”

“All right, then,” the captain assented, “I’ll do as ye say. Git up, Tom Bunker, and git out of this. When ye say yer prayers to-night—that is, if ye say them, which I doubt—thank the Lord that ye got out of this scrape without any bones broken.”

With that, Captain Josh picked up his stick, and started for home, while the on-lookers went back to the store to discuss Tom Bunker’s defeat.

CHAPTER VI

A NEW FRIEND

Rod was late for school, and received a tardy mark. The teacher also spoke quite sharply, and told him that school opened at nine instead of a quarter after. At any other time Rod would have felt keenly this reprimand. But now it did not trouble him, as he had other things to think about. He was very quiet during the morning, and joined in none of the games. Sammie Dunker left him alone, and for once the small girls and boys had peace.

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Rod gave hardly a thought to Tom Dunker's action in frightening him. It was what he had said about the Poor House, and his father and mother which worried him. "What did he mean?" he asked himself over and over again. Why did he say that I should go to the Poor House instead of living with decent people, and that I wouldn't own my parents if I knew them? His brain grew hot as he brooded over these words. Other children had their fathers and mothers with them, and why was it that he had never seen his, and knew nothing about them? Mrs. Royal had told him that his mother was living, and several times she had read her letters to him. But she was a vague person, one he had never seen, and in whom he had no special interest. The Royals, and the people he knew in Hillcrest were of more importance to him than his own mother. But now a desire entered his soul to know something about his parents. Were they bad people? he asked himself. Why did they not come to see him? Were they ashamed to do so? he wondered, and was that what Tom meant?

As noon approached, Rod began to feel hungry. He had eaten very little breakfast, as he had been too much interested in a new family of kittens which had been discovered in the barn. The other scholars who had come some distance would have their dinner, and he could not bear the thought of seeing them eating when he was so hungry. He, therefore, planned to spend the hour by himself down by the river.

As the children flocked out of school, Rod moved with them. But the teacher stopped him, and handed to him a small parcel, neatly tied.

"What's that?" Rod asked, much surprised.

"I do not know," was the reply. "Some one left it here this morning."

Then Rod remembered that he had heard a knock, and the teacher had gone to the door, returning shortly with something in her hand. He had not seen the visitor, and so had soon forgotten all about the incident.

Going back to his scat, he untied the string, and unwrapped the brown paper. Then great was his surprise to find a dainty lunch lying within. There were several slices of choice home-made bread, two pieces of cake, a large wedge of pumpkin-pie, and a fine rosy apple.

For a few moments Rod sat staring at the feast before him. Who could have sent it? he wondered, Then all at once he remembered. It was the apple which solved the problem, and he knew that there was only one tree in the neighbourhood which produced such fruit as that. He had often seen the tree from the road, but had never dared to venture near, as it was too close to Captain Josh's house. He knew now where the lunch had come from, and it made him so excited that for awhile he forgot to eat as he sat there thinking it all over.

When Rod went home from school, Mrs. Royal noticed the crimson mark upon his cheek where the whip had struck him. She asked no questions, however, for she wanted Rod to tell of his own free will how it happened. It was after he was in bed, that the boy looked up inquiringly into Mrs. Royal's face, as she stood by his side before bidding him good-night.

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"Grandma," he began, "what is a pauper?"

"Oh, it is a person who has no home, and no money, and has to live upon others," was the reply.

"Am I a pauper, grandma?" and the boy's face flushed.

"You a pauper!" Mrs. Royal exclaimed, as she sat down upon a chair by the side of the bed. "What makes you ask such a question, dear? Whoever put such an idea into your head?"

"Tom Dunker said that I am a pauper."

"He did! When did he tell you that?"

"To-day, just before he hit me with his whip and made the mark upon my cheek."

"Oh!"

It was all that Mrs. Royal could say. She had become suddenly aroused, feeling sure that something of a serious nature had happened that day.

"Why did he call you a pauper, dear?" she at length asked as calmly as possible.

"'Cause I told him I didn't scare his horses, and make them jump. He got mad, and said I was a pauper, and should be in the Poor House instead of living with decent people. And he said that I didn't know who my father and mother are, and that I would be ashamed of them if I did, that's what he said."

Into Mrs. Royal's eyes came an expression of deep concern, mingled with indignation.

"You poor boy," she soothed, taking his little left hand in hers. "You have had great troubles to-day, have you not?"

"But am I a pauper, grandma?" the boy insisted.

"No, you certainly are not, dear."

"And I shouldn't be in the Poor House?"

"No, no. You are just where you should be, with grandad and me."

"And my father and mother are not bad, and I wouldn't be ashamed of them if I saw them?"



"No, not at all. I never heard of your father, so I think he must be dead. But I believe that your mother is a good, noble woman."

"Why doesn't she come to see me, then?"

"I do not know, dear. But she says that she will come some day. She longs to see you, and in every letter she writes she asks so many questions about you. I have read some of them to you. She wrote many when you were very little, and I have kept every one."

"Have you, grandma? I am so glad. Will you read them to me sometimes?"

"Yes, dear, I shall read you one or two every night."

"Oh, that will be so nice. And I am glad that Tom Dunker was wrong. He didn't know about my mother, did he?"

"No, dear."

"Do you think Captain Josh knows, grandma?"

"Why, what makes you think that, Rodney?"

"Cause he was so kind to me to-day. He took my part, and then brought me such a nice lunch."

"Brought you a lunch!" Mrs. Royal exclaimed, in surprise. "What do you mean?"

"Well, you see, when the horses ran over the dinner you gave me this morning it was all knocked out in the road, and I had nothing to eat, so Captain Josh brought me such a nice lunch."

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"Did you see him?"

"No, I didn't. But there was a big rosy apple, and I know where it came from. It grew on that tree right by the captain's house."

Mrs. Royal sat very still for some time. She was thinking over what Rod had just told her. Tom Dunker's action troubled her, and she thought how mean it was for him to take revenge on a little child for what her husband had done. But there was compensation, for Captain Josh's kindness interested her greatly. No one had been able to understand the old man, and every one dreaded him. That he had defended Rodney, and then had taken a lunch for him all the way to the schoolhouse was something unusual.

For some time she sat there, and when she at last rose to go downstairs to meet her husband, who had just returned home, Rod was fast asleep. His cares for the present were over, and as Mrs. Royal watched the little curly head lying upon the pillow, she gave a deep sigh as she bent over and kissed him. Must he go through life handicapped? she asked herself, for no fault of his own? Would he always be looked upon as a waif, an ill-starred child, and in the eyes of the world, a pauper?

Parson Dan had come in from a long drive from the outmost portion of his large parish. He was tired and hungry, and enjoyed the supper which was awaiting him. It was then that his wife told him about Rod's experience during the day. The clergyman was deeply interested, and when supper was over, he rose from the table, and instead of taking his pipe, as was his usual habit, he reached for his coat and hat.

"Why, where are you going, Daniel?" his wife asked, in surprise.

"I must see Captain Josh," was the reply. "I want to hear the whole story of to-day's transactions, and to thank him for what he did for our boy. I have never known Rodney to deceive us. But this is such a serious affair, that I must hear the story from some one else who knows."

He was about to open the door when a loud knock sounded on the outside. When it was opened, great was his astonishment to see the very person they had been talking about standing before him.

"Captain Josh! This is a surprise," and the clergyman held out his hand.

"Evenin', parson," was the gruff reply. "Thought I'd make a little call on you and the missus," and he thumped his stick heavily upon the floor as he entered.

Mrs. Royal came quickly forward, shook hands, and offered the visitor a big comfortable chair.

"My, that feels good," the captain exclaimed. "I ain't as young as I used to be, and that walk has puffed me a good deal."

"How would a smoke suit you?" the parson suggested, knowing the captain's fondness for his pipe. "I have some good tobacco here, sent from the city by an old friend of mine."

"He certainly is a good judge of baccy," the captain remarked, after he had filled and lighted his pipe. "A friend like that is worth knowin', eh?" and he slyly winked at Mrs. Royal.

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"We have many such friends, I am thankful to say," Mrs. Royal replied, "and we don't have to go to the city for them, either."

"No? Well, I'm real glad to hear that," and the captain blew a big cloud of smoke into the air. "I never made many friends in my life. Guess I was too cranky; at any rate, that's what Betsey says, and I guess she must understand me by this time, ha, ha!"

"You must not judge yourself too harshly, captain," Parson Dan replied. "Anyway, if you don't make many friends, you are able at times to be a friend to others. I wish to thank you for what you did for our little boy to-day."

"So ye've heard all about it, eh?" and the captain fixed his keen eyes upon the parson's face.

"Only partly, captain. Rodney told Mrs. Royal some of the story this evening, and I was just going over to hear it all from you as you entered."

"It was a mean trick that Tom Dunker tried on him to-day," the visitor returned, "and I'm sorry that I didn't give the coward a bigger dose than I did. Oh, how he did squawk when I got both of my hands upon his measly carcass. I guess him and that boy Sammie of his will learn to leave decent people alone after this."

"Why, what about Sammie?" the Royals asked.

"What! haven't ye heard?"

"No, not a word."

"Well, if that doesn't beat all! And Rod never told ye?"

"He said nothing to us about Sammie."

Captain Josh looked first at the clergyman and then at Mrs. Royal with an expression of doubt in his eyes.

"And so ye say he didn't tell ye anything?" he finally blurted out, while his stick came down with a bang upon the carpet. "If any one else had said that I wouldn't believe him. To think of a boy doin' what he did and not rushin' home all excited, and blattin' out his yarn. But, then, I always knew there was extra stuff in that lad. I have had my eyes on him ever since the mornin' I gave him a cow, ho, ho!" and the captain leaned back and laughed heartily as the recollection of the "cow incident" came back to him. "That was my first present," he continued, "but it isn't my last, not by a long jugful, no, sir-ree."

"But what did Rodney do, captain?" the parson enquired. "We are very anxious to hear."



“Do! What did he do, eh? Why, he walked right over Sammie Dunker, that’s what he did. Oh, I heard all about it at the store that very night. Sammie has been a regular chip of the old Dunker block ever since he started fer school. He bullied all the little chaps, and had them all scared to a shadder. But when he butted up against Rod it was a different proposition, ho, ho! I’d like to have been there.”

“Do you mean that Rodney was fighting Sammie Dunker?” the clergyman asked, with a note of severity in his voice. “I am astonished.”

“Oh, no, there was no fightin’, parson. Sammie didn’t fight; that’s not the Dunker way. But he hurt little Nancy Garvan, and when Rod told him to stop, he slapped him in the face. Rod then walked into him and gave him two black eyes, a bloody nose, and left him sprawlin’ upon the floor. That was all there was about it. Oh, no, there was no fightin’.”

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"H'm, I see," Parson Dan quietly remarked, while a slight gleam of pride shone in his eyes. He glanced toward his wife, but her head was bent over some sewing she had picked up from the table.

"I've been watchin' that boy of yours fer some time," the captain continued, "and he's the right stuff. I know more about him than ye think. I'd 'a' given my cow to have seen him put that toad into Bella Simpkins' lap, ho, ho, ho! That was the best thing I ever heard, ha, ha, ha!"

"But some of the neighbours think it was sheer badness which made him do it," Mrs. Royal replied.

"I know they do, confound their skins!" the captain roared, springing to his feet in his excitement. "Haven't I heard it on all sides? They twist every blessed thing he does into badness, and then account fer it all by sayin' that he is a pauper. But, by jinks! there isn't an ounce of badness about that boy. I've taken an interest in him simply because—well, mebbe I'm a cranky cuss—and when I see people down on a lad, I like to take his part. And look here, parson, I'm givin' warnin'."

"What warning?" questioned the clergyman, shrinking back from the huge fist which was suddenly thrust toward his face.

"Warnin' to you, parson, not to bury any one I knock out who interferes with that lad of yours. It'll be sich a clear case of suicide that ye won't dare to read the Burial Service over him. Everybody knows now that I've taken that boy under my care, and if any one runs against my fists it won't be an accident, but a clear case of self-destruction, and it won't be necessary to hold an inquest."

Both Mr. and Mrs. Royal smiled at the captain's quaint expression of loyalty to Rodney.

"I trust there'll be no more trouble," the clergyman replied. "Come, fill up your pipe again. My city friend would be delighted to know that Rodney's able champion enjoyed the tobacco he sent."

"Well, I don't care if I do," and the captain knocked the cold ashes out of his pipe. "I'll fill up, and then git home. But there is one thing I want to ask ye, and that's what brought me over here to-night. Me and Betsey are pretty lonely at times. We never see a child around the house, and we'd both consider it a special favour if ye'd let yer boy come to see us once in awhile."

"Why, certainly," the parson replied. "I give my consent, and I feel sure that you will, won't you?" and he turned to his wife.

"Yes, captain, I am quite willing for Rodney to go, and it is very thoughtful of you to want him. I hope that he will behave himself."



“No fear of that,” the captain eagerly returned. “I’ve got some fine apples jist waitin’ fer him, and several other things to surprise him when he comes. So, good-night, I must be gittin’ along.”

CHAPTER VII

CHUMS

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It was a beautiful Saturday morning, and Captain Josh was busy in his little work-shop at the side of his house. He was in a hurry, and his big hands moved swiftly and deftly as he cut the cotton or tied a piece of string. Once or twice he stepped back to view his work, and then a pleased expression appeared upon his face. Occasionally his eyes turned toward the little window above the work-bench until they rested upon the road, leading from the main highway to his house. The captain was expecting company, and this was something remarkable at "The Anchorage," the name of the snug cottage by the riverside.

Within the house Mrs. Britt, too, was busy, and as she moved about the kitchen, her step was lighter than it had been for years. She had just finished making a batch of doughnuts, not the lean kind, mostly holes, but big fat ones, coated with sugar, like thick frost upon the window pane in winter. She was now making apple pies, the kind where the juice runs out into the oven, and some of it sticks to the plate.

Mrs. Britt was known throughout the parish as an excellent cook, though of late years few people were ever allowed the privilege of tasting her dainties. This was her husband's fault, and not hers. She was naturally of a sociable disposition, and fond of company. But Captain Josh's crankiness had antagonised every person in Hillcrest, and it was Mrs. Britt who suffered the most. But she was loyal to her husband, and if people would not come to her home, she would not go to theirs.

At one time Captain Josh had been the most agreeable of companions, and his return from a voyage was always a red-letter day in the parish. His ringing laugh was heard at the store, and every evening his house was filled with neighbours, who dropped in to have a smoke, and listen to the yarns of the old seaman.

But two events coming close together produced a great change in the captain. One was the absence of his only son, Jimmy, who had gone far away to the northland, and never wrote home to his parents. The other, was the loss of his vessel, the *Flying Queen*, a three-masted schooner, which, loaded with a valuable cargo, lost her bearings, and went ashore in a heavy fog. Owing to Captain Josh's excellent past record, the shipping company was most lenient. He was permitted to retire with a moderate allowance. This amount, together with what he obtained from his few acres of land, and the fish and the fur he took, was quite sufficient to keep him and his wife in moderate comfort.

The loss of his vessel, followed by his retirement, was a severe blow to the captain. He was too old to take command of another ship for new owners, and he chafed at his enforced stay on land. He longed for the sea, for nowhere else did he feel so much at home. His pride was hurt as well. He felt keenly the humiliation, and he believed that his neighbours laughed at him behind his back. Thus for years he brooded over his troubles until they became a vital part of his very being, and soured his former jolly disposition.

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There was one redeeming feature, however, to Captain Josh, and that was his intense sympathy for any unfortunate creature, whether man or beast. Let any dumb brute be abused, and it aroused the captain to intense indignation. And so when he found that most of the people in Hillcrest were turned against Parson Dan's lad, simply because he was a waif, he naturally took an interest in the boy, which increased the more people talked. The climax to his interest was reached the day he took Rod's part against Tom Dunker.

On this Saturday morning Captain Josh had tied the last string, and cut off the ends close to the knot. He then glanced once more through the window, and his eyes brightened as he saw the little lad he was expecting not far from the house.

Rod was not walking very fast, for he was on new, and hitherto forbidden ground, and, notwithstanding the invitation, he was not altogether sure of the reception he would receive. He was a trim, looking lad in his well-fitting suit, as clean and neat as Mrs. Royal's hands could make it, while a large straw hat covered his curly hair. He wore neither shoes nor stockings, and his feet and legs were as brown as the sun could make them.

Captain Josh was at the shop door to receive him.

"Ye're late, lad," was his only greeting.

"I'm sorry, captain," was the reply, "but I had to go to the store for grandma. Oh!" and he stopped short as his eyes rested upon the fine full-rigged schooner sitting upon the work-bench.

"How d'ye like it?" the captain asked, delighted at Rod's interest.

"Great!" and the boy stepped cautiously forward, as if afraid that the white sails were wings; to bear the wonderful thing away. "Who made it?" he whispered.

"Oh, some fool."

"You?"

"What! d'ye call me a fool?" the captain roared, looking so fierce that Rod shrank back a step.

"No, no, no. I didn't mean that. I only, I only——"

"I know, lad, I know," and the captain laughed heartily. "Ye didn't mean any harm. Yes, I made her years ago fer another boy. She's been lyin' here a long time, and so t'other day I got her down, cleaned her up, and put on new sails, thinkin' that perhaps ye might like her."

"What! For me?" Rod asked in surprise.

"Sure, if ye'd like to have her."

Would Rod like to have her? His eyes sparkled, and his hands trembled with excitement as he examined his treasure. What a wonder it was.

"What's her name?" he asked.

"The *Flyin' Queen*, after the schooner I lost."

"Will she sail?"

"Y'bet. Let's launch her."

From the window Mrs. Britt watched the two as they walked down to the shore. She recalled the day, over twenty years ago, when another little lad had trotted as eagerly as Rod by the captain's side, and it was to sail a small boat, too. Her eyes grew misty as her thoughts went back to that scene. But mingled with this sadness was a feeling of thankfulness that her husband had taken such a strong liking to Rod. Not since Jimmy left had he done such a thing, and she was hopeful that this child would unconsciously change him back to the genial big-hearted man he was when she married him.

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Rod was delighted with the *Flying Queen*, and wading in the water to his knees, he sailed her along the shore. The captain had a pickerel net to look after, which kept him busy for some time. But he missed scarcely anything that Rod was doing, and he was greatly pleased at the boy's delight.

"Pull her ashore now, lad," he at length ordered, "and let's go fer a sail."

"What, in the *Roaring Bess*?" Rod eagerly asked, as he glanced toward the yacht fretting gently at her anchor a short distance away.

"Sure thing. Dinner won't be ready fer an hour, so we'll take a spin around fer awhile."

Rod could hardly believe his senses. How often he had looked upon the *Roaring Bess* from the respectable distance of the main road. To have a sail in her had been his one great ambition. While lying in bed he had often imagined himself skimming over the water, with the sail, big and white, bending above him. Now his dream had really come true, and here he was at last sitting by Captain Josh's side, watching him as he headed the boat upstream. A gentle breeze was drifting in from westward, sufficient to fill the sail and send the *Roaring Bess* speeding over the water. A deep sigh escaped Rod's lips.

"Hey, what's wrong?" the captain cried. "Gittin' tired, and want to go home?"

"Oh, no, no," was the emphatic reply. "I sighed because I am so happy."

"H'm. That's it, eh? I thought people generally whistled or laughed when they are happy."

"Is that what you do, Captain Josh, when you're happy?"

"Me? I'm never happy."

"Why, I'd be happy all the time if I had a boat like this."

"Ye would? Well, take the tiller, then, while I fill me pipe."

A new thrill of joy swept through Rod's entire being as he clutched the wooden handle and moved it to left or right as the captain ordered. Never did any commander in charge of the largest vessel feel greater pride than did the young helmsman. His face glowed, and his eyes sparkled with excitement, while the breeze tossed his wavy hair.

Captain Josh watched him out of the corner of his eye as he puffed away at his short-stemmed pipe.

“Ye’ll make a good sailor some day, lad,” he remarked. “Ye’ve got the eye fer sich business.”

“That’s what I’m going to be,” was the reply. “I’ll be a captain, and have a big ship of my own. I’m going to call her the *Roaring Bess*, and I’ll take you along with me.”

“I’d like to go well enough,” and the old man’s gaze wandered off into space, “but I guess my sailin’ days’ll be over by that time. But here we are back home again. Betsey’ll be waitin’ dinner fer us.”

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And what a dinner that was! Rod remembered it long afterwards, and how Mrs. Britt sat there smiling upon him, and urging him to have “just one more piece of pie, and another cruller.” Never before had he felt so important. He was the guest being treated with such respect. When holding the tiller that morning he had longed for Sammie Dunker and the rest of the boys to see him. So now, sitting near the bluff old captain and his wife, he desired the same thing. He felt quite sure that no other boy in the whole parish had been so honoured, and if his schoolmates ever heard of it, they would be sure to look upon him as a person of great importance.

When dinner was over, Captain Josh pushed back his chair, filled and lighted his pipe. Rod was surprised that he did not return thanks when they were through, as was the custom at the rectory.

“I’m very thankful for that dinner, Mrs. Josh,” he remarked.

“I’m glad you enjoyed it, dear,” was the reply.

“Yes, I did. It was so good that I want to thank God for it. Do you mind?”

“No, certainly not,” and Mrs. Britt glanced anxiously toward her husband. But when she saw the captain take his pipe out of his mouth, and bow his shaggy head while the boy repeated the few words of thanks he had been taught, a feeling of gratitude came into her heart, and her eyes became moist.

There was silence for a few minutes when Rod finished. The captain puffed at his pipe, while Mrs. Britt began to clear away the dishes.

“Kin ye swim, lad?” Captain Josh suddenly asked, in his deep gruff voice.

“No, I can’t,” was the somewhat nervous reply.

“Ever been in the water?”

“Oh, yes. Lots of times.”

“And ye can’t swim. Well, ye’ll have to git over that if ye’re round where I am.”

“Can you swim, Captain Josh?” Rod asked.

“Ho, ho,” and the old man leaned back in his chair and shook with laughter. “Kin I swim? Why, boy, I could swim before I was as old as you. When I was fifteen I could swim across the river.”

“You could!” and Rod’s eyes shone with admiration. “Did you ever swim across the ocean, captain?”

“Not quite, lad. Not quite that far.”

“Well, then, I will some day, Captain Josh,” Rod cried, as he rose to his feet, and stood erect. “When I’m a man, I’ll swim across the ocean and back again before breakfast, see if I don’t.”

“That’ll be quite an undertakin’, lad,” and the captain’s eyes twinkled. “I hope I’ll be standin’ on the shore when ye git back. I guess ye’ll have more cause fer thankfulness then than ye did after eatin’ yer dinner to-day. But come,” and he rose suddenly to his feet; “I want ye to help me put out my net. Ye must take a nice fresh pickerel home with ye when ye go.”

What a wonderful afternoon that was to Rod! Most of the time was spent upon the water, and he received his first real instructions about the handling of the *Roaring Bess*, the ropes, sail, port and starboard, to say nothing of his lesson in splicing. There was also the swim in the little secluded cove, with the captain as an excellent teacher. Rod little realised that he was being thoroughly sounded as to his qualities and capabilities.

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"Ye'll do, lad," was the captain's comment, when at last they came ashore. "Ye're worth botherin' with, I kin see that all right. If ye don't know more'n yer master in a few months, I'll be much surprised. So, there now, take this pickerel to yer grandma, and tell her that ye took it out of the net yerself, and don't ferget to give her my compliments."

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHUMS TO THE RESCUE

Parson Dan and Mrs. Royal were greatly interested in the story Rod had to tell them that evening of his experiences during the day. It seemed hardly possible that cranky Captain Josh could become such an interesting companion to a little boy. They discussed it for some time after Rod had gone to bed.

"It is quite evident that the captain has taken a great fancy to Rodney," Mrs. Royal remarked, as she bent her head over some needlework she had in her hands. "But are you not a little anxious, Daniel?"

"Anxious! About what?" the parson inquired, as he took his pipe from his mouth and looked questioningly at his wife.

"Oh, about the influence he might exert upon our boy. Will it be for his good, do you think?"

"Umph!" and the clergyman blew a cloud of smoke into the air. "Don't let that worry you, Martha. No harm will come to Rodney from this friendship. It will be just the opposite, I believe, and he will influence the captain for good."

"But Captain Josh never comes to church, Daniel, so what will people say?"

"Let them say, Martha. They will talk, anyway, and they might as well have something to talk about. It will create a little diversion. No doubt Miss Arabella Simpkins will consider it her bounden duty to come right here, and express her views. And suppose the captain doesn't come to church, is that any reason why a little boy should shun him? It may be the means of making Captain Josh see things in a different light. Perhaps the Lord has a hand in this, and who am I to interfere with His plans? He has often used children to lead men back to Him, and it may be that he is using Rodney now."

As the weeks and months passed, Captain Josh and Rod became firmer friends than ever, and scarcely a day passed that they were not together for a while. There were so many things for the boy to see and learn that his interest never waned. He was so happy when out on the river in the *Roaring Bess*, and ere long he knew all about the boat, and could steer her almost as well as the captain himself.

When the fall settled in, and the weather became cold, the water was abandoned, and so the yacht was pulled out upon the stocks by means of a rude windlass. Here, covered with a large canvas, she remained during the long winter months, safe from the driving storms which often raged over the land.

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Then it was that the captain turned his attention to trapping, which he had followed for several years. There were several big brooks flowing into the river, draining a large area of country, principally wooded, and these abounded with mink, raccoon, and other fur-bearing animals. The captain was an expert, and knew the most likely places where game could be best taken. Rod at times went with him on his regular rounds to visit the traps, and it was always a great joy to the boy when he was allowed to carry back some furry prize which had been secured.

Next to these trips, Rod's chief delight was to sit before the big open fire on a cold or stormy Saturday afternoon, and listen to the captain as he told stories of his sea life, while he worked fixing up his traps, making stretchers for the pelts, or doing other odd jobs. How the boy's heart would thrill, and his eyes sparkle with animation as Captain Josh told of furious seas he had encountered, the dangers he had escaped, and the races he had made with other sailing-vessels. Sometimes he would tell an amusing tale, at which the boy would laugh in high glee. Often Rod would ask questions about the sailors, the sea-monsters, and the various ports the captain had visited. Sometimes they would pore over an old geography, while the captain pointed out with his big forefinger the countries he had visited, and the routes he had taken. Rod was thus so well acquainted with certain countries that his teacher was much surprised at his knowledge.

It was only natural that people should talk about this strange friendship between the rough old sea-captain and the little boy. How their tongues did wag, and many were the visits of protest paid to the rectory. The principal discussion, however, always took place at the regular meetings of the Ladies' Aid Society. This was done most of all for Mrs. Royal's benefit. She knew this, and with much self-restraint she resisted making any reply for some time. But at one meeting, when the criticism became extremely severe, she could stand it no longer. Mrs. Harmon had just been indulging in one of her long dissertations, and finished by asking the rector's wife if she did not consider it very unbecoming for a small boy, and a waif at that, with no doubt bad blood in his veins, to be so much in the company of a rough creature like Captain Josh. He should be at home, studying his lessons and learning the Catechism.

"Mrs. Harmon," Mrs. Royal replied as calmly as possible, "I have listened for some time to the criticisms which you and others have made about our allowing Rodney to associate with Captain Josh, and I think it is about time for me to say a word. Mr. Royal and I have talked over the matter very carefully, and we can see no harm in what is taking place. The captain has taken a remarkable fancy to the boy, and I know for certain that Rodney has received no harm from him. On the contrary, he has been benefited, for the captain has taught him many useful things.

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"As for his lessons, I wish to inform you all that Rodney has never neglected them, and you know as well as I do that he stands at the head of his class. He studies his Catechism, as well, which is more than I can say of most of the boys in this parish. I ought to know, as I have taught a class in the Sunday school for years. We had one boy of our own, remember," here her voice became low, "and in our mistaken zeal for his welfare we intended to make him a model of perfection. Instead of studying him, we studied ourselves. We never considered the nature of the child at all. We looked upon him as mere clay in our hands, and we tried to mould him in our own way. When, alas, it was too late we found that he had a will of his own, and when he became old enough he rebelled at our restrictions, and, oh, well, you know the rest. Now, we do not intend to make the same mistake with Rodney. He is a boy, with all the strange impulses of a boy's restless nature. What you have called evil in him, is merely childish enthusiasm. He is bubbling over with energy. It is our earnest desire to guide him along right channels, and not to break his will. Whether we shall do that or not, remains to be seen. Most of you women here are mothers, and know the responsibility of bringing up children. I do not interfere with you, and I now ask you to be as considerate toward us. I trust that henceforth all criticism will cease, especially at these meetings, where we are gathered together to carry on the Lord's work."

When Mrs. Royal finished there was intense silence, and for once garrulous tongues were still. All felt that the rebuke was just, though it made them very angry. They were greatly surprised at Mrs. Royal's boldness, as they had never heard her speak in such a decided way before. When at last they did find their voices, they talked of other things, and during the rest of the afternoon they never alluded to what the rector's wife had said. But when once away from the meeting some of the women gave their tongues free scope, especially Mrs. Harmon, who felt keenly what Mrs. Royal had said.

"I was never so mortified and offended in all my life," she confided to Miss Arabella, as they walked along the road together. "Just think of her talking that way, and she a clergyman's wife, too."

"Umph!" and Miss Arabella tilted her nose higher than ever, "she talked mighty big to-day, but she'll find out her mistake sooner than she expects. Just think what she said about that horrid old captain, who can't speak a civil word to any one. Why, he swears awful. I heard him say 'dang hang it' one time, and a man who uses such language as that is not a fit companion for a little boy."

Little did Captain Josh and Rod care what people said. Though months had now passed into years, their friendship was as firm as ever. Happy were they in each other's company, and many were the trips they made up and down the river in the *Roaring Bess*. The captain had sturgeon nets in a cove five miles away from his own shore. Twice a day he visited these, and when Rod was on hand he went with him. The boy was always interested in the big fish which were often caught, and when they were

sometimes tethered in the shallow water near the Anchorage he felt sorry for the poor creatures.

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"I wonder if they mind it," he once remarked to the captain. "Do you suppose they think of their little baby sturgeons, and how they are getting along?"

"Guess they don't bother much about it, lad," was the reply. "They haven't enough sense fer that. They are like a lot of people who are willin' to be led around by the nose jist like that big feller out there. He is always swimmin' around, but he gits nowhere. He soon comes to the end of his rope, and yet he keeps on swimmin' the same as before."

The day this conversation took place, the wind was blowing in strong from the northwest, and the captain was making ready for a trip to his nets. Soon the boat was speeding up the river, with her sail full spread to the stiff breeze. Having reached the cove and taken a number of fish from the nets, they began to beat homeward. By this time the wind had increased in strength, and as they ran backwards and forwards across the river, they were continually washed by the waves which raced to meet them.

"Isn't this great!" Rod exclaimed, as he nestled in the cock-pit, and held on firmly lest he should be swept overboard. "I was never out in such a breeze as this before."

The captain made no reply, though he gave a quick glance at the boy's animated face. If Rod had been frightened, the old seaman would have been terribly disappointed. As for himself he was in his element, and he was reminded of the many times he had faced rough weather out on the mighty deep. The howling of the wind, and the dashing waves made the sweetest of music in his ears, and he was delighted that the boy, on whom he had set his affections, should feel as he did.

They had just tacked and begun beating to the left, when the captain, glancing down the river, gave a start of surprise, and pointed with his finger to a small yacht in mid-stream, which was having a hard time in the wind.

"She's got too much sail fer a breeze like this," he remarked. "If she isn't well managed, she'll go over. Now, look at that!" he cried, grasping the tiller with a firmer grip, so as to be ready for any sudden emergency. "My, that was a close call. A little more and she'd a been on her beam ends."

Hardly had he finished speaking, when a furious squall struck the staggering yacht, and like a wounded eagle she reeled, and flopped her big sail into the rough water. With a roar which might have been heard a long distance off, the captain brought the *Roaring Bess* almost up to the teeth of the wind, and headed her for the wreck. How her sharp prow did tear through the waves, and at times she was almost smothered by the leaping water. But this course would not bring them to the overturned boat. It was necessary for them to tack once more, and as they drew near they could see people clinging frantically to the half-submerged yacht. The captain gave a loud shout of encouragement when he came within speaking

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distance. With much skill he handled his boat, and told Rod to be ready to give a hand when needed. With the *Roaring Bess* brought right up to the wind, she soon drifted alongside of the overturned yacht. There were five persons in the water, three men and two women. With much difficulty the latter were dragged on board, and then the men followed. This accomplished, without a word the captain headed his boat for the shore, while the drenched persons huddled in the cock-pit close to Rod.

The latter had not been idle during this exciting rescue. He had taken a prominent part in helping the women on board, as the captain had been busy managing the yacht. But now he crouched back in his corner, somewhat abashed in the presence of the strangers. He watched them, nevertheless, especially the younger of the two women, a girl with a very beautiful face. Her long golden hair was tossed wildly about, and at times a shiver shook her body. But her eyes attracted him more than anything else. They were dark eyes, filled with an expression of tenderness and sympathy. When she turned them upon Rod his heart gave a bound such as he had never experienced before. At that moment there was nothing he would not have done for her sake. He longed for something to happen that he might show her how brave he was, and that he might seem a hero in her eyes.

Nothing unusual happened, however, for Captain Josh steered the boat through all dangers, and drew up at last near the shore in front of his own house. Then to Rod's surprise the strange men lifted the girl carefully out of the yacht into the tender, and when they had reached the shore, one of the men carried her in his arms up to the Anchorage.

"Too bad she got hurt," Rod mused, as he walked home, for it was getting late. "I wonder what happened to her."

That evening he told Parson Dan and Mrs. Royal all about his experience that afternoon, the wreck, and the girl who had been carried into the house.

"I must go over in the morning and learn all about it," the clergyman remarked when he had heard the story. "There may be something that I can do to help."

Rod lay awake for a long time that night. He could not get the girl with the golden hair and wonderful eyes out of his mind. When at last he did go to sleep, he dreamed that she was struggling in the water, and that he had jumped off the *Roaring Bess* to save her.

CHAPTER IX

WHYN

Next morning Parson Dan and Rod started for the Anchorage. Rod was more quiet than usual, and walked along the road without any of his ordinary capers. His cheeks were flushed, and his eyes shone with excitement. His steps, too, were quick, and his companion found it difficult to keep pace with him. It was quite evident that he was in a hurry to see the girl who had been rescued from the river the previous day.

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Nearing the house, they heard some one hammering in the workshop. There they found the captain busily engaged upon something which looked like a chair.

“Good morning, captain,” was the parson’s cheery greeting. “You’ve turned carpenter, so I see.”

“Poof!” and the captain, gave a vigorous rap upon a nail he was driving into place, “it’s necessary to be every dang thing these days, with the world so full of idiots. It’s good there’s somebody who kin turn his hand to anything. It’s the fools who make so much work fer honest folks.”

“Why, what’s up now?” the parson queried.

“Ye’d better ask ‘what’s down?’ It’s that little lass in yon, down in bed, because some numb-skulls thought they could sail a boat. I told ‘em this mornin’ what I thought of ‘em fer takin’ a gal like that out on the water, an’ they went off in a huff.”

“How is she this morning, captain? Rodney told me all about the accident, and so we have come to make inquiries.”

“Oh, she’s all right, considerin’ what she went through. She’s all clewed down now and ridin’ easy. Guess she’ll be there fer some time. Want to see her?”

“Yes, if she’s able to be seen.”

“Able! Why, she’s the fittest one of the bunch as fer as her mind is concerned. I want to git this chair fixed up fer her as soon as possible. Go right in. I guess ye’ll find Betsey in the kitchen.”

Mrs. Britt pleasantly received her visitors, and introduced the clergyman to Mrs. Sinclair. The latter was a woman of striking appearance. Her face, of considerable strength and refinement, was marked by lines of care. But it was her eyes which attracted Parson Dan’s special attention as he shook hands with her, and inquired after her daughter.

“Oh, Whyn came out of the affair the best of all,” and a smile illumined Mrs. Sinclair’s face. “I was greatly worried about her last night, but she seems none the worse for her experience. Would you like to see her? I am afraid you will find her a regular little chatter-box.”

Mrs. Sinclair said not a word to Rod, in fact she had hardly noticed him. He remained standing in the middle of the room after the others had left, twirling his cap in his nervous hands. He wanted to see the girl, too, but he had not been invited, and he felt indignant. He had the first right to go, so he told himself, for he had helped to rescue her. He thought of going out to the workshop and talking it all over with the captain. He

dismissed the idea, however, and perching himself upon a chair, waited to see what would happen.

It seemed a long time to him before the others came out of the girl's room, but in reality it was only a few minutes. There was a smile upon the clergyman's face as he turned to the boy.

"You're the favoured one this morning, Rodney," he said. "The princess wants to see you. She hasn't much use for us older people."

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This was astonishing news to Rod, and his knees felt weak as he walked across the floor, and entered the room. He paused when just inside, and stared in amazement at the vision before him. There, lying upon a little cot, was the most wonderful person he had ever beheld. Could it be possible that this was the same girl he had seen all drenched with water the day before? Her hair was flowing over the white pillow like a shining stream of gold. At this moment it was touched by the sun from the southeast window, which added much to the entrancing effect. And then those eyes! They seemed to read him through and through. But they were laughing eyes now, sparkling with interest and amusement.

Rod stood very still, uncertain what to do. So this wonderful girl was a princess, he said to himself. He never dreamed of such a thing when he first saw her the day before. He knew something about princes and princesses, for Mrs. Royal had often read to him stories about such people. So this girl was one of them. He had no doubt about it, for Parson Dan had called her a princess. What should he do? The books told how people got down on their knees to princesses, and kissed their hands. Ah, that was the right thing for him to do now.

Stepping quickly forward, he knelt by the side of the bed, and seizing the girl's right hand which was lying upon the counterpane, he pressed it to his lips. A merry ringing laugh followed this action, which caused Rod to start and lift his head. Was the princess laughing at him? Perhaps he had made some foolish blunder, and she was making fun of him.

"Oh, you queer boy, what did you do that for?" and again the girl laughed.

"Didn't I do it right?" Rod asked, as he sprang to his feet and stood straight before her.

"Do what right?" and the girl looked her surprise.

"Kneel, and kiss your hand. They all do that."

"All who?"

"The people in the stories. They always kiss the hand of a princess when they meet her."

"But I'm not a princess."

"You're not! Grandad said you are, and I guess he knows."

"Ho, ho, isn't that funny?" and the girl's hearty laugh again rang out. "I'm no princess; I'm just plain Whyn Sinclair. Your grandfather must have been joking. It must be nice to have a grandfather like that. His eyes are just full of fun. Sit down, and tell me about him."

“He isn’t my grandfather,” Rod replied, as he took his position upon the edge of a chair close to the bed. He was feeling more at home now in the presence of this beautiful girl, since she was not a princess.

“He isn’t your grandfather!”

“No. I haven’t any real grandfather, and I never saw my father or mother.”

“You didn’t! Oh, you poor boy.”

“No. I’m only a waif, that’s what they call me. I was left at the door of the rectory one night a long time ago when I was a little baby, and Mr. and Mrs. Royal have taken care of me ever since.”

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"How lovely!" and Whyn clasped her thin white hands together.

"Lovely! What do you mean?"

"Oh, it's so romantic."

"What's that?"

"Just like you read about in stories. Maybe your father and mother are a real prince and princess, or some other great persons, and you were stolen away from them when you were a baby by cruel people. What a story that will make. I shall write about it at once."

"A story!" and Rod's eyes opened wide in surprise. "What are you going to write?"

"You see, I'm an authoress, or rather, I'm going to be one some day. I lie in bed and think out such lovely stories. But this is something real, not a bit like the others. I am going to make so much money, that I shall be able to help mamma, and she won't have to worry as she does."

"What makes her worry?" Rod queried.

"She worries about me. I can't walk, and have to lie in bed all the time. It costs so much for doctors' bills, and though mamma never says a word to me, I can tell what's troubling her. Now, I have a secret, and I am going to tell it to you, if you promise that you won't say a word to any one about it."

"What is it?"

"You won't tell?"

"Don't know until I hear what it is."

"Oh, well, I'll have to keep it to myself, then," and the girl gave a sigh of disappointment. "I was hoping that you would promise, for it would be so nice to relieve my mind by telling some one."

"Maybe I'll promise afterwards," Rod replied.

"That might do," Whyn mused, as she lay very still and looked far off through the window. "Yes, I guess that will do. You see, I once heard the doctor in the city say that I must go to a specialist, and maybe he could cure me."

"What's a specialist?" Rod questioned. "I never heard of it before."

"It's a doctor in some big city like New York, who knows so much. He might be able to make me better, if I could only go to see him."

"Why don't you go, then?"

"I can't," and a slight shade passed over the girl's sunny face. "It takes a lot of money, and we are poor. Mamma plays the organ in St. Barnabas Church on Sundays, and gives music lessons through the week. But it takes so much to pay doctor bills."

"Where's your father?" Rod asked.

"He's dead. He died when I was a little baby."

"Oh!" Rod was all sympathy now. So this girl was an orphan, something like himself, with a mother but no father.

"I have one brother," Whyn explained. "He is older than I am. He is at Ottawa now, working for the Government. He helps us all he can, but he has been there such a short time that he can't do much yet. He will after awhile, though, for Douglas is so good."

"Is that your brother's name?"

"Yes. I miss him so much, for we always played together, and he used to read to me, and wheel me about the house."

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"Have you told him your secret?" Rod inquired.

"Not yet. I want to surprise him. You see," here she lowered her voice, and glanced toward the door, "I am going to write a story."

"Oh!" Rod's eyes grew suddenly big.

"Yes, a real story, which has been in my mind for some time. I am going to change it now and bring you into it. There were some parts I could not work out, but now I know. I shall make you a boy scout, a patrol leader, who rescues a cripple girl from the river."

"What's a boy scout?" Rod queried.

"Didn't you ever hear of the scouts?" and Whyn looked her surprise.

"No. Never heard of them before."

"Well, isn't that funny, and you a boy, too."

"Guess they can't be much," Rod replied, somewhat nettled. "Grandad and Captain Josh know about most everything, and if they haven't heard of them they can't be of much account."

"But they are," Whyn insisted. "Douglas was a patrol leader, and he told me what they did. They met in the school-room of our church, and had such a great time. They had a supper, too; every month, and when that was over they sang songs and played games."

"Is that all they did?"

"Oh, no. They had to work hard, for they had to learn so many things. To get the tenderfoot badge, they had to know the scout law, how to tie knots, and a whole lot about the flag."

"H'm, I guess I know about knots," and Rod gave his head a superior toss. "Captain Josh taught me about them."

"But did he teach you how to help people who cut themselves, or break their arms, or if some one falls into the water, how to bring him back to life?"

"Why, no! Can the scouts do that?"

"Sure they can. I know of a scout who jumped off a wharf, and rescued a little girl. When he had her out of the water he brought her back to life, when everybody else thought that she was dead."

“Gee!” It was all that Rod could say, for he was becoming deeply interested now.

“And they learn more than that,” Whyn continued. “They talk with flags.”

“Talk with flags! I never heard of flags talking, and I don’t believe it.”

“Oh, I don’t mean that flags talk,” and Whyn laughed outright. “The scouts use flags for talking to one another when they are some distance apart; it is called ‘signalling.’”

“How do they do it?”

“Well, one boy will stand, say on a hill, while another is somewhere else, and each has two little flags. They wave these and whichever way a flag is waved it means a letter. I did know all the letters myself once, for Douglas taught me. In that way the scouts can talk with one another as far as they can see. Soldiers send messages that way, so I understand, and they can warn one another when an enemy is near.”

“My, I would like to know that,” and Rod gave a deep sigh. “I wonder if Captain Josh knows anything about it. I am going to ask him, anyway.”

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"There are many other things the scouts have to learn," Whyn explained, "and they are very important."

"What are they?"

"I don't exactly know. But there is a book which tells all about them. Douglas told me that a scout must do a good turn every day."

"What's that?"

"It is to do a kind act of some kind. I know of one boy who looked after the baby so that his mother could go out for awhile. Another rescued a poor little kitten from some cruel boys who were teasing it. When I write my story with you in it, your good turn will be the rescuing a girl from the water just like you did yesterday. I hope to sell the story and make so much money that I shall be able to go to the specialist in New York."

"What are you going to call the boy?" Rod asked.

"I haven't decided yet. Maybe I shall call him Rod; wouldn't that be nice?"

"How did you know that was my name?"

"Mrs. Britt told me this morning before you came."

"Did you ask her?"

"Yes."

Rod's heart gave a little flutter of pleasure. So this beautiful girl had been thinking of him, and had even asked about his name. It made him feel happy all over.

Just then Parson Dan appeared in the doorway.

"My, what a great talking time you young people have had," he exclaimed. "Here I have been waiting for you, sir, ever so long," and he laid his hand affectionately upon the boy's shoulder. "I hope he hasn't tired you, dear," he continued, turning toward Whyn.

"Oh, no," was the eager reply. "We have had such a lovely time. May be come again soon?"

"Certainly. I know it will give him great pleasure."

As they were leaving, Rod went close to Whyn and whispered:

"I'm going to be a scout, and get Captain Josh to help."

“How nice,” and the girl’s smile of encouragement followed him as he left the room.

CHAPTER X

HIS FIRST “GOOD TURN”

Rod was greatly excited over what Whyn had told him about the boy scouts, and on the way home he plied Parson Dan with numerous questions.

“Didn’t you ever hear of them before, grandad?” he asked.

“Yes, Rodney, I did,” was the reply. “But there are so many things taking place in the cities these days that it is hard for an old man like me to keep run of them all. If I were younger I might be able to do something. But in the country where the boys are so scattered, I am afraid that it would be a difficult undertaking to form a band of scouts.”

“Well, I am going to be a scout, anyway,” Rod declared. “I want to learn how to bring a drowned man back to life, and to talk with flags. Oh, it must be great to do that! How can I learn, grandad?”

“There must be books which explain such things,” the clergyman replied. “Shall I write to the city to find out?”

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"Oh, will you, grandad?" and Rod fairly danced with joy, and his eyes sparkled with excitement. "Will you write at once?"

"Yes, dear. I shall write the letter this evening, and it will go down on Monday."

"When will the book come?"

"It should be here by Wednesday."

"Oh!"

"But, remember, Rodney, you must not let this scout idea interfere with your school lessons."

"No, grandad, I won't. I will study hard and fast so that I can read my scout book."

Parson Dan smiled as he watched the lad's enthusiasm. He thought, too, of another boy, who also had been full of life and fun, but who had been unnaturally checked when he should have been directed and led aright. He now realised only too well what a mistake had been made with Alec, and he was determined that the same should not be the case with Rodney.

The following days were very long ones to Rod. It seemed as if Wednesday would never come. He thought over everything Whyn had told him about the scouts, and wearied Mrs. Royal by telling her over and over again what he intended to do when the book arrived. He had not seen Whyn since Saturday, but was looking eagerly forward to seeing her as soon as he had his precious book.

Rod hurried home from school on Wednesday, certain that his treasure would be awaiting him. He did not dally along the road looking for birds' nests as was his usual custom. Neither did the butterflies interest him. He had something more important on hand, which absorbed all of his attention.

He had almost reached the rectory gate, when an automobile whizzed past, half-smothering him in a cloud of dust. This was a common occurrence during the summer months, and he paid little attention to the annoyance. The car had gone but a short distance, however, when a horse, driven by Miss Arabella Simpkins, took fright, reared, wheeled, upset the carriage, and threw the driver into the ditch. The terrified animal then bolted down the road dragging the overturned carriage after it.

The men in the car were greatly concerned over the accident. They picked up the apparently unconscious woman, and found that blood was streaming from her nose. Seeing Rod standing near, they asked him who the woman was, and where she lived.

“She’s Miss Arabella,” was the reply. “Guess her nose is hurt. Captain Josh said if ever she got into an accident it would be the first thing that would get smashed, ’cos it’s so long, and is always poking into other people’s affairs.”

The three men looked keenly at the boy, and then at one another, while the faint semblance of a smile lurked about the corners of their mouths.

“We must get her home at once,” one of them remarked. “Is there a doctor anywhere near, boy?”

“The doctor lives five miles down the road,” Rod replied. “But I guess we don’t need him. Just wait a minute. I know what will stop that bleeding.”

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With that, he sprang across the ditch, hurried through the garden, and entered the rectory. Presently he reappeared, carrying something in his hand, which proved to be a key. Going at once to the prostrate woman, who was lying upon the grass, he told the men to lift her up. When this was done, he quickly slipped the key down the back of her neck.

"There, I guess that'll stop the bleeding," he panted.

Hardly were the words out of his mouth, when Miss Arabella leaped to her feet.

"A snake! A snake!" she yelled. "It's gone down my neck!"

With much difficulty the men soothed her excitement, telling her that there was nothing the matter. At last they induced her to enter the auto, and soon she was being borne rapidly to her home.

Rod remained for a few seconds staring after them, while an amused twinkle shone in his eyes.

"She thought it was a snake, ho, ho. Won't Captain Josh laugh when I tell him that? I didn't mean any harm, though. I just wanted to do a good turn. Guess that was something that a scout would do."

About half an hour after this incident, Parson Dan arrived home, stabled his horse, and went into the rectory. He found Mrs. Royal in her little sewing-room on the north side of the house, busily engaged upon some of the Ladies' Aid work. She smiled as her husband entered.

"I was afraid you would be late, Daniel," she remarked.

"I drove hard," was the reply, "for I never like to keep a wedding waiting. I believe that I have ten minutes to spare, so I shall take a glance at the Marriage Service. It is so seldom we have a wedding that I am a little rusty."

"Won't you have a cup of tea, Daniel?" his wife asked. "It might freshen you up a bit."

"No, dear, not now. Just as soon as I look over the Service, I shall go into the church to have everything ready."

He was gone but a few minutes when he returned, with an anxious expression upon his face.

"Have you seen the key of the church, Martha?" he asked. "I cannot find it anywhere."

“It must be in its usual place, Daniel. It always hangs there, and no one ever thinks of touching it but yourself.”

“Well, it’s not there now, and I have hunted all through the study.”

Mrs. Royal at once arose, and began to assist her husband in his search for the missing key. All their efforts were in vain, however, and before they were through the wedding party arrived. This was most embarrassing, for the ones who had come to be married were very particular, and would resent any delay. If they could not get into the church they were sure to be angry, for it would make them the laughing-stock of the entire parish.

“What shall we do!” Mrs. Royal gasped, as she glanced out of the window at the teams drawn up before the church. “Can’t you force the door, Daniel?”

“No. It would take a blacksmith to do that. And, besides, I wouldn’t allow it for any consideration. It would be terrible.”

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"Why not hold the wedding in the rectory, then?" Mrs. Royal suggested. "Perhaps they wouldn't mind under the circumstances."

"Wouldn't mind! Don't you know the Sanders well enough to realise what they would do and say? Haven't they been planning for a 'church wedding' for months? Here come more teams. What in the world shall we do!" and the parson drew forth his handkerchief, and mopped his perspiring brow.

"There must be only one person who knows where that key is," Mrs. Royal thoughtfully remarked.

"And who is that?"

"Rodney. If you didn't remove it, he must have done so."

"Where is he?" and the clergyman looked around as if expecting to see him appear.

"I do not know, Daniel. He always comes to see me when he returns from school, but I have not seen him this afternoon. That scout book came this morning, and he may be lost in that."

"But he is not in the house, Martha. I have boon all over the place and have not seen him."

"Is the book there?" his wife asked. "I left it on the dining-room table."

"I didn't see any book. But, hark, there is some one at the door. They're after me to attend the wedding, and what shall I say! How can I explain!" and the parson started to go to the door.

"Wait, Daniel," his wife called. "If the book is gone, Rodney must have taken it over to show it to Captain Josh, for he said he was going to do that just as soon as it came."

"But why should he take the key, Martha?" and the parson turned his despairing face upon hers.

"I do not know, Daniel. But you had better send some one after him at once. He may know something about it."

In the meantime the doorbell had been ringing furiously, and when Parson Dan at last opened it, he was confronted by several excited men, among whom was the bridegroom.

"What's wrong, parson?" Ned Percher cried. "We've been waitin' out here fer some time. The church is locked, and the people are gettin' impatient."

"I can't find the key, Ned, that's what's the trouble," the parson explained.

"Can't find the key!" came in a chorus from all.

"No. It's gone, and the only person who must know about it is Rodney, and I believe he's over at Captain Josh's."

The groom, a thick-set, red-faced man, now stepped forward.

"D'ye think this is the right way to treat me, parson?" he demanded. "Haven't I been always one of your best church members, and now when I'm to be married, ye lock the church against me, and say that the key is lost. What will Susie think? I'd like to know. She'll never get over the disgrace."

"You are not half as sorry as I am," Parson Dan replied as calmly as possible. "I am deeply mortified that such a thing should have happened. But talking will not mend matters now. The key must be found, so if one of you will hurry over to the Anchorage, and bring Rodney back, I shall be greatly obliged."

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Ned Percher at once volunteered to go, and soon he was speeding for the captain's house by a short-cut through the field. There was nothing else for the rest to do but to wait in front of the rectory until the messenger should return with the boy.

The bride was greatly disturbed over the delay. So overcome was she with the excitement that she had to be carried into the house, where she lay upon the sitting-room sofa, quite hysterical. The women who gathered around her by no means restrained their tongues, thus making the young bride feel as badly as possible. Several expressed their opinion of the clergyman for allowing such a thing to happen. It was another example, so they said, of the mistake he had made in bringing up a child of whose parents he knew nothing. They had said so before, and were now more firmly convinced than ever. Others told what it meant for a wedding to be delayed right at the church door, and related a number of cases where ill luck had followed such weddings. Thus, by the time Ned Percher arrived, with Rod close at his heels, the bride was almost in a state of nervous collapse.

During this time of waiting Parson Dan spoke to no one. He knew that the less he now said the better it would be. His face had lost its usual genial expression, and his eyes no longer twinkled with humour. He was feeling very keenly the whole unfortunate affair. Never before during the whole course of his entire ministry had such a thing occurred. He had often boasted that he had never once been late for a service, nor had he kept people waiting at either a funeral or a wedding. He stood with his face turned up the road, and a sigh of relief at last escaped his lips when he saw Rod coming toward him.

The boy was greatly surprised to see so many teams and people in front of the rectory, for Ned would tell him nothing of what was taking place. He was astonished, as well, when he observed the worried look upon the parson's face. But he had no time for questions just then, for the clergyman laid a heavy hand upon the lad's shoulder, and demanded if he knew what had become of the key of the church.

Instantly the cause of the excitement flashed upon Rod's mind. His face became pale, and he glanced nervously around upon the men who had gathered near.

"Do you hear me?" the parson again demanded. "Do you know anything about that key?"

"Yes, grandad, I do," was the trembling reply.

"Where is it, then?"

"It's down Miss Arabella's neck."

“Down Miss Arabella’s neck!” the clergyman repeated in profound astonishment. “What do you mean?”

“She got hurt, grandad, and her nose was bleeding, so I dropped the key down her neck. Captain Josh said that was the best thing to stop a bleeding nose.”

For an instant Parson Dan glared at the little lad before him. Then his face softened, and as amused light shone in his eyes as the humorous side of the situation dawned upon him. He longed to laugh outright, and give the culprit before him a big hug. But he had to control his feelings in the presence of all the people, who saw nothing funny about the matter.

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"Look here, Rodney," he said, "you go after that key as fast as your legs will carry you."

"Yes, grandad, I will," and Rod was off like a shot, glad to be free from the staring crowd.

So once more the wedding was delayed, and the murmurs of the waiting people increased.

CHAPTER XI

MISS ARABELLA'S "AFFAIR"

It was the lot of Miss Arabella Simpkins to have lived for over forty years without one real affair of the heart. There were reasons for this, well known to all the people of Hillcrest. Not only had her father, a lumberman of considerable repute in his day, been very particular as to the young men who visited the house, but Miss Arabella herself was the chief objection. She was by no means handsome, and in addition she was possessed of a sharp tongue, and, as Captain Josh truly said, "a long nose which was always prying into other people's business." These frailties naturally increased as she grew older until she became a dread not only to her brother, Tom, but to all her neighbours, especially the children.

She had two redeeming features, however: a generous heart for those she liked, and considerable money. This latter had its influence, and made her tolerated in the company of others, where she was indulged with a certain amount of good humour.

But a real romance had never come into Miss Arabella's life, and this was her great trial. No suitor had ever sought her out, and with languishing eyes had watched her as she moved among the other maidens of the parish. Friends of her girlhood days had been more fortunate. They were married, and had families around them, while she alone had been left "like the last rose of summer," as she often told herself.

But Miss Arabella never let people know about her trial. On the contrary, she wished them to believe that her heart had once been won by a handsome and gallant young man. Just what had become of him, or what had occurred to cause the separation, she would never tell, and only hinted mysteriously with a deep sigh whenever the subject of matrimony was discussed. People knowing her, always smiled, and among themselves often spoke of Miss Arabella's "affair."

The Simpkins' house was close to the river, and about a quarter of a mile from the rectory by means of a short-cut through the field, though much longer by the main highway. Rod took the short route, and in a few minutes reached the place. His heart beat fast as he drew near, for he dreaded meeting Miss Arabella, whose sharp tongue he had good reason to fear.

Tom Simpkins met him at the door, and ushered him into the sitting-room where Miss Arabella was lying upon a sofa near the window. She was somewhat paler than usual, and very weak. A look of disappointment appeared upon her face as the door opened and Rod entered.

“Oh, it’s only you,” she complained. “What brought you here?”

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"I came for the key, Miss Arabella," Rod pantingly explained, keeping as close to the door as possible.

"H'm, I should think you would not only be afraid but ashamed to come near me after doing such a mean thing as you did this afternoon," and the invalid fixed her piercing eyes upon the boy.

"W-what did I do?" Rod stammered.

"Do! Didn't you put that key down my neck, which gave me such a terrible shock?"

"But it brought you back to life, Miss Arabella, and it stopped your nose bleeding. Captain Josh said that was the best thing to do, and I guess he was right."

"Oh, that was what you did it for, was it?"

"Sure. I never thought of scaring you. I only wanted to do a good turn, that's all."

"But what did you say such things about my nose for, tell me that?"

"Why, did you hear me? I thought you didn't know anything."

"Then you were mistaken. I heard and knew more than you imagined."

"The men thought that you were almost dead, Miss Arabella, and they felt very bad."

"Did they?" the woman questioned, and her voice was softer than usual. Then she remained silent for a few seconds, looking absently before her. "See here, Rod," and she smiled upon the boy for the first time in her life, "I will forgive you for what you said about my nose if you will tell me something."

"What is it?"

"You remember that fine looking man, with the blue eyes, and hair streaked with grey."

"Can't say that I do, Miss Arabella."

"He was the one who held me in his arms while you dropped that horrid key down my neck."

"Oh, yes, I know now."

"Well, Rod, do you think he cared much that I was hurt?"

"Yes, I think he did."



"Are you sure?"

"Yes. He looked awful scared when you tumbled into the ditch."

"Ah, I knew it," and the invalid closed her eyes, while a smile overspread her face. "I felt from the first that he cared," she murmured.

Then she lay so perfectly still that Rod thought she had fainted. He stepped to her side, and touched her hand.

"Miss Arabella," he began, "have you fainted?"

"Oh, I thought that he was standing by my side," she simpered. "I must have been dreaming."

"No, it's only me, and I would like to have the key. They can't have the wedding till I get back."

"What wedding?" and the invalid sat suddenly bolt upright.

"Why, Bill Stebbins and Susie Sanders want to get married, and they can't get into the church 'cos you have the key down your neck."

"A wedding! What thoughts of bliss come to my mind at that word," and Miss Arabella clasped her hands, while her eyes rolled up to the ceiling.

Rod was now becoming very impatient. He thought of the crowd waiting before the rectory, and Parson Dan's anxiety.

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"The key, Miss Arabella," he insisted. "Will you please——"

"And you think he cared?" the woman interrupted.

"Yes. But, Miss——"

"And did he look at me much with those splendid blue eyes?"

"I think he did, Miss Arabella. But will you please give me the key. They are waiting
——"

"And do you think he will come back, Rod? He said that he would return soon. But men are so fickle."

A new idea suddenly shot into Rod's mind.

"Give me the key, Miss Arabella, and I will go after that man. It will be my good turn."

"Oh, will you?" and the woman's face lighted up with joy. "Don't tell him that I sent you."

"No, I won't. But the key, where is it? If it's down your neck, I'll go out of the room until you find it."

"And you will hurry, Rod?"

"Yes, yes, but——"

"And you think you can find him?"

"I'll try if you'll give me the key, Miss Arabella. But if you keep me waiting any longer I won't go one step."

"Well, it's on that shelf over there. Take it, and hurry."

Rod wasted no time. He sprang for the key, seized it, and darted out of the room. Over the field he sped as fast as his nimble feet would carry him, and never paused until he had handed it to the anxiously waiting clergyman.

Having performed this task, Rod turned his attention to Miss Arabella's "man." The wedding was of little interest to him, so he strolled down the road with not the least idea how he was going to bring back that man with the "splendid blue eyes." With hands thrust deep into his pockets he walked along whistling a merry tune. His mind was really upon Whyn, and the book he had left at the Anchorage. He would much rather have gone back there, but he knew that he must do his duty to the love-sick woman first.

He had not gone very far ere he saw a man coming toward him, leading a horse, which he knew to be the one which had run away. He recognised the man, and he was overjoyed at seeing him.

"Hello! Have you come to give a hand?" the man accosted as he drew near.

"Yes, sir. I was looking for you," Rod replied, as he walked along by the man's side.

"Thought I had run away with the horse, did you? Well, we had a hard chase, but found her at last, with the wagon all smashed to bits. We tried to lead the horse behind the car, but couldn't get her anywhere near it, so I had to foot it the whole way."

"Miss Arabella will be glad to see you, sir."

"Will she, eh? I suppose there'll be the Old Harry to pay. You said something about her tongue, didn't you? I expect to know more of it shortly."

"Oh, she won't scold you, sir. She thinks a lot of you."

"Of me?"

"Yes, sir. She thinks you are great. I really believe she is in love with you, that's all."

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"Whew!" and the man whistled softly, while an amused light shone in his eyes. "Did she send you after me?" he inquired.

"I promised, sir, that I wouldn't tell."

"Oh, I see," and the man relapsed into silence. A picture of Miss Arabella's angular figure, thin face, and long sharp nose rose before him. And to think that she was in love with him! It was almost too good to be true, and he longed to laugh outright. What a story he would have to relate when he got home.

Miss Arabella was lying just where Rod had left her when John Markham and the boy entered. She gave a little squeak of joy when the stranger stepped to her side.

"I knew you would come back," she murmured. "I was certain that you would not forsake me."

"Not until I had found the horse, madam," was the reply. "I regret very much that the wagon is broken, but I shall make good your loss."

"Don't mention such a thing," and the invalid feebly waved her thin hands. "Such material matters don't count for anything to a heart over-flowing with gratitude."

"Yes, you were most fortunate to escape as you did, madam. You might have been seriously injured, nay, you might have been killed, and so I can understand how grateful you must feel."

"Oh, I don't mean that," and Miss Arabella raised her soulful eyes to the man's face. "I am so thankful that you have come back."

"You didn't imagine that I would run away with your horse, did you, madam? She is certainly a fine beast, and it is lucky that she did not receive any serious damage. I am much pleased that I have been able to deliver her to you with so few scratches upon her. A little treatment will make her all right. You will find Bickmore's Gall Cure very good."

"It's not that, not that, I assure you," and again Miss Arabella flapped her hands in agony of soul. "What does a horse amount to when the heart is affected?"

"Oh, is that what's the matter?" and Mr. Markham assumed an expression of great solicitude. "It was the fall, no doubt, which did it. Have you had trouble there before?"

"It wasn't the fall that caused it," and Miss Arabella covered her face with her hand. "It goes deeper than that."

“Dear me, madam, you must certainly see the doctor. It is very serious, and you must not delay any longer. I believe the doctor lives down the road. Shall I call on him on my way home, and tell him to come at once?”

Before Miss Arabella could reply, a raucous honk outside arrested their attention.

“It’s merely the car,” Mr. Markham explained. “I must be going now.”

“What, so soon? Must you leave me again?” and the invalid raised her eyes appealingly to the man’s face.

“Yes, I must be off. My wife will be wondering what——”

“Your wife!” Miss Arabella shrieked, sitting bolt upright. “Do you tell me that you have a wife!”

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"Certainly. She is waiting for me with some friends down the road. Several of us men took a spin this afternoon so that the women could have a little chat together. It is getting late now, and we must hurry back to the city. This accident has delayed us. So, good-bye, madam. I trust you soon will be well. I shall see about the carriage at once."

With that, he left the house, closely followed by Rod, leaving Miss Arabella speechless upon the sofa.

CHAPTER XII

SCOUT WORK

Two weeks after the scout book arrived the Hillcrest troop of boy scouts was formed, with Captain Josh as scoutmaster, and Rod as patrol leader. Whyn had much to do with this, and her enthusiasm inspired and encouraged the others. News soon spread among the rest of the boys in the parish of what was taking place, and it was not long before several more asked to become members. The Scout Commissioner and the Secretary of the Province visited Hillcrest, explained many things, and started the work along proper lines.

Deep in his heart Captain Josh was delighted with the boys. They no longer feared him, though he was as gruff as ever. But they soon found that this gruffness was only on the surface, and that in reality he was deeply interested in their welfare. He studied the scout book thoroughly until he knew it from cover to cover. He was determined that his troop, even though it was known as the "Lone Patrol," was to be well trained, and a credit to the parish. He did not wish to have too many boys at first, but to drill the ones he had chosen until they were proficient in every part of the scout work.

Whenever the captain was in doubt as to what he should do, he always consulted with Whyn, for he found that she had excellent ideas, and remembered so much of what her brother Douglas had told her. Her joy was even greater than the captain's when she learned that a troop was to be formed, and she planned all sorts of things for the boys to do.

Just as the work was well under way, Mrs. Sinclair informed the Britts that she and Whyn must leave for the city. She had her work to do there without which they could not live. Then it was that the captain showed his hand. He had been thinking over this very matter for some time, and had discussed it with his wife.

"Let Whyn stay with us, Mrs. Sinclair," he suggested. "I do not see how we can get along without her."

"But I cannot afford that, captain," the widow replied.

“Can’t afford what?”

“To pay her board.”

“Who said anything about paying?” the captain demanded. “She’s worth more than her board any day. We don’t want any money. If ye’ll let her stay with us we’ll be quite willin’ to pay you something fer her. We need her, and so do the scouts. It’ll be a shame to take her back to that stuffy city at this time of the year.”

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"But what shall I do without her?" Mrs. Sinclair asked. "She is all I have near me, and I shall miss her so much if she remains with you."

"You can come and see her as often as you like," Mrs. Britt replied. "We shall be so glad to have you."

And so it was arranged that Whyn was to stay for several weeks at least, and the girl was delighted when she heard the news.

"You are the dearest and best people in the world, excepting mamma," she told the captain and Mrs. Britt. "It is so nice to be here, and when I know that mamma can come to see me often I do not mind staying."

"But ye'll have to behave yerself, young woman," the captain replied. "No more lyin' awake at night, remember, worryin' about the scouts. And ye've got to eat more than ye have in the past."

"Oh, no fear of that," and Whyn laughed merrily. "I am going to eat so much that you will be glad to send me away."

It did not take the captain long to get the scouts down to steady work. As the holidays were now on they often met during the afternoons, when the captain drilled them in marching, instructed them about the flag, and taught them how to tie a number of knots. It was necessary for them to know such things before they could obtain the tenderfoot badges. They had to learn the Scout Law as well. It was not all work, however, for the captain often took the boys for delightful spins upon the river in the *Roaring Bess*, and soon all the scouts were able to handle the yacht in a creditable manner.

It soon became evident that they must have a building of their own where they could meet on wet days. The Commissioner had told them that there was nothing like a club-room for their meetings. The captain had been thinking this over for some time, and at last offered the use of an old rafting shanty near the shore, and which could be easily seen from Whyn's window. This building was fairly large, made of boards, and the roof covered with tarred paper. It was well lighted by four windows, which showed up the dirty condition of the room in an alarming manner when the captain and the boys first inspected the place. There were remnants of old bunks, tables and chairs, while broken boxes were scattered about. But after two days of steady work a great change took place. The boys were willing and eager, and inspired by the captain they toiled until their backs ached. Holes in the roof were patched, the broken door mended, several chairs were brought from the boys' homes, and when all was done they were delighted at what they had accomplished. They now no longer dreaded wet days, for they had a place to meet where they could carry on their work to their hearts' content. The captain

had two good flags, which he placed upon the wall, and the boys brought magazine pictures, and tacked them around the room. In this way the place was made very cosy.

Whyn was delighted with the progress which the scouts made upon their club-room, which she called "Headquarters." She could see it from her window, and often she would sit and watch as the boys worked around the building, cutting down some of the underbrush, and cleaning up the ground. When their work was done they always came to her room, and talked over everything with her.

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At first some of the boys had been quite shy and diffident in Whyn's presence. But this soon wore away, and they all became the firmest of friends. There was nothing the scouts would not do for the invalid girl, and when they were in doubt about anything it was always to her they turned to help them out of their difficulty. She knew more about the scout work than they did, and many were the helpful suggestions she made.

"You must have scout suits," she told them one day, "and each of you must earn the money to buy his own. All the scouts do it, and it is really expected of them. Douglas sold newspapers to buy his, and I remember the day he brought his suit home. He looked so fine when he wore it, and we were proud of him."

The scouts liked this idea, and they spent over an hour discussing it, and how they were to earn the money. Whyn was able to tell the price of the entire suit, and where it could be bought in the city.

Rod listened to this conversation, but said little. He walked home in a very thoughtful mood, and the Royals noticed that he was more silent than usual as he ate his supper. Generally he was bubbling over with news about the scouts. But now he had nothing to say of what had taken place that afternoon. Rod was worried over the suit question, as he had not the slightest idea how he was going to earn the money to buy his. He could not think of any way out of his difficulty. The other scouts had plans which would not do for him, as they were farmers' sons, and could earn money right at home. He thought of this the last thing before he went to sleep that night, and the moment he awoke it came into his mind.

"I want you to take something for me over for Miss Arabella this morning," Mrs. Royal told him after breakfast. "The poor soul has not been well for some time, and I heard last night that she is worse. I have made up a few dainties for her as her appetite is almost gone, so I understand."

Rod did not fancy this errand, for he remembered only too well the last time he had seen Miss Arabella lying so still upon the sofa after her affair of the heart. It was, therefore, with lagging steps that he made his way across the field, carrying in his hand the little basket filled with the good things Mrs. Royal had sent for the invalid.

Miss Arabella was in bed looking paler than ever, so Rod thought her nose seemed longer than he had ever seen it. She was propped up with several pillows, and her hair was done up in papers. She looked to the boy like pictures he had seen of natives with funny head-dresses out in the islands of the Pacific Ocean.

"So Mrs. Royal sent those things, did she!" she whined. "She might have come herself. She has been here only three times this week, while you haven't been near me for a long time. I might die here, and no one would care. This is what people call a Christian land, is it?"

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"What's the matter with you, Miss Arabella?" Rod asked in surprise. "I didn't know you were sick. I have been so busy with the scouts that I haven't had time for anything else."

"Who are the scouts?" the invalid questioned. There was evidently something taking place in the parish of which she had heard nothing, and her curiosity was aroused.

Then Rod told her about the troop which had been formed, the club-room, and the wonderful girl, to all of which Miss Arabella listened with much interest.

"And do you mean to tell me that cranky old Captain Josh is looking after the scouts?" she demanded.

"Sure. He's great," was the reply.

"Well, I declare!" and Miss Arabella leaned back against the pillow as if exhausted by the idea.

"I wish you could see Whyn," and Rod gave a little sigh. "She'd do you a whole lot of good."

"Do me good! In what way, I'd like to know? I guess it would take more than her to make me better."

"But she is so jolly," Rod explained. "Her eyes are laughing all the time, and she is never cross."

"Humph!" and the invalid gave her head a toss. "If she had to put up with what I have to she would not feel that way."

"Oh, but she does, Miss Arabella. She has pains all the time, and she can't walk a step. She hasn't walked for a long time."

"She hasn't! Well, how can she laugh and not be cross?"

"I don't know for sure. But I guess she is trying to be a scout."

"What has that to do with it?"

"Quite a bit. You see, a scout has to smile and whistle no matter what happens. If he jams his finger or stubs his toe, he must smile and go on whistling just as if nothing had happened. It's hard at first, but after you learn how to do it you feel good all the time."

"And so you think I should do the same, eh?" and the woman fixed her eyes upon the boy's face.

“Not exactly, Miss Arabella,” and Rod gave a little chuckle. “You might smile more than you do, but I don’t think you could whistle. But maybe you can. Did you ever try?”

“No, I never did,” was the snapping reply, “and I detest girls and women who can.”

“But Whyn whistles,” Rod explained, “and I’m sure you’d like her if you saw her. You ought to see her, Miss Arabella. I believe she’d make you better. And, besides, you’d do a good turn if you went to the Anchorage. Whyn doesn’t see many women and she’d be so pleased to see you.”

“What do you mean by a ‘good turn’?” the invalid asked. “Is it something else the scouts have to do?”

“Sure. You see, a scout is supposed to do a good turn each day. That is, he must try to help somebody or something. When I put that key down your neck, Miss Arabella, it was only my good turn which I was doing. Captain Josh said it was the best thing to do to stop nose bleeding. Now, if you’d go to see Whyn that would be your good turn, see?”

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"H'm, I guess I've got all I can do to look after myself without trying to do good turns to others," the woman sniffed. Nevertheless, when Rod had gone she thought over everything he had said, and for once forgot all about her own troubles.

CHAPTER XIII

THE VISIT

The morning after Rod's visit to Miss Arabella's, Mrs. Britt was busy in the kitchen making doughnuts. The scouts were coming that afternoon, and once a week, at least, she had some treat for them, and she knew what they liked. Mrs. Britt's interest in the boys was as keen as her husband's, and it gave her great pleasure to have them about the house. Her home life had been very lonely since Jimmy went away, so the shouting of the scouts and their merry laughter brought back other days.

She had just completed frosting a number of doughnuts, and had them all heaped upon a large plate, when the kitchen door was suddenly thrust open, and Miss Arabella burst into the room. Though the morning was very warm, a thick shawl enwrapped her shoulders, and she wore a heavy winter dress. Her eyes were wide with fright, and she was trembling so violently that she was forced to sink into the nearest chair.

"Why, Miss Arabella!" Mrs. Britt exclaimed, "are you sick? You must lie down at once."

"No, no, I'm not sick," and the visitor flapped her hands in despair. "But your husband, Mrs. Britt, your husband, oh, oh!"

"What's the matter with him?" Mrs. Britt enquired, while her face turned suddenly pale. "Has anything happened to him? Tell me quick."

"Yes, I'm afraid so. It's awful. I didn't know he was that way. Has he been troubled long? You should take him away at once. I always knew he was queer, but I had no idea he was so bad."

"Will you please tell me what is the matter?" Mrs. Britt demanded. "I don't understand you. Joshua was all right a few minutes ago."

"Was he?" and Miss Arabella looked her surprise. "But you should see him now. He's out there in front of the house waving his arms up and down just like this," and the visitor, forgetting her weakness, leaped to her feet and imitated what she had seen the captain doing. "He was looking up at the window," she continued, "and saying things I could not understand. It sounded as if he was going over his letters, and every once in awhile he would clasp his hands before him like this, and cry 'brute.' Oh, it is terrible!"

Mrs. Britt gave a deep sigh of relief, while an amused twinkle shone in her eyes.

“Sit down, Miss Arabella,” she ordered. “There is nothing wrong with Joshua. He is practising signalling, that’s all. Whyn is helping him from her window. He has to teach the scouts this afternoon, and is brushing up a little. You see, every time he moves his arms he makes a letter. The alphabet is divided into groups, and at the end of each group he stops swinging his arms, and clasps his hands before him before making the next group. That is what Joshua must have been doing which frightened you so much.”

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"Oh, dear me!" and Miss Arabella began to fan herself with an old newspaper she picked up from off the table. "I never got such a shock in all my life. I don't know what people are coming to these days when an old man like your husband will act in such a way. I came over on purpose to see that girl you have here, and it has nearly cost me my life."

"Have one of these doughnuts, dear," Mrs. Britt soothed. "I shall get you some of my home-made wine, which will make you feel better." And the good woman bustled off to the pantry, from which she shortly emerged with a well-filled glass.

"That does make me feel better," Miss Arabella remarked, after she had drunk the wine and eaten two doughnuts. "That walk has certainly given me an appetite."

"And I guess you'll feel better still when you see Whyn," Mrs. Britt replied, as she led her visitor into the front bedroom.

The invalid girl was sitting by the open window in the big chair the captain had fitted up for her. Her cheeks were flushed with excitement, and her eyes were sparkling with animation. She was holding a small signalling chart in her hands, at the same time giving instructions to the captain outside.

"Try that again," she was saying. "Don't hold your arms so stiff. There, that's better."

Hearing the sound of footsteps, she turned suddenly and her eyes fell upon Miss Arabella's lank form and thin face. For an instant only she hesitated before reaching out her delicate white hand.

"Oh, you're Miss Arabella," she exclaimed. "I'm very glad to see you, and it's so good of you to come. Sit down, please."

"For pity's sake, how do you know who I am?" was the astonished reply.

"A little bird told me," and Whyn gave a merry laugh.

"H'm. I guess it was a bird without any feathers, and a little red head."

"Yes, that's who it was. You see, I know most of the people in this place, though I have met only a few. Rod told me that you were sick, and what you look like."

"He did, did he? And I suppose he told you that I had a long nose which was always poking into other people's business."

"Why, no!" and Whyn's face grew suddenly sober. "He never told me anything like that. He only said that you were thin, with a sad face, and that you were very lonely, with no one to love you."



“So he said that, did he?” and a softer expression came into the woman’s grey eyes. “But I suppose he told you a whole lot more, though?”

“Only about how he put the key down your neck,” and again Whyn smiled. “Wasn’t it a funny way to do a good turn?”

“Not very funny for me, Miss,” and the visitor tossed her head. “But tell me, how old are you?”

“Just sixteen,” was the reply.

“What’s wrong with you, anyway? You don’t look very sick.”

“It’s my back. I am not able to walk, and can sit up only for a little while each day.”

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"My, it must be hard for you to be that way. I know something about it myself," and Miss Arabella gave a deep sigh.

"I try to forget my troubles, though, by thinking of bright things," Whyn explained. "And now that I have so much to do with the scouts I have scarcely any time left to think about myself. Every night my back aches so much that I cannot sleep for several hours. But last night I was thinking about Rod, and didn't mind the pain hardly at all."

"Why, what's wrong with Rod?" the visitor inquired. "I don't see why you should lie awake thinking about him."

"No, perhaps you don't, and maybe it was foolish of me, but I couldn't help it. You see, it had to do with his scout suit. Each boy must earn the money to buy his own suit, and when the scouts were talking about it, they all told how they were going to raise the money except Rod. He didn't say anything, and I knew by the look on his face that he hadn't the least idea where he was going to get the money for his suit. I felt so sorry for him. When Rod is thinking hard he is very quiet. He was just like that yesterday, and he didn't even say a word to me when he left. Oh, I wish that I could think of some way to help him."

"Who are the other scouts?" Miss Arabella asked.

"Well, there's Jimmy Perkins. He's corporal, and——"

"Old Ezry Perkins' son, eh? I guess I know his pa, a mean old skinflint, if ever there was one. But he dotes on that boy of his, and he'll get him the suit all right. Who else?"

"Then, there's Tommy Bunker, the boy with a face like the full moon."

"Yes, I know the Bunkers only too well. Stuck up people, they are, who think they own the whole parish. You ought to see Mrs. Bunker come into church. She holds her head so high, and steps so big and mighty, that she thinks she's doing the Lord a great service by coming. Tommy'll get his suit, never fear. Mrs. Bunker will see to that."

"Billy Potter comes next," Whyn hastened to explain, "and Joe Martin, and Phil Dexter, and——"

"There, that will do," and Miss Arabella sniffed in a most significant manner. "I know the whole tribe. Nothing but trash, every one of them. Queer scouts, I call them. Yes, they'll all have suits, and my, how they'll strut around."

"I'm afraid Rod will not get his for some time," and Whyn sighed. "He's patrol leader, too, and I am sure he will feel very badly."

“No doubt he will. But, there, I must be off,” and Miss Arabella rose suddenly to her feet. “Good-bye. I’ll be over to see you again soon,” and with that, she whisked out of the room.

CHAPTER XIV

UNEXPECTED ASSISTANCE

When Miss Arabella left the Anchorage she seemed like a different person from the one who had entered it but a short time before. Her step was quick and decisive, as if she had something important on hand.

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"It was wonderful," Mrs. Britt told her husband, "the way Miss Arabella went out of that door. She had hardly time to say 'good-bye.' I wonder what has come over her."

"H'm," the captain grunted contemptuously, "most likely the hawk has been worryin' that poor little bird in there, and it was that which made her so happy. I don't know of anything on earth that would please that skinny creature as much as naggin' at some poor little innocent thing like Whyn, fer instance. Her long nose is gettin' more hooked every day."

"Hush, hush, Joshua," his wife remonstrated, "you mustn't say such things about a woman. Remember, Miss Arabella was greatly concerned about you this morning. She thought you had gone out of your mind when she saw you signalling in front of the house."

"She did, eh? Ho, ho! And I suppose she wished that I was crazy enough to be sent to the 'sylum. That's a good one, and I must go and tell Whyn."

Miss Arabella had almost reached her house when she met Rod walking slowly along, with his eyes fixed upon the ground. He was thinking deeply, and wondering how he was to earn the money to buy his scout suit. So far he could see no way out of his difficulty. He knew that if he spoke to Parson Dan and Mrs. Royal they would gladly give him the money. But he must earn it himself, for that was the scout rule.

"Well, what are you after now?" was Miss Arabella's sharp greeting.

"Grandmother sent me after the basket," Rod explained. "I couldn't get into the house, and so I thought maybe you were dead."

"Do I look like a dead person?" the woman asked, while a grim smile lurked about the corners of her mouth.

"No, not now, Miss Arabella. But yesterday you looked as if you might die at any moment."

"Well, yesterday is not to-day," she snapped. "I'm much better, so if you'll come back, I'll give you the basket you left here."

When they had reached the house and entered the kitchen, Miss Arabella, instead of getting the basket, sat down upon a splint-bottom chair, and began to take off her wraps. Rod stood in the middle of the room and watched her without saying a word. When the hat and shawl had been removed and laid carefully upon the table, the woman turned to the boy.

"You told me yesterday," she began, "that you are a scout. Is that so?"

“Yes, Miss Arabella.”

“But where is your scout suit?”

“I haven’t it yet, and I can’t get it until I have the money.”

“Well, that’s just what I want to speak about. Look here, Rod, you’re not such a bad boy after all, even though you did put a toad in my lap, and drop that key down my neck. Now, I’ve made up my mind to help you. I’m going to give you your suit, see?”

Rod started, while, an expression of joy leaped into his eyes. He was about to speak, when he suddenly hesitated, and his face grew grave.

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"What's the matter?" Miss Arabella demanded, noticing his embarrassed manner.

"I—I can't take it," he stammered.

"And why not? I'd like to know."

"Cos I have to earn the money myself, and if you give me the suit it won't be fair."

"Oh, rubbish! What's the difference?" was the disgusted reply. "The other scouts will have their suits given to them, and why shouldn't you? I don't want them to get ahead of you."

"But they've got to earn their own money, Miss Arabella, and they'll have to tell how they earned it, too. Captain Josh won't let them wear their suits unless they do."

"H'm, is that so? Well, I call it a queer arrangement. How do you expect to earn yours?" and the woman looked keenly at the boy.

"I don't know. I've been thinking over it a lot. If I only knew some way, I would work so hard. Haven't you anything for me to do, Miss Arabella? I would run errands, carry in wood and water, or do anything else."

"No, there's nothing like that you could do around here. Tom is supposed to look after such things, and I don't want to take his jobs from him. He does little enough as it is, dear knows. He spends so much of his time at the store that he won't look after the garden. The strawberries are getting ripe, and I expect they'll rot before he'll touch them. I never saw such a man. I wish to goodness he had to work for his living instead, of depending upon what his father left him."

"Let me pick the berries, Miss Arabella," and Rod stepped quickly forward. "I'll do it for a cent a box, or less if you want me to. I know a boy who did that and he earned three dollars."

Miss Arabella did not at once reply, and Rod was afraid that she did not agree to his proposal. She remained silent for a while, plucking at her dress in a thoughtful manner.

"Rod," she at last began, and her voice was softer than he had ever heard it, "I am going to give you that patch of berries. It will be your very own, and you can do what you like with it."

"Oh, Miss Arabella! Surely——"

"There, that will do, now," she snapped. "None of your thanks for me. You'd better go and get ready to go to work. I saw a good many ripe berries out there this morning, and you can't afford to waste any time."

Rod didn't walk across the field. There was no slow sauntering home when he was once out of the house. He burst into the rectory like a whirlwind, just as the Royals were sitting down to dinner. Breathless and excited, he blurted out his story, and when he was through Mrs. Royal told him to get ready for dinner.

Rod could eat but little, as his mind was so taken up with the good fortune which had come his way. He was anxious to be off to the store to get some berry-boxes.

"Where are you going to send your berries, Rodney?" Parson Dan inquired when they were through with their dinner.

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"To the city, I suppose," was the reply. "I can't sell them here very well. Nearly all of the summer people raise their own."

"You should have some one place in the city to send them, Rodney. I have heard that Peter McDuff gives good prices. You might try him."

"Will you write him a letter, grandad?"

"I think you had better do it yourself. This is your business, and you must carry it through from beginning to the end."

It took Rod some time to write that letter. It was the first business one he had ever written, and he did not know just what to say. At last, after numerous efforts, he decided that this would be satisfactory:

HILLCREST, N. B.

July 12th, 1911.

"MR. PETER McDUFF,
St. John.

"Dear Sir: I have some strawberries which I am going to pick myself. I want to buy a scout suit, and Miss Arabella has given me her berries. What will you give me for them? I will send them down on the boat when I hear from you.

"Yours very truly,

"ROD ROYAL."

Rod carried this letter to the office, mailed it, and brought back a number of berry-boxes from the store in his little hand-waggon. The rest of the afternoon he spent in making a crate to hold the boxes. Long and patiently he toiled, and at times Mrs. Royal went into the workshop to see how he was getting along. When supper time came it was a queer ramshackle affair he had constructed, which would hardly hold together long enough to reach the wharf, let alone the rough handling it would receive on the steamer.

That evening after Rod was in bed, Parson Dan took a lamp and went out to the workshop. His heart was strangely moved as he looked upon the pathetic efforts of the little lad. Casting aside his coat, he started to work, and in about half an hour he had fashioned a neat strong crate, capable of standing the strain of travel. Into this he put the berry-boxes, placed upon it a good strong cover, and went back into the house.

Rod was surprised and delighted next morning when he went into the workshop. He had his misgivings, however, and asked the parson whether it was right for him to receive any help.

“That’s all right, Rodney,” the clergyman explained. “You can hardly be expected to make the berry-boxes any more than you can make the large crate. There are some things others must do for us. You will need two or three more crates, so the one I made last night will show you just how the work is to be done. You did remarkably well yesterday with nothing to guide you, but to-day I expect you to do better.”

Thus encouraged, Rod once more set to work, and by night he had finished two crates which greatly pleased Mr. and Mrs. Royal. They were overjoyed at the boy’s enthusiasm, his skill and his work, as well as his willingness to be taught.

The next day a reply was received from Peter McDuff. Rod was greatly excited as he tore open the envelope.

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"MR. ROD ROYAL," so the letter began,

"Dear Sir: Your favor of the 12th received, and its contents noted. I shall be pleased to receive as many berries as you can send, and will give you market prices for the same.

"Yours respectfully,

"PETER McDUFF."

This was the first business letter Rod had ever received and he was delighted. After showing it to Mr. and Mrs. Royal, he rushed over to tell the good news to Captain Josh and Whyn. The latter was much pleased, and she gave him some sound advice.

"You must keep that letter," she told him, "for you cannot always trust people. I have heard some queer stories of mean tricks which have been done. Then, you had better read the market prices every day in the paper, and cut the piece out, so you will know just exactly how much your berries are bringing. How I wish I could help you pick them."

Monday morning Rod began to pick his first berries. The patch was not a large one, but it seemed big to him. Hour after hour he worked, and at times his back ached. The day was hot, and the perspiration poured down his face. But he kept faithfully at his task, stopping only long enough to eat his dinner. When supper time came he had twenty boxes of nice ripe berries lying side by side upon the kitchen table. He could not eat a bite until all had been placed safely in the crate, and then he stood back and gazed upon them with admiration. In fact, he had to come out several times before he went to bed to view his treasures. But at last the cover was placed on, nailed down, and the ticket tacked upon the top.

Early the next morning Parson Dan and Rod took the berries to the wharf in the carriage, in time to catch the first steamer of the day. Thus at last his precious berries were off on their way to the city, and as Rod watched the *Heather Bell* as she glided away from the wharf he tried to catch a glimpse of his box where it was lying among the rest of the freight. He pictured Mr. McDuff's delight when he saw what fine berries he had received.

That day Rod picked twenty more boxes, fifteen in the morning, and five during the afternoon. They were becoming scarcer now, and it would be necessary for him to let them ripen for a day before he could expect to fill a third crate. The rest of the afternoon he spent with the scouts. It was their regular meeting, at which they were to tell how they were getting along with the raising of money for their suits. The reports were by no means encouraging from most of the boys, as they had accomplished nothing. Rod alone told what he had done, and how much he hoped to make out of his berries.

“I am going to earn every cent myself,” he said in conclusion, “and I am not going to get my suit until I can pay for it.”

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"Good fer you!" the captain exclaimed. "That's the kind of talk I like to hear. And look here, you fellows," he continued, turning to the rest of the scouts, "if ye want to remain in this troop ye've got to git a hustle on. I've got letters in my pocket from several boys who want to join. Some are willin' to walk quite a distance, and if ye don't want to obey orders, out ye go. A troop can't be run right, any more than a ship, unless orders are obeyed. I'll let yez off this time, but, remember, a week from to-day ye'll report again, and then I'll give my decision. That'll do now, so let's go fer a sail."

Every day Rod studied the price of berries in the newspaper, and cut out the list. He also kept his account in his little note-book. At the end of the first week he had made the following entries:

"July 17th—20 boxes at 7 cents \$1.40
July 18th—20 boxes at 8 cents 1.60
July 20th—15 boxes at 7 cents 1.05
July 21st—10 boxes at 9 cents90

"\$4.95"

The next week he sent off several more boxes which amounted to three dollars according to his reckoning. He knew that the freight would have to come out of this, which he believed would not be over one dollar at the most. Thus he would have about seven dollars to spend upon his suit, billy-can, axe, haversack, knife, and several other things he saw in the scout list which had been sent from the store in the city where the supplies were kept.

Rod showed his account to Captain Josh, and the latter believed that the figures were about right, as he had each day found out from the farmers what they had received for their berries. He was somewhat surprised that Peter McDuff had sent no regular statements to Rod. He, accordingly, made careful inquiries from several people who knew McDuff, and what he learned gave him considerable uneasiness.

CHAPTER XV

IN THE CITY

Rod was now very anxious to buy his scout suit. He thought of the money waiting for him in the city, and he spoke about it to Captain Josh.

"I want to examine all the boys in the tenderfoot tests," the captain replied. "The ones who are able to pass, and have earned the money for their suits will go with me to the city. The rest will have to stay at home."

The very next day the captain examined each scout separately. Rod was the only one who was able to pass all the tests, and had earned the money. The others felt somewhat sore because they could not ask their parents for the money, and thus go to the city with the captain. Several, in fact, were quite sulky.

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"Yez needn't look like that," the captain told them. "Ye've got only yerselves to blame that ye're not ready. Ye're like too many people today who expect to get things without workin' for them. But this troop is not run on sich lines. Some day ye'll come bang up against another troop, and how'll ye feel if ye git licked. Why, when I asked some of you boys to tie a clove-hitch ye handed me out a reef-knot, which is nothin' more than a 'granny' knot, which any one could tie. I want yez to do more than other people kin, or what's the use of havin' a troop? So git away home now, fer we'll have no more fun until yez git through with yer work."

Rod was delighted at the idea of going to the city with the captain.

"I'll look after the boy," the latter told Mr. and Mrs. Royal, "and I'll see that he gits fair play, too. Ye'll certainly be proud of him when he comes back wearin' his scout suit."

The Royals were most thankful at the change which had come over the bluff old captain. It seemed almost incredible that such a transformation should take place in him in such a short time. It was the influence of their little boy, they were well aware, which had done it, and they often talked about the way they had been criticised for having taken the lad into their home and hearts. They thought, too, of his mother, and the mystery concerning her instead of lessening, deepened as the months rolled by. She never failed to send her weekly letter, and the money each month. Rod's bank account was steadily growing, for the Royals had not spent one cent of it, even though at times they felt the need of some of it when the money due from the parish was much in arrears.

They were greatly puzzled that Rod's mother did not come to see him. In every letter she wrote of her longing for her boy, and how she hoped to come some day. She had said the same thing for years until it had become an old story now. To Rod his real mother was a visionary person, who wrote to him every week and sent him money. But apart from these things she was of little interest to him. His world was in Hillcrest, and not far away in some big city.

The next day Captain Josh and his charge reached the city, when they went at once to Peter McDuff's store. They were kept waiting for some time, as the owner was not in. When he returned the captain stated the object of their visit, and how the boy wished to get his money in order to buy his scout suit.

Going into his little office, McDuff remained there for about ten minutes, which seemed much longer to those waiting outside. When he did come out he handed the captain the account he had made up, and then proceeded to thumb over several bills.

Captain Josh examined the paper carefully, and then handed it to Rod without a word of comment. The latter gave one quick glance, and his face became pale, while his eyes grew big with astonishment.

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"What is it, lad?" the captain queried. "Find somethin' queer there, eh?"

"Yes, sir," was the reply; "I don't understand it at all. I sent down one hundred boxes, and this paper gives only eighty. And, oh, look, he pays only six cents a box," and Rod held up the account for the captain to see.

"What's the meaning of this?" and Captain Josh turned suddenly upon McDuff, who was keenly watching the two. "This boy sent you down one hundred boxes of strawberries. I was at the wharf myself when each crate was shipped, and I counted them, though Rod didn't know it. Then you give him here only six cents a box when they were bringing from seven to nine. Surely there has been some mistake."

"There has been no mistake," McDuff angrily returned. "I never make mistakes. Only eighty boxes were sent to me, and six cents is all they were worth. You can take that or nothing. I am too busy to waste all the morning talking. Here's your money," and he held out four dollars and eighty cents to Rod.

"Don't take it, lad," and the captain reached out a restraining hand. "The full amount or nothin'. Is that all ye'll give?" he asked, turning to McDuff.

"Not a cent more. It's all I got, and it's all they were worth."

For an instant the captain looked the storekeeper full in the face. Then glancing quickly around the store, and seeing a telephone, he moved toward it.

"You can't use my phone," McDuff cried, feeling sure that the captain had some special object in view.

"I can't, eh? Well, if you say so, that settles it. I kin git one next door. I only want to call up my lawyer, that's all. He knows me pretty well. I'd like to use other means to settle this matter, but I guess Lawyer Allen's advice might be the better way."

"What! you don't mean to go to law over this little matter, do you?" McDuff anxiously enquired.

"Certainly I do. It isn't the amount so much as the principle. Ye're tryin' to cheat a little boy, and I'm goin' to stand by him, I don't care how much it costs. I'm scoutmaster, and he's patrol leader of the Hillcrest troop, and if ye think ye kin do him a mean trick, then ye're mighty much mistaken."

"But look here," McDuff angrily replied. "You seem to be making a big fuss over nothing. And, besides, you've charged me with cheating that boy, and I'll make you take back your words. Two can play at this game."

“No doubt they kin,” the captain reflectively answered as he moved toward the door.
“But look, Peter McDuff, it makes a great difference who’s in the right, and who kin back up his statements. It’s no use fer us to argue any longer. Come on, Rod.”

“Wait a minute,” the storekeeper called out, when he saw that the captain meant business, “maybe we can arrange this affair without going to law. I’m willing to come to some reasonable terms. What will you take to settle? Split the difference, eh?”

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"No. Not one cent less than what's comin' to the boy. That or nothin'. I'll give ye five minutes to think it over," and the captain, coming back into the store, seated himself upon a barrel of flour.

McDuff was angry, there was no doubt about that. Customers who came into the store, and were waited upon by the clerk, were astonished at the conversation which was going on between the two men. But McDuff paid no heed to them. He wanted to get clear of this troublesome countryman. He little realised that a few boxes of berries less would cause such a fuss. He had done the same thing before, and had bluffed out of paying. But now it was different. He stood in the centre of the floor for a few seconds, frowning, and longing to express himself in violent words. Presently he turned and went again into his office. When he came out he handed the captain a new account.

"There, will that suit you?" he demanded. "Rather than have you say that I cheated the boy, I am willing to pay him for more berries than he ever sent me, and to give a higher price than they were bringing at the time."

Captain Josh took the account and studied it carefully.

"That looks better," he remarked. "Eight dollars in all, and with the freight deducted leaves just seven dollars. Yes, that will do, I guess. Now fer the money."

When several crisp bills had been handed over, and the account receipted, Captain Josh turned to the storekeeper.

"Jist a word before we go, Peter McDuff," he began. "It is well fer you that ye've settled up this business at once. I advise ye not to try any more of yer tricks upon people after this, especially upon a boy scout. If ye'd held out, and had not paid that money, I'd a fixed ye so ye'd been no longer in a position to cheat any one. I have enough evidence to knock ye sky-high. Ye may thank yer stars that ye have a little sense left, even if ye haven't any honour."

The storekeeper made no reply, but turning on his heel, left them.

After Captain Josh and Rod had eaten their dinner at a restaurant, they started off to buy the scout suit. The boy was greatly excited over this, and his eyes bulged with astonishment when he saw so many suits and other supplies for the scouts.

"Ye must do a big business here," the captain remarked to the clerk.

"We certainly do," was the reply. "There are over six hundred scouts in the city, and most of them get their outfits here. I suppose you'll be at the big parade this evening?"

"What parade?"

“The scouts are to turn out in a body, when they will be inspected by the Lieutenant-Governor. He is to give them an address, so I understand, on the Y. M. C. A. grounds. It will be a big affair, and well worth attending.”

This was too good an opportunity to miss, so the captain and Rod went early to the place of meeting. The former wished to see what other scouts did, and he had planned to come to the city on purpose to visit several of the troops in their own rooms. But now he could view them all together, which would be far better.

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At half past seven the mayor, with several of the city officials, accompanied the Lieutenant-Governor as he rode up in a big auto. They all dismounted and took their seats upon the temporary grand-stand which had been erected. They had not long to wait ere the sound of music was heard, and presently down the street the head of the big procession appeared in view. As the scouts swung up, Rod's heart beat fast, and even the captain stood straighter than usual. There was something inspiring about the way those boys, six hundred strong, advanced, in full uniform, with sloping staves. They marched well, with bodies erect, and as they moved by the stand they gave the full salute. Then they swung around and lined up before the Lieutenant-Governor.

By this time a large crowd had gathered, and a cheer went up at the splendid conduct of the scouts. When this had died down, the mayor spoke a few words of encouragement, and then introduced the chief official of the province.

Captain Josh and Rod were quite near and could hear every word the Lieutenant-Governor uttered. He was proud of them, so he said, and his heart had been greatly stirred by what he had witnessed. He was glad to know that there were so many scouts in the city, and he wished that all the scouts in the province were present on this occasion.

After speaking for awhile, and giving them some words of advice, he outlined a plan over which he said he had given considerable thought. He wanted the scouts to be thrifty, and to open up bank accounts. He hoped to meet them again in a year's time, and that troop, whether in the city or any other part of the province, showing the biggest bank account in proportion to its size, would receive a prize. A friend of his, who wished to remain unknown, had made this suggestion, and offered to present a bugle-band to the winning troop. Each bank-book had to be handed in to the Provincial Secretary, together with a detailed account as to how the money had been raised, and signed by the scoutmaster. Further instructions would be given later. All other troops which had competed would each receive a troop-flag.

When he was through the scouts gave him three rousing cheers and a "tiger." After the National Anthem had been sung, the band once more struck up, the scouts formed into line, and were soon swinging on their way back to their various headquarters.

Captain Josh and Rod said very little as they walked along the street toward the hotel where they were to spend the night. But when once within the room which had been assigned to them, the captain laid his right hand upon his companion's shoulder.

"Hillcrest troop must win that prize, lad," he remarked.

"Can we do it, captain?" was the reply.

“Do it? Sure we kin. We may be the smallest troop in the province, but we’ll show them a thing or two.”

In his dreams that night Rod saw once again the six hundred scouts. But they seemed different now, for among them was the Hillcrest troop receiving from the Lieutenant-Governor the coveted bugle-band, amidst the wild cheers of the other troops.

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CHAPTER XVI

WHYN DECIDES

There was considerable excitement among the Hillcrest troop when Captain Josh and Rod returned home. The rest of the scouts were at the wharf to meet them, and marched with them at once to Whyn's room. The new scout suit was greatly admired, and the jealous ones had enough sense to keep quiet. In fact, they were too much ashamed to say anything, so they sat and listened to what was going on. Whyn was delighted, and made Rod stand before her while she examined him with critical eyes.

"My, I wish you all had suits like that," she sighed, "then you would look something like a troop. Soldiers never seem of much account until they get their uniforms on."

Captain Josh then told of the trouble they had had with Peter McDuff, and how at last he had been compelled to pay what was right.

"Good for you!" Whyn exclaimed. "You're the right kind of a scoutmaster to have. I shall tell that to Douglas when I write again."

When the captain told about the parade of the six hundred scouts, and what the Lieutenant-Governor had said, the enthusiasm became very keen. The scouts' eyes sparkled with interest, and all began to talk at once. Yes, they would win the prize, they declared, and they would buy a motorboat with the money they earned. Though they had spoken about such a boat before, the captain had scoffed at the idea, saying that the *Roaring Bess* was good enough for him. But deep in his heart he longed for a motor-boat even more than the boys. The yacht was all right for pleasure, but it was hardly suited for business, such as fishing, and carrying passengers over the river. If the scouts could earn enough money to buy a motor-boat he could have the use of it.

How to earn the money was the important question, and many were the ideas suggested. One boy thought they might catch rabbits next winter; another wished to go over to the big island and dig for gold which Captain Kidd was supposed to have buried there. All expressed their views except Rod. He waited until the rest were through before speaking.

"Let us leave it to Whyn," he at last suggested. "She always has some plan, and will know what we might do first."

"That's good," the captain agreed. "We can't do better than that."

"Oh, I don't know," the girl laughingly replied. "You might make a mistake if you let me choose."

“No, no,” came in chorus. “You’ll do all right.”

“Very well, then, I’ll do the best I can, though you’ll have to give until to-morrow to decide. I want to sleep on it to-night.”

“But no lyin’ awake, remember,” the captain warned. “Ye’re not to stay awake thinkin’ it all over. If ye do, I’ll wash my hands of the whole affair.”

“No fear of that, captain,” and Whyn smiled up into his face. Such a smile as that was worth a great deal to the old man, though he never spoke of it to any one. “There is one thing, however,” the girl continued, “which must be done before we begin to earn that money.”

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"And what's that?" the captain inquired.

"All the scouts must have their suits. It will be necessary if the plan which has just come into my mind can be worked out."

"Hey, d'ye hear that?" the captain roared, as if he were giving orders to a rebellious crew. "Ye must have yer suits, and then we'll git down to work in dead earnest."

Rod was anxious to get home to show Mr. and Mrs. Royal his new suit. They had been waiting for him for some time, and were quite anxious, as the steamer had been up for over an hour. When he entered the dining-room they thought that they had never beheld such a fine-looking boy. Their hearts swelled with pride, and Mrs. Royal secretly brushed away a tear with the corner of her apron.

Rod told them all about what they had done in the city, about Peter McDuff, the parade, and how the Hillcrest troop was going to enter the contest for the prize. This was of much interest to the Royals, and they sat at the table later than usual discussing the whole matter.

"I have important news for you this evening, Rodney," Parson Dan after a while informed him. "I had a letter from your mother to-day, and she says that she hopes to pay us a visit sometime this summer."

"Oh!" It was all that the boy could say, but several anxious thoughts surged through his mind. Was his mother coming to take him away? he wondered. He did not wish to go, as all of his interests were centred in Hillcrest.

Mr. and Mrs. Royal, too, looked grave. They had thought of the same idea. Would Rod's mother ask them to give up the boy? How could they part with him? they asked themselves.

"When is she coming, grandad?" Rod at last asked.

"She doesn't say, so we may expect her at almost anytime."

"I don't want to see her," the boy cried, while tears started in his eyes.

"Don't want to see your mother, Rodney!" the clergyman exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes, in a way I want to see her," was the faltering reply. "But if she wants to take me away, I don't want her to come. Oh, don't let her take me, grandad," and Rod sprang to his feet, and stood beseechingly before the parson. "Why should she come for me now? If she wanted me very much, why didn't she come before?"

“There, there, dear, don’t worry,” Mrs. Royal soothed. “It is hardly likely that your mother will wish to take you away from us. It is only natural that she should long to see you. There must be some good reason why she could not come before. You had better go to bed now, for you must be tired after your busy day.”

The scouts were anxious to know what plan Whyn would suggest for raising money, and so they were earlier than usual at her room on the following afternoon. It was a beautiful day, and through the open window drifted the scent of flowers, and new-mown hay. It was a cool refreshing spot, this little room, where the bright-faced girl received her visitors. Captain Josh was not present, as he had work to do in his garden.

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Whyn greeted the boys with a smile, and after they had seated themselves upon chairs and the floor, she plunged at once into the subject of special interest.

"Let's give a concert," she abruptly began.

"A what?" the boys exclaimed.

"A concert and a tea. Don't you understand? I have been talking it over with the captain and Mrs. Britt, and they think it a good idea. The plan is this: We shall invite all the people in the place to come early before it gets dark. They can gather in front of the house so I can see what is going on. We will ask Parson Dan to give a speech, and then you scouts will show what you can do. You will give a talk on the flag, tie the knots, say the scout law, and do some signalling. After that the captain will march you up and down before the people, and you will do the staff-drill which he is going to teach you. Then you will sell ice-cream and candy. Each scout is to bring something, and Mrs. Britt will make the candy. Perhaps other people will assist, too. Oh, it will be grand!"

"How much do you think we will make, Whyn?" one of the boys asked. "Can't we have something bigger than that? It will take a long time to earn much money that way."

"It will be a beginning, though," was the quiet reply. "We must not expect to raise all the money at once. After we are through with this we can try something else. We might get fifty people to come, and if we sell tickets at ten cents each that will bring us in five dollars. I am sure the summer people will come, and we may have more than fifty. Then, we should make five dollars from the refreshments, and that will be ten dollars in all, which will not be too bad for a start."

The scouts finally agreed to what Whyn said, and they spent considerable time talking over the whole affair, and arranging their plans. The interest now became very keen, and when the tickets had been made each boy undertook to sell as many as he could. In a week's time all the tickets were sold, and more had to be made by Mrs. Britt and Whyn.

The scouts practised hard for the important event, and Captain Josh spared no pains in his efforts to drill them as thoroughly as possible. Each one had now passed the tenderfoot tests, and were ready for their badges. They had also earned the money for their suits, and it was a great day when all appeared before Whyn dressed in their complete uniforms. The girl was delighted, and her eyes sparkled with joy as the captain marched them up and down outside her window.

The big affair was to take place Thursday evening, and when the scouts visited Whyn on Monday afternoon they were in fine spirits. Everything had been arranged, many tickets had been sold, and it looked as if the concert would be a great success. They found the invalid girl quieter than they had ever seen her before, though she greeted

them with her usual smile and listened to them for several minutes as they talked about scout matters.

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"There is something which troubles me," Whyn at length remarked. "Every concert should have singing, or music of some kind. Now, we have not arranged for one song, and I am sure the people who come will be disappointed. I am so fond of singing myself that I know how much it will be missed. But I suppose it can't be helped. I wish you boys could sing."

"Maybe some of the choir members would come," Rod suggested.

"Oh, do you think they would?" Whyn eagerly asked.

"I am not quite sure that they will. But I will speak to grandad about it. I know he will do all he can to help."

"I hope they will come," and Whyn gave a tired sigh. "I haven't heard any singing for such a long time, that I am hungry for it. I had such a wonderful letter from Douglas to-day," she continued, after a slight pause. "He says that Anna Royanna, the great new American singer, has been in Ottawa, and he heard her one night. She is quite young, so he writes, very beautiful, and with such a sad sweet face. The people went fairly wild over her voice, and she had to sing one piece twice before they would let her stop. And do you know, she is coming to St. John, and will be at the Opera House on Wednesday night. Just think of it!" and Whyn's eyes glowed with enthusiasm, while she clasped her thin white hands together. "She will be there, so near, and yet I won't be able to hear her. But mamma will tell me about it, and that will be something."

The scouts did not remain long in Whyn's room that afternoon. They knew that she was tired, and so when they left her they made their way to the shore, and sat down upon the sand under the shade of a large willow tree. They were unusually silent now, for all were thinking of what Whyn had told them about the wonderful singer.

"Isn't it too bad," Rod suddenly began, "that Whyn can't hear her sing?"

"She can't go to the city, that's sure," Phil Dexter replied, giving the stick he was holding a savage thrust into the yielding sand.

"Maybe she'd come here," Billy Potter suggested.

This was a brilliant idea, and the scouts looked at one another, while the light of hope brightened their faces.

"Would she come?" that was the question each asked himself. These boys knew nothing about the ways of the great world beyond their own parish. If they did they would have known how utterly ridiculous was the thought of a famous singer coming all the way to such an unknown place as Hillcrest to sing to an invalid girl. But to them their little circle was everything, and the idea of such a noted person coming was nothing out of the ordinary.

“How much do you think she’d want?” Tommy Bunker queried.

“Let’s give her half what we make,” Rod suggested. “And look,” he continued, “we mustn’t say a word to Captain Josh or Whyn, or to anybody else. Let it be a big surprise to all. If she comes we can keep her hid until the very last, and then she can come out and sing just like people do in story-books. Wouldn’t Whyn be surprised and delighted?”

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"But who's going to ask her?" Phil enquired. "Father's going to the city on Wednesday, for I heard him say so this morning. Maybe he would see her."

"But we mustn't let him know anything about it," Rod warned. "Why couldn't you go with him, Phil?"

"I wouldn't like to go alone," was the reply. "She'd scare me, and I wouldn't know what to say. I'll go, for one, if dad'll let me, and I guess he will. Then, if you'll come, too, Rod, I'll go with you to see her. You can do the talking, and I'll back you up."

"Mighty poor backing, I should say," Joe Martin retorted, with a grin. "Better take some one with more spunk, Rod. I think you should go, though, as patrol-leader."

"I guess Phil will do all right," Rod replied. "We could go to hear her sing, that's if I can go. I will find out about it and let you know."

CHAPTER XVII

ANNA ROYANNA

Rod had no opportunity that evening of speaking to Parson Dan or Mrs. Royal about the wonderful singer. There were visitors at the rectory for tea, and he was in bed before they left. He thought very much about it, nevertheless, and in his sleep he dreamed that he was listening to Miss Royanna. He could see her quite plainly, just as Whyn had described her, and he was so disappointed when he awoke and found himself in his own little room, and not in the Opera House with the singer before him.

"I was reading in the paper last night," Parson Dan remarked, just after they had sat down to breakfast, "that a famous singer is coming to the city. Her name is Anna Royanna, and she will be at the Opera House Wednesday night. Wouldn't you like to go, dear?" and he looked across the table at his wife.

"I'm afraid not," was the reply. "The Ladies' Aid will meet here on that day, and so I could not possibly leave. Why don't you go, Daniel? You are fond of good singing, and it is so seldom that you get away from the parish."

"It is utterly out of the question, Martha," the clergyman sadly returned. "I have to bury old Mrs. Fisk at Stony Creek to-morrow afternoon."

"Oh, I had forgotten about that, Daniel. Isn't it always the way when anything of special importance comes to the city? You have never been able to attend."

"It seems so. But never mind, dear, we are going to take a long holiday next summer, and that will make up for much we have lost."

“May I go, grandad?” Rod suddenly asked.

“Go where, Rodney? With us next summer?”

“No, but to hear Miss Royanna.”

“You!” and the parson straightened himself up. “Why, I didn’t know that you would care to go.”

“But I do, grandad. Phil Dexter is going with his father to the city to-morrow, and why couldn’t I go along with them? Phil and I could go to hear Miss Royanna ourselves if Mr. Dexter doesn’t want to go. Oh, may I?”

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"Well, we shall think it over," the parson replied, "and let you know later."

That afternoon Mrs. Royal told Rod that he could go to the city. It might do him good, so she said, to hear such a famous singer. She knew that she could trust him to behave himself, no matter where he was.

Rod was delighted, and hurried over at once to inform the rest of the scouts, who were already gathered at Headquarters. In the paper which came that day from the city there was a long piece about Anna Royanna, and Parson Dan read it aloud that evening. It told how this wonderful singer had sprung suddenly into fame during the last year. She had been singing before but had attracted little attention until one night a noted foreign singer heard her voice at a party given in a private house. It was through him that such success had come to her.

Rod and Phil were fortunate in obtaining seats in the Opera House, the only two which were left. As they looked around upon the crowded place they were for a time somewhat bewildered. They were not accustomed to seeing so many people together, and they felt very small and insignificant. Several people watched with interest the two boys who stared at everything and everybody in such undisguised wonder. But Rod and Phil did not care. They wanted to see and hear Miss Royanna and it did not matter to them what people thought.

The curtain at last slowly rose, and a deep hush passed throughout the building. Then a woman moved quietly to the centre of the stage. Rod sat bolt upright when he saw her. He paid no attention to the storm of applause which greeted her appearance. He saw her bend her head slightly in acknowledgment of the reception she received. Never before had he seen such a beautiful woman, and his heart went out to her at once. What would Whyn say when she saw her? he asked himself. Then a doubt flashed into his mind. Would this marvellous woman listen to him? Would she be willing to go all the way to Hillcrest to sing to a helpless girl? He felt his courage slowly oozing away and he almost wished that he did not have to speak to her. Would she have anything to say to him? he wondered. He noted her dress; how beautiful it was! And her face, he could see it quite plainly, was sweet, and yet sad, just as Whyn had described it from her brother's letter.

Rod was presently aroused from his meditation by the sweetest sound he ever heard. He thought there must be a bird singing somewhere on the stage. He rubbed his eyes, thinking he was dreaming. But, no, it was only the woman standing before him, and she was singing. As he listened to her he could not help thinking of the fields in Hillcrest, of the birds and flowers, which he knew and loved. And thus his thoughts would wander every time she sang. It was so strange that he could not account for it, and he wondered if Phil felt the same way. Now he was tucked in his little bed at home, with the

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wind sobbing around the house, and the rain beating against the window. Then, he saw soldiers marching, and horses galloping, such as he had seen in pictures. Once he was sure that he was lying on the grass beneath the shade of an old tree with the bees humming around him, and the grasshoppers playing upon their funny musical saws. He felt angry whenever the people made a noise, and drove the pictures away. He didn't think of the singer now, of how she was dressed, or what she looked like, and he didn't remember even one word she had uttered. He hardly realised that he was in the big Opera House with the crowd of people about him.

But there was one piece, and the last, which he did remember. It was the way the woman sang it which had such an effect. He was sure that there were tears in her eyes. His own were misty, anyway. She said that she always closed with it, and it was called, "My Little Lad, God Bless Him." That appealed to Rod. So this woman, then, had a little boy, and he wanted to hear what she had to say about him. The very first words arrested his attention.

"There's a little lad, God bless him!
And he's all the world to me;
Guide him, Lord, through life's long journey,
Guard him, keep him safe to Thee.

REFRAIN:

"You're my only little laddie,
Golden hair, and eyes of blue;
God, who made the birds and flowers,
Chose the best when He made you.

"Streams may ripple, birds may carol,
Twinkling-stars may dance and shine,
But life's sweetest joy and rapture
Is to know that you are mine.

REFRAIN:

"You're my only little laddie, *etc.*

"Parted, though, by time and distance,
Hearts can never sundered be.
Love Divine, oh, still unite us,
Strong to each, and strong in Thee.

REFRAIN:

“You’re my only little laddie,
Golden hair, and eyes of blue;
God, who made the birds and flowers,
Chose the best when He made you.”

Rod paid little heed to the storm of applause which greeted this song, and when it was repeated he did not follow the words as closely as before. He was thinking about that boy, and wondering where he was. He was sure that the woman was almost crying when she got through. What made her feel so badly? Was her boy away from her somewhere, and if she wanted him so much, why didn’t she go to see him?

At last the curtain dropped, and the concert was over. As the people began to go out, Rod overheard what those nearest to him were saying. They were loud in their praise of the singer.

“It was that last piece which caught me,” he heard one man say. “It wasn’t the words so much as the way she sang it.”

“I was crying when she got through,” his companion, a woman, replied. “I just couldn’t help it. She’s had trouble in her life, mark my word.”

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Rod and Phil now were uncertain what to do. They remained where they were until the people in front of them had all passed out. They felt very helpless and forlorn there in that big place. The curtain was down, and the singer had disappeared. But they must find her, and she was somewhere on the stage in the background. They knew nothing about the regular way of entrance, and, so, after a moment's consultation, they hurried forward down the long central aisle. Coming to the stage, they clambered upon this, made their way along the edge, and slipped quickly about the left-hand corner of the curtain. Behind this no one was to be seen, but observing a door to the right, they made straight toward it. They had scarcely reached it, when they were met by a pompous little man, who demanded what they were doing there.

"We want to see Miss Royanna," Rod replied, shrinking back somewhat from the man's fierce look.

"See Miss Royanna!" the man shouted in surprise. "If that isn't the limit! Well, she can't be seen, that's all there is about it."

"But we have come all the way to see her," Rod insisted.

"All the way from where?"

"From Hillcrest."

"Ho, ho! that's a good one. D'ye think she'd gee such bushies as you? Get out of this, or I'll chuck you."

"But we must see her," and Rod stepped boldly forward. "It's very important."

"Get out of this, I say," and the man caught him roughly by the shoulders, wheeled him around, and was about to send him headlong out upon the stage, when a stern voice arrested him.

"What's all this about, Ben?"

"I'm kicking these two bushies out, sir, for their impudence in coming here," the little man replied, letting go of his grip upon the boy.

As Rod turned, his heart gave a great leap, for there before him stood the very man with "the splendid eyes and grey hair," who had so won Miss Arabella's heart.

For a few seconds John Markham eyed the two boys. Rod's face looked familiar, but he could not recall where he had seen it before. He was always meeting so many people that it was hard for him to remember them all. Perhaps this was one of the newsboys, and that was the reason why he recognised his face.

“What do you want, my lad?” he kindly enquired.

“We want to see Miss Royanna,” was the reply.

A smile passed over the manager’s face at the idea of the famous singer entertaining such company.

“I am afraid that Miss Royanna is too tired to see you to-night,” he replied. “She gave strict instructions that no one was to be admitted.”

“But we have come all the way from Hillcrest to see her,” and Rod lilted his blue eyes appealingly to the man’s face. “It’s very important, sir.”

“From Hillcrest, did you say,” and light now began to dawn upon Mr. Markham’s mind. “And how is Miss Arabella?” he asked, while an amused twinkle shone in his eyes.

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"Oh, she's well, I guess. But may we see Miss Royanna? It's so important, and we won't tire her very much."

John Markham remained silent for a while. He did not wish to turn these little lads away now, but he wondered whether the singer would mind if he should take them in. He had a great respect for Miss Royanna, for it was seldom that he was able to obtain such a notable person, and from the time that she had accepted his invitation to come he had been greatly puzzled. Why should she have been so willing to come to St. John, when cities four to five times the size were clamouring for her? But she had written, accepting at once, and had seemed really glad to come.

"Wait here," he at last ordered, as he turned on his heel, "and I shall see what I can do with Miss Royanna."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WAY OF THE HEART

Anna Royanna was very tired, and she was sitting in an old easy chair waiting for the manager to come to take her to the hotel. She leaned back in a listless manner, with her inclined head leaning upon her right hand. It was a small hand, and very white. Her dark hair partly shrouded her face of singular beauty and sweetness. But lines of care were plainly visible, and as she waited there this night those lines deepened. She was much depressed, notwithstanding the reception she had received from the crowded house. She had been told that she was expected to sing at the matinee on the morrow, and this was not at all to her liking. She had been planning something of a far different nature. She had engagements for weeks ahead, and she had only come to St. John when asked to do so that she might carry out an idea which had long been in her mind. But now this must be abandoned for the present if she consented to sing at the matinee, as she must leave the city early the next morning.

While she was thinking over these things, the door softly opened, and John Markham entered.

"Are you ready to go?" she enquired.

"You are very tired," was the reply, "and it is no wonder. But you made a great hit to-night, and I have been almost swamped with requests from visitors who wish to see you. Some were determined to enter, especially women, and I had to be very firm, in fact almost rude."

"You were quite right, Mr. Markham," and the woman lifted her eyes to his face. "I have no desire to see such people. I know them only too well. They are quite willing to fawn upon me now when I have met with some success. But one time when I was poor and

struggling they treated me like a dog. I suppose Mrs. Featson, Mrs. Juatty, Mrs. Merden, and other women of their set were there.”

“Oh, yes, and they were most insistent. But how do you know of them?” and the manager looked astonished. “I thought that you were an entire stranger here.”

“So I am, in a way,” and a slight smile overspread the woman’s face. “But I know those women to my sorrow. Some day, perhaps, I may be able to tell you more, but not tonight. Are you ready to go now?”

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"Just a moment, Miss Royanna," and the manager motioned her not to rise. "There are two little boys outside, who are very anxious to see you."

"Boys! to see me?"

"Yes. They came from the country, and will not leave, so they say, until they see you."

"What do they want?"

"I do not know. But I am acquainted with one of the little chaps, as I met him this summer. I have a good story to tell you when you get rested. Shall I bring them in? They will not keep you long."

"Yes, let them come," was the reply. "I love boys; there is no pretence about them."

Rod's heart beat fast as he followed Mr. Markham into the presence of the great singer. What should he say? he asked himself. Would the woman be willing to go? Phil crept close at his heels, of no more use than a kitten.

As Rod approached, Miss Royanna held out her hand.

"So you want to see me?" she began. "I am not very often favoured with a visit from boys."

Rod felt more at home now. These words had put him at ease. He looked keenly into the woman's eyes, and what he saw there gave him great encouragement. In truth, Miss Royanna was much impressed with his manly bearing. He stood so erect, with his blue eyes looking straight into hers. For an instant there flashed into her mind the idea that she had seen those eyes before. Some chord of memory was stirred, which affected her in a remarkable manner. She tried to recall something, but in vain.

"You wish to speak to me, so I understand," she encouraged, noting Rod's embarrassment.

"Yes, please, if I may. But I'm afraid now that you won't do it."

"Do what?"

"Come to our concert."

"Your concert! Where is it to be held?"

"At Captain Josh's, and Whyn would like to hear you sing so much. You see, the scouts are getting up a concert to raise money, and we want some one to sing. Whyn is sick, and can't walk. She heard about you from her brother, Douglas. She couldn't come

herself to hear you, so we have come to ask you to help us out, and sing for Whyn. It would be a great surprise for Whyn, as she knows nothing about what we are doing. We will give you half what we make at the concert.”

John Markham turned suddenly around, so that the boys could not see the amusement upon his face. He wanted to laugh outright, so funny did it all seem. He longed to rush out and tell some of his friends the whole story. The thought of the famous woman being asked to go to sing in an out-of-the-way country place, and to receive half the proceeds, tickled him immensely.

Miss Royanna was also amused, and her eyes twinkled as Rod blurted out his request. And yet there was something about his straightforward manner which appealed to her. She thought, too, of the sick girl, and the spirit of true chivalry which had caused these two boys to come all the way to the city for her sake. How disappointed they would be when she told them how utterly impossible it would be for her to go.

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"Where is this concert to take place?" she at length enquired.

"At Headquarters, just in front of Whyn's window, so she can see and hear," was the reply.

"Yes, but where? How far is it from the city?"

"Oh, I forgot that," and Rod smiled. "I thought everybody knew that Captain Josh lived at Hillcrest."

"Hillcrest, did you say?" the woman demanded, while a new interest shone in her eyes.

"Yes. It's on the river, about twenty-five miles from here. You could go up in the afternoon boat, and get there in plenty of time."

The woman sat up suddenly in her chair now, for an idea had stabbed her mind with a startling intensity. Could it be possible, she asked herself, that this is he? Those eyes recalled one whose memory was very dear, and that erect poise of the head, crowned with such golden curls, could belong to no one else. And he was from Hillcrest as well, the very place.

"Tell me," she said in a low voice, controlling herself as much as possible, "your name, my little man."

"Rod Royal," was the reply.

There was no doubt about it now, and involuntarily the woman reached out her arms toward him. She drew them back, however, and placed her hand to her forehead.

"Are you ill, Miss Royanna?" Mr. Markham enquired. "I am afraid that these boys are tiring you. They must leave at once."

"Yes, I do feel tired, and wish to get back to the hotel."

"And you won't go to the concert?" Rod questioned anxiously. "Whyn will be so disappointed."

The woman's eyes were now fixed full upon the boy's face. She saw his lips quiver, and her heart went out to him with one mighty rush. How she longed to clasp him in her arms, shower kisses upon his little tanned face, and tell him all. But, no, she must not do it yet. There was a reason why she should delay. With an effort, therefore, she restrained herself.

"Will you come with me to the hotel?" she asked. "We can talk it over there."



“But, Miss Royanna,” the manager warned, who saw that she was much drawn toward the boys, “you must not make any rash promises, You are in great demand, and it will be a bitter disappointment to many if you do not sing tomorrow afternoon.”

“Leave that to me, Mr. Markham. I shall not disappoint any one, not even these boys.”

“And so you intend to go to the concert,” the manager remarked, as they were being bowled swiftly along in the car to the hotel.

“Yes. Why should I not? There will be plenty of time after the matinee. I can hire a car to take me there, and bring me back in the evening. I shall enjoy the trip out into the country, for I am so tired of cities.”

“But what will people think of your going to such a place to sing for a few country people?”

“I don’t care what they think,” and the woman’s voice was severer than usual. “I know that I shall not be able to meet a number of society lights, for which I shall be most thankful.”

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Rod and Phil had never been in a large hotel before, and they gazed with wonder upon everything they saw. The elevator, which moved so easily upwards, was a great mystery. Then the large carpeted hallway through which they passed, where their footsteps could not be heard, and last of all the spacious room into which they were admitted, caused their eyes to bulge with astonishment. When they were comfortably seated in big chairs, with the singer sitting close to Rod, so she could watch his every movement, the talk naturally drifted off to Hillcrest. Rod told about the scouts, Whyn, the Britts, Miss Arabella, and his own life at the rectory. Miss Royanna led him deftly along to tell about these various people, especially Mr. and Mrs. Royal. Soon she learned much about Rod's daily work, what he was fond of most of all, and numerous other things concerning his life.

"Have you lived long with your grandparents?" she asked.

"Ever since I was a baby. I was left there one dark, wild night by my mother."

"And so you have never seen her?"

"No. But I have had letters from her, though. She's coming to see me sometime this summer."

"How nice that will be. Won't you be glad to see her?"

"In a way I will," was the slow, doubtful reply. "But I'm afraid that she'll want to take me away."

"Wouldn't you like to go with your mother? She must long for you so much."

"But I don't know her, you see. She's a stranger to me. I know that I ought to love my mother, but somehow I can't."

"Oh!" The exclamation came suddenly from the woman's lips. She clasped her hands before her, and stared hard into space. So this was the outcome of it all? she said to herself. This was all that she had gained by her years of struggle and self-denial. She had won fame and money, but what did they amount to when her only boy was a stranger to her, and knew not what it was to love his mother?

"You write to her, I suppose," she at last remarked.

"Oh, yes. Every week I get a letter, and I always answer it. She sends me money, too."

"Does she? Isn't that nice. You must have plenty of spending money, then."

"No," and Rod shook his head. "Grandad puts it all into the bank for me. It is to stay there, so he says, until I grow up, and it will be enough then to send me to college."

“And your grandfather never used any of the money your mother sent to pay for your board and clothing?”

“Not a cent of it. He said it wouldn’t be right, because he loves me so much.”

The woman remained silent for some time, and Rod thought that her face seemed very sad. Perhaps she was tired.

“Guess we’d better go now, Phil,” and he turned to his companion who had not opened his lips once.

“What, so soon?” the singer enquired, rousing from her reverie.

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"Yes. Mr. Dexter, he's Phil's father, will be waiting for us, and he'll think we are lost."

"Just a minute, Rod," and the woman laid her hand lightly on his shoulder, "how would you like to go with me in the car to Hillcrest tomorrow?"

Rod's eyes sparkled for an instant with pleasure. How he had often longed to ride along the road in a big car such as he had seen buzzing by. Suddenly his face grew grave.

"I'm afraid I can't," he slowly replied. "It will be late when you get there, and I must be at the concert to take my part. Captain Josh and the boys couldn't get along very well without me. I'm patrol leader, you know, and so must be there."

The woman noted the brief struggle between pleasure and duty, and the decision pleased her. She was disappointed, nevertheless, as she was hoping to have his company next day. She concealed her feelings, however, and smiled upon the boys as she bade them good night as they stepped out of the elevator. Then she turned back to the silence and solitude of her own room.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SURPRISE

It was somewhat late as Rod and Phil hurried along the street toward the hotel where they and Mr. Dexter were to spend the night. This place was near the steamer, and it would not be far for them to catch the early boat next morning. It was a comfortable house, where countrymen generally stayed.

Only a few people did the boys meet as they moved on their way. Presently they encountered a policeman, who looked at them very closely, and enquired where they were going. Rod informed him, so with a warning that they should not be out so late, the official passed on. This was a new experience for the boys, and they were now fearful lest they should meet other policemen who might not be so lenient.

They had just reached a dark place when they heard some one walking with a heavy tread on the opposite side of the street. Thinking that it might be another policeman, the boys kept close together, and glided on as swiftly as possible. They did not run lest they should be heard. Their hearts beat fast, and they glanced nervously from side to side. The ways of the city, especially at night, were strange and mysterious to them, and all kinds of dangers seemed to be lurking around. Had they been on a country road they would have felt perfectly at ease. But here it was different.

They had almost gained a part of the street where an electric light flooded the pavement, when they heard a cry behind them, and then a thud as of some one falling. They stopped and looked back, but all was shrouded in darkness. On the opposite side

of the street they could hear sounds of struggling, while an occasional gasping cry fell upon their ears.

“There’s something wrong,” Rod whispered to his companion.

“W-what d’ye s’pose it is?” was the frightened reply.

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"Somebody is hurt, I guess. Maybe that man we heard has been knocked down. It often happens in cities."

"Let's run," Phil suggested, now trembling violently.

"Run where?" Rod enquired.

"To the hotel."

"And leave that man to be killed! Scouts don't do that," and Rod straightened himself up with a jerk.

"But what are we going to do?"

"Go after that policeman, see? He can't be far away. Come!"

The next instant the boys were bounding along the street after the policeman they had met but a few minutes before. Fortunately they ran across him sooner than they had expected, for hearing the sound of hurrying footsteps, the official blocked the way, caught the lads by the shoulders, and demanded what they were running for. Rod pantingly explained, and soon the three were hastening back to where the struggle had taken place.

At first the policeman had been doubtful as to the truth of the story, but when he flashed his light upon the prostrate form of a man lying in the gutter, he gave vent to an exclamation of astonishment. The man was unconscious, and he was bleeding from a wound in the head. Rod never forgot the look of that face lying there so white beneath the light of the lantern. It was the face of a man about thirty years of age, with a dark moustache, and a slight scar upon the right cheek. The policeman felt the man's pulse, and found that he was alive. He then placed a whistle to his lips and gave several long shrill blasts. He next enquired the names of the two boys, where they were from, and what they were doing out at that time of the night. To these questions Rod answered in such a straightforward manner that the policeman was satisfied.

"You had better get on now," he ordered, "But, remember, we'll want you in the morning to give evidence. Don't leave the city until you get permission."

Though both the boys would like to have stayed to see what would be done with the unconscious man, they did not dare to disobey the policeman, so they hurried off, and at last reached the hotel. They found Mr. Dexter anxiously waiting their return, and to him they related what had happened on the street.

"This is what comes of your galavanting around at such hours of the night," he growled. "You should have been in your beds long ago. And so we've got to wait, have we? This

is a pretty state of affairs. I can't afford to stay here all day to-morrow. Get away to bed now. You've done enough mischief for one night."

Rod went to bed, but he found it hard to sleep. His thoughts turned not only to the wounded man, but to the concert to be held the next day. Suppose he could not get home in time to take his part, what would Whyn and Captain Josh think, and how could they get along without him?

Early the next morning a message came summoning Rod and Phil to appear at the court room at ten o'clock. Mr. Dexter went with them, which was a great relief. Everything was strange to the boys, and they were very nervous as they were examined and cross-questioned. But they both told what they knew in such a manner as to give much satisfaction. At last the Police Magistrate told them that they could go home, but must appear before him whenever they were needed.

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The newspapers that morning gave considerable space to the assault of the previous night. They told of the cowardly attack, and the assistance the two country boys had given, mentioning their names, and where they were from. The injured man was unknown, and though careful search was made, there was nothing found upon his person to identify him. He had no money, and it was believed that his pockets had been gone through by his assailants. He was taken to the hospital where he was lying unconscious, and in a serious condition.

Mr. Dexter bought copies of both morning papers, which was a great extravagance for him. He was quite proud of the part his son had taken in the affair, and the notoriety which had come to his family. Rod and Phil read every word on their trip up the river that afternoon. It was the first time they had ever seen their names in print, and they felt very important. This was increased when they saw people looking at them, and pointing them out as the boys who had figured in the affair of the night before.

Parson Dan's eyes opened wide with astonishment when he opened his paper, which arrived just before dinner, and read to his wife the story of the assault in the city.

"Well done for the boys!" he exclaimed, as he laid the paper aside, and began his meal. "I wish they had caught the rascals who did that deed."

"The boys might have got badly hurt," Mrs. Royal replied. "I am very thankful that they escaped without any harm. What terrible things take place in cities. We live such quiet lives here that we little realise what is going on elsewhere."

"I do hope that the police will get those fellows," the parson mused. "The paper says that there have been several hold-ups lately, and it is believed that they have been done by the same ones who made the assault last night. I am anxious to see Rod to hear what he has to say."

"Perhaps the boys will have to stay as witnesses, Daniel."

"Sure enough!" and the clergyman put down his cup he was about to raise to his lips. "I never thought of that. And this is the night of the concert, too. What will Captain Josh do without the boys? I must go over and tell him the news. It will certainly upset his plans, for he depended so much upon Rod."

That same morning Anna Royanna, while at breakfast, read the description of herself and her singing in the Opera House. This did not greatly interest her, for she was beginning to weigh such articles at their true value. It was the custom now for papers to say pleasant things about her. It was the same wherever she went. She recalled the time, several years before, when the same newspapers had so begrudgingly given her a few lines concerning a certain performance of hers. She had to plead with the editors then. She was not famous, and how a sympathetic article would not only have

encouraged but assisted her as well. Now she was Anna Royanna, the noted singer, and a slight smile of contempt hovered about the corners of her mouth as she began to fold up the paper.

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Just then something caught her eye, which caused her to pause, and look more closely. "Rod Royal" were the words she first saw, but they were enough to make her devour eagerly the whole story of the adventure of the previous night. She studied the two words which had first arrested her attention, paying no heed to her breakfast which was getting cold. Neither did she notice the number of eyes turned upon her by various people in the room, for all were greatly interested in the famous singer, who had made such a remarkable hit the night before. There came to her again the picture of a sturdy little lad standing before her, with tousled auburn hair, pleading on behalf of an invalid girl away up in the country. Then her mind went back to that terrible night when she had carried him to the door of the rectory, and left him to the mercy of those within. And now she was looking upon his name in the paper. He was hers, and yet he did not know her.

It seemed to Rod that the steamer would never reach Hillcrest wharf. There were so many stops to make for passengers to disembark, and freight to be unloaded, that the boat was later than usual. He was almost certain that the concert would be over before they arrived. At last they were there, and the steamer's guard had scarcely touched the wharf, as he and Phil leaped ashore. Then they scurried down the road, leaving Mr. Dexter far behind. They were well aware that they had no time to go home for their scout suits, and this was a great disappointment. As they came in sight of the Anchorage they saw many people moving about the grounds. Rod waited to speak to no one, but hurried at once into Whyn's room. The girl greeted him with a cry of joy.

"Oh, Rod!" she exclaimed; "I am so glad you are back. Captain Josh is in a terrible state of worry."

She was sitting by the open window where she could see all that was going on outside. It was a beautiful evening, and the sun of the long summer day was still high above the horizon.

"How is everything going, Whyn?" Rod breathlessly enquired, as he wiped his hot face with his small handkerchief.

"Great," was the reply. "That is, so far. And only think, Rod, Miss Arabella has been here all day helping Mrs. Britt. She is a wonder. She is selling refreshments now."

"Is grandad here?" Rod asked.

"Yes, and everybody else, I guess. The summer people have turned out splendidly. There are several autos here, and so many strange people. I don't know any of them."

As Whyn mentioned the autos an expression of anxiety came into Rod's eyes. He wondered if Miss Royanna had arrived. Perhaps she was waiting for him. He must go and find out at once.

Left once more alone, Whyn sat and watched all that was going on. Her face was flushed with excitement, and her eyes sparkled with animation. But she was disappointed, nevertheless. The choir could not come, and so there would be no singing. Several of the members were away, so Parson Dan had told her, and the others would not come without them. The people will think it so strange, she said to herself, and the scouts will feel badly. Whoever heard of a concert without singing and music of some kind.

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Ere long the crowd began to gather about the large platform which Captain Josh and the scouts had built in front of their club-room. Then it was that the performance began. First came a staff-drill by all the boys. They did it well, and were called upon to repeat it. This was followed by signalling. The scouts were lined up, each holding two small flags in his hands. The captain in a deep voice called out the letters from A to Z, and not one boy made a mistake. He next picked out letters at random, and closed by an exhibition of sending and receiving a short message. One boy stood about fifty yards away, and sent words which were received by another at Headquarters. This won the hearty approval of the spectators, which rejoiced the hearts of the scouts. After this came military drill, and here the captain was in his element. One would have thought that he was on board of the *Roaring Bess*, giving orders to his crew. He paced up and down, shouting out in a tremendous voice, "Right—turn!" "Form—fours!" "Quick—march!" "Mark—time!" and so on. It was really excellent the way the boys rose to the occasion, showing to all what training and discipline could accomplish.

They had barely finished their marching ere Rod darted suddenly away toward the front of the Anchorage, and as Whyn followed him with her eyes she saw that he was hurrying to meet a large auto which had just arrived. Several people were in the car, and soon they were accompanying Rod to Headquarters, which they entered.

The watching girl was puzzled over this, and wondered who they could be. They must be people Rod knew, and was expecting, she reasoned. But why did they go into the club-house instead of staying outside?

Presently she saw Rod reappear and go straight to Parson Dan, who was sitting near a large willow tree. A short whispered conversation ensued, and then the clergyman followed the boy into the building. It seemed a long time to Whyn before the former came out again, and when he did, he at once mounted the platform, and motioned the people to be quiet. This latter was hardly necessary, as all on the grounds had noticed the arrival of the strangers, and were naturally curious about them, especially as Rod seemed so excited and delighted.

"I have a great announcement to make," the clergyman began, "and I myself can hardly believe it is true. It seems that the scouts have sprung a complete surprise upon us of a most enjoyable nature, and I am almost overcome by their audacity. In order to make this affair an unbounded success, they invited the noted singer, Miss Anna Royanna, to come here and sing. She complied with the request, and is now here."

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What more the clergyman said Whyn did not know. With a half-smothered cry of delight, she leaned as far as she could toward the window in order to catch the first glimpse of the wonderful woman. Tears came suddenly into her eyes as the meaning of what the scouts had done flashed into her mind. It was for her sake, she very well knew, that they had asked Miss Royanna to come. That was the reason why Rod and Phil had gone to the city. She understood it all just as plainly as if they had told her. And so she was to hear Anna Royanna after all! It seemed too good to be true. Surely it must be only a beautiful dream. But, no, it was real, for there were the people before her, and the singer, too, now standing upon the platform by the clergyman's side. She heard the loud and excited cheers of the people, and saw the woman bowing in acknowledgment of the reception. What was that she was saying? That she was delighted to come to the entertainment; that she was very fond of boys, and when they had asked her to come she had not the heart to refuse. How soft and pleasing was her voice, so Whyn thought. How nice she must be, and she longed to speak to her, and to look into her eyes. And to think that such a person had come all the way to Hillcrest to sing for her benefit!

But when Miss Royanna began to sing, Whyn forgot everything else. There were various kinds of songs, both humorous and pathetic, but all simple and familiar, which appealed to the hearts of the listeners. Last of all she sang "My Little Lad, God Bless Him!" and then went back into the building, followed by the clapping and cheering of the assembled people.

Whyn paid little attention to the excitement outside. She leaned back in her chair, closed her eyes, and listened once again to the sweet singer. How distinctly she could hear that voice, and the words of the last song. What a treat this would be to her for months to come. She must write at once to her mother and Douglas and tell them of the great joy which had come into her life.

She was aroused by voices outside the door. Opening her eyes, great was her surprise to see the famous singer standing before her. Parson Dan was there, too, as well as Mr. and Mrs. Markham, while Rod brought up in the rear as bodyguard. But Whyn had eyes only for one person, and her glad look of welcome went at once to Miss Royanna's heart. Stepping quickly forward, she stooped and kissed the invalid girl.

"We do not need any introduction," she said. "We are old friends, are we not? Rod has told me about you."

For once in her life Whyn found it impossible to reply. Her eyes were moist as she lifted them to the singer's face in mute admiration.

"What a lovely room," the woman continued, noting Whyn's embarrassment. "And you were able to see everything from the window. How nice."

“And I heard you sing, too,” Whyn replied. “Oh, it was great, and so good of you to come. I can never thank you enough.”

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"Don't try," and the woman smiled. "The enjoyment has been all on my side. It is the best time I have had in years."

For about half an hour Miss Royanna stayed, but it seemed only a few minutes to the invalid girl. The rest went out and left them alone. It appeared to Whyn as if heaven had suddenly opened, and an angel in the form of this singer had come down. She felt perfectly at ease now, and talked freely, telling about herself and her mother. It was only natural, however, that Rod should form the principal object of conversation. In fact, Miss Royanna led the girl on to talk about him, and the mother's heart was made happy as Whyn told how kind Rod was to her, and what a fine boy he really was.

"Will you write to me, dear?" the singer asked, as she bade the girl good-bye.

"Oh, may I?" and Whyn's face glowed with pleasure. "But you will not care to hear about our uninteresting affairs in Hillcrest."

"Indeed I shall. Tell me everything, and especially about Rod. You see, I know him better than the rest."

"Will you come to see me again?" Whyn enquired.

"Yes, just as soon as I can. I want to spend several weeks here in this lovely place. Then I shall be right near you, and find out all about the scouts."

"Oh, how nice!" and Whyn clasped her hands together. "I shall look forward to your coming. It will be something more to live for now."

All the people on the grounds crowded around the car as the singer stepped on board. Rod was standing right by the door, watching her face with great interest. How she longed to stoop, fold him in her arms, kiss him, and proclaim that he was her own boy. But, no, not now. She must wait. Waving her hand to the crowd, she was borne swiftly away, leaving the people with a great and new topic of conversation, which would last them for many a day.

CHAPTER XX

THE ISLAND ADVENTURE

Next morning the scouts met at the Anchorage to find out how much money they had made. Great was their delight to learn that they had taken in fifty dollars and seventy cents. It seemed too good to be true, and the only way they could account for the large sum was the money contributed by several men who had come in autos. They had paid a dollar apiece for their tickets, and had spent money liberally upon ice-cream, cake,

and candy. No refreshments were left over, and but for the timely assistance of Miss Arabella there would not have been enough.

It was in Whyn's room where this meeting took place. Captain Josh said very little at first, for he was satisfied to let the rest do the talking. He was happy at the way the affair had turned out, and he wished to do something to celebrate the occasion.

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"Boys," he at last began, after they had thoroughly discussed the entertainment and the singer, "we've had a great success, more than we ever expected, I feel now like doin' something desperate jist to relieve my feelings. Suppose we make a trip to the island, and camp there all night. We've been talkin' about this fer some time, and as I have to go over to look after some nets I left there, it might as well be now as at any time. You boys have never spent a night in the open, and it'll do yez good to learn how to camp and cook. All scouts must know something about sich things."

"Shall we go to-day?" Rod eagerly enquired. The big island had always been a fascinating place to him, and he longed to go there. He had heard many stories about it, and how much treasure had been buried there long ago by Captain Kidd.

"Yes, this afternoon," the captain replied. "We'll go in the *Roarin' Bess*, and tow the tender to take us ashore. You boys had better hustle away home now, and find out if yer parents will let yez go. Ye must bring along a blanket or two each, and enough grub to last yez fer supper and breakfast. I'll look out fer the tea, milk, and the cookin' utensils. The ones who are goin' must be here by three o'clock sharp."

Rod hurried home and found Parson Dan reading the morning paper which had just arrived.

"Look here, Rodney," and the clergyman pointed to the headlines of an article a column long. "See what the newspaper says about Miss Royanna, and how she came all the way to Hillcrest to sing for the scouts."

"What, is it all there, grandad?" and the boy eagerly scanned the page. "Read it, please," and he perched himself upon a chair nearby.

To him it was wonderful that the paper should make so much of what the singer had done. It told about the scouts, their entertainment, and how two of the boys had gone all the way to the city to ask Miss Royanna to go to Hillcrest.

"Isn't it great!" and Rod gave a deep sigh when the clergyman had finished. "How I wish Miss Royanna could live here all the time."

"She took a great fancy to you, Rodney," and the parson smiled upon the boy.

"I like her," was the brief comment.

During dinner Rod asked permission to go to the island with Captain Josh and the rest of the scouts. After some discussion he was told that he could go, and when the meal was over Mrs. Royal began to prepare some food for him to take with him.

"It will do the boy good," the parson told her. "The captain is most trustworthy, and camping out in the open for one night will do the boy no harm."

Parson Dan had thought much about Anna Royanna's visit to Hillcrest. He and Mrs. Royal had talked long and earnestly about the whole affair the night before. They tried to discover some reason why she should come all the way from the city to sing for a few country people, when she was in such great demand elsewhere. That it was for Whyn's sake did not altogether satisfy them. They recalled the special interest she had taken in Rod, and they felt proud that their boy should have received so much attention from such a woman.

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While driving along the road that afternoon, a new idea suddenly flashed into the parson's mind. "Can it be possible?" he asked himself. So foolish did the notion seem that he tried to banish it from his thoughts. But this he found to be most difficult. Why should she come all the way to Hillcrest? And what about her great interest in Rod, and that closing piece which she had sung in such a pathetic manner? Stranger things had happened before, he mused. But they generally occurred in stories, and not in real life. Anyway, it was interesting, though he decided to keep the idea to himself for awhile, to see if anything else would take place.

Captain Josh and the boys had a great time that afternoon. The island was about one hundred acres in size, and for the most part wooded. They tramped all over it, and their excitement was intense when they saw the holes which had been dug there by gold-seekers. The boys longed for picks and shovels, that they, too, might dig. But the captain laughed at them.

"There's no gold here, lads," he told them, "and ye'd be only fooled like others."

"But did anybody ever find gold here, captain?" Rod enquired.

"Not that I know of. But there have been some good jokes played upon people here, though," and the captain chuckled as some funny incident came into his mind.

After supper was over that night, the scouts gathered around the bright camp-fire, and asked Captain Josh to tell them a story about gold-seeking on the island. The boys were stretched upon the ground, watching the fiery-tongued flames and the countless sparks as they soared up into the darkness. This was a new experience for them, and they were delighted.

"What kind of a story d'yez want?" the captain asked.

"A funny one," was the reply from all.

"A funny one, eh?" and the old man scratched his head.

"Yes, the one which made you chuckle this afternoon," Rod suggested.

"Oh, that one, ha, ha! Sure I know all about it, fer I was there myself. I was younger then than I am now, and fond of an occasional joke. I heard that two men were goin' to hunt fer gold right over there by the shore near that big rock I showed yez to-day. They had been stuffed about buried gold, and so they were goin' to hunt fer it. I saw Jim Gibson, and asked him to join me in a little fun. We came over ahead, got things fixed up, and then waited jist behind that rock. It was dark as pitch when the men came, and from where we were hidden we could see them with their lanterns diggin' fer all they were worth right near that rock. We let them work away fer a spell, as we didn't want to spoil their fun too soon. But at last we began to groan and make queer noises. Say, ye

should have seen them men. They were almost scared out of their boots, fer they thought sure that ghosts were around. Then, when they were shakin' all over, I pulled a string, and off came a black cloth we had put over a word which we had printed on the face of that rock."

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"What was the word?" Rod eagerly enquired, as the captain paused for an instant.

"It was the word 'Death,' in big letters. I tell yez it must have glared out pretty ghastly in the night, fer the way them men yelled, and made fer their boat was something wonderful. Ho, ho' I kin never think of them fellers, and the scare they got, without havin' a good laugh."

"Did they ever find out who did the trick?" Phil asked.

"Not that I know of. But, somehow, word got around, and the lives of them men were made miserable by the questions they were asked about the gold on the island, and when they intended to go over and dig fer it."

For some time the captain told other stories to the boys. Most of these were about his experiences at sea, the gales he had encountered, and his numerous narrow escapes from death. It was a novel experience for the scouts to be lying there listening to these yarns, with the stars twinkling overhead. At last, however, their eyes became heavy and, wrapped in their blankets, they were soon sound asleep upon the hard ground. The captain sat for awhile before the dying embers, smoking his clay pipe. At length, knocking the ashes out of the bowl, he, too, stretched himself out full length near the scouts.

Rod was the last of the boys to go to sleep. His mind was busy with the joke the captain had told, and his experiences at sea. He thought, too, of the sweet singer, and wondered if he should ever see her again. When he did go to sleep he had a dream of a great crowd of men landing on the island, attacking the scouts, and carrying off a large chest of gold.

From this dream he woke with a start, and sat up. For a moment he was dazed, and could not imagine where he was. Then he remembered, and he was about to lie down again when the sound of a motor-boat fell upon his ears. He listened intently, wondering what people could be doing on the water at that time of the night. He could hear the regular breathing of his companions, and as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he could make out the form of the captain lying not far off.

The sound of the boat was more distinct now, and it appeared to be approaching the island. Was his dream really coming true? Rising, he groped his way to the captain's side, and touched his arm. Light though it was, the captain suddenly woke, and asked who was there. In a few whispered words Rod told him what he had heard. At this, the captain sat up, and listened.

"Sure enough," he remarked. "Somebody's astir at a queer hour. Guess we might as well look into this. Come on, let's go and find out. But we must be very careful, and not talk out loud."

Together they made their way cautiously along the shore, keeping as close as possible to the edge of the forest. They had not gone far, however, before the motor-boat drew into the island on their right. Then the engine slowed down and at last stopped, showing that those on board were about to land.

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"Quick, let's get behind this rock," Captain Josh whispered. "They must not know that anybody is here."

Thus safely concealed, the two watchers waited and listened to find out what would take place. They soon heard the boat grate upon the gravel, then a lantern flashed, and two men were seen walking up the beach.

"We might as well stay here," one of them said. "I'm dead beat. Let's build a fire and get warm."

"Where's the stuff?" the other asked. "That'll warm ye better'n anything else. We can't afford to light a fire. It will be seen from the mainland, and we can't tell who might be prowlin' around."

With an oath, the first speaker brought forth a bottle, and took a long deep drink, and then handed it to his companion. After this, they both went to the boat, got several blankets, carried them a short distance from the water, and spread them out upon the sand.

"My, this is a better place than we spent last night," one of the men remarked.

"Should say so," replied the other. "But didn't we give the cops a slip, though? I thought fer sure they had us one time, when they were pokin' around that old ware-house. Lucky fer us we were able to swipe that boat. Suppose we divvy up now. You've got all the swag."

With the lantern between them, the two men bent their heads, while one of them brought forth a pocket-book, and began to count out a number of bills. His voice was so low that the concealed watchers could not hear the amount.

"There, that's better," the other at length ejaculated, thrusting the money into his pocket. "Didn't we do that chap up fine? He put up quite a fight, though. But we landed him and his wad all right. I'd like to have got a rap at them kids at the same time. They nearly queered our job. Now fer another drink, and then fer a good sleep. We must be out of this before daylight."

For a few moments there was silence, as each man took his turn at the bottle. When they again spoke their voices were thick, which plainly told that the whiskey was having its effect. It was impossible to understand what they were saying. For awhile they conversed in a maudlin, complaining manner, and then knocked over their lantern, which went out.

Waiting for awhile, to be sure that the men were asleep, Captain Josh and Rod slipped quietly away, and went back to their companions. It was with considerable difficulty that

the boys were aroused and ordered not to make the least noise. Captain Josh explained what had taken place, and the conversation of the two men.

“I believe they are the very ones who knocked that man down in the city, and stole his money,” he said in a low voice. “Now, they must not leave this island until the police take them away, and it’s up to us to keep them here.”

“But what are we to do?” Phil Dexter enquired, his teeth chattering with fear.

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"Leave that to me, lads," was the reply. "All I want yez to do is to get on board the *Roarin' Bess* as quickly as possible. There mustn't be any talkin' or noise if we're goin' to carry this thing through, see?"

CHAPTER XXI

THE ROUNDING UP

Quietly and as speedily as possible the scouts boarded the tender, and soon reached the *Roaring Bess*. They shivered as they stood upon the yacht, and longed to be home in their own warm beds. A heavy fog was drifting up the river, which made the air very chilly. To most of the boys this meant greater discomfort, but to the captain it brought considerable satisfaction. It was just what he needed to aid him in his undertaking. In a few low words he outlined his plan to the scouts, and told those who remained behind to be perfectly still. There were several blankets he had stored away in a locker, which they could use to make them comfortable.

Taking with him only Rod and Phil, as they were the oldest boys, the captain entered the tender, seized the oars, and began to pull away straight for the motor-boat. The fact that this latter had been run ashore made him certain that it was a small boat, and could, therefore, be easily drawn off the beach. The tide had risen somewhat since the robbers had landed, which would make the task much easier.

The fog was now thicker than ever, which made it necessary to advance very cautiously. Rod crouched in the bow, with his eyes fixed intently ahead. For a time he could see nothing, as everything was blotted out by the fog. The heavy moisture dampened his clothes, and drifted into his face. Phil was seated astern, shivering with cold and fear. He had no liking for this adventure, and would rather be back on the yacht.

Presently Rod caught sight of the motor-boat, and whispered to the captain to go slow. Soon they were near the shore, and as they drew up close to the strange craft they found that she was floating on the rising tide, and was almost adrift. With difficulty the captain suppressed a chuckle of satisfaction, as he quickly made a rope fast to the motor-boat, gave it to Rod, seized once more his oars, and swung the tender about, and drew away from the shore. When at a safe distance from land he fastened the rope to the bow of the motor-boat, tied it to the seat of the tender, and then with a sigh of relief settled down to long steady strokes. Not a word was spoken now, but the three night adventurers thrilled with excitement. The boys felt no longer cold, as they were so excited over what they had accomplished.

After some hard pulling, the captain drew up alongside of the yacht. The rest of the scouts were eagerly awaiting his return.

“There’s no wind,” the captain remarked, “so that thing’s got to tow us out of this. I guess I know enough about an engine to handle that one all right. Rod, you steer the yacht, while I manage that old tub.”

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Though the fog was still thick, the light of early morn was making itself felt which was of much assistance as the captain scrambled on board the motor-boat. It took him but a few moments to examine the engine, start it, and head the boat out into the middle of the river, with the *Roaring Bess* and tender trailing behind. When everything was going to his complete satisfaction, he leaned back and fairly shook with suppressed laughter. He knew now that he had those rascals prisoners for a few hours at least, and in that time much could be done.

The engine was of six horse-power, and the craft an ordinary rafting-boat, built especially for towing. It accordingly made good progress up the river, and in about an hour's time the captain was able to pull up at Hillcrest wharf. He came here instead of going to his own shore on purpose to send a telephone message to the city. He had thought all this out, and knew that there was no time to be lost.

Near the wharf lived the storekeeper, who had charge of the telephone, and with some difficulty he was awakened by heavy thumps upon the door of his house. He was astonished to see Captain Josh standing outside, and it was several minutes before he realised what was wanted.

"Want to telephone, eh?" he at last queried.

"Sure. Haven't I been tryin' to tell ye that fer the last five minutes?"

"Very important?"

"Should say so. D'ye s'pose I'd be prowlin' around at this time of the mornin' if it wasn't?"

It took the storekeeper some time to get Central in the city, and to become connected with the Police Station. Then the captain stepped to the 'phone and gave his message. "They're on the island now," he said in conclusion, "and I'll keep a good watch out. Ye'd better send some men up at once.

"They're a stupid lot of blockheads down there," he growled, as he hung up the receiver. "They didn't know where Kidd's Island is—jist think of that. And they wanted to know how long it would take a motor-boat to reach the place."

"I guess they'll get a hustle on, though," the storekeeper replied. "I see there's a reward of one hundred dollars offered for the capture of those robbers."

"There is!" the captain exclaimed. "How did ye hear that?"

"Why, it was in yesterday morning's paper. Here it is; you can read it for yourself."

“Well, I declare!” and the captain scratched his head. “I didn’t see that. H’m, ’for the capture of the men who assaulted and robbed an unknown man at Sheer’s Alley,” he read. “Guess we’ll come in fer that money, or I’m much mistaken.”

“But you haven’t captured them yet,” the store-keeper reminded him.

“We’ve got them over there, though,” the captain retorted.

“But they’re not captured yet, remember. You haven’t got your hands on them. I don’t believe you can claim that money unless you give those chaps up to the police.”

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The captain went back to the boat in a very thoughtful mood. The offer of the reward placed the whole affair in a new light now. One hundred dollars! It was just what the scouts needed to help them, and it would be money well earned, at that. What a pity to let others win the reward after what he and the boys had done.

All the scouts except Rod had gone home, and this was for the best. The captain did not want too many around lest they should spoil the plan he had in his mind. Making the *Roaring Bess* fast to the wharf, he and Rod boarded the motorboat and started for home. It took them only a few minutes to reach the shore, and they surprised Mrs. Britt as she was lighting the kitchen fire.

"Stay and have breakfast with us, Rodney," was her friendly invitation, after the captain had briefly related their experience on the island. "You must be hungry after such an adventure."

Rod was only too willing to remain, and during the meal they discussed all that had taken place during the night.

"We must take those rascals ourselves," the captain remarked. "It would never do to allow the police to come here and land them after we have done the rounding up."

"But how will we do it?" Rod enquired. "Maybe they carry revolvers. Won't they shoot us down if we go near them?"

"Leave that to me, lad," and the captain smiled as his eyes roved to a rifle standing in a corner of the room. "But come, we haven't any time to lose. I imagine the police are on their way now. It will take them from one and a half to two hours to run up from the city. It all depends upon what kind of a boat they've got. I expect it will be a fast one, though, for they can't afford to dilly-dally."

With nothing to tow now, it did not take them long to reach the island. They landed near where the scouts had camped during the night, and pulling the boat well up on the shore, they made their way to the place where they had left the robbers. The captain went ahead, while Rod followed close at his heels. The boy's heart was beating fast now, for he knew that a great adventure was soon to take place. He felt proud that the captain had chosen him for this important undertaking, and he was determined not to show the least sign of fear no matter what happened.

As they approached the place they advanced most cautiously, bending low, and stepping softly so as not to make the slightest noise. Reaching the big rock, they crouched behind it for a few seconds, and listened. Hearing nothing, the captain peered carefully over the edge. Drawing quickly back, he motioned to Rod not to make the least sound.

“They’re jist wakin’ up,” he whispered, “and there’s bound to be trouble when they find their boat gone.”

This was exactly what happened. Soon the voices of the men were heard in an excited conversation. The captain again looked upon them from his concealed position and saw them straining their eyes in an effort to locate their boat.

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"She's gone adrift," one of them exclaimed. "Why didn't ye tie her?" and he turned angrily upon his companion.

"It was as much your business as mine," was the retort. "Ye always blame me fer everything. But it's no use wranglin' over it now. We've overslept ourselves, and a pretty mess we're in. If we don't get that boat we're stuck on this island."

"Maybe she's drifted along the shore somewhere," the other suggested. "There's been no wind, so she can't be far away."

"There's a tide, though, which is just as bad. This is a mess, sure."

"Well, talkin' won't do any good," his companion replied. "I'm goin' to hunt along the shore."

He had taken but a step when a deep voice from above startled him, causing him to pause and look quickly up. As he did so, his face underwent a marvellous change of fear and rage, for there was the captain, looking calmly along the barrel of his rifle.

"Stay jist where ye are," was the imperative order. "If one of yez move, I'll shoot quicker'n blazes. Yer boat's all right, so don't worry about her."

A stream of angry oaths now leaped from the robbers' lips, as they realised the helplessness of their position. They did not dare to move, as they were too close to the frowning muzzle of the over-shadowing rifle.

"It's no use to talk that way," the captain warned, "so jist shet yer dirty mouths. I've heard sich gab before, and it doesn't jar me in the least."

"Who are you, anyway?" one of the men demanded, "and how dare ye hold us up? Ye'll pay dear fer this."

"Is that so? It doesn't matter who I am; ye'll find that out soon enough."

"What d'ye mean?" was the reply.

"Never mind. I'm not here to argue with the like of you. There'll be others who kin do that better. All that I want yez to do now is to behave yerselves, and do as I order."

"Well, what d'ye want us to do? Spit it out, and don't be long about it either."

"Don't git on yer high-horse," the captain warned. "I'm not used to be talked to in that manner. I never allowed it when I was aboard the *Flyin' Queen*, and I guess I'm too old to change now. What I want yez to do is to strip off yer duds, that is, yer pants and jackets."

“Do what?”

“Didn’t ye hear me? Git out of yer duds, but keep yer faces this way. Don’t lower yer eyes, or I’ll shoot.”

At this strange order the foiled men stared in amazement, and for once their tongues were silent.

“D’ye hear me?” the captain roared. “Strip at once, or I’ll blow yer measly carcasses to pieces. Never mind the reason; I’ll keep that to myself.”

Seeing that their captor was not to be fooled with any longer, the prisoners did as they were commanded, and soon they were standing in nothing but their underclothes. They suspected now the purpose of this move, and their hearts filled with rage.

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"There, that's better," the captain commented. "I'm glad to see that ye're so obedient. It has saved yez from a great deal of trouble at present. But before we go on with our interestin' proceedin's, I want yez to go down there by the water. Git along with yez," he continued, as the men hesitated. "Don't worry about yer clothes; they'll be all right. My, yez do look fine. Too bad there isn't a picnic of some kind here this mornin'. But, then, I guess that'll come later."

When the men had obeyed his orders, and were standing close to the edge of the water, the captain moved about the edge of the rock, closely followed by Rod. He kept his eyes fixed upon the robbers, and then ordered the boy to gather up the clothes and carry them up among the trees. Seeing what was being done, the cornered men once more gave vent to their feelings.

"Talk all yez like now," the captain remarked, as he sat down upon a drift-log. "It'd be a pity to spoil yer enjoyment, seein' that soon ye won't be able to talk so free."

By this time Rod had placed the clothes in a safe place and, coming back, sat down by the captain's side.

"Did ye bring the guns with ye?" the latter asked.

"Yes, here they are," and Rod held up two revolvers. "I found them in the pockets, and thought it best to bring them with me."

"Ye did right, lad," and the captain took one in his hand. "Fine weapon, that, and loaded up to the muzzle. Wouldn't yez like to have it, eh?" and he held it out to the captives. "Too bad, isn't it, that I've got to keep it? But this toy isn't safe fer every one to handle, so I'll look after both myself."

By this time the fog had begun to lift from the face of the water, and in the distance the outline of the shore of the mainland could be faintly discerned. Then houses and hills came into view. The sun had already started forth on its daily course, and was now swinging over the tops of the pointed pines which lined the upper end of the island. The fog gradually disappeared, fading away in soft filmy wreaths. Not a breath of wind stirred the surface of the water. The captain often turned his eyes down stream for some sign of the boat from the city. Why were the police so long in coming? he asked himself. He had expected them at the island in two hours at the most, and still they were nowhere in sight. He was getting very impatient sitting there, keeping the captives under such strict guard. He determined to have something to say later about the slowness of the police. He would write an article for the paper, that was what he would do. If that was the way they always acted, was it any wonder that crimes were so frequent?



Another hour passed, and when the captain's patience was strained to the utmost, a large motor-boat suddenly rounded the lower end of the island, and slowed up right in front of where the capture had taken place. A number of men were on board, who looked curiously upon the strange scene before them.

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An officer, with several of his men, came ashore, when the two robbers were at once hand-cuffed, and hustled on board the boat. Rod now brought down their clothes, which were thoroughly searched, and everything taken from the pockets.

"It took yez a mighty long time to come from the city," Captain Josh at length blurted out.

"It was the fog which delayed us," the officer explained. "We couldn't see a foot ahead of us."

"H'm, so that was the trouble," and the captain gave a grunt of disgust. "Why didn't ye bring some one along who knows the river? I've been holdin' them chaps down fer three solid hours. I guess the lad here and me have earned our money this time all right."

"What money?" the officer sharply asked.

"The reward, of course; the hundred dollars offered fer the capture of them chaps."

"Oh, we'll look after that," was the nettled reply.

"Ye will, will ye? I guess ye'll git up earlier than ye did this mornin' if ye do. I'll stand by my scouts, and don't let me catch ye tryin' any tricks on me. There, ye'd better git off now, fer I want to go home. Take good care that them chaps don't git away. Come, Rod, let's be off."

CHAPTER XXII

A NEW ADVENTURE

There was considerable excitement in Hillcrest over the capture of the two robbers. Never before had such a thing happened in their quiet community, and it formed a choice subject of conversation for many weeks. The city papers made much of it, and commended Captain Josh and the scouts upon what they had done. One morning paper which was very favourable to the Scout movement, had a special editorial on the subject, under the heading of "The Lone Patrol." It pointed out how much good a few boys in outlying districts could accomplish when properly organised and trained. It told also of the visit of Anna Royanna to this patrol, and how she had sung at their entertainment.

All this was very pleasant reading to the people of Hillcrest, and the ones who had looked with disfavour upon the movement were now anxious to assist. A number of parents who had formerly refused to allow their boys to join came to the captain, and asked him to undertake the training of their sons.

“Not jist now,” the captain told them. “I have all that I kin handle at present. I must git the ones I have licked into shape before tryin’ my hand upon any more.”

These requests were most gratifying to Captain Josh, and he smiled grimly at the thought of the change which had come over the people. It was sweet revenge, as well, to be able to refuse the very ones who had talked most against the scouts when they were first organised. But this had nothing to do with his not taking the boys, for the captain was too big a man for that. He really desired first of all to train the few scouts he had to the best of his ability. It was not quantity he wanted, but quality, and he was determined that his one patrol should be looked upon with pride by all in Hillcrest, and to belong to it would be considered a great honour by any boy.

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Parson Dan and Mrs. Royal were much pleased at the part Rod had taken in the capture of the robbers. They talked it all over with the captain when he came over to see them the very next day.

"The boys did fine," the old man proudly remarked. "They know how to hold their tongues and obey orders, which is more than many older people kin do."

Rod fairly walked on air, and held his head very high. The thrill of adventure now filled his soul, and he longed for something more to happen. It was a long quaint letter he wrote to Anna Royanna in reply to the one she had sent him. He told all about the adventure on the island, the capture of the robbers, and how he and Phil had gone to the city with the captain as witnesses. He mentioned, also, that they had received the one hundred dollars' reward, and had put it in the bank with the rest of the scout money. It seemed so easy and natural for him to write to this woman. He was sure that she was interested in everything that went on at Hillcrest. "I hope you will come to see us again," he wrote in conclusion. "Whyn speaks about you every day, and so do all the rest of the scouts." Mrs. Royal smiled at these words when Rod showed her the letter he had written. It was true in a way that Whyn was really a scout, in fact, a very vital part of the patrol.

The letter which Rod wrote to his mother was very different from that to the singer. It was brief, and not bubbling over with information as was the other. He found it hard to tell her about the things which interested him, and he did not ask her to come soon. He was too much afraid that she would arrive and take him away.

A woman far away smiled sadly as she read these two letters, with different addresses on the envelopes. She could see at a glance the boy's interest in the singer, and what a pleasure it was for him to write that letter. But the other, to his mother, was a task, a mere duty, the sooner done, the better. But then, she knew that it was only natural, and she longed for the time to come when letters would not be needed, and Rod would know the truth.

No one in the whole parish of Hillcrest was more interested in what had taken place than Whyn. She was never tired of talking about the capture, and the winning the reward. It was a great letter which she wrote to Douglas, telling him all that had recently happened in the little Hillcrest world. Whenever the scouts gathered in her room, she discussed plans with them, and listened to their various experiences. These latter were now confined to drill, studying for the new badges, and sailing with the captain on the river.

By this time the scouts had one hundred and fifty dollars in the bank, which to them seemed a great sum. Several were quite satisfied with the amount. But Whyn was of a different opinion. "We must make it two hundred, at least," she told them. "It is time to

get to work and raise that other fifty, for it will not do to stop when we have made such a good start.”

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Summer passed, and fall came in with the long evenings, and still the scouts had not hit upon any plan of increasing their bank account. They had all kinds of suggestions, but after they had been thoroughly discussed, they were found to be of little value. Some were too foolish, while others were beyond their power.

It was Whyn who at last solved the problem. In reality, it was her mother who made the suggestion to her during her recent visit. The invalid was delighted, and could hardly wait for the scouts to come to see her.

"I know what you can do," she told them, when they had settled themselves about the room in their usual manner. "You can make wreaths for the churches in the city. They will need them for Christmas decorations."

"Make wreaths!" was the surprised exclamation of all.

"Yes. Don't you understand? You have them in the church here every Christmas, don't you?"

"Certainly," Rod replied. "We make them out of hemlock, and club-moss. But I didn't know you could sell them."

"You can in the city," Whyn explained, "for mamma told me so. They will bring from four to five cents a yard. Wouldn't it be great for us to make up a whole lot, say five hundred yards? Let me see, that would be twenty or twenty-five dollars. Just think of that!" and the girl's eyes danced with excitement.

Then followed an animated discussion as to the kind of wreaths they should make, and the best time to do the work. All this was settled by the entrance of Captain Josh. He entered heartily into the plan, much pleased at the interest of the scouts in raising more money.

"Guess we'd better begin upon the club-moss first," was his decision. "The snow'll be here soon, so while the ground is bare we kin gather as much as we'll need. We kin git the hemlock any old time. We kin work at nights, and on Saturday afternoons, and Betsey'll be glad to give a hand. I'm afraid I don't know much about sich things. If there is any splicin' to do, or special knots to tie, jist call on me. If it had anything to do with sailin' vessels I could help considerable. But riggin' up churches is not in my line. Howsomever, I'll help all I kin."

The very next Saturday Captain Josh led his scouts into the woods to gather their first supply of club-moss. He carried his rifle with him. There was a black fox in the neighbourhood, which had been seen by several, and the captain longed to get sight on it "jist fer one little instant," as he had remarked.

Phil had his small dog with him, which annoyed the captain.

"I wish ye'd left that critter home," he growled. "It'll scare away everything fer miles around. What's the use of bringin' my gun when that thing's along?"

"Gyp wouldn't stay," Phil explained. "I tied him up, but he chewed through the rope."

"H'm," the captain grunted, "I guess he'd eat through a chain by the looks of him. He's about the toughest brute I ever set my eyes on. Does he ever eat people?"

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A hearty laugh from the boys was the only reply to the captain's sarcastic remark. They were in great spirits, and the tramp through the woods filled them with joy. It was merely a winter-road they followed, used by farmers for bringing out their logs and fire-wood. It was very crooked, too, and rough, but in a short time the deep snow would cover up the latter defect, and the jingle of bells would echo among the trees. Now it was the talk and laughter of the boys which alone disturbed the peaceful silence.

After having walked a little over half an hour, they came to a place, somewhat open, and here they found club-moss in abundance lining the ground. To their left, the rippling of the brook could be heard flowing on its way to the river. Ahead of them stood the thick forest of pine, fir, and spruce. It was a cool November day, and when the boys started from home their warm mittens had felt good. But the brisk tramp had set their blood in rapid circulation, and with bare hands they now gathered the moss and stuffed it into bags which they had brought with them. They worked with a hearty good-will, vying with one another, each striving to have his bag full first.

Their task was almost finished, when Gyp's savage barking up among the thick trees arrested their attention.

"Let's go and see what he's got," Rod suggested.

"Oh, it's only a squirrel he's treed," the captain contemptuously replied, straightening himself up for an instant from his bent position. "It's all that critter's good fer. If he'd something big it'd be worth while."

For a few moments longer the boys worked in silence. But they could not keep their attention away from Gyp, whose barks were now becoming more savage and insistent than ever. That he was in a great state of excitement was quite evident. Even the captain was at last forced to take notice.

"It does seem that he has something more'n a squirrel," he remarked. "Maybe it's a coon he's got up a tree. They're thick over there along that bank. Guess we might as well go and see what's up, anyway."

At this the boys were delighted. They wanted to explore the deep recesses of that forest, and now that there was some excitement there made the longing all the greater. They followed in Indian fashion after the captain, who strode rapidly forward, with his rifle in his right hand.

Gyp's barking sounded louder the nearer they approached. The boys as well as the captain strained their eyes ahead, anxious to find out what was the matter with the dog. For awhile they could see nothing through the net-work of trees and branches. But as they came close to the high steep bank overhanging the brook, they peered forward and caught their first glimpse of the excited dog. In front of him was a huge fallen spruce

tree, with its roots projecting outward, like spokes in a great wheel. This tree had been lying there for years, and across it had fallen numerous small saplings and dead branches, until from a distance it assumed the appearance of a native African hut.

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The roots of this tree were only a few feet from the edge of the steep gravelly bank, and this, together with a furious gale, had been the cause of the spruce's fall. Between two of the perpendicular roots, which were partly embedded in the ground, was a large hole, before which Gyp was making all the fuss. The stiff hairs on his back stood straight on end, and he kept leaping constantly forward and backward, wild with excitement.

With considerable difficulty the captain thrust the dog aside, and with the rifle firmly clutched in his hands, he stooped in order to obtain a view of what was within. Scarcely had he done so, ere a deep growl and roar startled him, while at the same time a large black bear hurled itself like a catapult from among the roots.

Taken by complete surprise, the captain reeled backward, dropping the rifle as he did so in an effort to maintain his balance. Before he could do this, however, he had gone over the edge of the bank, and after him went the bear. Down that steep incline man and beast rapidly ploughed their way, taking with them a small avalanche of stones and gravel. At the bottom of the bank was a pool of water about two feet deep, and into this they plunged, the captain in a sitting position, and the bear upon its back. Then followed a wild scramble as each endeavoured to get out first. The bear succeeded better than the man, for the captain had injured his knee, which made it difficult for him to move quickly.

Had this been a young bear he would have taken to his heels at once, and disappeared among the trees. But being an old-timer, and not a bit cowardly, he had no intention of running away. He was very angry at being disturbed when he had his house all ready for his long winter sleep. Then that tumble down the bank into the water was more than his bearish nature could stand, and he was ready for fight. He scrambled out of the water, and rushed toward the captain. The latter had no chance at all with his injured knee, and with nothing to defend himself. It was a critical moment, but he braced himself up, fumbled in his pocket for his clasp-knife, and then faced Bruin, who was now standing, on his hind legs ready for the attack.

When Captain Josh and the bear disappeared over the bank the boys stared in amazement, which soon changed to fear when they saw what the animal really was. They crowded together, and it needed but a word to cause most of them to rush panic-stricken from the place.

It was Rod who saved the situation. No sooner had the captain and the bear reached the water, than he sprang forward, seized the rifle, and leaped down the bank. He had much difficulty in keeping his feet, and several times he thought that he would lose his balance and tumble head-long into the pool below. He managed, however, to keep from falling by digging his feet into the gravel, and thus step by step moved quickly downward.

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Rod knew something about the captain's rifle, as on several occasions he had been shown how it worked, and once, which was a red-letter day to him, he had been allowed to fire it off. It was quite fortunate that the boy had this slight knowledge, which now served him in good stead. Rod saw the bear rise on its hind legs, and he knew from stories he had read that this was the ordinary method of attack. He could not afford to lose a moment, he was well aware, if the captain was to be saved.

Creeping close to where the bear was standing, he drew back the hammer, took steady aim at the brute's body, and pulled the trigger. At once there was a loud report, and Rod was sent reeling backward as if hit on the shoulder by a huge rock. For an instant he imagined that the bear had struck him with its paw, but a shout from the captain caused him to scramble to his feet. Then his eyes rested upon the black form of the bear lying upon the ground but a short distance away.

"Is it dead?" he asked, hurrying over to where the captain was standing.

"Dead! Doesn't he look like it?" was the reply, as the old man laid a heavy hand affectionately upon the boy's shoulder. "That was a great shot, lad, and jist in the nick of time. My! I was sure he was goin' to have me fer dinner. That would have been a slower and more painful death fer the brute, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER XXIII

FIRST AID

By this time the rest of the scouts had scrambled down the bank, much ashamed of themselves for their recent fear. They were now most anxious to do all they could to assist the captain. They soon learned that he was unable to walk, for in addition to his injured knee he had sprained his ankle. He tried to take a few steps in order to show the boys that he was not much hurt. But this was more than he could endure, and he gave a deep groan of pain as he sank down upon the ground.

"It's nothin', lads," he growled, somewhat annoyed at the accident. "Yez better go home and git a team to take the bear out. I'll stay and keep him company till yez come back. He might be jist fooling and will sneak off into the woods. We can't afford to run any risk."

"We'll not leave you, captain," Rod stoutly protested. "You're soaked with water, and you'll get a bad cold if you stay here. We'll carry you home."

"Carry me!" the captain exclaimed in surprise. "Yez couldn't tote a heavy log like me all that distance."

"We're going to try, anyway. We're scouts, remember, and you have often told us what to do in a case like this. I guess the bear will be all right. He looks quiet enough now."

There was nothing for the captain to do but to submit, and though he growled somewhat at what he called their foolishness, yet he was pleased at their interest on his behalf.



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The boys at once set to work to prepare a stretcher for their wounded scoutmaster. With a scout axe, Rod cut down several small maples, trimmed off the leaves, and cut them the necessary length. He then asked the captain for his coat, as it was the largest they could get. Through the sleeves of this they ran two of the poles, which thus formed one end of the stretcher. Then taking off their own coats they did the same to the other end. It took five of theirs to equal the captain's, and even then they were afraid that all combined would not bear the man's weight. In addition to the coats, the scouts fastened their leather belts together, and stretched these between the poles for greater support.

The captain was greatly pleased at the speedy way in which the boys did this work. But he had his doubts about their being able to carry him home. He weighed about one hundred and seventy pounds, which would mean over forty pounds to each of the four scouts who would take their turn at the stretcher. Rod thought of this and a new idea came suddenly into his mind. Picking up two of the other maple saplings he had cut, he placed them crosswise beneath the stretcher, and stationed a scout at each end. When all was ready, the captain rolled himself upon the rude contrivance which had been made, and told the boys to go ahead. At once the eight scouts stooped and without any difficulty lifted him from the ground. They were delighted to find that not a sleeve ripped, and not a belt gave way.

It was decided that they should follow the brook down-stream for a distance until they came to the old winter-road. By doing this they would escape the thick woods, as well as the climb up the steep bank. It was a rough trip, and the captain was jolted a great deal.

"Don't make me sea-sick," he warned, when he swayed more than usual. "Ugh!" he groaned, as one of the boys slipped upon a rock, and dropped the end of his pole. "I've been over many rough seas in my life, but nothin' to equal this. Steady, there," he cried, as the swaying motion increased. "Ah, that's better," he encouraged, when they at length reached the winter-road.

The scouts enjoyed the captain's remarks. He cheered them when they did well, and made them rest occasionally. But it was a heavy load they were bearing, and right glad were they when at last they reached the Anchorage, and handed over their charge to Mrs. Britt.

That afternoon Phil's father took his horses and went with the scouts to bring in the bear. Several able-bodied men accompanied them, for news had spread from house to house of what had taken place up the brook. It was almost sundown, when they returned, and quite a crowd of neighbours were gathered around the captain's house to see the bear which Rod had shot.



The scouts were delighted with their adventure, and each considered himself a hero when he met other boys in the parish. Whyn was greatly excited over the whole affair, and had to hear every detail from the captain himself. Her eyes sparkled with pleasure when she learned of the brave part Rod had taken. She was wise enough, however, not to praise Rod when the rest of the scouts were present, for she knew that they would be jealous. But when he was alone with her one afternoon, she told him just what she thought.

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"I think you did great," she exclaimed, after they had talked for awhile about the bear.

"Oh, I didn't do much," was the reply.

"Yes, you did. If it hadn't been for you, the bear would have killed the captain. He told me so himself."

"Well, I'm glad I was there to save him. It was my good turn, that's all, and one must never expect praise for that. But, say, Whyn, have you seen the bear's skin? It's a beauty. The neighbours skinned it, and Phil's father is going to take it to the city. He thinks that he can sell the meat as well, for some people like it to eat."

"What a letter I shall write to Douglas," the girl replied, as she clasped her hands together. "Isn't it great, the many wonderful things I have to write about!"

"And I shall write to Miss Royanna," Rod declared. "I know she will like to hear about that bear, though she will be so sorry that the captain got hurt."

"And will you write to your mother?" Whyn asked.

"Yes, I suppose so. But I don't know whether she's interested in bears or not. But I know that Miss Royanna is, for she's interested in everything. Say, Whyn," and Rod lowered his voice, "I wish she was my mother; wouldn't it be great?"

"Oh, Rod!" and the girl looked her astonishment.

"There, I knew you'd say that. But I can't help it. I don't know my mother, and how can I love some one I have never seen? I suppose she'll land here some day and take me away. She said that she was coming last summer, but she put it off, lucky for me."

After the excitement over the bear had somewhat subsided, the scouts settled down to the work of making wreaths. For awhile this was carried on in the kitchen of the Anchorage, as the captain wished to be on hand, and to give what assistance he could. It was several weeks before he was able to bear his foot to the ground, and this was a most trying time to him. Such an active life had he always led that to be confined to the house was hard for him to endure. Whyn was also able to be present, and sat in the big chair the captain had made, and watched with interest all that took place. She made a few wreaths herself, though she was not able to do much, as she tired very quickly. The scouts liked to have her with them, and she was often able to instruct them, and to pass judgment upon their work.

Another valuable helper was Miss Arabella. It was quite remarkable the way she "happened along," as she expressed it, whenever the boys met for wreath-making. In fact, she and the captain became quite friendly, which was a great surprise to all.

“Guess ye’ll have to be scoutmaster, Miss Bella,” he told her one evening.

“Goodness me!” was the startled reply. “I couldn’t handle a bunch of boys.”

“And why not, Miss Bella?”

“They’re too much like men; always wanting something, and never satisfied when they get it.”

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"So that's the reason ye never got a man, eh? Ho, ho!" and the captain gave a gruff laugh.

"Yes," Miss Arabella snapped. "I was afraid he might be just like you, Captain Josh," at which retort the boys shouted with delight, while the captain, too, was highly amused at the fun which had been caused at his own expense.

Thus on the nights when the work of making the wreaths was carried on an excellent spirit of friendship prevailed. Neighbours, hearing of the good times at the Anchorage, often dropped in to assist the scouts. On several occasions they brought refreshments, such as sandwiches, cakes, and doughnuts, which added very much to the enjoyment of the evenings.

The neighbours were so pleased with these social gatherings that they were very sorry when the wreaths were all made and sent to the city. They had experienced the pleasure of meeting together during the long winter evenings, and there was now a serious blank in their lives. They accordingly decided that something must be done, with the result that a small club was formed, which met once a week at the scouts' Headquarters. The women brought their knitting or sewing, while the men were allowed their pipes. There was a programme arranged for each night, consisting of songs, recitations, and at times a debate on some familiar subject.

The scouts were only too glad that their elders were so interested in thus gathering together, and they did all they could to keep the room clean, and make it as bright as possible. They themselves met twice a week, and when the captain was able to get around, the regular scout work was continued.

Captain Josh had studied hard to keep ahead of the boys, and in this he did remarkably well. But when it came to giving addresses on First Aid to the Injured, he candidly confessed his ignorance.

"Give me a broken rope," he said, "and I'll splice it in no time. But a broken bone is too much fer me. As fer veins, arteries, bandaging, and sich things, ye can't expect an old man like me to understand about them. No, we've got to leave that to some one else."

And that some one proved to be Doctor Travis, a young man who had recently settled in the parish. He was much interested in the scouts, and hearing of their need through Parson Dan, he offered his services free, which were gratefully accepted by the scouts.

It was a raw winter night when the doctor gave his first lecture to the boys. A stiff wind was swinging in from the northeast, plainly telling that a heavy storm was near at hand. But safe within their warm room, the scouts gave no heed to what was taking place outside. They listened with intense interest as the doctor explained to them what a wonderful machine the human body really is, the difference between veins and arteries,

the various kinds of fractures, and other things necessary for a second-class scout to know.

The lecture was as interesting as a story, and the doctor was delighted at the attention of the scouts. The large chart made everything so clear, and impressed firmly upon the minds of the boys the things they had heard. It was half-past nine when they were through, and when the door was opened, all were surprised to find such a furious storm raging over the land. It had been snowing for some time, and drifts were already piling up around Headquarters.



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"Ye must stay with me to-night," Captain Josh told the doctor. "We kin put ye up all right, and in the mornin' ye'll have a chance to see Whyn. I want ye to have a look at her, anyway, fer she's not been up to the mark of late."

Thus the doctor made up his mind to remain, and he bade good night to the boys as they left the room, and plunged out into the storm.

"Take care of yerselves, boys," the captain shouted, "and don't git lost."

Such a warning was needed, for no sooner had the scouts left the building than the storm struck them in all its fury. The night was so dark that they could not see a yard ahead of them. But the road to the main highway was fenced in, and so they were kept from going astray.

Rod led, and with bent heads the rest followed. Step by step they pressed onward, with the snow driving full into their faces. It was cold, too, and the wind, piercing their clothes, chilled them. It was fortunate that they had not far to go, else they would have found it almost impossible to reach their homes on such a night.

They had gained the highway, and Rod had just turned to leave his companions, who lived in the opposite direction, when he stumbled and fell over something lying in the snow. His cry of surprise soon brought the rest of the scouts to his side. Regaining his feet, Rod felt with his hands to see what the object was over which he had tumbled.

"It's a man!" he shouted, straightening himself suddenly up. "Maybe he's frozen. Come and let's carry him back to the house."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PRODIGAL SON

Captain Josh and the doctor were enjoying the tea which Mrs. Britt had ready for them, when the scouts arrived bringing the man they had found in the snow. He was a heavy load, and the boys were almost exhausted by the time they reached the house. In a few brief words Rod explained how they had discovered him, and then the doctor at once examined the unfortunate man. Soon all was in a bustle about the place, and not until the unconscious man was attended to and in bed, did the boys leave to begin once more their battle against the storm.

The stranger was a man of about thirty years of age, heavily bearded. His face had the appearance of one who had experienced much suffering, and his staring eyes were deep-sunken in their sockets. Mrs. Britt had given him only a brief glance, but that was sufficient to remind her of one who was constantly in her mind. When the captain and the doctor were again back in the kitchen discussing the stranger, she stole to his side,

and looked intently upon his face. She held the light close, and as she did so she trembled so violently that she almost let the lamp fall from her hand. Recovering herself, she went immediately to her husband's side and touched his shoulder.

"It's Jimmy!" she cried, clasping her hands before her. "It's our own boy!"

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With a startled exclamation, the captain sprang to his feet, and looked questioningly at his wife.

"Jimmy, did you say? In there?"

"Yes, I am sure of it. Come, see for yourself," and Mrs. Britt led her half-dazed husband into the little bed-room.

The doctor remained behind in the kitchen. His thoughts, however, were not upon his pipe, which was sending wreaths of blue smoke into the air. He was thinking of far deeper things. His brief career as a medical man had already brought him into close touch with many strange circumstances. He liked to ponder them over very carefully. But this was altogether different, and as he sat there, he endeavoured to imagine the life of the son who had gone from home years before, and had returned in such a sad condition.

He was aroused by the captain's hand laid heavily upon his shoulder.

"It's him, doc! My God, it's Jimmy!" It was all the old man could say. He shook like a leaf, and sitting suddenly down upon a splint-bottom chair, he buried his face in his hands.

"Are you sure?" the doctor asked, not knowing what else to say.

"Sure," was the low reply. "Strange I didn't know him at first. But it's him all right. And, say, doc, ye'll bring him around, won't ye?" and the captain raised his eyes appealingly to his companion's face.

"I shall do all I can, captain, never fear."

"May the Lord bless ye, doc, fer them words. Isn't it lucky that ye're here to-night? Jist think what the scouts have done. But fer them my Jimmy would be lyin' out there in the storm. And, say, d'ye believe in God?"

"Y-yes, I suppose so," was the somewhat doubtful response.

"But ye'll be sure now, dead certain, won't ye, doc?"

"Why? I don't catch the drift of your meaning."

"Ye don't? Why, that's queer, after what He's done fer my Jimmy. Who else sent them scouts out there to bring my boy in but Him? And to think that all of these years I've been scoffin' at Him and religion, and then fer Him to do so much fer me and my Jimmy!"

The doctor knew not how to reply, and so continued his smoke, while the captain sat nearby with bent head, deep in thought. The storm still raged without, but there was silence in the kitchen, save for the kettle which sang upon the stove. But a more intense silence reigned within the little bed-room adjoining, where a mother knelt by the side of her only child, holding his cold right hand in hers, and offering up wordless prayers that he might be spared.

News of Jimmy Britt's return soon spread throughout the parish, and everywhere there was the buzz of gossip as to the strange way he had come home. Some thought he must have been drunk, which caused him to fall upon the road. Others believed that he was so poor that he could not afford to be driven from the train. But all were of one mind that his not writing to his parents for years was most mysterious.

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While all this talking was going on, Jimmy was being slowly restored to life through the doctor's skill, and the mother's careful nursing. Mrs. Britt now found the work of looking after two patients almost beyond her power of endurance. It was then that Miss Arabella offered her assistance, and proved a veritable angel of mercy in her attention to Whyn, and doing what she could about the house.

During the weeks which followed the night of the great storm the scouts did not meet at Headquarters. They knew that the captain had little or no heart for anything now but the care of his son. They accordingly met from house to house, but most often at the rectory, where Mrs. Royal always made them welcome. They were all greatly interested in the captain's son, of whom they had heard so much, and they longed to see him. Nearly every day Rod went to the Anchorage to see Whyn, and they talked very much about Jimmy. The latter, however, he never saw, as no visitor was allowed in his room.

To the scouts the winter seemed very long, and delighted were they when spring at last set in. The days lengthened rapidly, the snow disappeared, and the ice was fast weakening in the river. It was a fine afternoon when Rod was making his regular visit to Whyn that he saw Jimmy. He was sitting in a sunny spot right in front of the house. His thick beard had been removed, and his face was very pale after his illness. Rod recognised him in an instant, and it was with difficulty that he kept back a cry of astonishment. With fast-beating heart he rushed into Whyn's room, much to the girl's surprise, for he was in the habit of entering quietly.

"Why, Rod, what's the matter?" she inquired.

"You look half frightened to death."

"It's him, Whyn!" he exclaimed. "I'm sure of it."

"Who is it? What do you mean?" the girl asked. "Sit down, and be sensible."

"He's the very man who was knocked down and robbed in the city, Whyn."

"What man?"

"Jimmy. He's out there. His whiskers are all off, and I knew him the instant I got my eyes on him."

"Does the captain know that?" Whyn questioned, after a moment's thought. "Isn't it strange that Jimmy should have been helped twice by our troop? How delighted Captain Josh will be."

"You tell him, Whyn," Rod suggested. "He ought to know, but if I say anything it will seem like boasting. It was only our good turn, and we are not supposed to say anything about what we do."

Whyn had no scruples, however, and that very afternoon she spoke to the captain. She told him all that Rod had said, how that he was sure that Jimmy was the very man who had been attacked and robbed. The captain said very little, but later he had a long talk with his son, who, up to the present, had been very reticent about the past few years of his life. Jimmy was sitting on a log near the shore when the captain spoke to him about the matter. For a few moments the younger man remained very silent, as he whittled a piece of cedar wood with his sharp knife.

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"What's wrong with ye, lad?" the captain asked. "Why can't ye answer a straight question?"

"Sit down, dad, and don't get excited," was the reply. "There, that's better. There's something I want to tell you, and it's been on my mind for weeks past, so it might as well be now as any other time. When I left home I wrote to you quite often. But when I got away north, and mixed up with a rough crowd, I somehow got out of the way of writing. I was a long way from the post-office, and mails were very irregular, which perhaps had something to do with my neglect. I struck it rich there, dad, and made my pile, which, thank God, is now safe in the bank. When I came 'outside,' it was to have, as I thought, a good time. I did several of the big cities on the Pacific coast, and then drifted to New York. I need not tell you of my life there, as it wouldn't do any good. I had the money, and so there was no trouble about seeing the seamy side of life. But one night, I don't know yet how it happened, I drifted into a place to hear a famous singer. She was great, and her voice, oh, dad, I wish you could have heard it. But what got me was the closing piece. It was called, 'My Little Lad, God Bless Him.' I can't begin to tell how that song affected me. It seemed like the cry of a broken-hearted mother for her only boy, who was away from her. In an instant I thought of mother and you, and when I left the place that night I was all broken up. I tried to shake the feeling off, but every night it came upon me stronger than ever.

"As the weeks went by I became very wretched. I saw what a brute I had been, and how you at home must have suffered. The upshot of it was, that I left New York, landed in St. John, got waylaid, was in the hospital unconscious for a long time, unknown to all. When I got out, I took the evening train, intending to hire a team at Greenside to drive me home. I couldn't get any one to bring me at that time of the night, and so I began to foot it. When the storm overtook me I fought hard, but I was very weak, and—oh, well, you know the rest."

When Jimmy was through, the captain sat for some time without saying a word. He looked straight before him, as if watching the ice, and wondering when it would go out. But he saw nothing there, for his mind was upon more important things.

"Jimmy," he at last remarked, "this is all His doin's. I kin see that now. He has protected you, and brought ye back to us."

"Who?" Jimmy asked in surprise. "It was that song which did it."

"Ah, yes, Jimmy. But back of that was Another, the very One I've been neglectin' fer years. It's wonderful, lad! it's wonderful, and don't ye fergit it."

The very next Sunday morning, Parson Dan, and all those at church, were astonished to see the scouts march in, accompanied by their scout-master. It was the first time in years that the captain had been there, and all noted how thoughtful and reverent he

was. He had ordered the scouts to attend Headquarters that morning, without telling them of his plans. From there he had marched them straight to church, with orders to behave themselves, and do credit to the troop.

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That day there was no one in all the parish as pleased as Parson Dan at the great change which had come over the careless and indifferent captain.

CHAPTER XXV

DRIFT-LOGS

The following week was very stormy. The rain drove up from the south, and the river rose rapidly. The ice, now greatly weakened, slowly stirred before its final rush to the sea. Then the moment arrived when it started forward, impelled by the gathering mass up-stream. All day long it surged onward, and far on into the night, carrying along trees, and stones, ripping and grinding, demolishing a wharf here, or up-rooting a tree there. No power of man could stop it. People stood on the shore watching the sight, familiar, and yet always new. The last sign of winter had now departed, and all knew that in a few hours the first steamer of the season would be on her way up-river.

With the ice, and following it, came the drift-logs. In a number of cases booms had been broken, and the work of months ruined in an instant. For a hundred miles or more these logs were scattered along the river, drifting with the tide, caught in coves, and mouths of creeks, or stranded upon the shore. To collect as many of these as possible was a big task. Yet it was important, for these logs represented much money, and their entire loss would spell ruin to some lumbermen.

In less than two days after the ice had gone out, a notice was posted at the store. It told of the offer of ten cents for each drift-log. There were men who made a regular business of this every spring. They bought all the logs which had been collected by the inhabitants along the river, took them to the city, where they were sorted out according to private marks, and sold to their respective owners at an excellent profit.

Formerly, Captain Josh had paid no attention to such posted notices. The work of gathering drift-logs he considered beneath the dignity of an old sea-captain. "I'm not a scavenger," he had often told people, when they had asked him why he didn't collect the logs which always floated near his shore, and into the little cove just below his house. "If I can't make a livin' without doin' sich work, then I'll give up."

But this spring the captain studied the notice most carefully, and he walked back to the Anchorage in a very thoughtful mood. He was thinking of the scouts. He was anxious that they should make more money, and here was a fine opportunity. They had already two hundred dollars in the bank, for the bear and the wreaths had added another fifty to the account. But the captain was not satisfied. He longed to have three hundred dollars there, for with that amount there was hardly a possible chance of the Hillcrest troop being beaten in the struggle for the prize. He disliked the idea of now turning

scavenger after he had talked so much against the work. But he was not thinking of himself, so that made a vast difference.

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He found the scouts at Headquarters, for school was out, and this was their regular afternoon of meeting. They were awaiting his coming with eagerness, as they, too, had seen the notice in the store. But they knew the captain's views on the matter, and, therefore, had serious doubts about speaking to him in reference to the drift-logs.

"Hello, boys," was his cheery greeting, as he seated himself upon a block of wood before the door. "How's business?"

"Not very good," Rod replied. "But we have a plan for making more money."

"Yez have, eh? Well, that's interestin'. What is it?"

"But we're afraid you won't like it," Rod declared.

"H'm, is that so? Must be pretty bad, then. Not goin' to steal chickens, are yez? I can't agree to that."

The boys gave a hearty laugh, and the captain smiled grimly. He was quite certain what the plan was which the scouts had in view.

"Oh, no, we wouldn't steal anything," Rod hastened to explain. "We want only honest money. This will be honest, but you don't like the way of earning it."

"How d'ye know that, young man? What makes ye wise so mighty sudden?"

"You have often said so yourself, sir. Haven't you told us that you didn't like collecting drift-logs? You always said it was beneath your dignity, didn't you?"

"Ho, ho, that's it," the captain roared. "Suppose I did say that, what's wrong about it?"

"Nothing, sir, nothing, only——"

"Only what?"

"That you wouldn't care for us to gather drift-logs, and sell them."

"Did I ever say anything about you?" the captain demanded.

"No, sir. But we thought——"

"Oh, so yez thought, eh? Well, then stop sich thinking and git to work. It's beneath my dignity to be pokin' around after logs, because I'm a sea-captain. But that has nothin' to do with you. It's beneath my dignity to go bare-footed, but it's all right fer you. It's beneath my dignity to go to school, but not fer you, see?"

“And you’re quite willing to let us collect the logs?” Rod enquired. He was all alert now and excited, as were also the rest of the scouts.

“Sure. Go ahead, and I’ll keep an eye over yez.”

“And may we have the tender?”

“Certainly. Yez couldn’t do much without that. But be very careful, and don’t git a duckin’. I don’t want any accidents. Yer parents look to me to take care of yez, and I don’t want to have any bad news to carry to yer homes.”

Thus it came about that the boys began to gather logs that very afternoon. The captain sat upon the shore watching and giving advice. Four of the scouts manned the tender. Two rowed, while Rod and Phil herded the logs together, which were then towed to the little cove and fastened to the shore. The rest of the boys rolled the stranded logs into the water, and then by means of poles floated them also into the cove. It was very exciting work, and the time came all too soon for them to go home. But before they left they counted how many they had, and found that there were one hundred and forty-five safely rounded up. This was most encouraging, and their hearts were filled with joy at the success of their undertaking.

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The captain had watched the boys with great interest. He was proud of the speedy and skilful manner in which they had performed the work. He knew that if he had assisted there would now be many more logs in the cove. But he could not afford to lose his dignity, oh, no, and he chuckled as he sat there for a few minutes after the scouts had gone home.

That evening when supper was over, the captain started out alone in the tender. He told his wife that it might be late before he got home, and for her not to worry. He knew where many logs were lying in coves and creeks unknown to the scouts. Hour after hour he patiently toiled, collecting these, and lashing them together with timber-dogs and ropes he had brought with him. It was long after dark when he at last took his raft in tow, and began to row for his own shore. The tide was favourable, so after a pull of over an hour he had the satisfaction of making them fast to a tree in front of the Anchorage.

Next morning the captain was in great spirits, and he chuckled so often over his breakfast that his wife's curiosity was aroused.

"What is it, Joshua?" she asked. "You seem to be greatly amused over something."

"Oh, it's only a little surprise for the scouts," was the reply. "Don't say a word, and I'll tell ye."

"But what about your dignity, Joshua?" Mrs. Britt laughingly enquired, when she had heard the story. "May I tell Whyn? She would be so pleased, poor girl."

"Sure, Betsey. But how is she this mornin'?"

"No better, I'm afraid. She is failing fast. She hasn't been able to see the scouts for some time, and you know what that means. She just lies there all day without saying hardly anything. She is so different from what she was when she first came here."

"But she still takes an interest in what the scouts are doin', does she not?"

"Oh, yes, in a way. But she cannot get up her old enthusiasm. The least excitement tires her. She is an angel, if ever there was one. Mrs. Sinclair is coming this morning, so she wrote. She will be terribly disappointed in Whyn."

Often during the day the captain went to see if the logs he had gathered during the night were safe. Then before school was out, he took off all the tacklings, and scattered the logs along the shore, so that they had the appearance of having drifted there in the night. He kept a strict watch over them now lest they should get too far from the shore, and very glad was he when at last the scouts arrived.

They were surprised and delighted to find so many logs near at hand, and never for a moment did they suspect what the captain had done. It took them the rest of the afternoon getting the logs into the cove, and when this was accomplished, they stood upon the shore and gazed proudly upon their haul, as the captain termed it.

“Ye’ve done well, lads,” he remarked, “fer ye must have nigh onto three hundred now. But yez should have a boom around them. If a gale springs up, there’ll be trouble.”

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Acting upon this suggestion, and directed by the captain, the scouts spent another hour in encircling their logs with a stout boom, which they made secure to the shore.

"There, that's better," was the captain's comment, when this had been completed. "Yez'd better hurry home now, fer it's gittin' rather late."

As the boys were about to leave, a small tug came up the river, and swerved somewhat to the left. A man was standing in the wheel-house, watching those on shore. No word was spoken as the boat sped by, but a thoughtful expression appeared in Captain Josh's eyes as he stood and studied the tug for several minutes.

"I wonder what she's after," he mused, half aloud.

"Perhaps she's going up-river for logs," Rod suggested.

"Maybe she is, lad. But I was jist wondering whose logs she's after, that's all. I know that craft, so that's what makes me uneasy. If it's your logs she's after it'll be well to keep a sharp lookout to-night. Last spring quite a number of logs disappeared, and I know yez don't want to run any risk with yours."

The scouts were much excited now, and the idea of keeping watch appealed to their fancy. They all wanted to stay, but the captain told them to go home first and get permission from their parents.

"I'll keep a eye out," he told them, "until some of yez come back. Ye'd better bring yer blankets along, so that the ones who are not on duty kin sleep. I guess ye'll find the floor of Headquarters quite soft before mornin'."

By the time the scouts returned it was nine o'clock. They found the captain on guard near the shore.

"Nothin' doin' yit," was his greeting. "But, then, it's too early. The best thing fer yez to do is to take an hour each on watch. Put the youngest on first, and the older ones kin take from midnight. If anything of special interest turns up, let me know. I'll sleep with one ear open."

And thus the watch began. It was a novel experience for the scouts, and all were anxious for their turn to arrive. Every time the door opened and guard was relieved, all awoke, for they slept lightly, as the floor was not as soft as their own beds at home.

Phil had taken from twelve to one, and he was followed by Rod. It was a beautiful night, with the stars twinkling overhead. Not a ripple disturbed the surface of the river. Frogs croaked in the distance, and peculiar night sounds fell upon his ears. He sincerely hoped that something would happen during his watch, and as he sat upon a log among the bushes his eyes and ears were keenly alert.

Never before did an hour appear so tedious to Rod. When it seemed that he had been there long enough he pulled out the watch the captain had let the boys have for the night and, striking a match, saw that he had been on guard only half an hour. At times a drowsy feeling came over him, and he was forced to move about to keep from going to sleep at his post. He wondered if the other scouts had felt the same way.

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He had just seated himself after a short walk, when a sound out on the river arrested his attention. At first he thought that he must be mistaken. But, no, he was sure now that he could hear the noise of a boat cutting through the water. This brought him to his feet, and he strained his eyes in an effort to see what it could be. And as he looked he beheld a dim object in the distance, which was growing more distinct. It was moving when he first saw it. Then it slowed down and seemed to be drifting. There was hardly a sound made now, and the watcher on the shore could tell that the boat was drawing closer to where the logs were lying. This looked serious, and he believed that it was there for no good purpose. He waited a few moments, however, to be sure. He did not wish to give a false alarm, and thus bring upon himself the ridicule of the other scouts.

The boat was now near enough for him to discern it quite plainly. Presently it stopped and a small boat put off, and made straight for the logs. Rod hesitated no longer, but turning, sped swiftly along the shore and then up the path leading to the Anchorage. Reaching the house, he pounded upon the door, which was opened almost immediately by the captain.

"They're there!" Rod gasped.

"After the logs?" the captain enquired. "Are you sure?"

"Yes. Come quick, or it will be too late!"

Stepping to one corner of the kitchen, the captain picked up his rifle, and swiftly followed Rod to the shore. There they paused and listened.

"Ye're right, by gum!" the captain whispered. "The skunks! But I'll stop their fun. Into the tender now, and make no noise."

With Rod seated astern, and the captain at the oars, it took but a few minutes to come close to the tug. A long line had already been made fast to the raft, and the small boat with two men on board was returning from fastening the warp. Captain Josh ceased rowing and waited. Then he caught up his rifle, and held it in readiness.

"Hold on there!" he roared. "What's the meanin' of all this?"

"None of your business," was the gruff and somewhat startled reply. "Get out of the way or we'll run ye down!"

"Is that so?" and the captain drew back the hammer of his rifle. "Bluff all ye like, but I've something here which does more'n bluff. Stop rowin', I tell ye, or I'll blow yer heads off!"

It was remarkable what an effect these words had upon the night-prowlers. They could see, as well, the levelled rifle, and they believed that the man holding it meant business. They stopped rowing, but the boat still glided onward.

“Back water, and keep away from the tug!” the captain commanded.

The men obeyed, and soon the boat was lying but a few yards off.

“There, that’s better,” the captain commented. “Now, what have yez to say about yer actions here?”

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"We're only obeyin' orders," was the surly reply. "We were told to come fer these logs."

"Who told ye?"

"Nick Taftie. We're workin' fer him."

"H'm, I thought so. Worked fer him last year at the same job, eh?"

"Yes."

"How many of yez are there?" the captain enquired.

"Three. Pete Simons, the engineer, is on board."

"Well, then, ye jist tell Pete to drop anchor, and tumble in there with yez. If yez try any foolin', I'll shoot."

"But what are ye going to do?" one of the men demanded. "We can't stay here."

"Never mind what I'm goin' to do; ye'll find that out in plenty of time. It's not a bad place to stay, after all. Yez won't starve, and I shan't shoot so long as yez behave yerselves. Hurry up, and give Pete his orders!"

The engineer had heard every word which had been spoken. At first he was tempted to steam away, and leave his companions to their fate. But he knew that he could not very well steer the tug and handle the engine at the same time. He, therefore, decided to remain. It took him only a few minutes to run out the anchor, and join his companions, as they backed their boat to the stern of the tug.

"Now pull fer the shore," the captain ordered. "Don't try to git away from me. At the first sign I'll shoot."

Rod rowed the tender, while the captain with his rifle across his knees kept his eyes fixed upon the three men in the other boat. When a short distance from the shore, the captain commanded them to stop, and hand over their oars. This they reluctantly did, and waited to see what would happen next.

"Got an anchor on board?" the captain asked.

"Yes, a small one," was the reply.

"Well, out with it then, and don't pull it up till yez receive orders."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE BEST "GOOD TURN"

There was great excitement throughout Hillcrest over the capture of the log-stealers. In a short time everybody knew how the scouts had kept watch during the night, and how the three tug-boatmen were forced to remain in their anchored boat, with the captain guarding them while the scouts went for the magistrate and constable. There was a feeling of satisfaction that this had been so successfully accomplished, as it would no doubt put an end to such contemptible business in the future.

It was only natural that the trial should arouse unusual interest. It was held in the large public hall, and the building was packed with eager and curious spectators. Nick Taftie, the unscrupulous business man, was present. He had tried to get away across the border into the United States, but had been caught and forced to attend the trial. Everything was against him. The three boatmen told of the many logs they had stolen for him during other years. Taftie's lawyer fought hard and long, but all in vain. The evidence was too strong against him, and he was convicted. He was condemned to a term in Dorchester Penitentiary, and in addition, he had to settle for all the logs he had stolen from people along the river. The three boatmen were let off with a fine and a warning.

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The city papers made the most of this affair, and the day after the arrest they had long columns telling of what the Hillcrest troop had done. They mentioned, also, how these same scouts had captured the robbers on Kidd's Island, and how the famous singer, Anna Royanna, had visited the troop and had sung at their entertainment. Great credit was given to the scouts for having rounded up the gang of river-thieves. It was explained further that the boys had collected drift-logs for the purpose of earning money to win the Lieutenant-Governor's prize.

All this so impressed three lumber-merchants in the city that they united, and sent a cheque of one hundred and fifty dollars to the Hillcrest troop. This caused intense excitement among the scouts when they met at Headquarters, and the captain read to them the letter he had received. With whoops, worthy of a band of painted Indians on the warpath, the boys charged upon their scoutmaster in order to see the wonderful cheque. Then a babel of voices ensued as they discussed how much money they had, and what kind of a motor-boat they should buy. It was their opinion that they must get it at once. But the captain shook his head.

"Don't be in too big a hurry, lads," was his reminder. "That money must stay in the bank till the Governor gives his judgment. He'll want to see the bank-book, and he'll have to receive a full report as to how the money was raised. We must capture that prize, remember."

"How much money will we have when the logs are sold?" Rod enquired.

"Let me see," and the captain scratched his head. "We have two hundred in the bank. This cheque will make three hundred and fifty, and them logs should bring us twenty-five more. That's quite a sum, boys, and I think we're pretty lucky. I doubt if any other troop'll have that much."

In their excitement the scouts longed to rush into Whyn's room, and tell her the great news. But this they could not do, and the thought that she could not share their joy somewhat dampened their enthusiasm. The captain told them that two doctors were to hold a consultation over her that very day. His voice was lower and softer than the scouts had ever heard it as he mentioned this, and they knew that he was deeply grieved over the girl's condition. Their interest at winning so much money was now lessened. Their hearts were touched at the news about Whyn, and they left Headquarters in a quieter manner than they had done in many a day.

Rod was more deeply moved than the rest of the scouts. That Whyn could not get better had never before entered his mind. But for two doctors to hold a consultation over her brought a great sinking feeling to his heart. Would she never be able to see the scouts again? he asked himself, as he walked slowly homeward. He had no appetite for his supper, and went to bed earlier than usual. But he found it hard to get to sleep. Whyn was ever before him, and he thought

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of her lying there in her little room. Why should she die? he reasoned. The scouts wanted her, and so did her mother. He tossed for a long time upon his pillow, and when he did at last fall into a fitful slumber, he dreamed of Whyn, and the money the scouts had earned. They seemed to be mixed up in some funny way. He saw the girl holding out her hands to the scouts while they were counting over a large roll of crisp bills.

He could not get clear of this dream when he awoke in the morning, and he thought much of it during breakfast. Both Mr. and Mrs. Royal had noticed something unusual about Rod's manner. At first they thought that he was not well, and they watched him carefully as they now sat at the table. They were naturally proud of the part he had taken in the capturing of the river-thieves, as well as the way he was developing into such a strong manly boy.

"I saw Doctor Travis last night," the clergyman at length began. "He and Doctor Sturgis from the city held a consultation over Whyn yesterday afternoon. I am afraid that her case is very serious."

"I expected as much," Mrs. Royal replied, with a deep sigh. "The poor girl has been failing rapidly of late, so I understand."

Rod laid down the knife with which he was spreading his bread, and fixed his eyes full upon the clergyman's face. His heart beat fast, and he was very pale.

"She has one chance, however, so the doctor said," the parson continued, "but I fear that is almost out of the question."

"And what is that?" Mrs. Royal enquired, as her husband paused, and began to toy thoughtfully with his napkin-ring.

"To send her to some great specialist in New York. An operation of a most serious nature is necessary, but it will take so much money that it seems almost ridiculous even to think of such a thing. It is about all that Mrs. Sinclair can do to make a living as it is."

"But surely there is some one who would be willing to advance the money," Mrs. Royal replied. "Is it right that the girl should die without an effort being made to save her life?"

"It would take a large sum, Martha, and I am afraid that there is no one sufficiently interested in the girl who is able to do much. The specialist's fees alone would be great, to say nothing of other expenses. I know where some of the money could be obtained, but I should be most loath to use it."

As Rod sat and listened, with flushed face and sparkling eyes, the dream of the past night once more came into his mind. He saw Whyn holding out her hands to the scouts

while they were busy counting over their money. Then an idea came to him which caused him to give vent to a slight expression of delight.

“What is it, dear?” Mrs. Royal enquired. “You seem to be amused over something.”

“I was only thinking, grandma, and could not help it.” He wished to unburden his mind, but thought it best to wait until he had seen either Captain Josh or the rest of the scouts.

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Rod could hardly wait now until breakfast was over, so anxious was he to rush over before school to speak to the captain about his new plan. He finished the few chores he was in the habit of doing, and then sped across the field as fast as his legs would carry him.

The captain was in his shop near the house, but he was not working as Rod opened the door and entered. He was sitting on a bench, with his face buried in his hands. He looked quickly up as the boy walked in, as if ashamed to fee caught in such a manner.

"What's up now?" was his gruff greeting. "Ye needn't startle one out of his senses. Why can't ye knock in a proper manner?"

"Oh, captain," Rod panted, paying no attention to the rebuke, "I want to talk to you about something."

"Go ahead, then. It must be mighty important to bring ye here this mornin' in sich a hurry."

"It is, captain, and it's about Whyn."

"About Whyn, eh? What d'ye want to tell me about her?"

"That she can't get better, unless she goes to a specialist. Doctor Travis told grandad all about it last night."

For an instant the old man looked keenly into the clear eyes of the boy standing before him, and a deep love for this manly chap entered his heart.

"Sit down," he ordered, and his voice was husky. "So ye're interested in Whyn, eh?"

"Oh, yes. I don't want her to die."

"Neither do I, lad. Neither do I. But what are we goin' to do? Tell me that."

"Help her, captain. The scouts can do it. We've got money, and why shouldn't we give it for Whyn's sake?"

"What, take the money we've earned?"

"Yes. We've nearly four hundred dollars."

"But what about the prize, Rod?"

"Oh, we can get along without that, but we can't do without Whyn."



"Ye're right there, lad," and a mistiness came into the captain's eyes. "But it'll take a lot of money to send her to that specialist. Four hundred dollars won't go very far."

"But it will help," Rod urged. "It will be our good turn, anyway. And say, captain, wouldn't you do a great deal for Whyn?"

"Sure, lad, indeed I would. Do almost anything, in fact."

"Well, then, suppose you sell the *Roaring Bess*."

"Sell my boat!" This was almost too much for the captain.

"Yes, why not? You can get another, can't you?"

"I suppose so," was the slow response.

"And if that isn't enough, you can sell your place. You would do it for Whyn's sake, wouldn't you?"

This was more than the captain had expected. He crushed back a naughty exclamation, and rose slowly to his feet.

"Look here, Rod, what d'ye think I am? A saint? Git away to school now, or ye'll be late. I'll think over what ye've said, and discuss it with the troop this afternoon. Ye'll see the boys at school, so tell them to meet here as soon as they git out. Ye'd better not tell them anything about yer plan until I've had time to think it over fer awhile."

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Rod found it very hard to keep his mind down to his lessons that day. He was too much excited over the idea of helping Whyn. He wanted to speak to the other scouts about it, and thus relieve his feelings. But he had received the captain's order, and so must obey.

The rest of the scouts were most anxious to know what the special summons meant, so it did not take them long to reach Headquarters as soon as school was out. Their scoutmaster was there before them, who explained in a few words why he had called them together.

"I want yez to decide this matter fer yerselves," he told them in closing, "and I'll tell yez what I think about it when yez have made up yer minds."

"Certainly we must give the money," Rod cried, as soon as the captain was through. "It's for Whyn, and who wouldn't do anything for her? He has no right to belong to this troop if he wouldn't."

"Let's give it," the rest shouted in unison; "every cent of it."

"But what about the prize?" the captain asked.

"Let it go," was the general response.

"And the motor-boat?"

"We can do without that, eh, boys?" This from Rod.

"Yes, yes. Hurrah for Whyn!" and the scouts in their loyal enthusiasm threw their caps into the air, and shouted at the top of their voices.

Into the captain's eyes gleamed a light of joy and triumph. He felt at that moment like a general whose men had consented to make a mighty sacrifice for a great cause. He tried to say something, but the words would not come. Instead, he stepped up to each scout, and reached out his big right hand. This action on the part of their leader had more effect in filling their hearts with pride than an outburst of eloquence. They understood something of what the captain felt, and how pleased he was at their decision.

"But remember, lads," he reminded them, "our money'll go only a little way, and we mustn't git too excited jist yit."

"How much will it take?" one of the boys asked.

"I can't say fer sure. But I wouldn't be a bit surprised if it should take two thousand dollars."

“Oh!” was the astonished exclamation from all. “Why will it take that much?” they enquired.

“Specialists are expensive people,” the captain explained. “I knew a man years ago who went to one, and it cost him more’n that.”

“But maybe he won’t charge as much for a girl, especially when it’s Whyn?” Rod suggested.

“H’m, I guess that won’t make any difference. Anyway, we must be prepared, as our motto says. We’ve got to git more money, that’s certain, and how are we to do it?”

There was silence for a few minutes, as the scouts well knew from past experience how hard it was to think of any plan to raise money quickly. They realised that they could not expect to have such good fortune as they had during the past year. It was Rod who broke the silence.

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"I know what we can do," he began. "We can go through the parish, and ask every person to give something. That's what the Ladies' Aid did when they wanted to build that shed for the horses near the church."

"But how would Whyn like that?" the captain asked. "Wouldn't, it seem too, much like beggin'?"

"It would be better, though, than letting her die," Rod insisted.

"Sure, sure," the captain agreed. "But I don't like the idea, fer all that. Let's go home now and think of some other plan. If it comes to the worst, we might have to beg, but not if we kin help it."

CHAPTER XXVII

JIMMY

It took Jimmy Britt many weeks to regain his strength after his serious illness. For a long time he manifested very little interest in what was going on around him. His father and mother wore greatly disappointed and discouraged. He only spoke when spoken to, and spent hours wandering alone along the shore or out in the woods. The scouts annoyed him, and they kept as far from him as possible and he from them. The only conversation he had with his father concerning his past life was the day he spoke about Anna Royanna, and the influence her song had upon him. The captain and Mrs. Britt were afraid that the blow he had received upon his head had somewhat affected his brain, and this caused them considerable worry. The neighbours had already whispered this among themselves, for they had been quick to notice the change which had come over the returned son.

"Look here, Jimmy," his father said that evening after the scouts had left, "I want ye to write a letter fer me. My old hand is so cramped that I kin hardly hold a pen. Ye used to be good at sich work."

"All right," Jimmy replied, rising slowly and bringing down the writing materials from an upper shelf. "Now, fire away; I'm ready."

But the captain hesitated, and was at a loss how to begin. He scratched his head in perplexity.

"Dang it all!" he muttered. "Oh, jist tell him that we have a little sick girl here, who will die if she doesn't git to a specialist in New York, and that I'd like fer him to help out with the expense."

“What are you talking about, dad?” Jimmy asked. “I can’t write the letter until you give me the name of the person you want it sent to.”

“Oh, didn’t I tell ye? Well, that’s queer. It’s fer my old master, Benjamin Dodge, in the city. He’s got the money, and he told me that if I ever needed any help to go to him. I have never bothered him before, and never intended to do so, but this is different. Whyn’s life’s at stake, and that’s reason enough. The scouts are to give all the money they earned fer that prize, but it won’t go very far. We need a great deal more, and at once.”

“And did the scouts give that money of their own free will?” Jimmy asked. “Did you suggest it to them?”

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"No. I never thought about it until Rod came over this mornin' and put the notion into my head."

For some time Jimmy sat toying with the pen he was holding in his hand.

"Why don't ye write that letter?" his father demanded.

"So you say that the girl can't get better unless she goes to a specialist?" his son enquired.

"It's what the doctors say; that's all I know about it. But git on with that letter, will ye?"

"Look here, dad," and Jimmy laid aside the pen. "I'm going to the city in the morning, and suppose I see old Dodge about the matter. It will be much better than writing a letter. I can explain things which I couldn't write."

"Maybe that would be the best way," the captain agreed. "But put it up to him straight, Jimmy. He's a gruff cur at times, but he's got a big heart."

"I'll attend to that, dad. Just leave it to me."

The captain was very restless the next day. He thought that the time for the arrival of the evening boat would never come. Jimmy was to return on her, and suppose Dodge was unwilling to assist! What would he do? His eyes often turned toward the *Roaring Bess* riding at anchor before the house. Several times he stood in front of the door and looked out over his few acres of land. What his thoughts were he kept to himself, but the expression, of determination in his eyes told of a man who would not easily be balked in the object upon which he had set his heart and mind.

Captain Josh met Jimmy at the wharf, and the two walked down the road together.

"Well, did ye see Dodge?" the captain eagerly enquired.

"No," was the brief reply.

"No?" the old man repeated, while his heart sank low.

"I didn't see him, and I didn't intend to."

"But what about Whyn, Jimmy? Didn't ye promise me that——"

"Oh, that's all right," and the son gave a short laugh. "I have the money, and isn't that enough?"

"Ye've got the money, ye say?" the captain asked in astonishment, stopping abruptly, and looking keenly into the young man's face. "Where did ye git it?"

"Don't worry about that, dad. It's honest money, and I'm glad it's to be spent for a good purpose. But for that little song I heard in New York, it would have been all blown in by this time."

"Jimmy, d'ye tell me that it's yer own money?" the captain demanded. "Or are ye only foolin' me?"

"It was mine, dad, but now it's yours, so here it is," and the son brought forth a big roll of bills from his pocket, and handed it to his father. "Sit down, dad, and see how much is there."

Seating himself upon a stone, the captain spread out the bills upon his knee, by fifties and hundreds.

"A thousand dollars!" he gasped, when he had finished. His hands trembled, and his body shook from the vehemence of his emotion. "Jimmy——" It was all he could say.

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"There, there, dad, that will do," and the son laid his right hand affectionately upon his father's shoulder. "When you want any more, let me know. But don't give that girl a hint where that money came from. Tell her a friend gave it, see? Come, now, let's get home. Mother will be waiting tea for us."

The captain said very little during supper, and when the meal was over, he sat smoking for some time in deep thought. Then he laid aside his pipe, and went to Whyn's room. He knocked gently upon the door before entering. The girl gave him a wan smile of greeting, and reached out her thin hand. The captain held it for awhile, and Whyn was content to let it remain there.

"How are ye feelin', little one?" he asked.

"Tired," was the reply. "But mamma is coming to-morrow, and I must be better when she is here."

"Sure, sure. But we're goin' to have ye better all the time soon, so keep up courage."

"I'm afraid not," and Whyn gazed sadly and thoughtfully toward the window where the westering sun was casting its beams. "I shall never be better, captain."

"Tut, tut. Don't say sich a thing."

"But I know it, so what's the use of pretending? Didn't the doctors say that I can't get better unless I go to a specialist?"

"Well, why can't ye go?" the captain queried. "What's to hinder ye?"

"It's the want of money," was the slow reply. "It would cost so much, and we are poor. I know that Douglas would help if he could, but he can't do much now."

"But suppose ye had the money, and could go, would it make ye happy?"

"Don't tease me, captain," and the girl gave the hard hand which was holding hers an affectionate little squeeze.

"I'm not, Whyn, really I'm not. The scouts are goin' to send ye."

"Captain Josh!"

"There now, never mind any of yer exclaimin'. I knew it would surprise ye. Yes, the scouts have decided to send ye to a specialist. Everything is all arranged."

"But I can't allow it, captain," Whyn protested. "Do they mean to take their money and use it upon me?"

“Yes, that’s jist what they’re goin’ to do.”

“But what about the prize, and the motorboat?”

“Don’t ye worry about sich things. That matter is all settled. The boys love ye so much that they’re willin’ to do anything.”

Whyn lay very still for awhile, her eyes moist with tears. The captain, sitting by her side, watched her in silence.

“It is too much for them to do,” the girl at last murmured.

“Oh, not at all,” the captain replied. “They are only lendin’ ye the money, and ye kin pay them back when ye git well and write that book of yours.”

“How lovely that will be!” and Whyn clasped her hands before her in delight, something like her old manner. “It will take some time, though. But I shall do it, and the first money I get shall go to the scouts.”

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Suddenly an expression of anxiety came into her eyes as she fixed them full upon the captain's face.

"What is it, little one?" he asked.

"But the scouts won't have enough money, will they?" she enquired.

"Hardly enough, Whyn. But a kind friend has given some to help out. He doesn't want ye to know his name, and will it worry ye much if I don't tell ye?"

"No, not at all. You have been so good to me that I have no right to ask. Oh, I am so happy, and won't mamma be delighted when she hears the news."

The day after Mrs. Sinclair's arrival, preparations were made for the removal of the invalid girl. All knew that the trip would be a serious undertaking, but they said nothing about this to Whyn. Her mother was going with her, and Captain Josh and Mrs. Britt were to go as far as St. John. But before leaving, Whyn had one special request to make. She wanted to see the scouts, to thank them and to bid them good-bye.

They came the evening before she left, and filed silently into her room. It had been months since they had seen her, and all were shocked to see how she had failed. Whyn greeted them with a bright smile, and held out her hand to each one in turn.

"I can't talk much, boys," she began, "for I am very tired now. But I want to thank you all for what you have done for me. Be sure and keep the troop together. I want each one of you to write to me, and tell me all the news."

How the scouts got out of her room they could hardly remember, but at last they found themselves standing before the house looking out over the river. All wanted to say or do something to hide their real feelings. It was Rod who rose to the occasion.

"Come, boys," and his voice was low as he spoke, "let's have a swim. The water's fine."

CHAPTER XXVIII

EXCITEMENT AT THE ANCHORAGE

A deep gloom settled suddenly over the scouts after Whyn left. The enthusiasm and excitement of the last few days had departed, leaving them much depressed. They had little to work for now, as all hope of winning the prize was gone. Their logs had been sold, and the money placed in the bank where it would remain until needed for the sick girl. The boys never for a moment regretted the step they had fallen. There was something lacking, however, and they found it difficult to take up their regular scout work where they had left it off. They met at Headquarters as usual, and spent much time with

the captain out on the water, but whenever they came ashore and looked up at the window where Whyn had so often greeted them, their hearts became heavy. They wrote long letters to her and upon the arrival of the mail each day they expected letters from her. But none came. Only to the captain did Mrs. Sinclair write, telling him of their safe arrival in New York.

Mrs. Britt received a letter about the same time, which caused her to set to work house-cleaning in a most energetic manner. Every room was turned upside down, swept, and dusted, while the captain beat carpets and mats until his back and arms ached. Miss Arabella was taken into the secret, and she came to the Anchorage every day to give a helping hand.

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It was Whyn's room which received special attention. A carpet was ordered from the city to take the place of the old hooked-mat, and new curtains were put up to the window.

"My, that looks fine," Miss Arabella exclaimed, when the last finishing touches had been given to the room. "It will certainly be a surprise."

The captain chuckled when he was brought in to give his opinion. In fact, he had been chuckling ever since Mrs. Britt had received the letter which started her upon the special cleaning of her already neat house. The scouts felt that something out of the ordinary was pleasing the captain by his jolly manner. They often discussed it among themselves, but the more they talked, the more puzzled they became. They all knew about the house-cleaning, the new carpet, and curtains for Whyn's room, and that Miss Arabella was at the Anchorage most of the time.

"I guess I know what it's all about," Tommy Bunker confided one afternoon, when the scouts were discussing the matter.

"What do you know?" Rod asked.

"Jimmy's going to get married."

"Married!" was the surprised shout from all.

"Yes. He's going to marry Miss Arabella. Pa said last night that she's been looking for a man ever since he knew her, and if it wasn't to be her wedding, he was mighty sure she wouldn't be so mighty chummy with the captain and his wife."

"But they wouldn't live at the Anchorage," Phil replied. "Miss Arabella's got a home of her own, hasn't she?"

"Pa says that Jimmy and Tom Simpkins don't agree, and so they couldn't live in the same house," Tommy explained.

The scouts no longer scoffed at this idea. It did seem to them that something like a wedding was about to take place. The captain was so mysterious and full of fun, while Miss Arabella beamed upon the boys whenever she met them. It must surely be her wedding, they agreed.

At the close of the second week of all this excitement, the scouts received orders from the captain to meet him at the wharf in full uniform upon the arrival of the evening boat. They were all there half an hour ahead of time, wondering what was going to happen. Maybe Jimmy and Miss Arabella had gone to the city that day, had been married, and were coming up on the steamer. What else could it be?

When at last the steamer did arrive, and the gang-planks had been run out, the scouts strained their eyes in an effort to find out who were coming ashore. Several landed, and then to their astonishment, who should step out but Anna Royanna!

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When Rod first saw her he could hardly believe his eyes. Instantly the meaning of all the excitement of the past few days flashed upon his mind. It was for her that the Britts had been getting ready. He seemed almost dazed as he stood there watching the wonderful woman coming forward. He joined the others in the cheer of welcome which the captain ordered to be given; he felt her hand grasping his, and saw the smile of pleasure upon her face. But it all appeared like a marvellous dream, too good to be true. He walked by her side with the rest of the scouts, and listened to her conversation with the captain. But he said nothing, unless directly spoken to. He was too happy for speech, and he preferred to remain silent that he might think over the joy which had so suddenly come into his life. The singer held his hand that evening as he was about to leave the Anchorage. He promised that he would come to see her every day, and then sped home to impart the great news to Parson Dan and Mrs. Royal.

There was considerable excitement throughout Hillcrest when it was learned that the famous Anna Royanna had come to the Anchorage to stay for several weeks. It caused the greatest stir among the people from the city, especially the ones of the fashionable set. They could not understand why such a woman should wish to take up her abode at the Anchorage, of all places. To them, the Britts were very inferior people. They knew the captain by sight and reputation, but his wife they had never met.

After a week's hesitation and consideration, several women called upon Miss Royanna one fine afternoon. But she was not in. She spent most of her time with the scouts, so Mrs. Britt informed them. She lived out of doors during the day, and in the evening was generally at the rectory.

The Royals were charmed with the singer. She was so quiet and gentle, and made herself perfectly at home. How her presence brightened up the house. At times she played on the little piano, and sang several of her sweetest songs.

One evening when she was about to return to the Anchorage, a furious thunder-storm burst upon the land, accompanied by a torrent of rain. It continued so long that the Royals were able to induce their visitor to remain all night.

"I am afraid that I shall give you too much trouble," Miss Royanna told them.

"Oh, no," Mrs. Royal hastened to assure her. "It will be a great pleasure to have you. There is one room which is always ready, and," here her voice became low, "no one has slept in it for over thirteen years. It was my son's room," she explained, seeing the look of surprise in her guest's eyes.

As Mrs. Royal uttered these words, she turned and lighted a lamp, and, therefore, did not notice the strange expression which overspread Miss Royanna's face. Together the two went upstairs and entered the sacred chamber.

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"It was Alec's room," Mrs. Royal remarked, as she placed the lamp upon the dressing-table. "He was fond of all those things," and she motioned to the walls lined with books, fishing-rods, rifle, banners, snow-shoes, and pictures. "I have aired the bed, and made it up every week since he went away. I know it will seem childish and foolish to you. But, oh——" she suddenly paused and sat down upon a chair by the side of the bed. "You little realise how much he meant to us. He was our only child, and his memory is very dear."

"I know it," Miss Royanna replied, dropping upon her knees, and throwing her arms around Mrs. Royal's neck. "I think I understand how much you have suffered during all of these years. But is it right for a stranger to occupy this room? Could I not sleep on the sofa downstairs? I would be quite comfortable there."

"No, no. You must stay here. I could never before bear the thought of any one sleeping in this room. But with you it is so different. You seem to me like my own daughter, and that you have a right here which no one else ever had. I cannot understand the feeling."

"May I be your daughter, then?" the younger woman eagerly asked, as she caught Mrs. Royal's hands in her own hot ones. "It will make my heart so happy to be able to call you mother, and to feel that this is my home."

In reply, Mrs. Royal kissed the fair face so close to hers, and gave a loving pressure to the firm white hands. For some time they remained in this position, unheeding the storm which was still raging outside. Tears were in their eyes, but a new-found joy had entered their hearts, which made that chamber of sacred memories a more hallowed spot than ever.

When at last alone, and with the door closed, the singer stood as if spellbound. Could it be possible, she asked herself, that this was his room, just as he had left it years before? The memory of the past rose suddenly and vividly to her mind. She saw again his straight manly figure, with the light of love in his eyes, as he kissed her and bade her good-bye on the morning of that fateful day years ago. She recalled his words of cheer and comfort as he told her how he would win in the battle of life, and make a home for her and their little one. Then came the terrible news, followed by the fearful days and weeks of struggle in her effort to earn a living as she carried her boy from place to place. The memory was more than she could endure. Sinking upon a chair, she buried her face in her hands and wept as she had not wept in years. Outside the storm rolled away, and the moon rose big and bright. The house was very still, but within her room Anna Royanna sat alone through the long watches of the night. How could she sleep in such a place, with so many conflicting emotions agitating her heart and mind?

Mr. and Mrs. Royal both noticed that their guest was very pale when she came down to breakfast.

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"I am afraid you did not sleep well last night, dear," Mrs. Royal remarked, as she gave her an affectionate kiss. "It must have been the storm which disturbed you."

"I did not mind it," was the reply. "I have restless nights sometimes, and last night was one of them. But I shall be all right presently."

Parson Dan said nothing to any one about the idea which had come to him concerning the noted singer. But the more he thought about it, the more convinced he became that his suspicion was well grounded. He watched her very carefully, and noted her special interest in Rod. Another thing which confirmed his belief was the stopping of all letters from Rod's mother as soon as Miss Royanna arrived at Hillcrest. In her last one she had stated that she expected to be away for a number of weeks, and would be unable to write until her return. The parson's mind was greatly puzzled over the whole matter. If the famous singer was really the boy's mother, why did she not say so? Was there something which she wished to keep hidden?

He also watched the two when they were together, and as he studied their faces, he was sure that he could see a remarkable resemblance. No one else noticed it, so he believed, and not likely he would have done so but for the idea which had come to him that day he was driving along the road. Several times he was tempted to discuss the whole affair with his wife in order to find out if she had suspected anything. He always delayed, however, hoping that something of a more definite nature would turn up to set his doubts at rest.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE TROOPS DECIDE

A few days after the big thunder-storm, Captain Josh received an official letter from the Provincial Secretary of the Boy Scouts. It was so important that he at once called his own scouts to Headquarters that he might place the whole matter before them. The boys were naturally curious to know why they had been so hurriedly summoned, and they accordingly lost no time in getting together.

The captain, seated at a little table, with the open letter before him, seemed much puzzled, and all waited anxiously for him to speak.

"Boys," he began, looking keenly into their faces, "I've got a strange letter here from the Provincial Secretary. He tells me that in two weeks' time the Lieutenant-Governor wants to meet all the troops in the province, review them, and give the prize which was offered last year. Now, we all know about that, and so are not surprised. But the Governor wants to come to Hillcrest to hold the Review, and so the secretary asks me to make arrangements, that is, if I agree to the plan. They will all come from the city on the

mornin' boat, bring their lunches with them, and, hold the Review near the wharf. Now, what d'yez think about that?"

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This was certainly astonishing news to the scouts. Several weeks ago they would have given shouts of delight at the suggestion. But it was different then. At that time they were almost sure of winning the prize, and had often thought of the day when it would be presented to them amid the cheers of the other scouts. But now such a thing was impossible. Every cent of their savings had already been withdrawn from the bank to help Whyn, and they had nothing to show at the Review for all their efforts. They were, therefore, silent when the captain finished speaking. The latter noted this, and surmised the reason.

"I know jist what ye're thinkin' about, lads," he continued. "We'll go to that meetin' empty-handed, so to speak. But that needn't matter. We know that we've done right, and I think we should fall in line with the Governor's idea, and try to give the visitin' troops a good time."

"So do I," Rod replied. "Though we can't get the prize, it will be nice to meet the other scouts, see how they march, and what they look like. I think it will be great to have them come to Hillcrest."

"I wonder what made them think of coming here," Phil remarked. "They never did it before."

"It is to give the scouts an outin', so the letter says," the captain replied. "It is the Governor's treat, and he thought it would be so nice to visit a place on the river where there is a troop. The secretary wants to know why we have sent no account of what we have done during the past year in connection with the prize-contest. He says that all the other troops have done so, and he is surprised that we have done nothin'."

"I guess there won't be anything to report now," Rod replied. "Don't say anything about what we have done, captain, when you write."

"I don't intend to," and the old man glared upon the boys as if he had been charged with some serious offence. "De' yez think that I'm goin' to blab all about our good-turn? Not a bit of it. Let's git down to business now, and arrange about that Review."

The following days passed very quickly. There were many things the scouts had to do for the great event. The large field below the wharf was obtained, and here boards were brought for the grand-stand, which the captain was bound to have erected for the noted men who were coming. Stately elm, beech, and birch trees stood at the back and along the edge of the field, which would afford excellent shade should the day be hot. Flags, too, were gathered, and these were to be hung upon the grand-stand, while one big Union Jack was to surmount a pole from the top of the tallest tree.

There was other work for the boys as well. They were not yet second-class scouts, and the captain was most anxious that all should pass the examination before the Review

took place. He accordingly kept the troop busy, and Doctor Travis was most helpful in his lectures and in examining the boys. It was the day before the meeting when the captain proudly presented each scout with his second-class badge.

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"There, I'm thankful that's over," and he gave a deep sigh of relief. "Yez kin hold up yer heads now among the rest. I wish it was the first-class badge, though. Yez should have it by this time, and I guess ye would if we hadn't spent so much time in earnin' money."

The morning of the Review was clear and warm, and the scouts in full uniform were early on the grounds. The flags were all arranged, and everything was in readiness for the meeting. Word had passed throughout the parish that the Lieutenant-Governor was to be present, and all during the morning people kept coming, some by motor-boats, and others by teams. They brought their dinners with them, intending to make a holiday of it. Even Tom Dunker was there with his family. He had no use for Captain Josh or the scouts, but he did want to see the Lieutenant-Governor, and hear what he had to say.

When the *River Queen* at last appeared in sight, the wharf was black with people. As the steamer drew near and gave forth two raucous blasts, a band on board began to play the National Anthem. When this was ended, the scouts, crowding the bow, gave three cheers and a "tiger." Flags were flying fore and aft, and as the river was like a mirror, the *River Queen* presented a perfect picture of majestic gracefulness as if proud of the load she was carrying.

Captain Josh with his scouts kept guard at the outer edge of the wharf, and stood at attention as the various troops filed ashore. When at last the Lieutenant-Governor and several noted men came out, the boys gave the full salute, and then preceded them to the main highway where the other scouts were already lined up. Then down the road they all marched, the band going before, playing a lively air, the Governor, and others in carriages, followed by a long line of scouts, with the Hillcrest troop leading. It was a proud moment for Captain Josh, as he marched ahead of the procession. Drawn to his full height, and with his long beard sweeping his breast, he might have been taken for a great warrior of olden days leading his men into action.

After the troops had reached the grounds they disbanded, and then various games were begun. Baseball came first between two crack teams. Those not interested in this made for the shore, where, protected by thick trees, they were able to enjoy a good swim.

When the baseball match was over it was time for dinner. Soon the smoke of numerous fires rose above the trees near the shore where the scouts boiled water, cooked eggs and meat like old veterans. It was a scene of gay festivity, mingled with much laughter and fun. All kinds of mistakes were made, due to ignorance of cooking or the excitement of the moment. One patrol put their tea into their can with the cold water, and boiled all together. Some boys mixed their coffee with salt instead of sugar. But all mistakes and the bantering which followed, were taken in good part, for no one felt like getting angry, no matter what happened.

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The Hillcrest troop took no part in the games. They were content to stand by and watch. They knew nothing about baseball such as is played in the city, and were accordingly greatly interested, noting everything, and determined that they, too, would learn to play in the proper manner. But when it came to making a fire and preparing dinner, they easily led all the rest. Here they felt more at home, and were able to give considerable assistance to the less fortunate.

During the morning the Lieutenant-Governor, and the three who accompanied him, enjoyed themselves in their own way. They viewed the baseball game with much interest in the cool shade of a large tree, and then strolled to the shore to watch the scouts as they prepared their dinners. As they were seated upon a log, thinking it about time to go back to the steamer lying at the wharf where they were to have dinner, Captain Josh approached, and lifted his hat. He had disappeared shortly after the steamer's arrival, and no one knew what had become of him. The Governor at once rose to his feet, and held out his hand.

"You are Captain Britt, I believe," he began. "I have heard of you, and am very glad to meet you. We have been enquiring for you."

"Had other business on hand, sir," the captain replied, giving the Governor's hand a vigorous shake. "But I'm mighty glad to meet you."

"Allow me to introduce my friends," and the Governor turned to his three companions, "Senator Knobbs, Judge Sterling, and our Provincial Secretary, Mr. Laird."

"Glad to meet yez all," the captain exclaimed, as he gave the hand of each a hearty grip. "It isn't every day our parish is so honoured. Now, what about dinner? Yez must be hungry by this time."

"We are about to go back to the steamer," the secretary replied. "They have made ready for us there."

"Dinner on the steamer!" the captain cried in surprise. "Whoever heard of sich a thing at an outin' like this. Now, look here, I want yez to be my guests to-day, at a real out-of-doors meal. Yez kin eat on a steamer at any time. Will yez come? Everything is ready."

"But what about the dinner on the boat?" the Governor enquired.

"Oh, I'll send one of the scouts to tell them that ye're invited elsewhere. Will that do?"

"I shall be delighted to go with you, and I know that my friends will, too. It is very kind of you to ask us."



Calling to Rod, who was not far off, the captain sent him at once to the steamer. Then bidding the men to follow him, he left the shore, crossed the field, and entered the forest at the back of the grand-stand. Here a trail led off to the left, and after a few minutes' walk they came to a little brook gurgling down through the forest. Tall trees formed an arch over the water, birds twittered and sang, while a squirrel high up on a branch scolded noisily at the intruders. A few rods along the brook brought into view a grassy spot under the shade of a large maple tree. As the three strangers looked, their eyes opened wide with surprise, for there before them was a tempting repast spread upon a fair white linen cloth.

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"Sit down, gentlemen," the captain ordered, "while I make tea."

"This is great!" the Governor exclaimed, as he seated himself upon the ground, and leaned back against the bole of the tree.

"It certainly is," the Judge assented. "It reminds me of my boyhood days. This is good of you," and he turned to the captain, "to take all this trouble for us."

"It's only a pleasure, I assure yez," the captain returned. "Much nicer than the steamer, eh? Fall to, now. Ye'll find them trout rather good. Caught them myself in the brook. Betsey'll be right pleased if ye'll try her biscuit and pie. She was afraid they wouldn't be good. Have some tea, sir?" and he held the tea-pot over the Governor's cup. "Not too strong, eh? That's good. Ye'll find cream and sugar right there. Help yerselves, now, and don't be backward."

"Well, that's the best meal I've had in a long time," the Senator remarked, as he finished, and drew forth his cigar case and passed it around. "You didn't do all this yourself, did you, captain?"

"Should say not," was the reply. "Betsey, that's my woman, did the cookin', but Miss Royanna helped me fix things up here. It was her idea, not mine."

"Miss Royanna, did you say?" the Governor queried. "It seems to me I've heard that name before."

"Sure ye have. She's the great singer. Anna Royanna, she's generally called. She's livin' with us fer awhile. Greatest woman out."

"Strange," the Governor mused. Then he shot a swift glance toward the secretary, but that young man was staring hard at the captain.

"There is certainly some tone to all this," and the Judge gave a hearty laugh. "We little expected to have our dinner served by such a noted person, and to be waited upon by a worthy sea-captain, did we, sir?" and he turned toward the Governor.

But the latter had risen to his feet, as if suddenly aroused by some pressing engagement.

"Come," he ordered, "let's get back. It's time for the Review to begin. The scouts will be getting impatient."

It took them but a few minutes to return to the grand-stand where Parson Dan was waiting to receive them. He and the Governor were old friends, and hearty was the greeting between the two. Then the call was sounded, summoning the scouts. Soon they were lined up according to troops before the stand, where the officials were already

seated, with the clergyman by their side. They invited Captain Josh to a seat on the platform, but he refused, saying that he preferred to remain with his boys.

After the band had played a couple of inspiring national airs, the speeches began. They were not long, but full of interest, dealing with the scout movement. The Senator spoke first, and was followed by the Judge. Parson Dan was asked to say a few words, but he declined, saying that the boys wanted to hear the Governor, and not a prosy old parson.

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When the Governor at last arose, he was greeted with great cheers. All the people had crowded as close as possible, so as not to miss a word of the address of the prominent man who had come into their midst. Near the platform stood Anna Royanna. The speeches mattered very little to her, for it was Rod's face she was watching. She noted the eager interested look in his eyes, and his erect bearing as he stood at attention at the head of his patrol. How few the Hillcrest scouts were compared with the others, and a slight smile lightened the woman's face as she thought of the surprise which perhaps was in store for them.

The Governor at first complimented the scouts upon their neat smart appearance, and what an excellent thing the movement was. He then referred to the prize which had been offered a year before, and that the time had at last arrived when it was to be awarded. At these words the assembled troops stood straighter than ever, eager and intense to hear the name of the successful troop.

"I have the list before me," the Governor continued, as he arranged his eye-glasses, "and I consider it a very creditable one indeed, showing most plainly how active the scouts have been. The committee has gone most carefully over the reports received, and has examined the bank-books accompanying them. I wish that I had time to read to you the many and ingenious ways in which the different troops have raised their money, and I sincerely wish that all could win the prize. According to this list there is one troop which leads all the others, having earned the sum of two hundred and fifty dollars. The account of how this was raised is splendid, and by the rules laid down, that troop has won the prize."

Here the Governor paused, and a breathless stillness reigned as all waited to hear the name of the fortunate troop.

"I understand, however," the speaker slowly continued, "that there is only one troop present which did not send in a report of its doings during the last year. This, perhaps, seems strange to you, and I have good reason to ask the scout-master of that troop to step forward and give some explanation. I would really do so if I did not have the full information myself, and before presenting the prize, I am going to tell you something about that troop."

Then in a few words he told what the delinquent troop had done; how they had raised almost four hundred dollars, and how they had done it. He next told about the sick girl, and that the scouts of this troop had freely given every cent of the money they had earned to send her to a specialist in New York. There was a strong note of pathos in the Governor's voice as he mentioned the sick girl and the act of loving sacrifice on the part of the troop. He was a master of speech, and his words thrilled the hearts of his listeners.

“You now know,” he said in conclusion, “why that troop has made no report. The prize was within their grasp. They had to decide between it and the life of a sick girl. They chose the nobler course, and so they are not the winners to-day. I wanted you to know this before we go any further. I shall now proceed to present the flag, and I ask troop number seven to step forward.”

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At once thirty scouts advanced, gave the full salute, and stood at attention. When the Governor stepped to the front of the platform and held forth the written order for the bugle band, the scoutmaster refused to take it.

"We cannot accept it, sir," he simply said. "It doesn't belong to us, but to that troop which did so much for the sick girl."

The Governor was about to reply, when he was checked by an outburst of wild enthusiastic cheers. The scouts could restrain themselves no longer. With the greatest difficulty they had remained silent as the Governor told about what had been done for an invalid girl. But now this generous act on the part of troop seven following immediately after, was more than they could stand. They cheered at the top of their voices, and threw their hats high into the air. It was some time before order could be restored, for all were talking at once, notwithstanding the frantic efforts of the scoutmasters to restrain them.

"Do you really wish to give up all claim to the prize?" the Governor asked troop seven, as soon as he could get a hearing.

"We do," came as one from the thirty boys. "We cannot accept it."

"Is that the wish of the other troops?" the Governor asked.

The only answer was another outburst of cheering, if anything, more vehement than before. Scarcely had they finished, when Captain Josh strode rapidly forward, and confronted the Governor.

"We can't allow it," he shouted. "It's not right." He could say no more, for another deafening uproar forbade further speech.

"It is no use for you to refuse, captain," the Governor told him, when peace was once more restored. "The troops won't let you speak. Bring your scouts up here."

For a few seconds the captain hesitated. Then he wheeled, and ordered his troop to advance. Reaching the platform, the men there shook hands with each one of them. No one could say a word, for again the troops had let loose. The band struck up the air of "For They Are Jolly Good Fellows," and soon the assembled troops were singing the words for all they were worth.

To Rod the whole thing seemed like some wonderful dream. He could not remember anything the Governor said after that. He only heard the captain giving the order for them to leave the stand. When they were dismissed, they were surrounded by such a crowd anxious to shake hands with them that the boys, and even the captain, were more bewildered than ever. Rod was finally rescued by Anna Royanna, who placed her arm about his shoulder and led him away. This loving act, and the look of pride in her

eyes, spoke louder than many words. That she was pleased was to him a greater reward than all the wild cheering of the scouts.

CHAPTER XXX

THE NIGHT RUN

It took the Hillcrest troop a long time to get settled down after the excitement of the Review. Whenever they met at Headquarters they could do nothing but discuss everything that had taken place. For awhile they were greatly puzzled as to how the Lieutenant-Governor had learned so much about them. At last it leaked out that Anna Royanna had supplied the information.

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"I hope you do not mind," she said to the captain, when he asked her point blank if the rumour was true.

"No, not at all," was the reply. "But I wish to goodness ye'd given us a little warnin'. It was as great a surprise as when that bear charged me up the brook. I wasn't expectin' it."

"Oh, I hope it was not as bad as that," was the laughing response, for the singer had heard all about the adventure with the bear.

"Not hardly as bad, Miss. But the scouts are all upset. When not playin' baseball, they are talkin' about what happened at the Review, till I'm almost discouraged."

"It's only natural, captain. They'll get over their excitement in time. I could not resist the temptation of writing to the Lieutenant-Governor. It would have been a shame for your boys not to have received credit for what they did, and I feel sure that all the other scouts present at the Review were helped by the story of their noble deed. I have just had a nice long letter from Whyn, and she is delighted with what the scouts have accomplished. She sends her good wishes to the boys, and thanks them over and over again for their kindness to her."

"How's she gittin' along?" the captain enquired. "It's been a week since we've had a letter from her."

"She is doing nicely, so she says, and the doctor thinks she will be able to come home for Christmas."

"Will she be well then?"

"It seems so. The operation was pronounced a decided success, though it will take some time yet for her to get strong."

"She's the finest girl that ever drew breath," and the captain turned away his face so as not to show the mistiness which had suddenly dimmed his eyes. "She's a plucky one, sure."

Three weeks after the Review Anna Royanna left Hillcrest. This was a great grief not only to the scouts but to the Royals as well. But the promise that she would visit them at Christmas if she could possibly arrange it, gave them some comfort. This bright sympathetic woman had entered so much into their lives, and had shared their joys and sorrows as one of themselves, that when she was gone they felt depressed for days.

With the passing of summer came the fall, with long cold nights, and heavy winds. The scouts found it pleasant to meet in their snug room around the genial fire. Gradually

they began to settle down to the work for the first-class tests, and also to review what they had already learned.

“Yez must never imagine that ye know a thing thoroughly,” the captain reminded them. “Fer instance, there is yer signallin’. Ye should be able to make each letter without thinkin’ how it is to be made. And I want yez to practise up the Morse system, as well as the Semaphore. It’ll come in mighty handy at night, when ye can’t use the flags. Yez kin never know too much.”

The scouts found great pleasure in carrying out the captain’s suggestion. By means of bull’s-eye lanterns they were soon able to send and receive messages at night in a most creditable manner. For a while the neighbours were startled by this performance until they learned the cause of the flashes through the darkness.

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The scouts had been at their room one bleak raw night, and had just left, except Rod, who had gone with the captain into the Anchorage for a parcel Mrs. Britt wished to send to the rectory. He had been there only a few minutes when several loud thumps sounded upon the door. Quickly opening it, the captain was surprised to see Tom Dunker standing before him. This was something most unusual, for since his defeat several years ago Tom had shunned both the captain and the Anchorage as if they were plague-infested.

Stepping quickly into the kitchen, the visitor stood there with face white and haggard, and his whole body trembling.

"What's wrong, Tom?" the captain asked. "Ye look most scared to death."

"S-S-Sammy's hurt," was the gasping reply. "He f-fell and broke his l-leg, and I'm afraid his n-neck, too."

"Why don't ye go fer the doctor, then?" the captain queried.

"I c-can't. He's over the r-river, down at Marshal's. He was sent fer to-day. Oh, my poor Sammy!" and the distressed man gave a loud wail of despair.

"What d'ye want me to do, man?" the captain demanded.

"Go fer the doctor. I c-can't git anybody else."

"H'm, is that so? I thought it must be something pretty desperate which would send ye to me."

"So ye won't go?" and Tom raised his eyes appealingly to the captain's face. "Fer God's sake, do, or my Sammy'll die."

"Certainly I'll go, Tom, jist as soon as I git ready. You call at the rectory on yer way back, and tell the Royals that Rod won't be home to-night, fer I must have him with me. It'll take two to handle the *Roarin' Bess*. I know they won't mind so long's the boy's with me."

"It's good of ye, and I shan't soon——"

"There, keep that fer some other time, Tom Dunker," the captain interrupted. "I can't be bothered with sich nonsense now. Where's my oil-skins, Betsey?" and he turned to his wife. "Better let Rod have that old suit of mine; he might need it before we git back."

Rod was delighted with the idea of a run on the river on such a night. He had often imagined what it would be like to be out there in the *Roaring Bess* with a strong wind blowing. To him, fear was unknown when on the water, especially when the captain

was along. And so as the yacht left her mooring, and headed down-stream, he sat in the cock-pit and peered ahead into the darkness, pleased that he was on watch to give warning of any approaching vessel.

A strong wind was racing in from the east, giving the captain a busy time in handling the boat. This was still more difficult when they reached the channel, and the *Roaring Bess* drove into the rougher water which is always found there. The white-caps leaped high, and drenched both man and boy.

“Lucky we brought our oil-skins,” the captain remarked. “We’ll have to beat back, and then there’ll be some fun. I wonder if the doctor is a good sailor. My, that was a whopper!” he exclaimed, as a larger wave than usual struck the yacht. “Guess it’ll be rougher before mornin’.”

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"This is great!" Rod cried, as another wave leaped upon them.

"Tut, that's nothin'," the captain replied. "If ye'd been with me aboard the *Flyin' Queen* when we struck a gale, ye'd know something about big seas then. Why, this is only a mill-pond."

"I'm going to see a gale some day, captain. I want to go out on the ocean in a storm."

"Ye do, eh? If ye go, I guess it'll be aboard a liner, where ye'll be penned up like a rat in a trap. That's the way people travel these days, 'in luxury,' they call it. But give me my old *Flyin' Queen*, a strong breeze abeam, and ye kin have all yer iron or steel tubs as fer as I'm concerned."

The *Roaring Bess* had made good time down the river, lifting and swinging forward with long plunging leaps as if glad of the freedom she was enjoying. Ere long the wharf was reached for which the captain had been heading, and in a few moments she was lying in smooth water on the lower side, safe from the wind.

"You stay here, lad," the captain ordered, as he sprang ashore, and made a line fast to the nearest post. "I'll run up fer the doctor."

It took him but a short time to cross the field to Marshall house. Here he found Doctor Travis, and briefly stated the object of his visit.

"It's a terrible night, isn't it?" the doctor enquired.

"Oh, no. Jist a gentle breeze."

"But look at your oil-skins. You've been drenched from head to foot."

"Well, what of it? A little water won't hurt anybody. The more the better, is my motto."

"Very well, then, I'll go," and the doctor reached for his big coat and hat. Then he seized his grip, and followed the captain down to the wharf.

"You sit there in the middle," the captain ordered, as they reached the boat, "and keep yer head low in case the boom should take a sudden yank over. Ye won't git so wet there, either."

The wind on the homeward run was almost dead ahead, and it was necessary to beat from side to side of the channel. But the captain knew every inch of the way, and he was almost as much at home here at night as in the day. Up and up they steadily crept, while the *Roaring Bess* raced from side to side, tossing volumes of water at every plunge. Rod was alert and active as a cat now, crouching close to the captain, ready to obey his slightest command. How the boy did enjoy it, and his whole body thrilled with

the excitement of the wild run. The more the yacht reeled, the greater his pleasure. But the doctor had far different feelings. He liked the water, but not on such a night as this. He was sure that the boat was going over every time a furious gust struck her close-hauled sail, and he always gave a sigh of relief when she righted herself again, with no more damage than some extra water tossed on board.

They were opposite the head of the island now, and had just tacked for their "short-leg" run, when, without the slightest sign of warning, something struck the mast a terrific blow. The yacht reeled wildly, the mast snapped like a pipe-stem, and fell with a splash into the water, carrying sail and all with it.

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The instant the blow came Rod sprang to his feet, and as he did so a part of the rigging caught him, and swept him overboard. With a wild cry for help, he tried to grasp something, but he could find nothing upon which to place his fingers. The cold waters closed around him. He tried to swim, to keep afloat, but the oil-skin suit hindered him. He battled with the desperation of despair. It was a terrible fight he made for life there in that inky blackness, with the water surging about him, and trying to win him for its victim. It seemed that he had been struggling for a long time, and could resist no longer. His strength was going, and he had little power for any further effort.

Just at this critical moment a firm strong hand clutched him like a vise, and he knew that the captain had come to his rescue. This roused him to new hope and energy.

"Keep cool, now," the captain cried. "I've got hold of the riggin' here."

All this had happened so suddenly that for a few seconds the doctor was dazed. He could see nothing, but he knew by the cry of the boy, and the startled roar from the captain, that something was seriously wrong. Then he heard the splash as the latter went over the side. In dismay, he waited, peering through the darkness in an effort to find out what had become of his companions. It seemed like an age that he stood there until he heard the captain's voice bidding him to give a hand, and pull him in. He sprang at once to the side of the yacht, leaned far over, and stretched out his right arm. But he could touch nothing.

"Where are you?" he shouted. "I can't reach you."

"Out here," was the reply. "Try ag'in."

Leaning farther out now upon the overturned mast, he tried once more, and had the satisfaction of feeling the sudden grip of the captain's fingers as they closed upon his own. Carefully and with much difficulty, for the strain was heavy, he was able to draw the submerged man toward him.

"Here, take the boy," the captain gasped. "Never mind me."

With his left hand the doctor clutched Rod's oil-skins, and was soon able to drag him into the yacht. This had scarcely been accomplished before the captain pulled himself aboard, and stood by his side. Forgotten was everything else as the old seaman bent over Rod as he lay in the bottom of the cock-pit.

"I believe he's unconscious, Doc," he cried. "Is there anything ye kin do fer him?"

"We must get his wet clothes off at once," was the reply. "I'll wrap him up in my great-coat."

“I’ve a couple of blankets in the locker there,” and the captain turned around, and began to fumble with his hands for the latch of the little door. “Ye’d better strip him, Doc.”

It took the latter only a few minutes to get the soaked clothes off the unconscious boy. He then wrapped him up securely in the two blankets, and laid him in a sheltered place in the cock-pit.

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"Good Lord, what will the Royals say!" the captain groaned. "Here we are adrift and can't lift a hand to help ourselves. I wonder what struck us, anyway."

"It was something big," the doctor replied. "I heard the water striking against it as we drifted off. It is over in that direction," and he pointed to the right. "Listen, you can hear it now. It's adrift, and following us."

"I wonder what it kin be," the captain mused. "I can't imagine what would rip away the mast before strikin' the yacht. It is certainly very queer."

"Is there any chance of our drifting ashore, do you think?" the doctor asked. "It will be hard on that boy if we are forced to stay here all night."

"There's a strong current runnin'," the captain returned, "and it's likely to hold us in its clutch fer some time. The tide won't change fer over an hour, and it's hard to tell where we'll be by that time. Hello, what light's that up yonder?"

As the doctor looked he saw a bright glare in the distance, which was becoming brighter every minute.

"It's coming toward us, anyway," was his comment. "What can it be!"

The captain made no reply for awhile, but stood very still, with his eyes fixed upon the approaching light.

"I've got it!" he exclaimed. "It's that big tug which went up this afternoon. She's lost one of her scows in this gale, and is now lookin' fer it with her search-light out. It was the scow we struck. I understand it all now. We ran right in front of it, and its big flare of a bow caught our mast. Confound Bill Tobin! Why didn't he take care of his scow?"

Tide, wind, and steam soon brought the tug near. Her search-light swept the water in every direction, at times dazzling the eyes of the two men in the yacht. At last it remained fixed full upon them, showing that they were observed. In a few minutes the tug was alongside.

"Hello, what's wrong?" came a deep gruff voice from the wheel-house.

"What's wrong with you, Bill Tobin?" Captain Josh asked in reply. "Ye've got us in a nice fix to-night. Why didn't ye take care of yer old scow? She's smashed us, that's what's wrong."

"Oh, is that you, Josh Britt?" and Captain Tobin's voice suddenly changed. "Climb on board, and we'll try to straighten matters out."

Without more words, Captain Josh lifted Rod tenderly in his arms and scrambled up into the tug.

“For heaven’s sake! what have ye got there?” Captain Tobin exclaimed.

“Parson Dan’s son, that’s who it is. Got a bed ready?”

“Bring him here,” and Captain Tobin turned to his right. “Put him in my bed; he’ll be all right there.”

By this time the tug-boatmen had made fast to the *Roaring Bess* with a long rope, and kept her in tow as the tug was swung around and headed for the drifting scow.

“We’ll just run that confounded scow into the lee of the island,” Captain Tobin told the ship-wrecked men, “and then we’ll put you ashore as fast as this old tub can travel. Will that do?”

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"I s'pose so," Captain Josh replied. "But git a big hustle on. Ye've got something more important than a scow to save to-night."

CHAPTER XXXI

BETTER THAN A FAIRY TALE

News of the accident on the river soon spread throughout the parish. For a time various kinds of reports were in circulation, until it was learned that Rod was the only one who had received any injury. It was told how Captain Josh had carried him up to the rectory, while the doctor went ahead to tell the Royals what had happened.

While the neighbours talked, Rod was lying in his little bed in the grip of a raging fever. He knew nothing of what was going on around him, nor how anxious ones watched him night and day. It was Miss Arabella who came to Mrs. Royal's assistance in this time of need to help with the household affairs. Her tongue had lost none of its sharpness for those she disliked, but for her friends she was most loyal. She would have done almost anything for Rod, and she was not slow in expressing her opinion of Tom Dunker and "his whole tribe" for causing so much trouble.

Captain Josh almost camped in the rectory kitchen. When not there, he was wandering about the door-yard right in front of Rod's window. He ate and slept at the Anchorage, but that was about all.

"It's my fault that the boy is sick," he told his wife, "and it's up to me to be on hand in case of need. Jimmy kin look after things around here while I'm away."

Numerous were the visitors who came to the rectory to enquire about the sick boy. Tom Dunker was one of them, and he found the captain on guard at the back-door.

"How's Rod to-day, cap'n?" he asked.

"No better," was the gruff reply. "Had a bad night."

"I'm real sorry, cap'n, I surely am," Tom blubbered. "To think that he did it all fer my Sammy."

"How is yer kid?" the captain questioned.

"He's better, thank the Lord. The doctor got there jist in time. But fer you and Rod he'd be dead now."

"Cut that out, Tom. I'm not used to sich stuff."

"But I can't help it, cap'n," the visitor sniffled. "I can't sleep at nights fer thinkin' of it all. I shan't fergit it in a hurry, oh, no."

"Big fool," the captain muttered to himself as he watched Tom shuffle away. "It takes a mighty hard blow to knock any sense into a head sich as his."

As the days passed, Rod became more restless, and kept calling for Anna Royanna. It was hard for the anxious watchers to listen to his piteous pleadings. The doctor's face grew grave during one of his frequent visits as he watched the raving boy.

"Do you suppose she'd come?" he asked Parson Dan, who had followed him into the room.

"Would it do any good, doctor?"

"It might. One can never tell. Anyway, I think that Miss Royanna should be told how sick he is. She is very fond of the boy. You should send word to his mother as well."



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"You're right, doctor," the clergyman replied.

"I shall send two messages at once."

In less than two days Anna Royanna entered the room where Rod was lying. She had been driven from the station by a fast team. Her face was pale and worn, clearly showing that little or no sleep had come to her eyes the night before. In fact, she had not slept since she had received Parson Dan's message. Everything else was forgotten. Only one thing mattered to her, and that was the boy lying sick unto death in far-off Hillcrest.

Rod had been more restless than ever during the night, and the fever was at its highest. All realised that this was the crisis, and that a short time would decide everything. He was still calling and raving as the singer entered the room. Stepping quickly to his side, she placed her hand upon his hot forehead.

"Hush," she soothed. "I am here. It is Anna Royanna."

That touch, more than the words, seemed to have a magic effect. The parched burning lips ceased to move, the staring eyes closed, and with a deep sigh Rod turned his head on the pillow, and sank into a peaceful sleep. Lovingly, and with eyes brimming with tears, the woman stood for some time and watched the boy. Then a light step aroused her. It was the doctor.

"The turn has come," he whispered. "You were just in time."

Rod rapidly recovered, and there was joy not only at the rectory but throughout the entire parish. Captain Josh was almost beside himself with joy, while the scouts plucked up sufficient courage to meet at Headquarters to talk about the accident, and their patrol-leader's illness.

It was a great day for Rod when he was able to sit up and receive visitors. Captain Josh had been often in the room, but so far the scouts had not been allowed to come. When at last they were given permission to visit the invalid, they could not get to the rectory fast enough. They were surprised to see Rod so thin and white, and when they left after their brief visit, they hurried back to Headquarters for another long talk.

Rod was never so happy as when Anna Royanna was with him. Many were the stories she told, and she would often read to him. She seemed to be in no hurry about going away, and this pleased the boy, as he wanted her to stay until after Christmas. They were to have a big time on Christmas Day, so he told her. Captain Josh and the scouts were coming for dinner, and perhaps Whyn would be home.

One day Rod noticed that Mr. and Mrs. Royal seemed happier than usual when they came into his room. Though no parents could have been kinder than they ever were to

him, yet now there appeared a marked difference. He could not explain what it was, but at times he found them both watching him with a new expression in their eyes. He even caught Mrs. Royal brushing away a tear, which surprised him.

“What makes you cry, grandma?” he asked.

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"Oh, several things, dear," was the reply. "People sometimes cry when they are very happy, you know."

"I understand, grandma. You are happy because I am getting well."

That evening after Rod was snugly tucked in bed, Miss Royanna came and sat down by his side. She had a book in her hand and she was going to read to him as was her custom now.

"Tell me a story, please," Rod begged. "I like that better, and your stories are so interesting."

"What kind do you want to-night?" the woman asked, as she looked into the bright eyes before her.

"Oh, anything. You always know best."

For awhile Anna Royanna remained silent, to all outward appearance very calm. But she was greatly agitated. She knew that the moment had arrived of which she had dreamed for years. Would it make any change in him? she wondered. Would he feel the same toward her?

"What are you thinking about?" Rod questioned.

"About what I am going to tell you," and the woman gave a slight laugh. "It's the most wonderful story you ever heard."

"Better than a fairy tale?"

"You can judge that for yourself when you hear it."

"All right, then. Go ahead."

"The beginning of this story goes back quite a number of years," the woman began. "There was a young man who went away from home, and left his father and mother alone. They missed him very much, for he was their only child. He was a handsome man, and all who saw him admired him. After awhile he met a woman who loved him dearly. They were married, and lived so happily together in a little cottage with trees all around it. They didn't have much money, but they had each other, and that meant so much to them. At last a little stranger came to their home, a dear baby boy, and then their cup of joy was full. He was so sweet and cunning, and they were never tired of watching him grow. Then something terrible happened. The father of the baby was suddenly killed."

“Oh!” It was all Rod could say, as with eyes full of sorrow he fixed them upon the face of the story-teller.

“Yes, he was killed,” the woman continued in a low voice, while with a great effort she restrained her feelings. “It was in a railway accident. His wife was thus left alone. She was a stranger and without money, and for days she wandered about trying to get work. But no one wanted a woman with a baby. She was told to put it either in the Poor-House, or the Orphan Home, or let somebody adopt it. If she did this, she knew that she would have to give up her darling forever, and this she could not do.

“At last, in despair, she worked her way back to her husband’s old home. It was a dark cold night when she reached the house, and there she left the baby, and hurried away as fast as she could.”

“Why didn’t she stay there?” Rod enquired. “Wouldn’t they have been glad to take her in? I know I should.”

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"Yes, dear, they certainly would. But this woman did not know them then, and she was very independent. She made up her mind that she would work hard, and when she had enough money she would go to see her boy."

"And did she?" was the eager enquiry.

"Not for years did she see him again. She worked so hard, and at times people treated her most cruelly. But her little boy was ever in her mind. For him she toiled, and for his sake she was willing to put up with almost anything. She sent what money she could for his support, but that was very little at first. Then one night she saw her boy! It was in a city, and she knew who he was, though he didn't know her. Oh, how she wanted to put her arms around him, and kiss him."

"Why didn't she do it?" Rod asked. "What stopped her?"

"She was afraid that he wouldn't love her as a boy should love his mother. So she made up her mind that she would win his love first, and when she was certain, then she would tell him who she was."

"And did she?"

"Not for some time. You see, she went under a name different from her real one. She saw her husband's father and mother, and became well acquainted with them. But she did not tell them who she was, as she wanted them to love her too. Then, there was something else which kept her from telling people who she really was. She made her living——" Here she paused, as if uncertain how to proceed.

"How?" Rod enquired.

"By going on the stage."

"Oh, she was an actress, then," the boy exclaimed. "I have read about such people."

"No, not exactly that. But she sang on the stage."

"Oh!"

"What's the matter, dear?" the woman enquired.

"Nothing much. Only something funny came into my mind. That's all."

"Yes, she sang in public," the story-teller continued, "and she had made an agreement to sing for three years. She was afraid that if people knew that she was going under a wrong name it might make trouble. Anyway, she was sure it would make a whole lot of talk, and she didn't want that to happen for awhile. It was one night after she was

through singing that she met her little boy. He came with another boy to see her, and asked her to go and sing for a sick girl at Hillcrest."

With a startled cry of joy, Rod sat up suddenly in bed. His eyes fairly blazed with excitement, and his body trembled.

"Are you the woman?" he cried. "Am I the boy? Are you my mother? Oh, tell me quick. Is it really true?"

"Yes, dear," and the woman caught both of his hands in hers, "every word is true. You are my own boy, and I am your mother. Are you glad?"

The expression upon Rod's face, as with a deep sigh of relief he lay back once more upon the pillow, was answer enough. All the old dread that the other mother would come back and carry him off suddenly disappeared. And yet he wondered about the letters she used to write. A puzzled look came into his eyes.

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"What is it?" his mother asked. "Are you sorry?"

"Oh, no. But I was wondering about that other woman who used to write to me, who said she was my mother."

"It was I who wrote those letters, dear. I had to, you see."

"And you are not Anna Royanna, after all?"

"No. My real name is Anna Royal. I only changed part of the last name to Royanna."

"Why, it's just like a fairy tale," Rod exclaimed. "But, no, it isn't, either," he mused. "A fairy tale is only a make-believe, while this is really true. It's better than a fairy tale. Isn't it great!" and his eyes sparkled. "But, say, do grandad and grandma know about it?"

"Yes, dear. I told them last night."

"And I bet they were pleased."

"Indeed they were. I wish you could have seen their faces when I told them that you are Alec's boy, and their own real grandson."

For a few minutes there was silence, Rod thinking of all that he had heard, and his mother recalling the night before, when she had revealed to Mr. and Mrs. Royal the story of her life. Never should she forget the look of intense joy which came into their eyes, nor the sweet peace which possessed her heart as they enfolded her in their arms, kissed her, and called her "daughter." It had seemed almost too good to be true. She was roused by Rod's voice.

"May I tell Captain Josh?" he asked. "It would be great for him to know."

"We talked that over last night, dear," was the reply. "Christmas will soon be here, and you are to have a party on that day. How would it do to wait until then?"

"Oh, that'll be great! Captain Josh, and the scouts will be here."

"Yes, and Whyn will be back by that time, so I understand, and we can arrange for her and her mother to come up from the city. Will that do?"

"Won't it be great!" and Rod fairly shook with delight.

"It certainly will. We shall all go to the service on Christmas morning, and your grandfather wants to offer up special thanks for all the blessings we have received. We shall then come home for dinner, and have all the afternoon and evening for games."

When Captain Josh came to see Rod the next day, he noticed the happy expression upon the boy's face.

"What's up, lad?" he asked.

"What do you mean, captain?"

"Oh, I hardly know," and the old man scratched his head in perplexity. "But everybody in this house seems about ready to explode with excitement. I never saw sich a happy bunch in all my life. Ye'd think that summer had been suddenly dumped down here, with all the birds singin', the bees hummin', and the flowers bloomin'. That's the only way I kin describe it."

"I guess you're about right, captain," was Rod's brief reply, for he was determined not to give away the wonderful secret.