THE GALLANT YALE WENT LEAPING OVER THE FOAMY WAVES LIKE A GRAYHOUND OVER THE DEER.
CHAPTER I.

AN EARLY START.

Brad Buckhart was snoring when a knock upon the door awoke Dick. It was pitch-dark, yet Merriwell knew some one had entered the room. He sat up at once, saying:

"Is that you, Art?"

"Sure thing," answered a dimly seen figure. "Time to turn out. Wake that Texas tornado, please."

Dick gave Brad a thrust with his foot.

"Whoa-o, consarn ye—Whoa-o!" mumbled the Texan. "I'll teach you to buck! I'll give you the spurs. Steady now! Whoa!"

Arthur Kent laughed softly.

"Thinks he's riding a bucking broncho, evidently. He seems to be a good sleeper."

"He's the champion," said Dick, jumping out of bed and turning to wake his chum.

"Woof!" exploded the Texan, rearing up. "What's the matter? Critters on the stampede again?"

"Time to get up and stir yourself if you're going fishing this morning, Brad," said Dick.

"Fishing!" grunted Buckhart. "Where? When? How? Just dreaming I was on a drive. What in the name of old Sam Houston do you mean by waking me up in the middle of the night this fashion?"

"Kent says it's near morning."

"Darkest hour before dawn, you know," put in Arthur Kent.

"Who's that?" growled the Texan. "Who's in our room, pard? and what's the galoot doing here? No baseball to-day, is there?"

"Not to-day," chuckled Dick. "We're not in New Haven, Buckhart; we're down at Kent's Castle Rock bungalow. Shake the fog out of your head and get up. Where are those matches?"

"I have one," said Kent, striking a match and lighting a lamp.

The light revealed Buckhart sitting up in bed and rubbing his eyes when he was not staring around in a bewildered manner. Already Dick was disappearing through a door which led to the bathroom.

Arthur Kent, a youth of twenty-two or three dressed in a woolen shirt and rough, serviceable trousers, laughed at the befogged appearance of the Texan. Kent was a healthy, clean-looking youngster, with a pleasant face.

"Judging by your snores and snorts, Buckhart,"
he said, “I think it was a nightmare instead of a broncho you were mounted upon.”

“Great horn spoon!” mumbled Brad; “I sure opin I’m some mixed. Hello, Kent, is that you? Thunder and Mars! but I do put in the licks when I sleep! It takes me some time to get my blinkers open. Now there’s my pard, he can wake up quicker than a catamount can wink its eye. I sure never saw anything just like him. One minute he’s dead to the world, and the next minute he’s wide awake. Hear him slopping cold wet water onto himself now. Brrrr! Close the window, won’t you, Kent, old chap? I don’t mind cold air, but this atmosphere is a whole lot damp, and it gets into a man’s bones.”

Kent put down the window, which had been wide open.

“Come, come,” he urged. “You know we want to beat Leon Spofford to the fishing grounds this morning. He told us last night that he’d be there first.”

“And so you’re turning out directly after midnight, are you?” mumbled Brad, as he dragged himself out of bed.

“It’s ten minutes past three,” said Kent, “and it will come daylight in a hurry. Take your cue from Dick. Here he is ready to get into his clothes now. Stir up, stir up.”

After a quick shower and a brisk rub, Merriswell came leaping back into the room, fresh as a frisky colt. He began dressing rapidly.

“Ow-w—wow!” groaned Brad. “I guess I’ll cut out the moisture. No bath for me. A little aqua on my face will have to suffice.”

“You’ll feel better if you take a quick shower,” said Dick. “It will wake you up. Come, Buckhart—come to life. Go on now, and get your shower. It will be only a minute or two, and you’ll feel a hundred per cent better.”

“Oh, all right,” said Brad resignedly. “Just as you order, pard. I know I’ll feel better, but when it comes to cold water on my delicate, sensitive person, there are mornings upon which I am a dog-gone coward. Not that I object to cleanliness, gents; but out on the ranch water is sometimes a whole lot scarce and precious, and a man has to stagger along for a protracted period without indulging in the luxury of a real bath.”

“Only an Englishman takes a cold bath to keep clean,” said Dick. “An American takes it for the vin, ginger, and good health there is in it; and he uses plenty of soap and warm water for cleansing purposes.”

A moment later the hissing sound of the shower came from the bathroom, accompanied by doleful, shuddering groans and cries, which told that Buckhart was apparently suffering intensely. And yet the Texan was one who could face and endure all sorts of deprivation, distress, and torture without a murmur, even with a smile. Knowing him as he did, Dick was aware that much of Brad’s distress on this occasion was assumed.

“Hey!” roared the son of the Lone Star State directly; “where are the towels? Think I’m an owl? Think I can see in the dark? Gimme a light! Gimme a towel! Gimme a towel before I congeal and turn to a pillar of ice! Oh, I’ve got one. Wool!”

“He will have every one in the bungalow wide awake if he keeps up that roaring,” said Kent. “If he wakes the governor at this hour he’ll be pretty sure to hear something about it later on.”

“Stop your racket, Buckhart,” requested Dick. “We’re not the only people in this ranch. Have a little consideration for others, who may want to sleep.”

This silenced the Texan. He soon appeared and began dressing.

“This yere business is what makes fishing a whole lot disagreeable,” he observed, savagely plunging into his clothes. “In order to hook a few finny denizens of the deep you’ve got to crawl out of the hay at an unearthly hour, and suffer all sorts of inconveniences. It’s not all it’s cracked up to be. You hear me softly wrabble!”

“Why,” said Kent, “if I’d known you felt this way about it, I wouldn’t have——”

“Don’t take him in earnest, old chap,” interrupted Dick quickly. “He always growsl that way for the sake of hearing himself talk. If we had proposed going fishing without him—if we’d suggested leaving him behind, he would have been the maddest man this side of the Panhandle country.”

Brad grinned over his undershirt.

“You bet your boots!” he confirmed. “If there’s anything doing, yours truly, Bradley Buckhart, Esq., proposes to have a thumb in the mess. Don’t you take me so serious, Kent. If you’ve got to swallow my hot air, just take it with a pinch of salt. Maybe that figure of speech sounds somewhat grotesque, but I opine you grasp my meaning. Where are my breeches?”

“Trousers, Brad—trousers,” laughed Dick. “Don’t use that vulgar word.”

“If you keep on, pard,” growled the Texan, “you’ll have my language pared down and refined to the ex-
trême point of delicacy. There are times now that I don’t know my own language when I hear it. I’m sure getting conventional and refined in my general conversation.”

“You’re the biggest sort of a bluff I ever struck,” smiled Dick. “Your style of talk is a bluff from start to finish, for you know the average Texan doesn’t talk that way, and——”

“But the average Easterner thinks he does, and I mortally hate to disappoint people,” laughed Buckhart. “I’ve kept it up so long now that it’s become second nature to me. Yet on occasions, having mingled a whole lot freely with New Englanders, I can reel it off in a fashion that would deceive a stranger into thinking I hailed from Boston. I can even say baath and watter and co’t and bo’t. The Yanks do bear down on the broad a sometimes, and ignore the letter r most disgracefully. Then again, they forget there’s such a letter as in the alphabet, and they poke an r into all sorts of places where it doesn’t belong. I beg your pardon, Kent. If my remarks seem somewhat in bad taste, blame Merriwell for introducing the subject. Where are my shoes? I’ll be with you as soon as I can get into ‘em.”

“Not those, Brad,” said Dick, as the Texan produced a pair of leather laced boots. “You brought along a pair of rubber-bottomed canvas shoes for wear on the water.”

“So I did,” said Brad, returning the leather shoes to the closet and fishing out the canvas ones. “Here they are. Now I’m with you.”

“Take your heavy coats, fellows,” said Kent. “You’ll need them until the sun gets up. If you’re ready, come on.”

He took up the lamp and led the way to the back door. The lamp was blown out in the kitchen, and Kent burdened himself with a huge wicker hamper, of which, however, he was relieved by Merriwell, which enabled him without inconvenience to lock the door behind them.

“What’s in the basket?” asked Buckhart. “Fishing tackle?”

“No,” replied Kent. “All the fishing tackle and bait we need is on board the Yale. The hamper contains grub, which I had the cook put up for us last night. We’ll be as hungry as bears, for there’s nothing like salt water to give a man an appetite.”

“I sure reckon that’s right,” said Brad, “for I’ve got mine with me now. I allow I could relish a fried bootleg this minute.”

A soft, cold breeze rustled the trees back of the bungalow, which crouched close in the shelter of Castle Rock, a queer-looking block of solid stone that rose high in the air and somewhat resembled the ruins of an old castle. A sound like the murmur of waves drifted up to their ears as they followed Kent down a path which led to the shore of the sheltered cove. Already the darkness was beginning to melt, and a faint gray streak appeared in the eastern sky. The path brought them to a dock and a float, beside which lay two rowboats and a small saphtha power boat. At a distance from the shore they could faintly discern the outlines of a sloop, the slender, skyward-pointing mast oscillating gently with the slight swell which crept into the cove.

“Get in here, fellows,” directed Kent, placing the hamper in one of the rowboats. “I’ll take the oars. Oh, do you want to row, Merriwell? Well, all right.”

They pushed off, and Dick pulled toward the sloop. Kent fended the boat as it ran alongside the sloop, and a moment later leaped over the rail upon the larger craft.

His feet hit an object hidden beneath an outspread strip of canvas, and a moment later the silence was broken by a shrill yell, and a human figure flung the canvas aside and uprose from the bottom of the sloop.

CHAPTER II.

DOWN THE BAY.

Arthur Kent was a Yale man and a popular fellow, although not an athlete or a club frequenter. Some time ere the spring term closed Dick and Brad had accepted Art’s invitation to spend a few days at Castle Rock bungalow, Morton Kent’s summer place on the western shore of Narragansett Bay. On the journey thither they had fallen in with Leish Spofford, another Yale man, and learned that he was on his way to his father’s summer home, Graystone, which, they were surprised to hear, was located less than a mile from Castle Rock. Spofford was accompanied by his intimate friend, Luther Leighton.

“You ought to have a first-class time at Castle Rock, fellows,” he had said. “Kent is a jolly good entertainer, and his folks are most agreeable people. There will be plenty of swimming, boating, and fishing. By the way, Leighton and I are going out for deep-sea fishing in the morning. Perhaps Kent will have that on the programme, to. If he does, tell him
I'll trim his old Yale to the fishing grounds with my Scud, just the same as I used to last year."

They had carried this message to Kent. Later in the day Spofford and Leighton came over to Castle Rock in a power boat and called on Arthur.

"You want to look out for your boats, Art," cautioned Léon. "Thieves have been at work hereabouts. They got at Wade Morton's boats last week, so the governor says, and stripped 'em. I should dislike it if you were given the excuse of having your boats plundered between now and to-morrow morning, for if you're going out fishing I'll beat you to the Blue Ledge grounds."

"I presume that's a challenge," laughed Kent. "We'll see whether you beat us or not. With anything like an even start, I think the Yale can trim your boat."

"She hasn't been able to do it up to date," cheerfully reminded Spofford.

"I've had her overhauled and rerigged," said Arthur. "She's got a new set of sails, and——"

"They would look good to thieves. Take care of them, Kent, old man. Did you know the bank at Woodfords was robbed last night?"

"No. Was it?"

"Sure. The vault was blown open and a big haul in cash and securities made. At noon to-day not a trace of the robbers had been found."

"Well, I hardly think they will trouble us," laughed Arthur.

Remembering this warning, Kent had taken precautions, and when that human figure rose from beneath his feet with a wild yell he was not nearly as much surprised as were his guests in the smaller boat. The canvas covering was flung off, and an aged darky stood shaking and shuddering before Kent.

"Po' mercy sake," chattered the colored man, "don't hurt a po' ol' nigger, Mr. Robber! Take anything yo' want, but don't do no pussional violence to old Joe. Help yo'selves to de sails, de ropes, de anchor, de jibboom, and de keel, but spare dis nigger."

"Well, you're certainly a first-class watchman, Joe," laughed Kent.

"Wha-who-what's dat?" gurgled the aged colored man, leaning forward and peering at Arthur. "Am dat yo', Marse Art? Mah golly! Ah was dreamin' dat a whole ship load of robbers had jes' captured me and was agwine to make me walk de plank. Mah goodness! Ah certainly was purt' nigh skeered into canipition fits! Yes, sah! Ah owns it up in a perfectly dishonorabe manner. Ah's so weak in mah knees now dat Ah can hardly keep on mah pins. Ah hopes yo' won't take no defense, Marse Art? Yo' know old Joe ain't nebber jes' himself when he first wakes up out ob a shoozing spell. Ah tell yo', Marse Art, it was po'ful lonesome out here all last night——yes, sah, po'ful lonesome. Couldn't seem to git ober de feeling dat robbers was gwine to come down on me befo' mawmaw."

"Where's your pistol, Joe? You took a pistol, didn't you?"

"Yes, sah, yes, sah, Ah b'lieve Ah did. But, 'pon mah word, Ah don't know where it am. Lemme see. Mebbe Ah's got it down here in de bottom of de scoop. Yes, here she am, right down here in de bottom of de scoop. Ah put it right side ob me when Ah lay down to get jes' a little res'. Ah ain't slept much of late, Marse Art, so mah eyelids they got po'ful heayby before mawmaw. Couldn't seem to keep 'em open to save mah gizzard. Ah tried hard 'nough. Ah kept saying, 'Joe, robbers am gwine to come and cut your haid off if you go to sleep, you po' fool nigger.' But it didn't do no good. Ah jes' had to snooze a little. Ah don't b'lieve Ah've been sleepin' more'n five minutes."

"Well, everything seems to be safe, Joe, and you may take the rowboat ashore. Come on, fellows."

Dick and Brad boarded the Yale, first swinging the hamper of food over the rail.

The aged colored man hesitated doubtfully.

"Ah certainly hopes yo' won't hold no obnixity fo' me, Marse Art," he finally said in a pleading tone.

"Mebbe it was a good thing Ah done forgot dat pistol, fo' if Ah'd 'membered it, jes' likely as not Ah'd riz right up and commenced shooting right and lef'. Ah's po'ful reckless when Ah's under the influence of agitation, sah."

"It's all right, Joe. Go on. We've got to be movin', and you're in the way."

The colored man let himself cautiously over the rail into the rowboat and paddled away with the oars.

"Ah wish yo' good luck fishing, young gen'mans," he called. "Ah hopes yo' catches a whale."

The oars clanked in the locks as the old negro receded and faded into a dull black splotch in the direction of the pier.

The sloop was cast free from her moorings and worked out toward the mouth of the cove, with Arthur getting the sails ready before hoisting them, assisted by Brad, to catch the light breeze.

"I'm glad you woke me up now," declared the Texan, "and I'm glad I took that shower, too, pard.
I'm feeling like a fighting cock. I'm going to show you to-day that a Texan can catch fish. You hear me?"

The gray streak in the east was taking on a reddish tinge and stretching far along the horizon. Above it lay a mass of heavy clouds.

"Think we'll have a good day, Arthur?" asked Merritwell.

"I hope so," was the answer, "though I wouldn't be dead sure of it."

"How far is it to the fishing grounds?"

"Something like twelve miles."

"I should think you'd have power in your boat," said Brad.

"Not I," laughed Kent. "I enjoy sailing too well, and I don't care to make a mongrel of the Yale. If we get any wind, the run down to Blue Ledge and back will be as much sport as the fishing."

The reddish glow in the eastern sky soon dimmed North Point Light, which gleamed to the eastward. Getting out into open water, Kent trimmed the sails and took the rudder.

"We ought to get along about the time Spofford and Leighton swing out from Graystone," said Art. "Leon is always boasting about his old Scud. I'd like to get a square show at him once."

Swiftly the morning light spread across the water, and finally the rim of the sun, huge and fiery, rose above the horizon.

"Looks some like a scorcher to me," observed Brad.

"What time do we get back here, Art?"

"That depends on the fishing. If it's good, we may not get back before nightfall."

"Wow! Do you reckon you've brought enough grub in that hamper? Say, maybe you don't know my appetite. Maybe you don't realize what sort of a feeder I am."

Kent laughed.

"Oh, I think we've got enough provisions to take care of us," he returned. "I gave Margaret, the cook, instructions to look out for that."

The sun rolled up high and showed itself in all its burning splendor. Then it plunged into the black clouds and was swallowed from view.

"That's not a good sign," said Kent; "but I don't take much stock in signs. There's Graystone, fellows."

They could see the handsome summer home of the Spoffords standing on a commanding elevation, from which a splendid view of the bay could be obtained.

"Old man Spofford must have the rocks," observed Buckhart.

"Oh, yes, he's well fixed," nodded Arthur. "If Leon chose, he could have a small yacht of his own, I fancy, yet he prefers his Scud for sport in these waters. He's a rather frugal chap. Not a bad fellow—I don't mean that; but he isn't given to squandering his money. In a minute we'll be able to see whether the Scud is lying at her mooring."

Near Graystone was a small, sheltered anchorage, and soon they could look in upon it and see the private pier of the Spoffords.

Kent uttered an exclamation of disappointment.

"What's the matter?" asked Brad.

"I declare, they've got off ahead of us again!" said Arthur. "I didn't believe they'd do it, but they're gone. The Scud isn't there."

"If Spofford had been looking for a fair and square race," said Dick, "he might have waited."

"I don't believe he can have been gone long," muttered Art. "I'll expect to get a squint at his sail when we round Saunter's Point. Confound it! I forgot my field glasses."

By this time, with a brisk breeze, they were skimming the water at a lively rate, kicking up a wake behind them and "carrying a bone." Occasionally a bit of spray flew over the occupants of the sloop.

Saunter's Point was rounded, and down to the south they perceived two white sails.

"One of these is the Scud," said Kent positively. "It's a good nine or ten miles to Blue Ledge yet, and Spofford will have to get the best out of his boat if he arrives here ahead of us."

CHAPTER III.

SOMETHING MYSTERIOUS.

It was a stern, steady chase, but the Yale did gain on the two boats in advance, and it was something like a race ere the waters of the bay were left behind. The sun was again swallowed for a time by the clouds in the eastern sky, out of which blew an erratic, gusty wind which sometimes died to a transient calm.

"With a steady breeze," said Kent, "we should be on the Scud's heels already."

Other boats, a great many of them, were to be seen upon the water, but only the Scud and her companion sloop interested the three youths in the Yale. Down past Narragansett Pier they raced, making for the
open ocean and the Blue Ledge where good deep-sea fishing was generally found. The sun again dragged itself clear of the black clouds and set the waves of the great salt sea glittering with tints of silver and gold. There was a long swell rolling in from the eastward.

"This yere motion may upset my stomach some later on," said Buckhart; "but I swear just about now I'm starving to death. Can't we have breakfast, Kent? If I don't fill that empty place inside of me pretty soon, I'll cave."

"Sure we can have breakfast," smiled Art. "Open up the hamper, boys. Best I can do, Spofford is going to beat me to the Ledge. The wind wasn't steady enough to give me a chance to overhaul him."

They opened the hamper and displayed an amount of eatables and drinkables that made Buckhart's eyes shine.

"Me-for about a dozen of these yere sandwiches," he said. "Look at those hard-boiled eggs. Look at the bottled coffee. Gee whiz! but I'm famished!"

Kent remained at the helm, and they passed him sandwiches and other food from the hamper. All three ate ravenously.

Dick amused himself by inspecting a somewhat torn piece of newspaper with which a coffee bottle had been wrapped. Suddenly he cried:

"Hello! this must be last night's paper. Here's part of an account of that bank robbery at Woodforde's. Listen to this:"

"Special officers from Providence are at work on the case and claim to have valuable clues, but it is generally believed that the police are wholly at sea. Two strangers, both young men, were seen lingering in the vicinity of the bank yesterday forenoon. One was somewhat short and stout with sandy hair; the other had a small, dark mustache. Both were dressed plainly and inconspicuously. Neither of these persons has been found in town to-day. It is said that the bank will offer a reward for the capture of the burglars."

"That's the whole of it. There's part of a sentence left here, but the paper is torn so that it doesn't make sense."

"Well, we don't have to trouble ourselves about bank robbers," laughed Kent. "We're not likely to run across them out here on the open Atlantic. Those fellows ahead of us have struck a calm, while we're still getting a breeze. We're overhauling 'em now."

The \textit{Scud} and her sister sloop lay becalmed, while the \textit{Yale} raced along at a rate which cut down more of the distance between them. Eventually, however, the sails of the \textit{Scud} filled again, and she was off.

"Know that other boat, Arthur?" asked Dick.

"I think it's Jack Storm's \textit{Lucy}. Yes, I'm sure it is. Storm must be making for the Blue Ledge, too. \textit{We're going to trim him, boys, just as true as you live.}"

A strong, steady breeze was filling the \textit{Yale}'s sails and causing her to lay over until her lee rail was awash. The water gurgled and splashed beneath the bilge of the sloop and along the rail. The wind rose until it sang through the cordage with a whistling sound. The two men in the \textit{Lucy}, the name of which was now plainly discernible upon the stern of the sloop, watched the \textit{Yale} footing it at that lively pace, which would soon put her second to the \textit{Scud}. It was a jolly race, in which Buckhart took considerable interest, for the gallant \textit{Yale} went leaping over the foaming waves like a greyhound let loose from the leash.

"This yere deep-sea sailing is some fine," remarked the Texan. "I admit that I relish it a whole lot. What's the matter, Kent?"

Arthur was frowning as he watched the \textit{Scud}.

"Spofford isn't making for the Blue Ledge," he said; "he's changed his course somewhat of late."

"I thought he was bearing to the westward," said Dick.

They were bounding along side by side with the \textit{Lucy}, and now from the latter boat a voice came across the water.

"There's something wrong on the \textit{Scud}!" was the cry. "Don't know what's up, but there's something doing there. Looks like a scrap."

These words electrified the three youths on the \textit{Yale}. They bent their eyes on the \textit{Scud}, watching to see if they could perceive anything of an unusual nature taking place there.

"It sure seems a plenty calm aboard her," observed Brad. "Don't suppose Spofford and Leighton would get into a scrap with each other, do you, Kent?"

Arthur shook his head.

"Not at all probable," he answered, "and there are certainly only two men on the \textit{Scud}. But, look! they have changed their course still more. The Blue Ledge lay off here to the left. They're heading toward Block Island."

"I don't opine there's any particular reason why we should follow them," said Buckhart. "Let 'em go. We came down here to fish."
The Lucy had swung in closer to the Yale, and now Jack Storm again hailed Arthur.

"There’s certainly something wrong on the Scud," he cried. "There are three or four men aboard her."

"You must be mistaken, Storm," Arthur shouted back. "There are only two."

"Both Chandler and myself saw three or four persons on that boat," declared Storm. "It looked like trouble of some sort."

"What do you think about it now, fellows," asked Kent, turning to his companions. "Certainly the whole business is somewhat peculiar."

"Rather," agreed Dick. "I say, Kent, which had you rather do, fish or sail?"

"Oh, it doesn’t make a bit of difference to me. I want to do what will suit you fellows best."

"This yere sailing is some pleasant and joyous," said Buckhart. "My curiosity is a whole lot aroused, and if you can overhaul Spofford’s Scud it would give me some satisfaction. I reckon I’d some rather sail than fish."

So it was arranged to give up fishing for that morning, and the pursuit of the Scud continued. Spofford’s boat was bearing straight toward the northern point of Block Island, and Kent watched the handling of the boat for a long time without comment. Finally he observed:

"Doesn’t seem like Leon Spofford at the helm. Somehow, whoever it is, he doesn’t handle the Scud just after Spofford’s style."

"It might be Leighton," suggested Dick.

"Some way I don’t believe that, either," muttered Arthur.

Deep shadows pursued them across the water from the eastward. Looking back, they saw ragged black clouds bulging and thrusting their heads upward.

"Mighty odd," muttered Kent. "I didn’t look for a storm to come from that direction."

Suddenly, almost without warning, the wind died and a flat calm fell on the sea, save for the steady, long swell upon which they rolled with their sails flapping. For a brief time the air was as hot as if it came directly from the mouth of a furnace.

"Think we’d better reef down, fellows," cried Kent. "I reckon we’re going to have a blow. Those clouds look nasty. Let’s put a double reef in her."

"Why don’t they reef on board the Scud?" said Dick. "They are laying and waiting for their sails to be blown away."

Merriwell possessed considerable nautical knowledge and was able to sail a boat, therefore he proved of valuable assistance to Kent in reefing. Buckhart took the tiller and held the Yale while his companions worked.

"Here it comes!" shouted Kent; "and it’s a good one, too."

A long, black line of wind-torn water was seen racing toward them with the speed of an express train.

"Give me that helm, Buckhart!" shouted Arthur, as he leaped toward it. "Everybody sit tight. There’s going to be something doing when she hits us."

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CHAPTER IV.

ACROSS BLOCK ISLAND SOUND.

They were overwhelmed, smothered, almost swamped in a twinkling. The wind broke over them with a howling shriek, and the black waves threatened to batter the Yale to pieces. The mast bent and creaked, and the force of the tempest almost drove the sloop under water. Kent was sorry now that he had not lowered every strip of canvas.

They were surrounded by darkness almost as deep as that of night. Not a sign of the Scud could they have seen had they looked for her, but for the time being they thought only of themselves.

Kent, gripping the tiller with both hands and holding it with all his strength, shouted to Buckhart. The Texan crept to Art’s side.

"If she lets up a bit," said Kent, "I’m going to swing her up into the wind and get that mainsail down. Think you can hold her close to the wind while Merriwell and I handle the sail?"

"I sure can try," was the ready answer.

 Barely were these words spoken when there came a sudden, unexpected lull, and immediately Kent, putting the tiller over, brought the sloop around with her nose into the wind.

Buckhart seized the tiller as Kent shouted to Dick: "Come on! Down with the mainsail and make it secure! It’s a wonder we didn’t lose the mast."

They leaped to their work and lost no time about it. As the boat lay rolling heavily they lowered the sail and made it secure, the jib flapping and cracking all the while like musketry.

As soon as possible Kent leaped to the tiller again and eased the Yale round. As if that slight lull had been ordered expressly to give them an opportunity to take care of the mainsail, the wind rose once more with howling shrieks and sent the spray flying over
them. The sloop lay far over, but swung safely about and was again carried away before the tempest.

"Look out for Block Island, Art!" cried Dick. "Don't get piled up on shore there."

Kent was thinking of that also. The tempestuous darkness was such that it could not be pierced for any great distance, but, according to his best judgment, Kent bore off to the northward of Block Island.

Suddenly, almost in their path loomed a huge vessel, also stripped down and holding its headway with the smallest possible display of canvas.

Kent put the tiller over and shot past under the vessel's stern.

"Close rub," cried Dick.

"Close rub," agreed Arthur, whose face was pale, but who seemed steady and nervy nevertheless.

"What do you suppose happened to the Send?" came from Dick's lips, which, leaning close, he placed near Kent's ear.

Arthur shook his head.

"I am afraid she was swamped the moment the wind struck her," he returned. "Spofford acted like an idiot in declining to furl his sails—if Spoofford was in control."

If possible, the tempest increased in fury. Mile after mile they plunged along through that boiling sea, at times almost buried beneath the hissing, raging waves. Suddenly Kent put the tiller over again and held off to starboard.

"Block Island shoals!" he screamed, with a jerk of his head toward a stretch of seething, foaming white water in the midst of the black sea.

"Great horn spoon!" gasped Buckhart; "we came near running plumb on top of 'em! Can we clear 'em now?"

That question troubled him only a few moments, for soon the Yale flew over past that seething stretch of water, which was left behind to port.

"At this rate we're bound for Peconic Bay," shouted Kent. "We're in Block Island Sound now. Long Island lies ahead of us."

"And we started out for a little quiet fishing," muttered Brad. "I don't opine they'll see us back at Castle Rock bungalow to-night."

Finally the heavens seemed to open and pour down upon them a perfect flood of water. In spite of the oillkins they had donned as soon as possible after being hit by the tempest, they were already wet and uncomfortable. It continued to rain and blow, although the greater fury of the tempest subsided shortly after the downpour began.

"We're nearer Long Island than Rhode Island now, fellows," said Kent. "We couldn't beat back against the wind in a good many hours. I think the best thing we can do is to run into shelter somewhere on Long Island—say at Sag Harbor, if we can hit it—and wire the people as soon as possible. They'll be worried about us, you know."

Eventually land appeared in the distance. Kent had set his course with the hope of rounding Gardner's Island at the north; but in this he was unsuccessful, and necessity forced him to turn into Napeague Bay.

"I'm none too familiar with these waters," he confessed. "Still, I believe we can make around here to the south of Gardner's Island and get into Sag Harbor all right."

But suddenly they found themselves in the midst of ledges and reefs which threatened them on every hand. Kent was frightened, although he kept to his post and handled the Yale to the best of his ability. Dick took a position forward and watched for ledges. They were finally driven nearer and nearer to the shore, and as a last resort swung into a little sheltered bay. As they did so the keel of the Yale scraped.

"By Jove, that's close!" cried Kent. "Fellows, we'll have to drop anchor in here until this blow is over and we can work out through these ledges, with a favorable wind."

The shore of the tiny bay and cove was wooded and broken. Even as they selected an anchorage and swung into it, Dick discovered something that made him shout and point toward the shore. There upon the rocks lay the wreck of a battered sloop. The mast was gone, and a mass of tangled rigging and tattered sails clung to the hulk.

"Look!" cried Dick. " Somebody climbed onto dry land yonder."

Kent put round and swung nearer to the shore.

"Fellows," he said, "that's the Send—that's Spoofford's boat."

"Well, what do you think of that!" burst from Buckhart. "They arrived here ahead of us some."

"But they couldn't have been ahead of us a great deal," said Dick.

"Not a great deal," agreed Arthur. "They ought to be somewhere near now."

"If they stuck to the boat," said Dick.

"Judging by appearances, they stuck to her. I don't see how she could have come in through the ledges unless they did. Perhaps they are yonder in the woods now. Ready, fellows, let's give them a shout."
They lifted their voices and shouted in unison.
Three or four times they did this, but the only answer was the gusty beat of the rain and the roar of the surges outside.

“Right, fellows,” said Kent. “Drop the anchor.”

He swung the Yale up into the wind, and the anchor fell with a splash. The jib was lowered and furled.

“Well, here we are,” said Dick; “but how are we going to get ashore? We have no boat.”

“If we get ashore,” said Kent, “it looks like a swim for us. I’m not going to swim myself. I’m hungry again, and if this infernal rain would let up I’d feel like eating.”

The hours slipped away as they lay there, rocking in that sheltered harbor. Despite the rain, they brought forth food and drink from the hamper and satisfied the cravings of their appetites. The day was wearing away. Late in the afternoon the rain fell to a drizzle and then ceased. The wind died away, although the roar of the surf still came booming to their ears.

“If we could work out of here now,” said Kent, “we might creep along up to Sag Harbor. If we stay much longer we’ll have to remain all night, for I’d never attempt to sail the Yale to Sag Harbor after nightfall.”

They were discussing what they would do, when a shrill yell reached their ears.

Standing on a rocky prominence of the shore was a bareheaded, barefooted boy. They waved to him, and he answered by waving his hand.

“Got a boat handy?” cried Kent. “Can’t you set us ashore?”

“If there’s anything in it, mister,” was the laughing answer.

“Go ahead,” said Kent; “we’ll pay you.”

The boy disappeared. Ten minutes later he came round a point with a small rowboat. In a short time he swung alongside the Yale.

“You had better luck than t’other fellows,” he chuckled.

“What other fellows?”

“They that owns that boat,” said the boy, jerking his thumb toward the wrecked Squid.

“Have you seen them?” asked Kent, seizing the lad’s arm.

“Sure thing, boss. They’re over to our house now.”

“How many?”

“Two of um.”

“Did they give you their names?”

“Yeh. One feller’s name is Spofford; t’other is Leighton.”

“Evidently,” said Dick, “we were fooled in thinking there was anything the matter on board the Squid.”

“Yes, that’s right,” nodded Kent. “But wait till I get next to Leon Spofford! I’ll have a few questions to ask him. Come on, fellows, let’s go ashore.”

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CHAPTER V.

A QUESTION OF NAMES.

The boy’s name was Jimmy Crisp, and he said his father was a fisherman who lived on the Neck, as the strip of land upon which he set them ashore was called.

“How far is it to the nearest telegraph or long-distance telephone station?” asked Kent.

“I guess Sag Harbor’s about the nearest, and that’s purty nigh ten mile,” said Jimmy.

“I’ll have to get over there to-night, fellows,” declared Kent, “and wire or phone home.”

“I should think Spofford and Leighton would feel like sending word to their people,” said Dick.

“Maybe they will,” nodded Art. “I should think so myself.”

Jimmy pulled the small boat up into a little cove, and they assisted him in carrying it above high-water mark, where it was left under the edge of some bushes.

“Suppose you fellers will want to be put off to your sloop,” said the boy, “so it’ll be best to leave my boat handy here. We’ve got a big dory and a good gas boat round at the mooring.”

They followed him by a sort of natural path up through the bushes from the shore, the wet branches raining showers whenever disturbed; but, as they were still wearing their oilskins, they did not mind. The swish, swish of the oiled garments sounded with every stride they made. Beneath their feet the ground was sodden and heavy. Gray evening shadows were gathering gloomily, and night was at hand.

“There’s our house,” said Jimmy, pointing down toward a dark, squatty building which sat near the water.

A light was gleaming from a window.

“They’ll be just about having supper,” explained
the boy. "I said I'd be back at supper time, but I didn't know 'bout you fellers then."

"We'll give Spofford and Leighton a surprise," chuckled Kent. "I don't fancy they will expect to see us over here."

A long float, supported by barrels, extended from the shore, and some distance beyond the end of the float two boats rocked upon the water, safely moored there in the shelter of the snug cove. They followed Jimmy to the door of the house, which happened to be standing open.

"Come right in," invited the boy, and they entered at his heels.

The table was set for supper, and Jimmy's mother was just bringing a huge dish of fish chowder from the kitchen. Besides the woman, there were three persons in the room. One was Jimmy's father, a hard-handed, bent-backed, weather-tanned old man; the others were young men, one fairly stout and stocky with red hair, and the last slender and shifty, having a quick, nervous manner and a pair of dark eyes set close together. He wore a small black mustache.

"Here," announced Jimmy; "is some fellers that got driv' into Slocum's Cove, same as t'other chaps, only they didn't pile their boat onto the shore."

Kent surveyed the two young men with inquiring eyes.

"Where are my friends, Spofford and Leighton?" he asked.

"Them's them," assured Jimmy, with a flourish of his hand toward the strangers. "He's Mr. Spofford," pointing out the red-headed chap, "and he's Mr. Leighton," indicating the other fellow.

The two young men seemed disturbed by the unexpected appearance of the party from the Yale. They exchanged glances, and the red-headed fellow rose to his feet.

Kent faced him.

"This is rather odd," said Arthur. "So your name is Spofford, is it?"

"Yes, that's my name," was the short answer.

"And your friend's name is Leighton?"

"Surest thing you know," came instantly from the chap with the restless eyes.

"I presume," said Arthur slowly, "that you own the sloop which ran ashore over in the cove a short distance away?"

"Yep, that's our boat," asserted the fellow of the red head. "What about it?"

"Waugh!" muttered Brad Buckhart. "I opine some one is prevaricating a plenty."

"It's rather singular," said Arthur Kent; "but I happen to know Leon Spofford, the owner of the Soud, and you're not the man. I'm likewise well acquainted with Luther Leighton—and your friend is not Leighton."

"Who said that my name was Leon?" demanded the stout chap; "and who claimed that my friend's name was Luther? My name is Bob, and his is Dennis—Bob Spofford and Denis Leighton. Them's us."

"I opine," murmured Buckhart, "that they will both be named Denis before we're through with them."

Dick Merriwell had been putting two and two together, and now he felt a growing conviction that these two fellows who had assumed the names of Spofford and Leighton were scoundrels and fugitives from the law. Reaching out cautiously, he gave a pull at Buckhart's elbow.

"Brad," he whispered, "I've got an idea that these chaps are wanted in Woodfords. I may be mistaken, but it wouldn't surprise me if we had found the Woodfords bank robbers."

The Texan nodded and pressed close to Arthur Kent.

Kent was likewise filled with the same suspicion.

"Would you mind explaining, gentlemen," said he, "how you happened to be in possession of Leon Spofford's sloop, the Soud?"

"That's our business," growled the red-headed fellow.

"Yep, that's our business," declared the other man.

"Perhaps so," nodded Kent, unruffled; "but as Spofford happens to be a personal friend of mine, I shall consider it my business."

"We bought the Soud," declared the man with the shifty eyes.

"Yep," nodded his comrade, "we bought her."

"When?" demanded Kent sharply. "When did you make this purchase, gentlemen?"

"Yesterday."

"At what hour?"

"Some time during the afternoon. Now look a' here, young fellers, what be you driving at?"

"It's odd," said Kent, "considering the fact that I saw Leon Spofford late yesterday afternoon and he said nothing about selling his boat. Instead of that, he challenged me to race him to the fishing grounds this morning. Don't you think it somewhat singular
that you should be in possession of the Scud, and
should be calling yourselves Spofford and Leighton?"

"If you think there's anything peculiar about it,"
growled the red-headed fellow, "you're welcome to
think so."

Tom Crisp, Jimmy's father, had been listening to
this conversation with growing interest. Although a
rough man, he was not a person of dull wits, and by
this time he had decided that there was something
very mysterious about the affair, to say the least.

"These gentlemen come here and tell me a story
about going out for deep-sea fishing and getting
carried away in the storm and blown across Block Island
Sound," he put in. "They claim they live somewhere
up near Hamilton on Narragansett Bay."

"As I happen to live up that way myself," said
Kent, "I'm perfectly well satisfied that they have not
told you the truth, sir."

At this the red-headed man swore and assumed a
decided belligerent and blustering air.

"You want to be careful!" he rasped. "You don't
want to git fresh and call us liars, young feller, for
if you do——"

"What then?" inquired Kent coolly.

"Well, mebbe you'll get hurt."

"Wauagh!" exploded Buckhart. "Mebbe so, and
then mebbe again somebody else will get hurt. Don't
take any bluffs from the galoot, Kent. My pard and
I will back you up."

Mrs. Crisp, who had seemed somewhat alarmed,
now beat a precipitate retreat to the kitchen. As for
Jimmy, his eyes were wide with excitement and his
cheeks were flushed.

"If you're honest men," said Dick Merriwell, speak-
ing up at last, "there's no reason why you should be
disturbed or angry. You may be aware of the fact
that the Woodfords bank was robbed day before yester-
day, and the bank robbers have not been captured.
Under such circumstances, what would be more nat-
ural than for us to question you closely? If you an-
swer in a satisfactory manner, that ought to be suf-
ferient; but you haven't seemed inclined to give us
much satisfaction. According to reports, the bank has
offered a reward for the capture of the burglars."

"Now what do you think of that, Gus?" cried the
slender chap savagely. "They take us for bank rob-
ers!"

"Gus? Gus?" murmured Kent. "Why, I thought
his name was Bob? Is it possible that your name is
not Denis?"

Merriwell would have checked Kent, but it was too
late.

Dick felt a pull at his coat tail, and glanced round
to see Jimmy, his eyes dancing with excitement, look-
ing up at him.

"Gee whiz!" whispered the boy; "you don't mean to
say they fellows is bank robbers, do ye?"

"Perhaps they are," nodded Dick.

"Great hocus!" gasped the lad. "Real ginuwine
bank robbers? Now what do you think of that?"

The cornered men were more than uneasy.

"If these fellows are all right," said Tom Crisp,
"they ain't no reason why they should git nervious.
But if they ain't all right, why then there certainly
is a reason."

At this point, without warning, the red-headed man
suddenly drew a pistol, an action which was imitated
by his companion. The weapons were leveled threat-
ingenly, and the leader of the two rascals cried:

"You guys stand right where you are! The fist
one that moves will git bored!"

"You bet your sweet life!" shrilled the slender fel-
low. "Stand still and hold your breath everybody!"

Tom Crisp muttered something beneath his breath,
but when he made a movement toward a near-by
closet one of those pistols was turned upon him and
he was ordered to lift his hands. He obeyed the
command.

Then the two scoundrels retreated toward the
kitchen door, keeping their eyes upon the occupants
of the room and holding their weapons ready for use.

"Look out for the old woman, Pike!" hissed the
red-headed chap. "Ready now——skip!"

Mrs. Crisp made no attempt to interfere with them,
and they both dashed through the kitchen and out by
the back door, disappearing into the darkness.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HOUSE OF TRAGEDY.

"Great horn spoon!" roared the Texan. "Give me
a shooting iron. It sure galls me a heap to be held
up without so much as a popgun on my person.
Wauagh! I'm a plenty riled! You hear me softly
warble."

"Dad, dad," cried Jimmy Crisp, "them fellows is
bank robbers!"

"Mebbe they be," nodded Tom Crisp; "but I didn't
feel like gaffling to 'em under the circumstances."
“Have you weapons of any kind in the house?” asked Dick.

“Sure. I've got a shotgun and a revolver in this closet. I was sort of edging over to get holt of a gun when that feller p’inted his pistol at me.”

He opened the closet door and quickly brought out a double-barreled shotgun and an old-fashioned, long-barreled revolver.

“They’re both loaded,” he explained.

Mrs. Crisp came rushing in, trembling with agitation.

“Thomas,” she fluttered, “I knowned them men wasn’t straight. I told you I didn’t like the looks of them. Just to think that we’ve been a-harborin’ burglers right here under our roof!”

“And to think the critters got away!” growled Crisp. “But they ain’t got off yet. There’s only one path off the Neck, and they won’t be liable to find it in a hurry without some one to show ’em the way.”

“Have you any neighbors near here?” asked Dick.

“None right close by, though there’s some lives within half a mile or so.”

“You say there’s only one path off the Neck, as you call it. If that path was guarded—”

“Them fellers would have a hard time to git away.”

“Those men may be even more desperate criminals than mere bank robbers,” said Arthur Kent. “I have reason to believe that the real Leon Spofford and Luther Leighton were on the boat seized by those rascals—the boat that lies a wreck over yonder in the cove. If that’s true, something serious has happened to Spofford and Leighton. Perhaps they are at the bottom of Block Island Sound. Perhaps those men are murderers, as well as bank robbers.”

“Oh, good gracious!” fluttered Mrs. Crisp. “And to think I was just going to feed such awful critters!”

“Crisp,” said Dick, “if you aid in the capture of those men you will get a share of the reward. If there’s any way to keep them from escaping from the Neck, it ought to be a simple matter to capture them.”

“I'll see to that,” declared the fisherman. “I'll go over to Brown's and turn him and his two boys out. With a couple of guns, they can hold the Neck so nobody can git past them.”

“For goodness’ sake, don’t leave me here all alone, Thomas,” entreated Mrs. Crisp.

“You will not be left alone, madam,” assured Dick.

“We’ll remain here with you.”

“I ought to send a message home as soon as possi-
the Slocum murder," she said. "It has completely upset me. I'm worried about Thomas, but I knew 'twasn't no good to ax him to stay home."

"I don't think there's any great danger, Mrs. Crisp," said Dick reassuringly. "It's hardly probable that those rascals will return here."

The woman plied them with questions as they ate, and they satisfied her curiosity as best they could.

Within half an hour Tom Crisp returned, accompanied by a strange, shambling hunchback, who likewise carried a gun.

"If them fellers didn't get off the Neck in a hurry," said Crisp, "they won't be able to do so now, for Bill Brown and his boys are guarding the path. They're hid in the brush and rock, where they can keep watch, and I told them to stay right there till they heard from me. They'll do it, too."

The hunchback rested the butt of his gun on the floor and gripped the barrel with both hands, peering out beneath bushy eyebrows at Dick and Brad.

"It was seh a night as this," he said, "that Jed Slocum murdered his family. I 'member it well, for wasn't I the one that found 'em? Wasn't I the one that seen Jed's door a-standing open and went and looked into the house? Didn't I disker the place all splattered——"

Mrs. Crisp interrupted him with a shrill cry.

"Stop that, Jokem!" she commanded. "You're always going on about that, and I've heard it until my nerves are on edge. You ain't never talked about nothing else since it happened."

The hunchback bobbed his head slowly.

"I ain't never thought about nothing else," he said. "I ain't been able to think about nothing else. Wherever I go and whatever I do, I'm always a-seeing them murdered folks. I think about it all day long. I think about it the fust thing in the morning and the last thing at night. I dream about it when I go to sleep. It was jest seh a night as this. There'd been a storm, and there was a quarter moon sliding through the clouds jest the same as the moon's sliding through the clouds to-night. I 'member it special well, for I went over onto Bald Knob and stood looking down at Slocum's house. I heared a scream that sort o' set my blood cold. It skeered me, and I went home and never said nothing about it. Next morning I went back and found Slocum's door standing open. Then I went in, and there I seen the awfullest sight that——"

"Will you stop it!" cried the agitated woman.

"Thomas, what made you bring Jokem here? You know how he upsets me."

"Don't mind him, Mary," said Crisp. "He was over to Brown's when I got there, and he heard me tell 'em about these bank robber fellers. While I was a-talking he slipped out, and before I got back to the Neck he come panting arter us, bringing a gun. I thought mebbe we might need him, though I dunno as he's any good. He always was a coward."

The hunchback showed no resentment over this.

"If it won't take us long," said Crisp, "to find out if them fellers is anywhere on the Neck. We can plumb over in an hour. I've brung an extra pistol, and that gives us all a weapon of some sort."

He produced the pistol, which Buckhart accepted. Crisp's own long-barreled revolver was in Dick's possession.

"Mary," said the fisherman, "we're going out to look for them fellers. You fasten the doors and windows. There ain't one chance in a thousand that they'll come back here, but you'll feel safer if you're locked up good and tight. Reason will teach ye that it wouldn't do them no good to come here and hurt you nolow. jest now I'll bate they're a-thinking a heap more about getting away safe and sound than about doing any one damage."

"If you'll take that critter away it will be a relief, Thomas," said the woman, nodding her head toward Jokem.

When they had left the house she closed and locked the door behind them. They set forth upon their man-stalking, the fisherman acting as guide. Dick followed at his heels, with Buckhart next, and the hunchback hobbling and panting at the rear. A full hour or more they spent scouring the Neck. At length they approached an old hut which stood dark and silent near a gully that led down to the shore.

"Better keep away," called the hunchback. "That's the Slocum place. It's ha'nted. I've seen lights there myself. You know, Tom Crisp—you know the stories they tell about the ha'nts."

"I don't take no stock in 'em," said Crisp, "though I'll acknowledge that I don't keer to prowl around the place alone at night."

Suddenly Jokem uttered a low, warning cry.

"Stop—stop and look!" he panted. "Didn't you see it?"

"See what?"

"The light."

"What light?"

"I seen it in the window."
"You're dreaming," said Crisp. "You've got ha'nts on the brain, Jokem. There ain't no light in the winder. The house is as black as a pocket."

The hunchback crept forward, seizing Crisp by the skirt of his coat.

"I tell yer I seen a light," he whispered. "It ain't there now, but I seen it jest the same. I ain't going no nearer that place, and you hadn't better. Keep away from it, I say. There's death hovering over it."

"Stay back, then," growled Crisp. "I reckon we'll look the place over. Eh, boys?"

"Sure," said Dick.

"You bet your boots!" came from Buckhart.

"Mebbe we'd better creep up cautious and quiet like," suggested the fisherman. "Come on, boys."

"There's death there!" hissed the hunchback shudderingly.

They left him mumbling to himself as they slowly and cautiously approached the old house. Nearer and nearer they crept. The place was dark and silent, with no sign of life anywhere about it. Suddenly, however, there was a bright flash of light. It was followed by the clear, sharp report of a pistol, and Dick Merriwell dropped to the ground, for a bullet had hummed past his ear.

"Down!" said Dick. "Jokem is right. There's death there!"

CHAPTER VII.

WAITING.

They dropped flat and lay close to the wet ground, for not one of them was anxious to stop bullets.

"Waugh!" muttered Buckhart. "I sure reckon the ghosts around that ranch are some substantial and earthly. Real genuine spooks don't, as a rule, resort to pistol-practice."

"We've found the bank robbers," said Dick in a low tone. "We've got them cornered in that old house."

"That's jest about the size of it," agreed Tom Crisp in great satisfaction. "We've got 'em sure, and they can't git away. I will own up that I was some afeared they'd got off the Neck ahead of me, but I judged they didn't know the way. They'll never git off now. If they is a reward offered for the capture of them critters, I cal'late I'm due to get a share on it."

"That's right," agreed Dick, "and I'm perfectly willing that you should have my portion of the reward money."

"Same here," came from Brad. "But how are we going to rope the varmints? It seems some probable that they are watching out a whole lot sharp to repel besiegers."

"According to Crisp, they can't get away," said Dick. "We might wait until Kent and Jimmy return. It's probable they will bring an officer and one or more of his assistants."

"Yes," growled Crisp, "and it's probable the officer and his bunch will sail in and claim the hull blamed reward money."

They were startled by a scraping, rustling sound behind them, and, squirming round upon the ground, they looked to see what it meant.

A huge, dark, froglike figure was creeping toward them.

"Who's that?" demanded Merriwell, holding the old pistol ready for use.

"It's me," answered the peculiar voice of Jokem, the hunchback. "I tol' yer there was death in that house. Mebbe you believe me now. Tom Crisp, you 'member what happened to Ben Briggs, don't ye?"

"No," answered Crisp growlingly, "I don't 'member what happened to him, for I don't know what happened to him. Nobody else knows."

"He laughed at the stories about ha'nts in the Slocum house," rasped the unpleasant voice of the hunchback. "He said them stories was lies and fakes and yarns made up by silly fools. He said he'd jest as leave spend a night in that house there, and offered to bate he'd do it. He was took up, and six living men saw him go into the Slocum house at nightfall. I was one of them, and you was another, Tom Crisp. No living man ever saw him come out. No living man has ever put eyes on Ben Briggs since he passed through the door of the Slocum house. He's got a widder living over at Promised Land."

"There's a woman living over at Promised Land," said Crisp, "who don't know whether she's Ben Briggs'widder or not. They never did git along too well together, and during the last year o' their partnership they fit like cats and dogs. There's a heap o' folks 'round these parts that's inclined to think Briggs grabbed his chance to skip out and leave the old woman for good. More'n half the folks who know about it sort o' cal'late that Ben Briggs is living lively and chipper somewhere on the face of the earth, while his wife waits in vain at Promised Land for his return."
"Briggs is dead," declared Jokem. "I've always held that his bones would be found somewhere in the cellar of that house of death."

"They're a whole lot of sense in that!" sneered Crisp. "Didn't a search party go through the house and the cellar without discovering anything at all?"

"A lot of searching they done!" scoffed the hunchback. "They looked the place over as quick as they could and then got out, for every one of 'em to the last man was sk irre."  

"Well, mebbe that's so," admitted Crisp; "but there warn't no place for Briggs to hide or be hid, alive or dead. Even you, Jokem, ought to know that spooks don't fire pistols. The kind of spooks we've got cornered in the Slocum house are a heap more lively than you be."

"Mebbe so, mebbe so," came from Jokem; "but there's death there."

"Plenty of it, for anybody that gits in front of hard bullets," said Crisp. "I ain't hankering to serve as a target myself, but I'd like to git my paws on them bank robbers and have 'em good and helpless all ready to turn over to Deputy Sheriff Hix when he arrives. Mebbe it would mean more money than a season's fishing."

"Maybe it would," said Dick. "Isn't there some way by which we can approach that house under cover of some sort? If we could get near enough-----"

"There's some brush and rocks running close to the back door on the south side," said Crisp. "We might git mighty close that way. Then, ag'in, we could crawl up the gully from the shore and come within two rods of the front door. It's most likely, however, that the critters will expect us to try it that way, and the winders will give them a good chance to guard the front door. They could pepper us full of bullets before we could git from the gully to the door."

"Let's try the back way," suggested Buckhart.

"Keep off, keep off!" rapped Jokem. "If you try it either way you'll find death sure."

"Oh, drat your croaking!" snarled Crisp. "Why in blazes did you come, anyhow? Git out!"

Keeping close to the ground, they retreated as best they could from that dangerous position. Slipping down behind a knoll, the fisherman rose crouchingly to his feet and led the way to the shelter of some scrubby bushes.

In spite of Crisp, the hunchback followed them like a dog.

"Stop where you be, Jokem," said the fisherman, turning fiercely upon him. "If you're so afraid of that house, keep away. We don't need ye. We don't want ye."

"Nary bit," agreed Buckhart. "I sure opine we can get along a plenty well without him."

Not a word of reply did the deformed man make, but he squatted there, gripping his old gun and peering through a gully. The moon came forth from a jagged mass of clouds and shed a dim, misty light upon the Neck.

"We'd better wait a while," suggested Merriwell. "Even the brush might not hide our movements should we attempt to approach the house now. In time clouds will cover the moon again, and we can seize the opportunity to advance."

"Pard," said Buckhart, "I'm wondering some."

"What about?"

"Spofford and Leighton. It's a whole lot mysterious what's happened to those two gents."

"I scarcely dare think of that," confessed Dick. "You remember, Brad, that the men on board the Lucy said there was something wrong taking place on the Scud."

"Sure," said the Texan. "I've been figuring that over in my mind a bit. They said there were three or four men on the Scud. We saw only two, and only two men landed here when the Scud was driven ashore."

"Which would indicate," muttered Dick, "that something of a tragic nature must have happened to the others during the run from Point Judith to Long Island."

"Death! death!" muttered the hunchback.

The Texan cast his eye skyward.

"Gents," he said, "I opine the moon isn't going to favor us by getting under cover for a right long time. The clouds are breaking away."

The fisherman took in the aspect of the sky with an experienced eye.

"Tain't cleared off," he declared. "There's clouds a-plenty, and they'll shet in ag'in sooner or later. All we've got to do is wait. They ain't no need of worrying; for the birds can't fly."

Therefore they remained there, talking in guarded tones, for a long time, waiting a favorable opportunity to approach the Slocum house once more.

It came at last. Misty clouds, torn and tattered, swept over the thin moon. They were followed by deeper and blacker clouds, and eventually the Neck again lay in shadow and darkness.
“Now’s our time,” said Crisp, half rising to his feet. “Foller me and keep low down.”

“Hark!” said Dick. “What’s that?”

They listened, hearing in the distance the muffled throb of a motor.

“Boys,” said the fisherman at last, “I cal’late that’s Jimmy a-coming back. I can tell pretty soon.”

Within two minutes he asserted positively that it was the boy returning.

“In that case,” said Buckhart, “I’m inclined to believe we’d better wait for reinforcements.”

At first Crisp was disinclined to do this; but Dick agreed with Brad, and, instead of approaching the old Slocum house, they retired over a ridge of land and waited.

The chugging of the motor was no longer to be heard. In less than ten minutes the sound of voices floated to their ears through the night.

Tom Crisp placed his fingers to his lips and whistled sharply.

He was answered directly by a similar sharp whistle.

“Yes, it’s Jimmy,” he said. “Here they come.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RECKLESS TEXAN.

The boy was followed by Arthur Kent and three men, one of whom was Deputy Sheriff Hix, of Sag Harbor. The other two were constables.

Kent detached himself from the little party and dashed forward, athrob with excitement.

“Merrinwell, Buckhart,” he called, “I got both Graystone and Castle Rock on the long distance. The folks have been worrying about us enough, and you can imagine their relief to learn that we were safe. I talked with Leon Spofford’s father, but I didn’t dare tell him the truth. Both Spofford and Leighton set out with the Scud for the Blue Ledge this morning. I told Mr. Spofford that the Scud had been beached here upon Long Island, and sought to pacify him by stating that Leon and Luther must have reached the island in safety. I didn’t tell him about the men who landed here and gave their names as Spofford and Leighton.”

“Where be them men?” demanded Deputy Sheriff Hix. “Jest p’int them out to me. I’ll arrest ’em in the name of the law. If they’re bank robbers, they’d better surrender when Bill Hix gits arter ’em. This young man says there may be a reward for their capture.”

“Yes,” growled Crisp, “and I s’pose you cal’late you’re a-going to gobble the hull of it. Now hold on, Mr. Hix—hold right on a bit. Let me inform you, sir, that I’m in for a proper share of that reward money. We’ve got the robbers located in the old Slocum house. The path off the Neck is guarded by Brown and his boys, all armed with guns. This ‘ere trap is my setting, Mr. Hix, and what comes into it belongs to me.”

“Pshaw!” grunted the officer. “You don’t say! Well, now, we’ll see about that later on.”

“Mr. Crisp has stated the truth,” said Dick. “If you arrest those men, officer, you’ll certainly get a portion of the reward money, but Crisp is due to receive his fair share.”

“Mebbe so, mebbe so,” snapped the deputy sheriff.

“We’ll talk that matter over later. Come on, Tompkins; come on, Rawdon; we’ll take the robbers.”

“Go ahead,” chuckled Tom Crisp. “Walk right up and take ’em. We tried cantering up to that house, and come nigh serving as targets while we was a-doing so. The gents in the Slocum house happen to be armed with shooting irons, and they’re good and prompt about using ’em.”

“Is that so?” squeaked Tompkins in a somewhat agitated tone of voice. “You don’t mean to say they shot at ye, hey?”

“That’s precisely what they done,” nodded Crisp.

“In which case,” wheezed Rawdon, who had a husky voice, “it behooves us to take proper precautions, Mr. Hix.”

“Sheriff Hix, if you please,” snapped the deputy.

“Sheriff Hix, if you please,” echoed Rawdon.

“Mebbe you feel jest like wallzing right up to the Slocum house and chancing it a-dodging bullets. As for me, I believe in taking proper precautions.”

“Quite correct, Rawdon—quite correct,” piped Tompkins. “That shows judgment and brains.”

“It shows you up for a couple of lily-livered cowards,” sneered Hix. “If you’re all seat of a couple of poor devils we’ve got cornered in that house, I’ll show ye that I ain’t. You jest watch me, gents. I’m going into the Slocum house and take them fellers single-handed.”

With which statement, the deputy sheriff set out boldly toward the house.

The others followed him, keeping at a distance. They saw him climb the ridge of land and continue hesitatingly toward the house. The moon came
forth once more and shed a misty light over land and sea.

"I cal'late," said Tom Crisp, "that there's likely to be a new deputy sheriff appinted in Sag Harbor."

 Barely had he uttered these words when the report of a pistol rang out, and Hix was seen to duck his head as a bullet whined past him.

 Another flash and another report followed, whereupon the deputy sheriff paused to flatten himself out upon the ground, while those who had been watching him retreated and sought cover.

 "Hold on there, you rascals!" cried Hix loudly. "I'm an officer of the law, and I demand your surrender! You're firing upon an officer of the law. Do you understand that?"

 No answer came from the Slocum house, and Hix was seen huddling in a little hollow, taking the utmost pains to hug the ground as closely as possible.

 Again the clouds drifted over the moon, and protected by the gloom, the erstwhile courageous deputy sheriff made great haste to retreat upon all fours,

 "The datted fools!" he snarled, as he reached his companions. "They ought to know better than to shoot at an officer of the law."

 "Why didn't you keep right on, Mr. Hix?" scornfully inquired Crisp. "You was going to march right up to the house and take 'em single-handed. Why didn't you do it?"

 Then the croaking voice of Jokem was heard once more:

 "There's death in that house. One man entered it alone and never come forth."

 "Consarn it!" rasped Hix; "how be we going to capture them critters?"

 "If we surround the house," said Merriwell, "they can't get away. In time they will have to surrender."

 "I guess that's good logic," said the deputy sheriff. "That's what we'd better do. There's enough of us to do it, and I'm for it. Tompkins, you and Rawdon go round to the front of the house. Crisp and me will watch this side. Two of these young fellers can take the south side, and the rest can watch the north."

 Tom Crisp was quite willing to keep with Hix, and the sheriff's plan was accepted. In time the house was surrounded. It chanced that Buckhart and Kent remained together. The Texan was impatient and disinclined to remain idle.

 "I sure don't fancy squatting out here on the wet ground all night," he said. "Have you a weapon, Kent?"

 "I bought a revolver in Sag Harbor," answered Arthur, displaying it. "Here it is."

 "If you're with me, we'll make a sneak for the back door. By crawling up to it a-plenty cautious and doing so when the moon is hidden by the heaviest clouds, we may get there without being seen."

 "I'm willing to try it," said Kent.

 At least thirty minutes they spent in creeping upon the silent house, sheltering themselves behind rocks and bushes and moving forward only when the darkness was most dense. Eventually they lay behind the last shelter of brush within thirty feet of the back door.

 "I've got an idea," whispered Buckhart, "that the door yonder isn't a whole lot stout. It's my opinion we can go through it on the jump. If you'll follow me, Kent, I'll put my shoulder into that door."

 "I'm here to follow you," said Arthur.

 Revolver in hand, the Texan rose until he was crouching in the attitude of a sprinter about to start for a hundred-yard dash.

 "Now!" he hissed.

 Then he went leaping forward straight at that door, with Kent at his heels.

 Brad's shoulder struck the door with terrific force, and it was torn crashing from its hinges. Into the house staggered the daring Texan, ready to use his pistol, if necessary. To the credit of his reckless nerve it must be stated that he fully expected to confront the hunted men, and he was filled with amazement on making his way from the kitchen into the next room without encountering any one. Through the house went those two youths, reaching the front door and flinging it open.

 "Come on, everybody!" shouted Buckhart. "Come ahead, Crisp! We're in here!"

 The others were astounded by this cry. They had heard the crash as Buckhart broke the back door down, but could not understand its meaning until they heard him shout for them to come. Amazed, they rose from their places of concealment and ran toward the house.

 "Come in, come in," urged the Texan. "If the varmints are here, we sure haven't found them yet."

 They poured into the house. Jimmy Crisp was the last to arrive, and he brought a lantern, which was quickly lighted.

 With the aid of that lantern, the place was searched, but not a sign of the fugitives could be found. Buckhart stopped and looked around.
“Gents,” he said, “our birds have flown. There’s no one here.”

But even as he uttered those words the sound of a low, muffled cry seemed to rise from beneath his very feet.

CHAPTER IX.
WHAT THE CELLAR CONTAINED.

There was something weird and uncanny about that sound, something that startled them all and set their nerves a-quer"er.

“Great horn spoon!” muttered Brad Buckhart. “Whatever was that?”

At the open door a dusky, crooked figure appeared, and the voice of Jokem croaked:

“Death! death! It is a house of death!”

“Yah!” snarled Crisp. “Chase yourself, Jokem! I’m dratted sick o’ hearing you repeating that sort of stuff!”

“There’s somebody somewhere inside this house,” said the deputy sheriff positively. “Keep still, everybody. Listen.”

Silence fell again, and once more they heard that smothered, muffled cry coming from beneath the floor upon which they stood.

“I must acknowledge,” rumbled Rawdon, “that I don’t like the sound on’t. I’ll go further and add that I wouldn’t be here at present all by my lonesome.”

“Nor me,” piped Tompkins in his squeaky little voice. “I’ve allus laughed when folks said the place was ha’nted, but still I ain’t got no relish prowling around a spot where bloody murder and assassination has been done.”

“Where be them bank robbers? that’s the question,” cried Tom Crisp. “We had ‘em cornered here; there wa’n’t no doubt consarnning that. Where be they now?”

“Mebbe the spooks has got them,” said Tompkins. “Mebbe that’s them a-groaning that we hear.”

Meantime Buckhart and Kent had been holding a consultation.

“Gents,” said the Texan, “if there’s a cellar under this house, it’s the next place to be investigated.”

“There’s a sort of a cellar,” said Crisp, holding his lantern high so that its light shone upon the faces of the men.

It was a picturesque group, the fisherman, the sheriff, the constables, and the Yale youths, with Jokem, the hunchback, dimly seen at the open door; for, although he had ventured thus far, he would not put a foot over the threshold. Jimmy Crisp was there also, but he kept back until Brad spoke about the cellar.

“I know how to git into the cellar,” he cried. “I’ll show you the way.”

They followed Jimmy to the kitchen, and, by the aid of the lighted lantern, he pointed out a trap door in the floor.

Jokem still remained outside and they heard him crying warily:

“Beware! Take care!”

Without hesitation Buckhart stopped to seize a loop of leather by which the trap door could be lifted.

“Keerful, young feller,” cautioned Crisp. “Jest wait a jiffy. We dunno jest what’s down there. Mebbe it’s them bank robbers, and perhaps they’ll shoot kind of lively and dangerous the minute that trap is opened. I don’t s’pose you’re pertickler anxious to git filled full of bullets.”

“If they’re down there,” said Brad, “they’re trapped good and plenty. It wouldn’t do them much good to shoot.”

“If ’tain’t the bank robbers,” said Hix, “who is it?”

“We’ll never find out by standing here guessing,” said Brad.

“Which is purty good logic—purty good logic,” piped Tompkins.

“Stand round everybody, with your we’pins ready,” commanded Hix authoritatively. “P’int ’em at the trap. Hold the lantern, Tom Crisp. All right, young feller; lift her.”

Brad gave a surge and hoisted the trap door, revealing a dark opening which the light of the lantern barely penetrated enough to show the upper end of a wooden ladder.

“Careful, you critters down there!” shouted the deputy sheriff. “Better not do no shooting, for if you do we’ll fill that hole plumb full of death and destruction!”

“Keep still, Hix!” cried Crisp. “Listen!”

Now they heard those smothered cries repeated much more distinctly. There was no doubt but the sounds came from that pit of darkness beneath the but.

“I must confess,” said Tompkins, his voice trembling, “that I don’t like it. It don’t sound to me like anything skurkely human.”

“Who’s going down?” asked Hix.

Even Tom Crisp hesitated. As for Jimmy, watch-
ing those men, he was quivering from head to foot with excitement.

"Why, Hix," said the fisherman, with a touch of sarcasm, "I expected you'd jump right down that ladder in a jiffy. You was hot to march right up to this house and grab them bank robbers, ye know."

"If those are bank robbers down there," said Arthur Kent, "they are certainly behaving in a most remarkable manner."

"Certain so," agreed Buckhart. "Give me that lantern and I'll go down."

Even as he spoke, he took the lantern from the hand of Crisp and held it at an angle, endeavoring to cast the light downward into the cellar, from which a damp, unpleasant odor rose through the open trap. The light, however, scarcely reached half the length of the ladder, and immediately the Texan stepped down upon the wooden rungs and began the descent.

Seeing Brad do this, Hix was willing enough to follow; but ere he could crowd after Buckhart Arthur Kent stepped over the edge and descended.

The feet of the Texan finally found the dirt floor of the cellar. Turning, with the lantern held off at one side, Brad peered into the gloom.

A mumbling sound like that of a choking or smothering human being came from a point near at hand, and the light of the lantern revealed a figure that moved slightly.

Brad stepped forward at once, with Kent at his elbow.

There were two of those figures, half sitting, half stretched upon the ground at the foot of a wooden post which supported one of the cross timbers of the house.

A shout broke from Buckhart's lips as he leaned forward and held the lantern so that its light fell upon those figures. It was echoed by a cry from Kent.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Arthur, leaping forward and peering at those forms. "It's—it's Spofford—and Leighton!"

With cruel gags distending their jaws, bound hand and foot and tied fast to the wooden pillar, they held Leon Spofford and Luther Leighton, the former still conscious, while Leighton lay twisted and curled upon the ground, his face covered with dirt, his limbs swollen by the pressure of the tightly knotted ropes. He was breathing huskily, hoarsely, and with a great effort and convulsive heavings of his chest, like a person at the point of death.

"Put that lantern down, Buckhart!" shouted Kent.

"Give me a hand here. Hurry up! These fellows are nearly dead."

Crisp and Hix had descended the ladder, but neither Brad nor Arthur paid immediate attention to their bewildered questioning. The two youths worked swiftly to remove the gags and release Spofford and Leighton from those paralyzing, blood-choking ropes.

"We must get them out of here as quickly as possible," said Arthur.

"That's sure right," agreed Brad. "They're right near done for."

The unfortunate youths were lifted by strong hands and carried to the ladder, up which they were passed to the men who had not yet descended into the cellar.

"Take 'em out into the open air instantly," directed Brad. "I opine fresh air and plenty of it is what they both need."

Hix and Crisp remained behind to look around in the cellar; but, finding nothing save a few old barrels and empty boxes, they mounted the ladder and hurried to the open air, where Buckhart and Kent were working over Spofford and Leighton. Brad had torn open the collars of both the unfortunate young men; then he began chafing their swollen limbs, seeking to start the blood flowing in their veins.

Leighton recovered slowly indeed, but Spofford did better, although he seemed to ramble in his persistent muttering.

"It's all right, Leon, old fellow—all right," palpitated Kent. "You know us, don't you? We're friends. You know me, old chap; I'm Arthur Kent."

"Kent? Kent?" mumbled Spofford. "I'm choking—smothering—dying! Help me! It's black—black as the pit! I can't—breathe! Where is Leighton?"

"He's here—right here beside you. You can breathe all right now, old man."

"A little—just a little better. But Leighton—I heard him groaning—groaning horribly. I knew he—he was dying. Those devils—those devils, they left us there in that hole to die—to die like dogs!"

"There's sure coming a day of reckoning with those whelps!" rasped Buckhart, still rubbing Leighton's limbs. "They ought to be lynched, and they would be if this was Texas. You hear me remark?"

Suddenly Leighton began to mutter. At first his words were absolutely without meaning, but finally he gasped:

"Dying! dying!"

Almost like an echo came the croaking voice of Jokem, who suddenly reappeared and stood staring down at the unfortunate youths.
“Death! death! I tol’r yer it was there. I knowed it was in that cursed house.”

Tom Crisp seized the hunchback by the collar and gave him a thrust and a kick.

“Get away from here!” he snarled. “If we’d listened to you, them two boys would ’a’ been left there to die.”

“But what I’d like to know,” said Hix, “is where them bank robbers be.”

“They can’t git off the Neck, Mr. Hix,” asserted Crisp, “and therefore certainly they ain’t fur away.”

Leon Spofford lifted a hand and reached for that of Arthur Kent.

“Is it you, Kent—is it you?” he whispered, peering with wild, hunted eyes at the face of Kent. “Where did you come from? I’m feeling better. I can breathe. But my jaws ache; my back aches; I ache in every part of my body.”

“How in the world did you come to be down there in that hole, Leon?” asked Arthur.

“I—I don’t know. Yes, I do. Those two men—they were hidden beneath the old sail in the bottom of the Scud. We were—off Point Judith. I thought—I thought I saw something move—under the canvas. I couldn’t—believe it. I spoke to Leighton. They heard me. The next minute they rose up—with pistols in their hands. They swore they’d shoot us. They meant it, for they were desperate men. We weren’t armed. What could we do? We couldn’t resist. They said we wouldn’t be harmed if we didn’t—put up a fight. How could we put up a fight? They bound us both—bound us hand and foot. They made us lie in the bottom of the Scud. Then came the storm. They ran ashore at last. Then, after talking it over, they set our feet free and marched us at the point of a pistol into an old house. They made us go down into the cellar and tied us again, gagged us, and left us there to die.”

“That explains it,” cried Kent. “You’re not dead, Leon—not by a long shot. You’re all right, my boy. Leighton is coming round. He’s all right, too.”

“This certain has been a some lively slice of doings,” remarked Buckhart, as he lifted Leighton’s head. “There you are, old fellow. Now be comfortable. I say, Kent, where is Merriwell? Come to consider it, we haven’t put blinkers on him for some time, and that’s a heap remarkable.”

“Where’s them bank robbers?” growled Hix.

Even as this question was spoken the distant sound of a pistol shot came echoing through the night.

CHAPTER X.

DESPERATE MEN.

As the reckless Texan was flinging himself at the back door of the old Slocum house, Dick Merriwell, near the edge of the gully which led down to the water, fancied he saw a moving figure creeping along the bottom of that fissure. Dick was not quite sure, and, the moon being hidden back of the clouds, his eyes served him but poorly. With his pistol ready for use, he remained there, peering down into the dark depths of the gully. He heard the crash of the broken door, and following this, a few minutes later, Buckhart’s voice shouting for every one to come on. His first impulse was to rush toward the house, and he started to do so. He had not proceeded far, however, when he halted and hesitated.

“I don’t hear any sound of a conflict,” he muttered. “They’ve got into the house, but there’s no scrap taking place or any indications that they have found the gentlemen we’re looking for. This gully runs close to the front door of that house. Is it possible those two rascals slipped out under cover of darkness and are making a sneak?”

Turning back, he ran hastily along the edge of the gully for a short distance.

“I’m exposing myself a bit foolishly, I suppose,” he decided. “If those fellows are down there they can see me against the sky, and they may take a notion to try their popguns on me.”

Turning away from the gully, he followed its course at a distance, finally clambering down over the rocks and reaching the shore. The mouth of the gully was close at hand, and he stood there palpitant and eager, a pistol in his hand.

The moon sifted through some thin clouds and dropped a little patch of light upon the waters of the cove. Something caused Dick to look over his shoulder, and out upon the bosom of the cove he saw the Yale rocking at anchor.

He saw something else. The moonlight showed him two black spots upon the water, something like a third of the distance from the shore to the ship. Those spots were moving slowly, leaving a slight wake behind them.

“Great Caesar!” muttered Dick, running softly over the wet, crunching sand until he had reached the edge of the water, where he halted and peered at those moving spots. “They are men—men swimming toward the Yale! By all that’s marvelous, I believe
they're the men we're after. They have tricked the rest of the crowd. If they reach the sloop they will attempt to escape in her. The tide is running out, and they'll have a fair chance to get away."

He lifted his pistol and took careful aim at one of those spots.

"Possibly," he said, "I might put a bullet through that man's head."

But Dick Merriwell had no desire to kill a human being, and his hand fell.

"I won't try it," he said—"even if they get away, I won't try it."

He knew it would be useless to call to them and order them to stop and turn back. They were desperate, and they would give no heed to such a command.

Suddenly he thought of the little boat Jimmy Crisp had left not far away. Thrusting the pistol into his pocket, Dick turned and ran toward that boat. He found it, and, alone, dragged it down over the sand and rocks to the water's edge. The oars were in the boat. Merriwell pushed off, wading out knee-deep, and then sprang aboard. Seizing the oars, he set them in the oarlocks and swung round until, looking over his shoulder, he could see that he was headed toward the Yale.

Not five strokes had he made when the moon passed into another deep cloud and darkness descended upon the water.

Strong and steady were the pulls Dick Merriwell gave at those oars. At intervals he looked over his shoulder, fancying he must be near the swimmers. Suddenly the Yale loomed dead ahead, her stern swinging out from the shore. Two more strokes sent him along the port side of the sloop. Dropping his oars, he seized the gunwale of the Yale.

"Well," he thought with satisfaction, "I reckon I'm here first, and those gentlemen will have to deal with me."

Rising, he lifted his foot to leap on board the sloop. As he did this he realized that some one was clinging to the starboard rail of the Yale, some one whose head and shoulders were lifted high out of the water; some one who had started to climb on board, but was hanging there, glaring across at Dick.

But that was not all, for the man had produced his pistol, which he had somehow kept from getting wet while swimming, and as Dick leaped the weapon was lifted and discharged at short range, the flash almost scorching Dick's cheek.

Forward headlong into the bottom of the Yale plunged Dick Merriwell—and lay still!

Panting and snarling, the ruffian who had fired that shot dragged himself over the rail and pounced upon the motionless youth.

"Got him!" he rasped. "Bored him that time, sure!"

Another pair of hands reached up out of the water and seized the rail of the Yale.

"Give me a lift, Gus," called the voice of Pike. "I'm pretty near done up."

Gus turned, seized his comrade by the collar, and helped him clamber into the sloop.

"Who was it in the rowboat?" panted Pike. "Who fired?"

"I did, and I reckon I put a chunk of lead plumb through the critter's head, for here he lays."

With which cold-blooded remark, Gus stirred the body in the bottom of the boat with his foot.

"Bad business! bad business!" muttered Pike regretfully. "I suppose you had ter do it, though?"

"Sure. He was jumping aboard when I fired. If I hadn't soaked him, he'd had us at his mercy. It was him or us, Pike."

"Well, we'd better be moving up some," said Pike, "for they must have heard you shoot. They'll be coming arter us again good and hot."

"If we can get outside of the ledges they'll have something to do to catch us. There's a good breeze blowing outside. If she holds cloudy, we can lose 'em on the open water, even if they chase us. Get up the anchor, Pike. Get busy now."

"What are you going to do with him?" questioned Pike, with a gesture toward the figure in the bottom of the boat.

"Never mind him now. He won't bother us none."

With savage haste they fell to, hoisting the anchor and getting up the sails. The running tide bore them toward the mouth of the cove ere the wind filled the hoisted canvas.

"It's taking chances some," muttered Pike. "The ledges are thick out there."

"What do you want to do?" snarled Gus. "Do you want to stay here and be nabbed by the bunch that's hunting us yonder, or had you rather take chances on drowning?"

"Me for the chances on drowning," said Pike. Gus was at the helm.

"Listen!" said Pike suddenly. "I hear voices!"

His companion laughed, harshly.

"That's right," he agreed. "Them fellers back
yonder have got down to the shore. They’re chiming it over. The moon——”

He was interrupted by a muttered exclamation of dismay from Pike, for the moon broke through once more and showered its light upon them. Looking back, they could see a number of dark figures upon the shore. Two or three of those figures started off at a run. Others remained looking out upon the cove, and suddenly there were several bright flashes of fire, followed by the whistling hum and spat of bullets and the barking of pistols.

“Keep low!” hissed Gus. “Let ’em bang away. The chances are a hundred to one that they won’t even touch this boat.”

At least a dozen shots were fired, and one of the bullets did strike the stern of the Yale. That, however, was the only piece of lead which came dangerously near either one of the fugitives.

Soon they were in the midst of the ledges, and now Gus was more than glad that the moonlight aided him in setting his course. He saw a black ledge rolling bare upon the starboard quarter, and another sending up spouts of foam to port. Between them he steered. There was a slight bump and a scraping sound, which brought the hearts of both rascals into their mouths; but, slipping over the rock that it had touched, the sloop glided on.

“Pike,” said Gus, “jest take a look at this feller and see where I plugged him.”

Pike stooped over the silent figure in the bottom of the boat, grasping it with his hands. With a jerk, he turned the body, and a moment later a broken howl of amazement escaped his lips, for a pair of hands had shot upward and fastened upon his throat.

Gus stared dully for a second or two, witnessing a struggle which was taking place at his very feet.

“Gimme a hand!” wheezed Pike. “This critter is mighty lively—for a dead one!”

Recklessly Gus released the tiller and flung himself upon Dick Merriwell.

Dick had not been hit by the bullet. His cheek had been scorched by the flash of the pistol and grazed by the lead, but he was unharmed. However, his toe had caught upon the gunwale of the Yale and pitched him headlong into the bottom of the sloop. His head struck with stunning force, and, for the time being, he lay senseless where he fell. His senses returning, he was dully seeking to form some plan of action when Pike bent over and turned him face uppermost.

For at least five minutes Dick Merriwell gave those two scoundrels the fight of their lives. While the un-piloted Yale veered hither and thither amid those dangerous ledges, the trio snarled and panted and fought in the waist of the boat.

“I’ll stick him!” cried Gus fiercely.

“Don’t use your knife!” pleaded Pike. “There ain’t no need of it. We’ve got him.”

Eventually they succeeded by their united efforts in pinning Dick helpless beneath them. There was plenty of cordage in the boat, and with this they tied Dick’s arms to his sides.

“There, my fine fellow!” palpitated Pike; “I guess that will hold you for a while.”

“Tie his feet,” ordered Gus. “Lively, now. It’s a plumb wonder we ain’t capsized already.”

As soon as possible Gus leaped back to the tiller. Crouching, Pike struck a match, sheltered it with his curved hands, and threw the light into Merriwell’s face,

“Hello!” he said, “so it’s you, is it? Well, I’m blewed if you ain’t a tough nut. You can put up jest about the fanciest sort of a scrap of any cove I know. Where did you get that bullet?”

“Nowhere, thank you,” answered Dick coolly.

“Well, I thought you was going some for a man with a slug of lead in him.”

“Here, Pike!” called Gus. “Listen! Can’t you hear a power boat?”

The slim rascal rose and turned his ear shoreward.

“Sure thing,” he answered. “There’s one coming.”

“Then we can excuse this moon willingly. On open water, with a good breeze blowing, a gas boat would have to go some to catch up with us. But now——”

“There it is!” cried Gus, pointing at a dark spot which crept out across the cove, heading toward them.
“Make sure your popgun is working, Pike,” said Gus. “I figure we’ll have to do a little shooting.”

Pike turned an anxious eye toward the sky.

“They clouds will favor us in less than a minute,” he said. “Better decide on your course before they shut in, pal.”

“They are good and heavy this time, and that’s luck for us,” chuckled Gus. “It will be dark enough.”

He was right, for when the next huge, dense mass of clouds rolled over the moon the darkness that fell upon them was so deep that they could see no more than a few boat lengths beyond the Yale. They could hear the surf pounding on the ledges and the shore near by, and, with the sails pulling, they plunged on across the black water.

A gleaming bar of light shot out toward them, moving to the right and left.

Gus swore.

“They’ve got a searchlight!” he rasped. “They will bother us some with that thing.”

The power boat was coming out through the ledges which guarded the mouth of the cove, and the searchlight swept the water.

Pike produced his pistol and waited, watching that searchlight.

“They’ll spot us with it,” he muttered. “They’re dead sure to do that. Ah!”

The light fell upon them faintly and hung there. They saw the glittering lenses of the lamp bearing full upon the Yale, and heard above the chugging of the motor the sound of men’s voices, followed by a half-distinguished command for them to stop.

“Go to blazes!” snarled Pike, balancing himself as the Yale lurched and rolled. “I’m going to try for that lantern, pal.”

Crack!

He fired at the searchlight.

Almost immediately there were three flashes of fire upon the power boat, and at least one bullet skimmed the water close to the Yale.

Gus brought forth his own pistol. With one hand on the tiller, he guided the sloop, while with the other he worked the revolver.

On a miniature scale it was like a running naval battle. The fugitives upon the Yale peppered away at the searchlight, while the pursuers answered by firing at least two shots to their one. Bullets began to whine and hum all around the sloop. The sails were perforated, and sometimes the spat of lead against wood told that the hull of the boat had been hit.

Suddenly Gus uttered a sharp, snarling cry of pain.

“What’s the matter, pal—hit?” asked Pike anxiously.

“Yep.”

“Where?”

“Left shoulder.”

“Bad?”

“Dunno. Guess not. Reckon she’s only clipped. Hang the luck! Can’t we hit that lamp?”

“If we don’t we’re caught,” palpitated Pike, jamming fresh cartridges into the cylinder of his revolver. “They’re gaining on us.”

Lifting his reloaded weapon, he fired three shots, and immediately following the third the searchlight went out.

“Got it! got it!” he snarled exultantly. “I smashed her that time. Now, Gus, can’t you dodge ‘em? They will reckon we’ll keep straight on for the open water. Swing in toward shore.”

“The ledges——”

“If we don’t change our course they’ll overhaul us, sure as fate, pal. Hadn’t we better chance it by running close to the ledges?”

“I reckon so,” said Gus, putting the tiller over and bringing the sloop round until she headed toward the shore.

Silently they slipped into the deeper darkness that lay upon the water along the land. They heard the barking of the motor boat as it passed them, continuing straight on toward the open water.

“That’s the stuff!” whispered Pike with satisfaction. “Fooled ’em all right.”

Almost beneath the forefoot of the sloop a ledge seethed and boiled.

With a muttered cry of dismay, Gus thrust the tiller over and cleared the ledge by a few yards. This change of course, however, forced them in still nearer
toward shore, and they realized they were amid a mass of dangerous ledges, over which the water bulged and foamed:

"If we ever get out of here——" began Pike.

That sentence was not finished, for, with a sickening crash, the sloop struck a jagged ledge, which tore a hole in her bottom. Through that hole the water began to pour at once.

Gus relinquished the helm instantly.

"It's swim again, Pike," he said. "She will swamp in a minute."

"Can you swim with your shoulder, pal?"

"I've got to. She's filling now."

"How about this chap here?"

"Let him sink with the infernal old boat," cried Gus.

Planting his foot on the rail, he plunged into the water and struck out for the shore, followed a moment later by Pike.

And Merriwell, bound with those ropes, was left to drown!

CHAPTER XI.

CAPTURED AT LAST.

The night was passing, and still those hunted men were upon the Neck, from which they had been unable to escape. Again and again they had hidden in the shelter of rocks and bushes while searchers passed near them. From the lips of those searchers they learned that the Yale had been found where the sea had lodged her in the cleft of a submerged ledge, and this had convinced the pursuers that the fugitives, unless drowned, were once more upon the Neck.

"We've got to get off here before morning, pal," said Pike. "If we don't, the jig is up with us. The game has gone agin' us. It looks to me like we was cooked."

"Not yet!" snarled Gus savagely. "I'll never give up until I'm down and out. I'm no quitter."

"Am I?" demanded Pike resentfully. "I'm with you to the finish."

"The boats of that fisherman ought to be at his pier now. Mebbe the power boat is there. If we can get it——"

"If we can get it we'll dodge 'em yet. If we could get any sort of a boat we'd stand a chance of fooling 'em."

They made for the home of Tom Crisp, little dreaming that Jimmy Crisp himself, hidden amid some thick underbrush, had been within twenty feet of them as they decided on this action.

Jimmy lay still until the scoundrels disappeared in the darkness. Then, panting with eagerness, he rose to his feet and crept away. Circling, he sought to get ahead of them, running as fast as his feet would carry him.

"If they git to that boat," he thought, "there'll be no ketchin' 'em in a hurry; but they've got to go some to beat me."

At a wild gallop, the boy raced down past his home toward the boat landing. A light gleamed in one of the windows of the house, and Jimmy felt certain his mother was there, waiting with anxiety for the return of her husband and son.

The power boat had been brought alongside the float and left there when the pursuers returned after discovering the wrecked sloop. Jimmy leaped on board, cast the painter off, and seized the line of the dory, which he made fast to a thwart. Next he cranked the engine vigorously.

After the manner of gas engines, this one balked unexpectedly. It fired once or twice, then stopped, and Jimmy fell to cranking again. He worked fiercely, the perspiration starting out upon his face. Finally he stopped and lifted his head. Against the sky he saw two figures which came running down over a ridge of land not far away.

"Here they come! here they come!" panted the boy, once more cranking for all he was worth.

The motor started—spluttered—stopped!

"What ails the thing?" thought the desperate boy, who was now, to confess the truth, not a little frightened.

Again he cranked her. Firing erratically, the engine began to do its work, and Jimmy joyously headed her away from the float.
“Stop!” cried a voice. “Stop, or we’ll shoot!”
“Shoot away!” squealed Jimmy, ducking down into the bottom of the boat.
With an oath, Gus fired a single shot at the motor boat, which was mooring off with the dory in tow.
His arm was seized by Pike, who rasped:
“Are you crazy, pal? That will bring the whole bunch this way in a hurry.”
Gus raged furiously.
“It was that cursed kid!” he declared. “He’s balked us again!”
“And we’d better light out of here lively. If you want to wait for your fool shooting to bring that bunch on us, all right. I’m hitting the high spots.”
Gus followed Pike, who ran up the path toward the house.
The light was still shining from the window of the cottage, and, to their surprise, as they drew near they saw that the front door of the house was standing open.
Suddenly Pike stopped, putting out his hand and seizing Gus.
“Look!” he hissed. “Look there! Men!”
He had caught a glimpse of dark figures in the path not ten rods beyond the house.
“In here!” rasped Gus, as he leaped toward the door.
Pike hesitated a moment, and in that moment a pistol spat and barked and a bullet flew past him, bedding itself in the wall of the house.
That settled it. Pike leaped through the doorway, slammed the door shut, and turned the key in the heavy lock.
“We’re cornered, pal,” he said—“cornered again! This time I’m afraid they’ve got us for fair.”
“If they take me,” said Gus, “it will cost them dear.”
A shaded lamp stood on the table near at hand. By the light Pike saw something in the face of his comrade which plainly indicated that Gus would fight as long as life remained in him.
“Where the devil is the old woman?” muttered Pike, looking around. “She ought to be here.”
“Put out that lamp!” snarled Gus.
A single step Pike made toward the lamp, and then he halted, his jaw drooping, his eyes bulging from his head, his face turning ghastly pale. A choking cry of terror came from his throat.
“Look, pal, look!” he groaned.
Gus whirled.
There stood Pike, his arm lifted, his finger pointing toward the doorway which led into the adjoining room.
Just beyond that doorway they beheld a terrible apparition. Clothed from head to foot in a white garment was a figure like that of a human being. Its face was white as snow; its eyes were fastened stonily upon them.
It was Dick Merriwell!
Slowly this apparition lifted a hand and pointed at the cowering, shuddering scoundrels. Its pallid lips moved, and a hollow, unearthly voice seemed to issue from its throat.
“Your hour has come! Drop your weapons, for you are doomed!”
Pike’s pistol clattered to the floor.
“It’s the dead!” groaned the superstitious wretch, covering his face with his hands and staggering back against the wall.
Even Gus was scarcely less affected. He stood there paralyzed and staring, feeling sure that the figure he beheld was that of a ghost—the ghost of the youth they had left to drown when the Yale struck upon the ledge.
There were heavy feet in the kitchen. There were the many voices of men. The ghostly figure advanced, still with its hand outstretched and its hypnotic eyes fastened upon the shuddering Gus.
Half a dozen men came rushing into that room from the kitchen, having entered by the back door. Buckhart and Kent were with them. Tom Crisp, Hix, the sheriff, and the two constables were there. Even Jokem, the hunchback, appeared.
The “ghost” had advanced within eight feet of Gus. Suddenly, with a single sweep of its arm, it cast the white garment—a sheet—aside. With a pantherish leap, it sprang upon the paralyzed scoundrel,
clutching his wrist and flinging him back against the wall.

The others lost not a second in rendering assistance, and at last the bank robbers were captured without striking a single blow in their own defense.

When it was too late, Gus had attempted to put up a feeble resistance. He was handled without gloves. It was Buckhart who tied the rope about the fellow's wrists and elbows, and Brad made his knots secure.

"Never mind squirming any, you onery galoot!" cried the Texan. "You left Spofford and Leighton truss ed up so that the blood was ready to burst from their veins, and a little of that medicine will do you good, I opine."

Mrs. Crisp and Jimmy looked in from the kitchen.

"I'm much disturbed, madam," said Dick Merriwell smilingly. "You brought the men just in time. I hope we haven't disturbed the rest of Spofford and Leighton, although I had to deprive them of the only sheet upon their bed."

"Whatever is it you've got on your face, pard?" asked Buckhart, laughing.

"A little of Mrs. Crisp's good flour," answered Dick. "I was making arrangements to give these frisky scoundrels a scare, if we could find them, when they so politely walked right in at the front door. I finished my make-up a trifle suddenly, and sent Mrs. Crisp to bring you in on us as soon as she could."

Leon Spofford, descending the stairs, thrust his head into the room and asked what was going on.

"Your kind friends who wrecked the Scud for you considerably walked right in here a few moments ago," explained Dick, vigorously wiping the dry flour from his face with his handkerchief. "These are the gentlemen, are they not?"

"Those are the men," answered Spofford unhesitatingly.

"By gum!" cried Deputy Sheriff Hix. "I plumb forgot all about my handcuffs. I guess we'll jest put the irons on these fellers. If they're real bank robbers, this ought to be a party good night's work fur me."

"And they was captured in my house," said Tom Crisp. "Where do I come in?"

"We'll take care of that, sir," said Dick. "I don't think Sheriff Hix will gobble up the entire reward money."

"But where's the loot they got from the bank?" cried Hix. "That's what I want ter know. Where is it? Speak up, you rapscallions. Tell us where 'tis."

"You'll have ter find out," retorted Gus defiantly. "Perhaps it's at the bottom of the ocean."

* * * * * * *

During the pistol battle between the fugitives on the Yale and the pursuers on the motor boat, Dick Merriwell was twisting and working at his bonds. Hagan and Woods were too busy to observe this, and therefore they were wholly unaware that Dick had practically released himself when the Yale struck the ledges and filled. Instead of drowning, Dick managed to get clear of the last strands and knots so that he was able quietly to swim ashore in the wake of the desperate men.

Gus Hagan and Pike Woods proved to be indisputably the men who had robbed the Woodfords bank. For their capture a reward had been offered, and there was likewise a reward offered for the recovery and return of the money and securities which the burglars had taken from the bank. Neither Hagan nor Woods could be frightened or forced into telling how they had disposed of the plunder.

Nevertheless, three days later Jimmy Crisp found it all where it had been buried in the guilly leading from the old Slocum house to the shore—and it was Jimmy who received the reward money.

**THE END.**

The Next Number (690) Will Contain

DICK MERRIWELL IN THE NORTH WOODS;

OR,

THE TIMBER THIEVES OF THE FLOODWOOD.

The Lone Man in the Woods—The Campers—The Story of Charlie Redbird—The Spring in the Woods—The Escape—The Indian Sentry—A Night Move—Missed by a Narrow Margin—Within a Hair's Breadth—Shooting Churn Falls—The Timber Thief's Son—A Desperate Situation—Good-by.
First Mention of Hand Guns.

Very early ordnance was small, some of it so small that many of the guns could be either mounted on wooden blocks as cannon or attached to staves for use as hand guns; but it is impossible to say how early the last-named form of their application was put in practice, and this partly owing to the fact that the same nomenclature is freely employed to express both classes of weapons in the written records of the period.

The first clear mention of hand guns that has descended to us occurs in Italian records and "un hand-gone" is scheduled in an English inventory of 1338. The metal portions of very early hand guns are cylindrical in form and usually about a span long—i.e., 9 inches—but they begin to lengthen about the end of the fourteenth century; they are cast in bronze or brass or made of wrought iron.

Though the use of iron, leaden, and even brass bullets at this very early period in the history of firearms is recorded, the favorite projectile, as shown by illuminations in manuscripts, would seem to have been a bat—i.e., a bolt or arrow feathered with brass (garros a feu); sometimes called quarrel, missile for the crossbow. Quarrel guns (quariloux gones) are mentioned in the treasury accounts of Henry IV of England (1590-1613), and such missiles were still being employed with firearms up to the end of the sixteenth century, as shown in a Tower inventory of 1599.

The early history of firearms, in the sense of tubes from which missiles are thrown by the action of a detonating compound of the nature of gunpowder, is wrapped in obscurity; though it may be safely inferred from the few early records that have come down to us that such weapons were first employed in warfare soon after the commencement of the fourteenth century, if not some time before. The country of their origin remains uncertain, but we may gather that it was most probably Italy, though the Flemings were early in the field.

A Byzantine record of the eleventh century and one of China of the thirteenth (1299) refer to tubes, respectively of bronze and bamboo, from which an inflammable compound was projected, with the object of setting fire to ships or buildings, and the material so employed was probably Greek fire, of which there were many varieties, some of which would seem to have been slightly detonating in character, but ordnance and hand guns require a mixture strong enough to propel a projectile from a tube of considerable momentum.

It will probably never be known when or where this epoch-making compound was invented. It is also stated that there is a reference in Chinese annals of 1292 to a fiery mixture having been employed in that country and year in what would seem to have been bombs, but the statement, resting as it does on the reputed copy of an older record, should be received with caution.

Prior to the invention of the match both ordnance and hand guns were fired by a red-hot iron bar or a live coal. Figures of guns shown in illuminated manuscripts or on the rather later engravings are often fanciful, and at the best give merely the shadow of the pieces, but fortunately a few very early actual specimens have been preserved, some of which have chambers, while others are without them. The topchile is on the uppermost side of the barrel, and the muzzle strengthened with an outer thickening or ring. This metal part is socketed into a staff, to which it is firmly attached by iron rings, though sometimes the stock itself is of wrought iron.

Among these weapons, the wooden stocks of which have mostly remained but a single example furnishing any reliable data as to the time it was used in warfare, and this piece was found when excavating among the débris of the fortress Vesta Taunenberg, a castle in Hesse, taken by assault and disaster many years ago. It was excavated in 1907 and is now deposited in the Germanische National Museum at Nuremberg, where there is a large and comprehensive collection of arms and armor.

This example is very close to a modern in outward form and weight. The staff fell to pieces going out and seeking position that it may mostly under the water and below where it freezes, to preserve their communication with the pond.

SOME STRANGE FOODS.

There are many other unconventional foods which have been declared quite as appetizing as roast beef. There is a big establishment in the Rue Saint-Lazare, Paris, where dromedary flesh is at the disposal of its customers. The most tasty pieces—callet, longi, hunch—are 8s. a pound, but only under is charged for a rib or steak, while the hump, which the Arabs declare to be the best part, is practically given away.

The Parisians are fond of experimenting with their diet. Some few years ago they astounded the more conservative Britisher by including roast worms on the menu. The worm was the cockchafer, and was first steeped in vinegar, which made it disgorge the earth it had swallowed, then rolled into a paste of flour, milk, and eggs, and fried to a bright golden color. The guests took the crisp dry worm between their fingers, and it cracked between the teeth. Although the dinner was pronounced a success, it has been recorded upon gores.

In the West Indies the local gourmets are rather proud of their palm worms, which are roasted before a wood fire on tiny spits and richly spiced. They are said to be a great delicacy, and to last for hours entirely their own.

Ants crushed in a mortar and the strained liquid mixed with water and sugar is a favorite drink in Brazil. It is said to taste like champagne.

The Japanese eat cockchafers, and the Chinese are fond of the chrysalides of silkworms, after the silk has been wound off. They fry them and season with pepper and salt and vinegar. The Zulus find much delight in locusts, both raw and cooked, and it is quite a common sight to see the natives catch them by the handful, crush them between their palms, and eat them with gusto.

The favorite delicacy of the native Australian are bugong cakes, which are made from a species of butterfly. Fires are lighted under the trees, upon which the butterflies settle, and, suffocated by the smoke, they drop to earth. The bodies are pounded into pulp and made into cakes, which have a very pungent odor, and they have the undesirable effect of making the eater very ill for several days; but if the diet is persevered with the unpleasant symptoms pass away, and the invalids digest them well and become exceedingly fat.

It is surprising what a large number of natives eat earth. This is very common in New California, New Guinea, and in the Malay Archipelago. In Java a certain kind of clay is mixed with water, the sand and stones being removed, leaving a soft paste. The clay is made into cakes about as thick as a lead pencil, and baked in an iron saucepan. It is supposed to taste like a piece of cork.

Most people think that if there is any nourishment in coal it must provide a very indigestible meal. On the contrary, Doctor Emile Fischer, who won the Nobel prize for chemistry a year or two ago, declares that coal is edible. He has made an extract of coal, and finds that this extract has the same nutritive qualities as beefsteak or eggs.

THE BEAVERS' HOME.

When the beavers' dams are completed, the animals separate into small companies to build cabins or houses for themselves. These are constructed upon piles along the borders of the pond. They are of an oval shape, resembling a beehive, and they vary from five feet to ten feet in diameter, according to the number of families they are to accommodate.

These dwellings are never less than two stories high, generally three, and sometimes they contain four apartments. The walls of these are from two feet to three feet thick, formed of the same materials as the dams. On the inside they are made smooth, but left rough without, being rendered impenetrable by rain.

The lower story is about two feet high, the second is formed by a wall of woven sticks, and the top floor is made of square reed mats with an arched roof. Through each floor there is a passage, and the uppermost floor is always above the level of the water. Each of these huts has two doors—one on the land side, to admit the rushings out and seeking provisions that arise mostly under the water and below where it freezes, to preserve their communication with the pond.
TIP TOP WEEKLY

NEW YORK, June 26, 1909.

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TIP TOP ROLL OF HONOR.

Following the suggestion of Mr. Butt L. Standish, that appeared in his letter to Tip Top readers in No. 460, the following loyal Tip Toppers have won for themselves a place on our Honor Roll for their efforts to increase the circulation of the King of Weeklies. Get in line, boys and girls, and strive to have your name at the head of the list.

Frederic B. Eastman, Canada.
Allan F. Malone, Arizona.
V. D. Reynolds, New York State.
Edward B. Egans, New York City.
Alfred M. Vandyke, Washington.
Edgar Bickle, Canada.
Ralph F. Paulding, Mass.
Carrie Hazeltine, Minnesota.
Clarence R. Sawyer, Canal Zone, Panama.
Roy Lincoln, Colorado.

The names of other enthusiastic Tip Toppers will be added from time to time. Send in the result of your efforts to push the circulation of your favorite weekly and win a place on the Roll of Honor.

APPLAUSE.

Owing to the large number of letters received, the editor of Tip Top cannot undertake to secure their publication under six weeks. Those who contribute to this department must not expect to see them before that time.

FREE POST CARDS.—Any boy who writes us, telling why he loves Tip Top, and what the magazine has done for him, as well as what he is doing on his part to increase its circulation, will, upon request, receive a set of six fine post cards of the principal characters in Tip Top free by mail. Be very sure and address your letters "Editor Tip Top Weekly Post Card Offer."

I have been reading "Tip Top Weekly" for 4 years, and think it about time that I wrote to the Applause column. No stories have interested me as the stories of Frank and Dick Merritt's adventures. Before reading "Tip Top" I had the bad habits of smoking and drinking; but when I read a few of your books I cast my bad habits aside and have not "backslid" yet. I have succeeded in getting nine of my companions to read "Tip Top" and Medal Library books. I am sorry to think of the young people of foreign lands who cannot read nor obtain this fine little magazine. Also of our brave young tars who are often disap-

pointed when they are unable to procure "Tip Tops" when they go on a cruise. A sailor's life may be good, but it would be more enjoyable if they could always receive "Tip Top" regularly while on the battleships. "Tip Top" does certainly deserve the title, "an ideal publication for the American youth." As I feel that I have taken too much room of the Applause column, I will close my letter, with many thanks to Street & Smith, Professor Fourmen, and "Tip Top" readers. Long life to them all.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

We know that a package of "Tip Tops" arriving on board one of our battleships during their long cruise was received more eagerly than any other publication. The boys declared it was just like a breath from home to meet their beloved Frank and Dick, and read of the well-remembered American sports.

Having been a reader of "Tip Top" for the past 6 years, I will write you a letter asking you to please have Felicia's appearance in an early number? She is my favorite of the girls of the younger set, and I think that she would add much vim to the present Yale stories. I hope that Felicia and Robert L. Claxton will meet soon, for I am sure that he will admire her far more than he does June Arlington.

Dick's friends, Hal Darrell, Tommy Tucker, Paul Rossmer, Robclaxton, Dave Flint, Barron Black, and Mable Ditson and her married friend are fine, but Frank and his friends are superior to Dick and his, to us older readers anyway. In the future, after we grow old, it will be a pleasure to read of Frank, his family, and his friends. Can we not have the reappearance of some of the old Yale flock, especially Jack Ready, Dick Starbrite, Dave Morgan, and Harry Batterson?

As physical culture is needed by the majority of the boys of the present time, Frank's school would be, in reality, a fine institution for the American boy. In my estimation no character of "Tip Top" has ever surpassed dear old Bill—not even Frank. Just think how he has stood by Frank through thick and thin. Their friendship is something that boys and girls can profit by, for they are indeed friends "tried and true."

In the recent numbers in which Bruce meets Otero, I sympathized with Bruce very much, and I felt that if I could see Otero I would give her a good shaking. My brother attends college, and in him I can see and better understand the love and regard that Frank, Dick, and their friends feel for Yale. I have not gotten many to read "the king of weeklies," but as I am yet under "sweet sixteen," I have time to do better. My mother, brother, and I look forward to the pleasant time we will have on Friday night, when "Tip Top" comes. Hoping to hear from the characters asked for, and wishing the best of success to every one connected with "Tip Top," I am the sincere deserter of

GIRLIE.

It is very pleasant to hear from some of the sisters of "our boys," especially when they tell us how eagerly "Tip Top" is watched for by the whole family. The author must himself decide about the return of the old characters. As many hundreds of characters have appeared upon this mimic stage during the thirteen years of "Tip Top's" existence, it becomes evident that to have even a proportion of them again enter into the stories would be manifestly impossible.

(A letter from Virginia.)

I will take the pleasure of writing my thanks to you for the good "Tip Top" that has done me. Before commencing to read "Tip Top" it was a small, weak boy, taking no interest in any sports at all. But I have taken these up and am now a healthy boy, full of life and vigor. I have read "Tip Top" for 5 years, off and on, but have read it regularly for 3 years. I have said, and will say, to-day that "Tip Top" is the best magazine of any kind published. It teaches a boy the curse of liquor and smoking. It has more common sense on one page than all other weeklies put together. I will close for the time, wishing Bert L. and Street & Smith a happy and prosperous life. I remain, a loyal Tip Topper.

Claud Urquhart.

And besides the lessons contained in these wonderful stories, the tales themselves have never been equalled for thrilling interest.
The author knows all American sports from Alpha to Omega, and can draw characters that fairly thwart with vital human interest. These are some of the things that have made "Tip Top" stand head and shoulders above all other juvenile publications all these years, and so long as Burt L. Standish remains at the helm, there is no danger of others getting within sighting distance.

(A letter from Canada.)

I enclosed you find my renewal blank for "Tip Top Weekly" and postage accompanying same. As to the regularity of the receipt of my paper, on the whole it arrived promptly, but at times it did not reach me until four or five days after the proper day for its arrival. But it has always arrived in good condition, and I have little to complain of. I am an enthusiastic Tip-Topper and have written several letters to the Alpahse, but none have appeared in print. I have worked hard to increase "Tip Top"'s circulation, and to a degree have been successful, having placed most of my Merrivell stories in our club library, and had the misfortune to lose most of them when our club rooms were burglarized. But I gained several Tip-toppers, so I feel amply repaid. I think it is the highest honor that could be given to any one to have his or her name placed on the Honor Roll. If I could get my name there you bet I'd be proud. Professor Fourmen and the editor of the Alpahse both do fine work, and I am the recipient of the stories, no word of mine can portray their excellence. Sincerely yours,
FREDERIC B. EASTMAN.

And your name shall appear at the head of the list, my boy. By the way, things are coming to a pretty pass when burglarly has to be resorted to by boys in order to secure a file of "Tip Top." Let us hope the lightning-fingered one read every number of the magazine that was stolen, for in that case he must speedily feel ashamed to have been concerned in such a cheap business.

Four years ago I began to read the "Tip Top Weekly." I can say no more in praise of this great publication than to tell you that I have not only continued to read it, but have induced many of my friends to do the same. I am an extra-wondered why "Tip Top" claims and retains the interest of every one who reads it, and after reading so many in the last four years, I see that it is the write which Mr. Benedict weaves into his stories. I know of more than one man who has passed the youthful age many years ago, but who holds the prospect of reading a Merrivell with delight. To give an example of the interest which "Tip Top" is regarded in my neighborhood, I will relate an incident which occurred a short time ago. As some may be aware, Chicago is at present promoting a new system of play grounds by which athletics are greatly encouraged. These play grounds, are splendidly equipped for athletics, and in the one of which I am about to speak is a director of athletics who is just the man a boy would want to manage his sports. A graduate of a big university, a brilliant athlete, and a fine man, he has done wonders for the untrained boys of my vicinity. One of his plans was to organize an association for the purpose of controlling athletic teams and in other ways bringing out the athletic talent of the members. To raise funds we decided to have an entertainment of some sort calculated to interest the boys of the neighborhood. We had much trouble in selecting an entertainment of this sort, and one of the members suggested that we attempt to dramatize several of the incidents of the covers of Frank or Dick Merrivell. Before it could be explained that this would be impossible owing to the difficult task of merging several "Tip Top" stories into one, almost the entire club joined in with the boy who had suggested it. If the publishers of this great book should ever decide to do so, I would be willing to wager that orders from all over the country—no, the world—will pour in from boys in the neighborhood where we are. I realize that this lengthy letter has merited a place in the waste basket, but I hope it will be read before such a disposition of it is made.

GEORGE T. DELOUE.
Chicago, Ill.

We do not doubt the accuracy of your views, and that if a play founded upon some of the scenes in the Frank and Dick Merrivell stories was placed upon the boards it would be received by crowded houses all over the country. Some day you may enjoy this treat.
noble chest, 2 inches above the required figure. None of the exercises you mention would be apt to retard growth. Try and reduce your weight by long runs and energetic work that brings out the perspiration. That is the way prize fighters cut off a pound a day in condition.

Prof. Fourmen: Will you please give me your opinion of my measurements? Age, 16 years 6 months; height, 5 feet 9½ inches; weight, 132 pounds; neck, 13 inches; chest, normal, 34 inches; expanded, 36 inches; shoulders across back, 44½ inches; waist, 32 inches; hips, 40 inches; thigh, 18 inches; calves, 15 inches; biceps, 12 inches; forearm, 14½ inches; wrist, left, 7 inches; right, 7½ inches. I am a reader of "Tip Top Weekly," and this part of the magazine has interested me. 1. Is smoking good cigars hurting me? 2. I have been catching in a baseball nine; could I play first base?  

Emmet Welch.  

Milwaukee, Wis.

Frankly, my boy, I would advise you to drop the smoking entirely. It is bound to do you harm, especially as you have grown very fast. You should weigh 150 pounds and have a normal chest measurement of nearly 30 inches. You must be the judge about first base. Few catchers are wholly fitted to play that position acceptably.

(A letter from New York.)

Prof. Fourmen: I am 19 years of age, weigh about 140 pounds, and am about 5 feet 10 inches tall. What should be the measurements for one of my age and height, for chest, waist, hips, thighs, and calves? What should I do to develop the neck, chest, upper arms, and the calves of the legs? What to decrease the size of the waist? I live in the country, work in an office from 8 a. m. to 5:30 p. m. I do not belong to the athletic clubs in town, and would like to know if I can develop myself at home. I do not drink, smoke, or chew, and keep good hours. I work indoors and therefore need some exercise. I thought I would write to you to see if you could give me some information. I am an ardent admirer of "Tip Top," and have read it for a great many years. I think it is fine. Thanking you for your courtesy, I remain, yours respectfully,  

Jas. C. Cober.  

F. S.—Do you think there is any chance of me growing an inch or two more?

Yes, you are likely to grow for two years more. You should weigh 155 pounds; chest, 39 inches; waist, 29 inches; hips, 37 inches; thighs, 22 inches; calves, 15 inches. I advise you to get one of our manuals, where you will find all you desire to know.

(A letter from Pennsylvania.)

Prof. Fourmen: Having read "Tip Top Weekly" for 2 years, I take the liberty of asking a few questions. My measurements are: Age, 15 years; height, 5 feet 7½ inches; weight, 133 pounds; neck, 14 inches; shoulders, 41 inches; chest, normal, 33 inches; expanded, 36 inches; waist, 20½ inches; hips, 35½ inches; thighs, 20 inches; calves, 14 inches. Would I make a good long-distance runner? What parts need expansion? How are my measurements?  

James Finigan.

Your weight is fair, but you should be close on 37 inches around the chest. Set to work with the determination to gain the missing inches. Unless you do it would hardly pay you to try long-distance running, where good lungs are absolutely necessary.

Prof. Fourmen: Being an admirer of "Tip Top Weekly," I have taken the liberty of writing you my measurements, wishing to know my weak points. My age is 16 years 3 months; height, 5 feet 4 inches; chest, normal, 32 inches; expanded, 34 inches; across shoulders, 17 inches; neck, 11½ inches; wrist, 6½ inches; forearm, 9½ inches; biceps, 10 inches; waist, 26 inches; thighs, 18 inches; calves, 14½ inches; ankle, 9½ inches; weight, 115 pounds. How is my chest? Please print this letter. Yours respectfully,  

Harry F. Reis.  


You are in very good shape I should say—indeed, gain one inch about the chest and you could hope for nothing more.

TIP TOP BASEBALL TOURNAMENT FOR 1909

The great interest taken by enthusiastic amateur baseball teams all over the country in our contests for some years past, has induced us to once again enter the field with a tempting offer. So here it is, boys: The two teams which, at the end of the season, have the highest average—the members of which play the greatest number of games, score the most runs and have lost the least number of games, will be declared the winners. Of the two winning teams, the one having the higher average will be declared the Tip Top Championship Team of the All-American Baseball Tournament for 1909, and will receive a beautiful silk pennant bearing a suitable device. Each winning team will receive a full equipment, consisting of trousers, shirt, stockings, shoes and cap for nine members. When possible send newspaper accounts of your games also to substantiate the score. Don't fail to send in your coupon at once. No notice taken of any score not entered on a coupon cut out of Tip Top. Coupons must be properly made out, one for each game.

1909 TIP TOP BASEBALL TOURNAMENT COUPON.

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WINNER: _______________________
FINAL SCORE: ___________________
HOW ABOUT THIS?

"The greatest baseball story I ever wrote"—Burt L. Standish says so, and he ought to know—is now running in

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

and some of "Burt L.'s" boys are not reading it! ARE YOU ONE OF THEM?

THE SECOND INSTALLMENT OF

BILL BRUCE OF HARVARD

is even better than the first, and the others will be better still. If you have missed any, get the back numbers and start reading this great story NOW.

THE POPULAR is the biggest magazine in the world.
It is the only magazine devoted entirely to stories of action and adventure.
It is the only magazine which contains complete in each number a full length novel.
  Each number contains one or more stories of college athletics.
  Each number contains one or more detective stories.
  Each number contains two or more Western stories.
It is the only magazine, except TIP TOP, in which the work of Burt L. Standish has ever appeared.

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STREET & SMITH, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK
NUMBERS 1 TO 396
TIP TOP WEEKLY
ARE CONTAINED IN THE MEDAL LIBRARY

We know that there are thousands of boys who are very much interested in the early adventures of Frank and Dick Merrwell and who want to read everything that was written about them. We desire to inform these boys that numbers 1 to 396 are pretty well out of print in the TIP TOP WEEKLY, but all of them can be secured in the numbers of the NEW MEDAL LIBRARY given below.

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167—Frank Merrwell’s Chums.
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193—Frank Merrwell’s Bravery.
197—Frank Merrwell’s Hunting Tour.
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213—Frank Merrwell’s Races.
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428—Frank Merrwell as Coach.
431—Frank Merrwell’s Brother.
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449—Dick Merrwell’s Rescue.
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482—Dick Merrwell’s Ability.
485—Dick Merrwell’s Trap.
488—Dick Merrwell’s Defense.
491—Dick Merrwell’s Model.
494—Dick Merrwell’s Mystery.

Published About January 5th
497—Frank Merrwell’s Backers.
Published About January 26th
500—Dick Merrwell’s Backstop.
Published About February 16th
503—Dick Merrwell’s Western Mission.
Published About March 9th
506—Frank Merrwell’s Rescue.
Published About March 30th
509—Frank Merrwell’s Encounter.
Published About April 20th
512—Dick Merrwell’s Marked Money.
Published About May 11th
515—Frank Merrwell’s Nomads.
Published About June 1st
518—Dick Merrwell on the Gridiron.
Published About June 22nd
521—Dick Merrwell’s Disguise.

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