

AT THE
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OF THE
TWO
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OF THE
TWO HEROES

ADAIR ALDON

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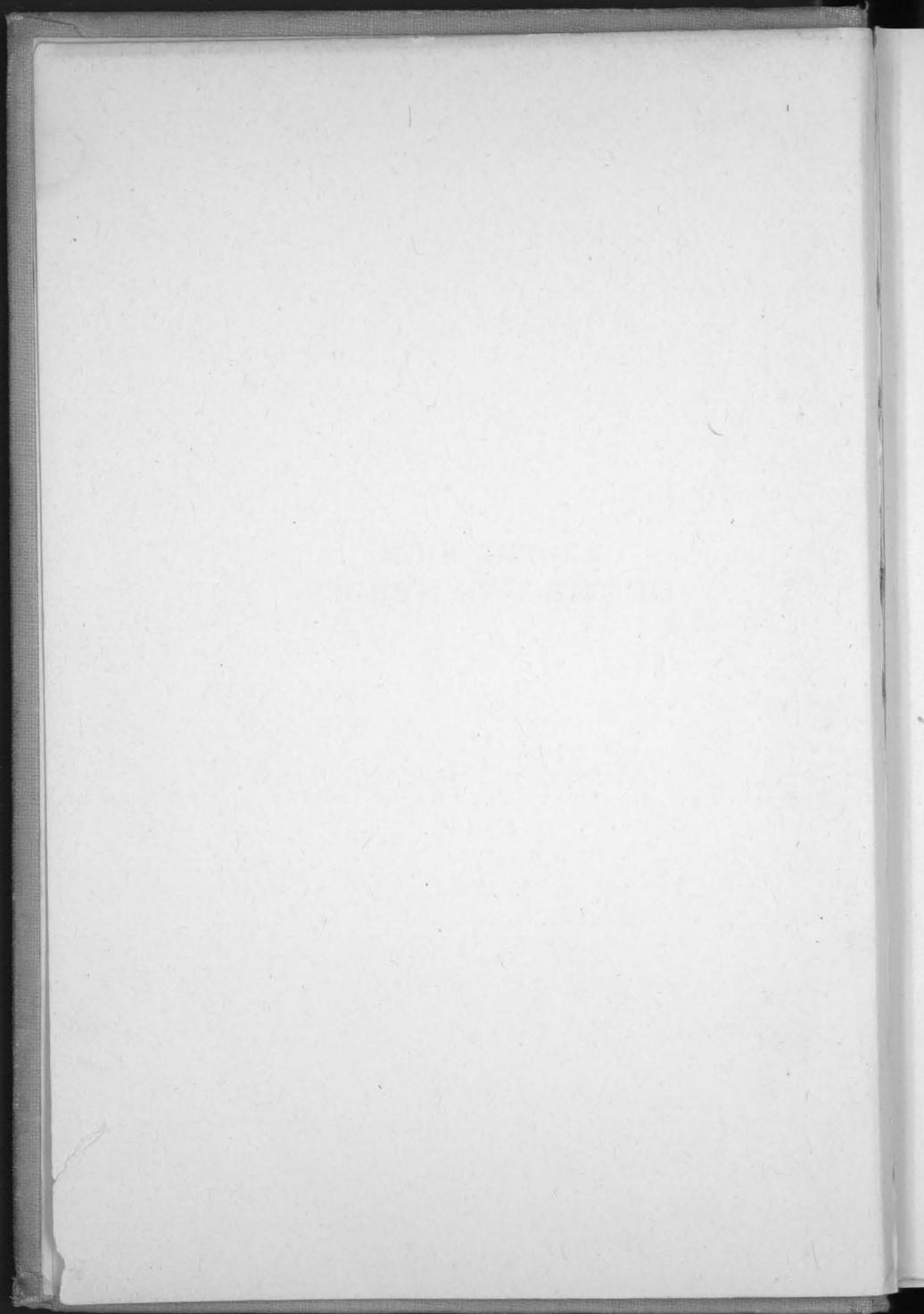
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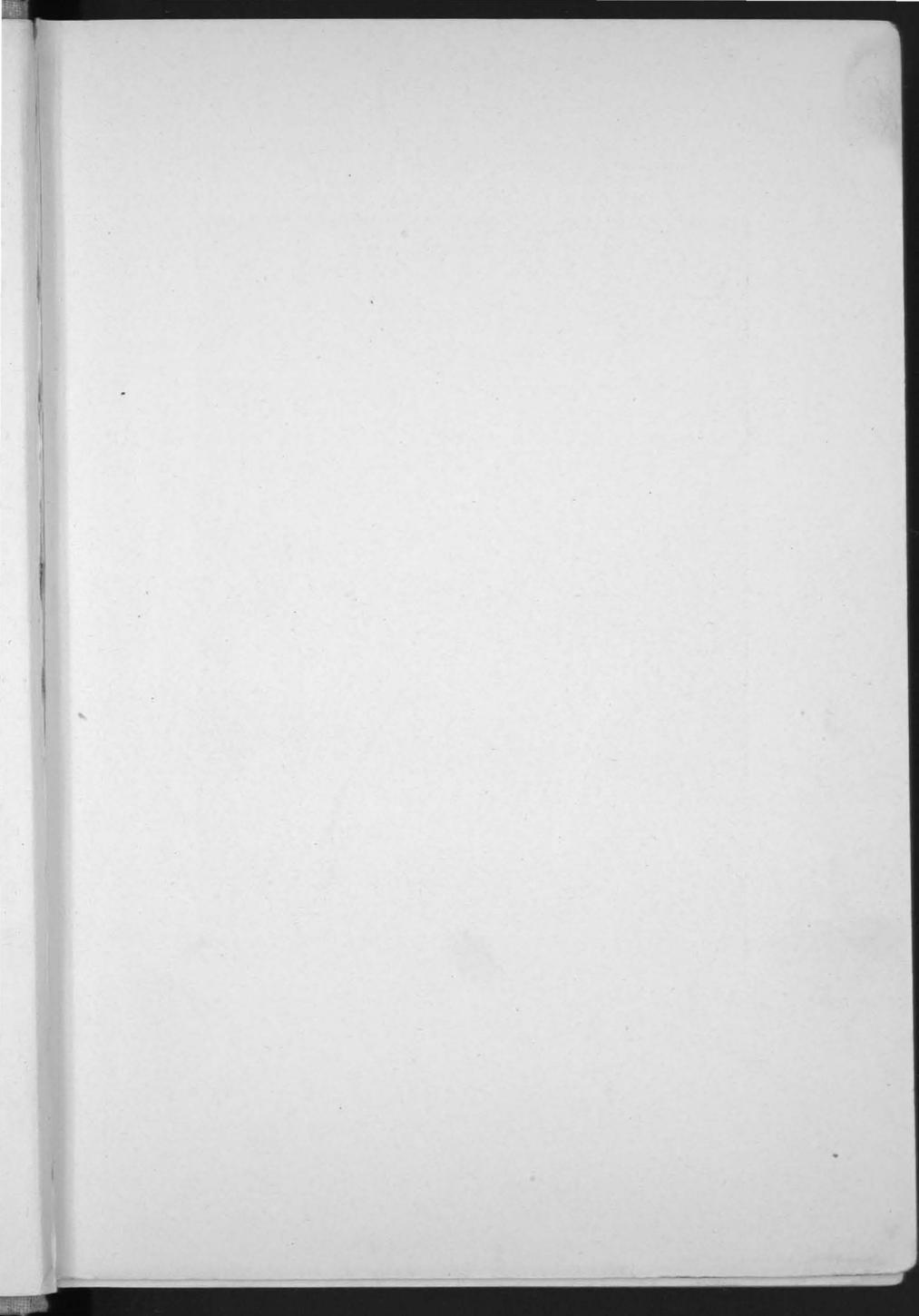
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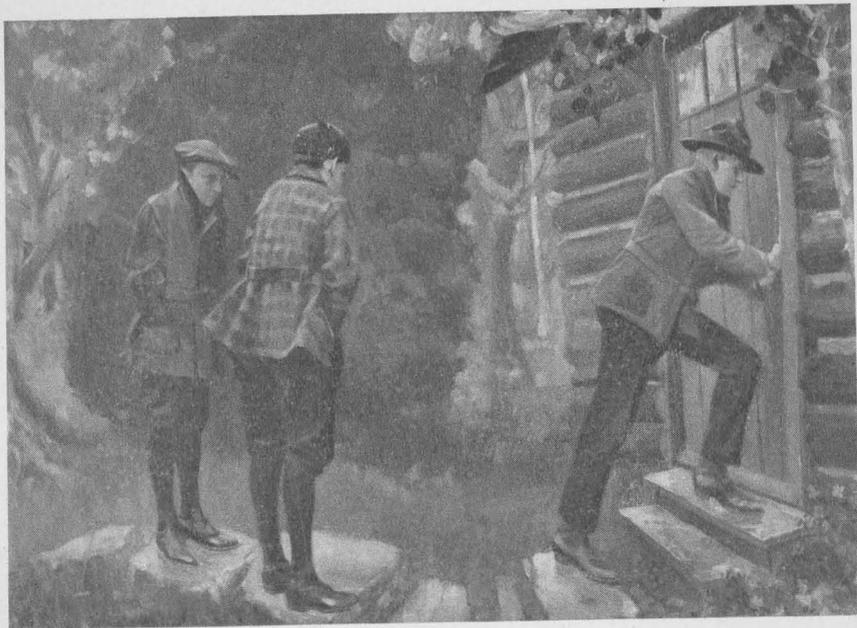




AT THE SIGN
OF THE TWO HEROES







They tried the door confidently, certain that they could get in.
It was locked.

AT THE SIGN OF THE TWO HEROES

BY
ADAIR ALDON *pseud.*

Cornelia Lynde Meigs.

ILLUSTRATED BY
S. GORDAN SMYTH



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**AT THE SIGN OF THE
TWO HEROES**

THE HISTORY OF THE
TWO NATIONS

AT THE SIGN OF THE TWO HEROES

CHAPTER I

THE HOUSE OF SHADOWS

THE morning light was still of that silver clearness that comes before the sun, and the dew was heavy upon the tufts of grass in the ruts of the unused road, when two boys, both a little hurried and breathless, went trudging up the steep slope of Seven Bays Hill. They had left their camp pitched by the willow-fringed stream in the valley below, taken a shivering dip in the cold water, and tramped away up the trail, leaving the third member of their company behind. It was that very one, Christopher Robeson, who had first suggested this expedition, saying that the sunrise

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behind the Green Mountains must be so well worth seeing that it would repay the effort of even such early rising as the long June days demanded.

Although the others had laughed him to scorn, for he was notoriously drowsy-headed at even the ordinary time for getting up, he had clung sturdily to his idea; so in the end it had been decided that all three of them were to climb the hill before dawn next day to see the sun come up. Yet here, it seemed, were only two of them, while the originator of the plan still lay, sleeping soundly, in his camp bed in the white tent below.

"Chris could n't wake up, after all his talk," said Howard Beckman, the light-haired, freckled boy who walked at the right-hand side of the road. "What will he say when he finds us gone?"

"We are none too early ourselves," replied Andrew Lloyd, the darker, slimmer boy. "It is twilight still down in the valley, but that is

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something very like sunshine on the tips of those poplar trees. And on the top of that chimney, too. I did n't know there was a house up here."

"Yes, Caleb Bucksall told me yesterday that there was a house on this hill that had n't been lived in, he said, for sixty years. It looks like a nice old place, only a trifle lonely."

They had just reached the top of the steep trail and had stood still a minute, breathless with the long climb, when there was a great rustling beside the path, a red-brown head appeared among the thickets of sweet-fern and briars, and Christopher, bursting through the bushes, came out on the road beside them.

"Did n't beat me, anyway," he panted. "I ran after you, straight up the hillside. But look, the sun has got ahead of us all."

The sun had indeed been before the three of them and hung just above the mountains, its fiery trail of scarlet and flame-color not yet faded into blue. The view spread out before

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them, in the clear vividness of the early morning, was the widest and fairest they had seen since they came to camp on the Two Heroes Island. The seven bays that had given the hill its name stretched below them in a great semicircle, some mere rocky inlets, some the wide mouths of little streams, bordered with rushes, low ground, and marshes. At the center of the great half-circle was an island, half a mile, perhaps, in width and length, with high, rocky shores and a close growth of dense pines. The air was very still and the blue waters of Lake Champlain shone with a sparkling blue that fairly dazzled them.

“There is something that looks like a boat in one of those harbors,” observed Andrew; but the others were not listening, for they had turned to look at the house standing behind five huge Lombardy poplars at the side of the road.

The building was a fairly large one, built so stoutly of great oak and pine timbers that,

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despite having been so long vacant, it was not yet falling into decay. Heavy wooden shutters closed the windows, but, where a hinge had rusted away, one of them was swinging open. Christopher, moved apparently by idle curiosity, walked across the dooryard, his feet making no sound on the soft grass, and peeped in at the window. He turned back to the others, an instant later, with a startled face and beckoned them to come close. At the same moment they heard from within a most disturbing sound, a groan that was almost a half-strangled sob. Very cautiously they tiptoed across the grass and peered over the high window-sill.

They saw a big, square room with a yawning black fireplace, and with a few chairs and benches and a table in the center of the floor. It was so gray and dusky that at first they thought the place was empty; but as they looked again, Andrew and Howard saw a huddled figure seated before an open window at

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the end of the room. The shoulders were bowed, the white head was hidden between two rough hands, and the heavy, sobbing sigh that the boys heard again told of heartbreaking trouble resting heavily upon this unknown sufferer. Presently the bent form—it was that of an old man—arose and stood leaning against the window which overlooked the seven bays and the little island below.

Fearing that the man might at any moment turn and discover them, the three boys slipped away as noiselessly as they had come and went quickly along the road that led down from the hill. It was plain to all of them that such grief as they had seen was not the sort upon which they could intrude with offers of help or of blundering sympathy.

“It was that Frenchman, Pierre Lebeau, who has been so good to us ever since we came here,” said Howard. “I had been thinking, every time I saw him, that he was the cheeriest and happiest old fellow alive.”

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“What was he doing up here, when he lives in the cottage just above our camp?” wondered Christopher. “He told me himself that he was so old and lame he could hardly walk beyond his own gate.”

“I wish we could help him,” said Andrew. “He has been kinder to us than any one else on the islands. How can we find out what to do?”

That very afternoon, when they mounted the path to the house of Pierre Lebeau, they were still attempting to decide how the subject of the old man's trouble was to be approached. Nor, after they had been there an hour, and he had been telling them stories and making them all laugh with his quaint, dry jokes, did they seem to have come any nearer to accomplishing what they wished.

Andrew lay upon the short grass, watching an eagle that sailed and dipped and circled above him.

“I should like to be as free as he is,” the boy

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observed idly. "I should like to be high up like that and able to see all that he does."

He could imagine just what the bird saw: the blue ranges of the Adirondacks on one side and the Green Mountains on the other, coming closer together as they stretched away toward Canada, with the shining waters of Lake Champlain lying between, showing the line of islands down its center. It could see the bays, the pine-covered headlands, the little valleys and hills on the Two Heroes Islands, and the white farm-houses dotted here and there—everything spread out like a map below the soaring bird.

"Free as he is?" echoed the old man, who sat near him on the door-stone of the little cottage. "Eagles and American boys don't know what freedom is, since they have always had it. Put an eagle in a cage for a year, or send a boy like you to spend three months in such a land as that where I was born; then you could learn what freedom really means."

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"Did you live in another country than this?" asked Howard, who was sitting on the doorstep by him. "We thought you were French-Canadian."

"No, I was born in Alsace and I can remember well the time when the Germans took possession of it. Laws, fines, imprisonments—you could not turn one way or the other without stumbling over some of them. And when I was eighteen years old and the time drew near when I must become a German soldier, why, that was one order too many and I came away."

"But was n't it hard to get away?" inquired Christopher, from where he sat in the shade of the currant bushes.

"Hard? It was said to be impossible. But the frontier between Alsace and France is long and, though it is well guarded, there are places where a determined fellow may slip through. And I was in the way of knowing where those places were."

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"And how did you know?" Chris pursued, being a boy ever full of questions.

But old Pierre changed the subject as though he had not heard.

"The eagle is coming down," he observed. "He will drop behind the shoulder of Seven Bays Hill in a moment."

Andrew turned over lazily on the warm grass and watched the gray speck grow into a bird and the bird into a magnificent creature with white head and mighty outstretched wings as the eagle circled in their direction, then swept away and disappeared beyond the hill. But Chris was not to be diverted from his questionings.

"Tell us how you knew a way of getting through," he demanded.

"When two countries hate each other, there are always ways of going back and forth across the border," Pierre Lebeau explained slowly. "Bales of goods are smuggled across just to cheat the customs; money, jewels, men are

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slipped in and out just because the people hate the law and love to defy it. Always has there been such hatred between France and Germany and always has such smuggling trade gone on. My father was in it, my grandfather—who knows how far back? I used to help, too, when I was a boy; used to get up in the night to tend the tired horses when hurried men rode silently in at our gate. I have peeped into the hiding-places under the hay and seen the packets of tobacco, the silks and strings of pearls. When I grew older I rode through the mountains myself, with heavy saddle-bags and with the customs officers following hard behind. It was a life difficult and dangerous and—I loved it. But I had no love for being a soldier of the German Empire, so I slipped by night through those same mountain passes, crossed France, and came to America. I have lived here all my life since and people have forgotten that I was not born on this side of the Atlantic. But I do not forget!”

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"But now that Alsace is free again," said Andrew, "don't you want to go back?"

"I am too old to go back," was the regretful answer, "although, if I could have carried a gun, I would have returned to fight for my country. No, it was my grandson who went, not I."

"And did he get to Alsace? Did he have much to tell you of the fighting?" Christopher asked eagerly.

"He did not write," the old man confessed reluctantly, "and though he has returned to this neighborhood, I have not yet seen him—close."

There was a strange, troubled look on his face as he spoke.

"I should think," said Howard, as though voicing an idea that had been revolving slowly in his mind, "that after all the excitement and danger in Alsace, it must have seemed, on these islands where there are only farmers and fishermen, a little dull and slow sometimes."

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"It was peace and freedom," returned the old man, "and if, sometimes, there are stirrings of desire for the old, lawless life, where the taste for smuggling was in our very blood——" he spoke with hesitation and sat staring away for a minute toward where the mountain ranges narrowed to the head of the lake and the gateway into Canada. "No, no!" he concluded more briskly; "it is all very different here in America, where we would not be worthy of our liberty should we wish to break the laws in which we all have a share."

There came, through the quiet that followed, the sound of hoof-beats on the narrow gravel road that wound upward to the Frenchman's gate. A horse came into sight, a black horse with wide, panting nostrils, carrying a thick-set rider who seemed to rest heavily and awkwardly in the saddle. He drew rein before the cottage door as Pierre Lebeau rose to greet him.

"I have a broken lock here that needs mend-

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ing," the stranger announced, fumbling in the pocket of his broad-skirted coat; "and it must be done at once, do you hear?"

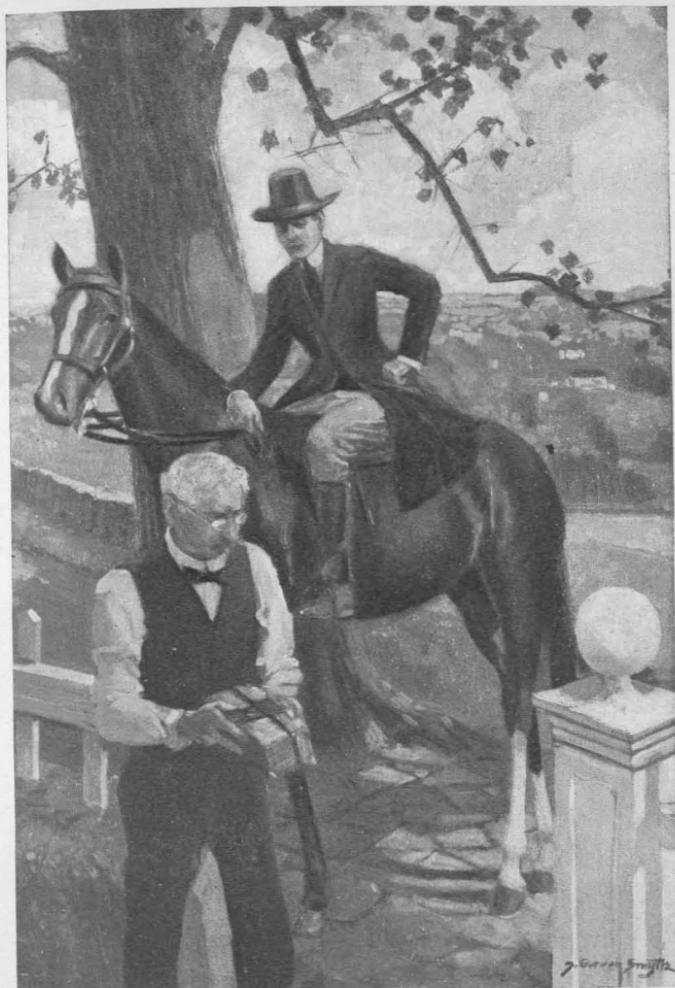
He drew out a small, square, iron-bound box, whose lid flapped open as old Pierre examined it gravely.

"And why cannot you have a sensible American lock on your strong-box, Monsieur Job Herron," he said, "instead of this queer foreign one that, once broken, it is almost impossible to mend?"

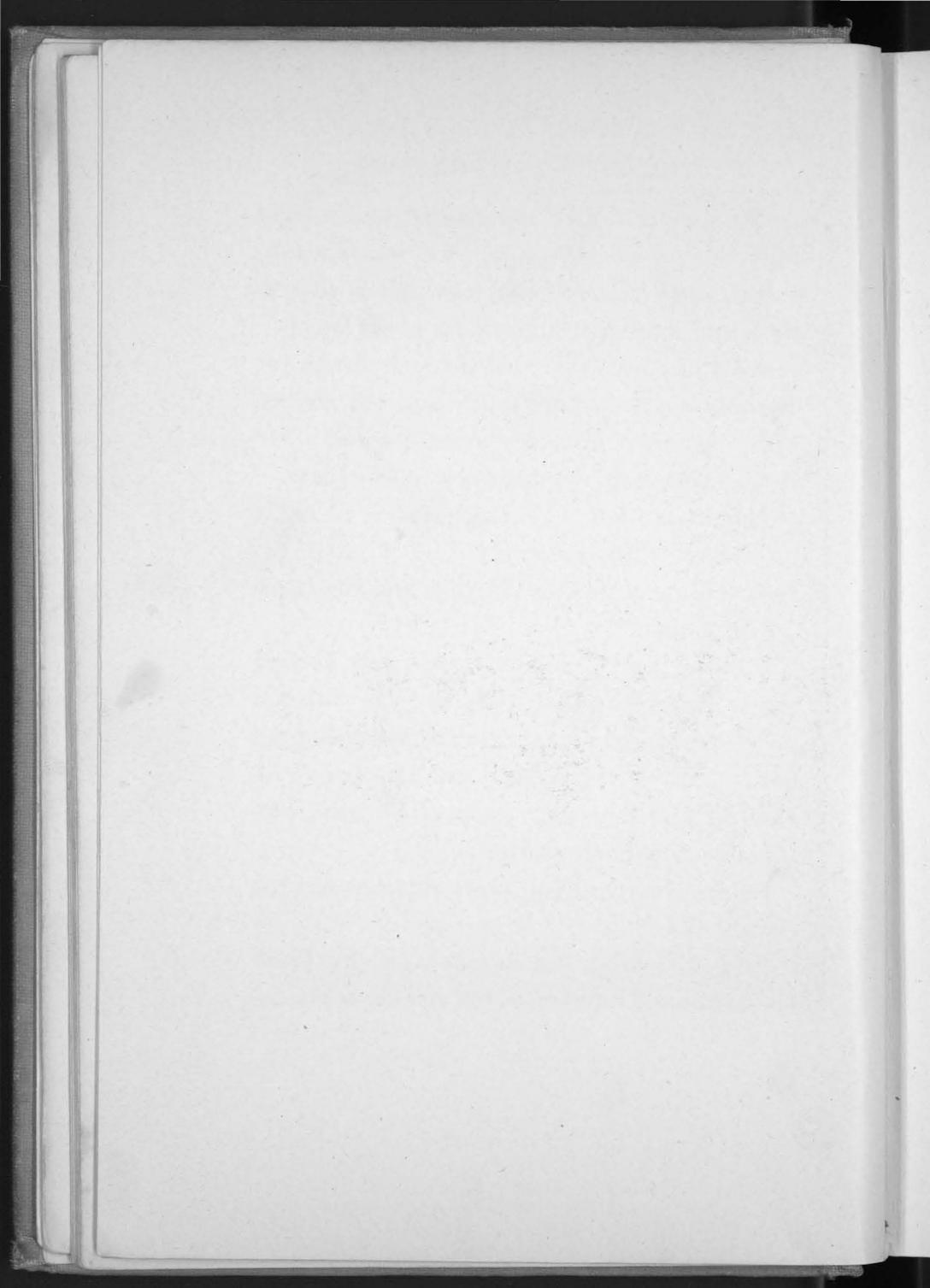
The other scowled. Andrew did not at all like the expression of his heavy-browed face and straight, grim mouth.

"It is none of your business where the lock came from. You are to mend it, be paid for it, and stop your chattering," he returned. "I must have it again by this evening."

"Suppose I cannot mend it," replied Lebeau, with spirit. "Are you not old enough yet to know that, even by paying, you cannot make a man do what is impossible?"



"You are to mend it, be paid for it and stop your
chattering"



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Christopher came forward and laid a hand upon the black horse's nose. He was a beautiful creature with slender legs and a coat as sleek and shining as a black cat's. It was evident that he had been ridden cruelly hard, for his neck, where the reins touched it, was covered with foam and his sides were heaving. He started nervously when the boy touched him.

"He looks tired. He is a beauty. What is his name?" Chris asked.

Job Herron flicked his whip and the horse jumped again.

"Oh, he is n't tired; he always gets himself into a lather like that. He is from Morgan stock and Morgan horses always will gallop up hills. Yes, he is a good enough horse. I have n't had him very long. The man who sold him called him Storm."

Pierre Lebeau had been unscrewing the broken lock.

"I shall have to put in a new one for you," he announced, "and that will not be ready to-

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night. You will have to wait until tomorrow."

"While you sit here gossiping on your doorstep, I suppose," returned Herron, angrily. "I tell you that I must have that box this evening and that I will have it. Do you understand?"

"And why have you such sudden need to secure your property," inquired Lebeau, his sharp eyes narrowing, "on this honest island where nobody locks a door or even latches a hen-house? You can take your box home with you and whistle for a locksmith who can perform miracles."

A thunder-cloud of anger swept over Job Herron's dark face.

"It is such a little island that it affords only one locksmith, a chattering, impudent old fool who thinks he can make people pay him more by refusing to do their work. Do not forget that there are certain things I can say and do

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that would make you a most unhappy old man, Pierre Lebeau."

There was a pause, during which the boys, watching, saw the old Frenchman's face go quite white.

"Well, well," Herron added, suddenly quite amiable again, "I will come for the box this evening and I have no doubt that it will be ready. Good-by."

He turned his horse's head and went cantering off down the road.

"He rides that horse cruelly hard," Howard observed as he looked after the disappearing rider.

"He is a cruel man," said Pierre Lebeau, briefly.

For a long time the old Frenchman sat on the door-step, brooding, his eyes on the ground, his face drawn with the pain of some deep anxiety. When he looked up and spoke, it was abruptly, as though with sudden resolve;

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yet what he said seemed in no way related to the question of the moment. He was plainly trying to talk in a casual tone, although his voice shook; and Howard, who was sitting by him, told the others afterward that his hands shook too.

"Have you ever heard," he said, "of the Green Mountain Boys?"

"Why, surely," answered Christopher, promptly, "we have heard of them all our lives. Were n't they the Vermont men of early days who banded together to enforce the laws and to fight in the Revolution?"

"Yes,"—the old man nodded several times—"yes, that is right. Brave men they were and loyal to one another, although they did not have much military discipline and the only badge of their society was the sprig of evergreen that they would set in their caps when they went out to fight."

"But," put in Howard as he paused, "you were telling us—"

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Old Lebeau went on as though he had not heard.

“That old house up on Seven Bays Hill was one of their meeting-places, so I am told. It was a tavern once, called the Two Heroes. These islands were named for two of their leaders, South Hero, where we are, for Ethan Allen, and North Hero for his brother Ira.” Again the old man paused.

“*Well?*” said Andrew. He was sitting bolt upright on the grass, his arms around his knees, staring at Lebeau. He wished that he might understand what was behind this rambling talk.

“Oh, nothing—nothing,” Pierre broke off hastily. “I was just going to say that the tavern is an interesting old place and that you might like to visit it. They say it has been changed very little since Revolutionary times, but it has long been empty now. It might be an experience for you to—to sleep up there one night. Yes, I know you are comfortable in

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your camp, but—there is no telling—boys like a change; it would not be a bad plan.”

His halting talk seemed to die away in mere babbling. All three of the boys stared at him, completely bewildered. His hands shook more and more as he fumbled with the box, yet, with a great and visible effort, he steadied his voice but changed the subject abruptly again.

“We are all citizens of this good free country,” he said, “citizens from the time we are born until we die. Some of us think we are too old to do much, and some too young; but we are mistaken: we owe our duty whatever our age. But it is better to be too young than too old,” he concluded pitifully, “because when you are too old you lose your spirit.”

Andrew got up and dusted his knees. He lacked the boldness to ask Pierre Lebeau outright what was the trouble, and he found it made him uneasy and uncomfortable to listen to things he did not understand.

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"I believe it is time we got back to camp, to cook our supper," he said politely. "We—we will be up again to see you. Come on, fellows. Good-by, sir."

They went off, down the path together, toward where the tents of their camp showed by the stream below.

"What was he driving at?" Andrew inquired blankly, but the other two shook their heads.

"He certainly is in trouble," Howard said; "and that Job Herron seemed to frighten him clean out of his wits. As far as I can figure it, there is something wrong going on, something that it might be his duty or ours to put right. But he can't bring himself to tell us."

They strode on down the hill in the hot sunshine, Howard leading the way. He stopped suddenly where the branch road led upward, the place being marked by a rude sign-post. Old and weather-beaten as the letters were, they still showed faintly the words, "To Seven Bays Hill."

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"There was only one thing clear in all he said," Howard observed. "He wanted very much, for some reason, to have us go up there."

They all stood hesitating.

"We have been there once, and it's supper-time now," suggested Andrew.

He used to think, long afterward, of what it would have meant had they all walked on, past the pointing sign-board, past the steep road, down to their tiny camp, to cook their meal, swim in the river, sleep long and dreamlessly, and forget all about Pierre Lebeau, his trouble, his strange desires, and the house on the hill. Much, so very much, would have been different had they done so. It took them a long minute to decide.

They could see the roof and gables of the house on the summit and the four big Lombardy poplars that grew, slim, lofty sentinels, before it. The dropping sun had magnified the shadows to gigantic proportions, so that the shade fell, in four long black lines, all across

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the house and its surrounding enclosure. The rest of the hill was still bathed in late sunshine. Once more the eagle could be seen, dipping and rocking against the empty sky.

"He said that it would be an experience to spend a night up there," said Andrew. "What do you think he meant? Ghosts?"

"I don't know what he was trying to tell us," announced Howard, firmly, "but I, for one, am going to find out if I can."

He turned and began to climb the steeply ascending road, while the others followed.

CHAPTER II

THE SECRET OF SEVEN BAYS HILL

“CITIZENS and heroes and sprigs of evergreen,” said Howard as they came toward the door of the house. “Pierre Lebeau talked about so many things all in a breath that I did n’t understand all. And why should that Job Herron have been able to frighten him so?”

“He was rather a queer customer, too,” commented Andrew. “Job Herron looked to me like the pictures of old Puritans, with those square shoulders and square-toed shoes and that wide black hat.”

“No,” objected Howard, who had apparently been giving much thought to that same idea; “he may have wanted to look like that

THE SECRET OF SEVEN BAYS HILL

kind of man, but he did n't. His face, somehow, was sharp and sly, and his eyes shifted when you looked into them. Puritans must have been obstinate and hard-headed enough, but they were n't sly."

They peered in at the window again and saw that the place was as gray and mysterious in the half-light of evening as it had been at dawn. The big room was quite empty now.

"I suppose we can go in," remarked Andrew; "the door is n't locked. Nothing about here ever is."

A long beam of sunshine dropped through the crack of the open shutter and showed the vague face of a picture on the opposite wall. Andrew went quickly to the door, lifted the rusty iron latch, and entered, the others behind him.

The place smelled close and dusty after the fresh air outside. The boys succeeded in unbarring the shutters and throwing the windows wide open, so that the evening breeze came

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rushing in to carry away the heavy atmosphere of the room. The sun was dropping from sight now, behind the Adirondacks, warning them to make haste if they were going to examine the place before dark. A wide hall ran all the way through the house, with the big, square room on one side and a smaller one on the other. Upstairs the arrangement was not so simple: the rooms were less large and more numerous, and there were narrow passages and low beams and steps up and down. It was growing dark so rapidly now that exploration could go no further. The boys clattered down the stairs, stairs with wide, shallow steps and a mahogany rail that showed the polish of a hundred years.

“If Pierre Lebeau meant us to find ghosts,” said Christopher, “there are certainly enough dark corners and cupboards for them to hide in.”

The old boards creaked and groaned under their feet as they passed along. None of the

THE SECRET OF SEVEN BAYS HILL

rooms except the big one below contained any furniture worth mentioning. If they were to spend the night it was plain that they must go down to the camp for bedding and supplies. It had grown so dusky within that, by common consent, further discussion went on outside upon the great stone door-step, where the last of the daylight still lingered.

The three boys were entirely upon their own resources and could act in the matter just as they pleased. The fathers of all of them had been brought up in this region; both of Andrew's parents had been there recently and they had suggested the place as a summer camp for the boys. Mrs. Bucksall, at the nearest farm-house, had promised to supply the campers with milk and eggs and to see that they wanted for nothing. She and her husband, Caleb Bucksall, had been friendly and kindly enough, but most of the other neighbors, reserved and slow-spoken Vermont farmers, seemed to look upon the arrival of strangers

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with more curiosity than cordiality. Very slow to open their hearts to new friends, they had a fashion of their own for the treatment of newcomers, a fashion which, for some time, did not go beyond the greeting of "Good morning" and "Good evening," when they met upon the road.

But old Pierre Lebeau, with true French warmth, had been the boys' good friend from the first day, had made them feel at home and welcome, had mended their fishing-rods and tinkered with their camp stove, and had told them endless stories as they sat about his door. The Two Hero Islands boasted no towns—only the Four Corners, that cross-roads where stood the church, the village store, and the blacksmith shop. The rest was all wooded hills, green meadows, and the grain fields of the far-spreading farms. The boys had pitched their camp by the little river, where it poured, singing and chuckling, over the gravel shallows and rocked the lily-pads in the pool below; and

THE SECRET OF SEVEN BAYS HILL

here they had been for a week now, absolutely their own masters.

They sat long in the twilight, talking over the house and its mysteries.

"It is like any other place, only older and dustier," Christopher said. "If Pierre Lebeau wanted us to stay here, why did n't he ask us, right out?"

None of the boys could answer that.

"It would n't be much trouble," maintained Andrew, "to bring up our blankets and candles and grub. Old Pierre promised that if we did sleep here we should see something interesting. Let's do it."

So the decision was made. Christopher, as a penance, perhaps, for his lack of energy in the morning, volunteered to fetch the necessary supplies from the camp while the other two gathered a heap of fire-wood from the old fence that lay rotting in the grass and from the fallen branches of the poplar trees. The big room looked almost cozy when they were finally

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settled, with candles on the mantel, a camp supper cooking before the fire, and the blanket beds already made up, one on each of the settles and one on a smaller bench set against the wall. Andrew had been startled by the huge size of the fireplace; for, standing between the andirons to set the backlog in place before he kindled the flame, he had been able to look up the wide chimney and see the stars.

In this Vermont climate, even though it was June and the days were warm, the nights were still cold, so that after supper, as the boys sat about the fire, lazily watching it burn down into coals, the warmth of the red glow was very pleasant. Andrew's eye was caught by the dull light upon the picture against the far wall. He got up leisurely and went over to examine it.

"Why, look!" he exclaimed. "I do believe it is the old tavern sign. It is painted on wood and there are some letters below—T. W.—Yes, it says, 'The Two Heroes.'"

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There were two faces shown in profile, one behind the other, as one sometimes sees them on coins or medals. One had so faded into the background as to be scarcely visible, but the other was still distinct, showing a man with firm, clear-cut features, wearing a hunter's shirt and a rough fur cap.

"I think it is Ethan Allen," said Christopher, who also had come to look. "My father has a picture of him. He says Ethan Allen was the greatest man these parts have ever known. Yes, it is the same square jaw and long nose and the sprig of evergreen in his cap. The other, faded, face must be his brother Ira. They are the two heroes that Pierre Lebeau was telling about."

It was interesting to think that Allen and the other leaders of the Green Mountain Boys had sat about this hearth to arrange those rash and valiant expeditions of which the histories tell. Perhaps the famous capture of Ticonderoga had been planned in this very room, or

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the expeditions into Canada. Perhaps some of the swift trials and punishments of men who were acting against the public good had been carried out here where they now sat. The boys talked until very late, of the long-dead men who had accomplished so much, who had been so burning with love for their own rocky, pine-covered bit of country and who had lived in such brave days.

Finally, and according to Christopher's not very practical suggestion, they went to bed and made themselves comfortable among the blankets, although they were all going to keep awake to see what might happen. The long day out-of-doors had, however, been too much for them, so that by eleven o'clock their eyes were growing heavy and their conversation became less and less. The candles were nearly burned out and the big tavern had begun to be full of those faint creakings and crackings that haunt old, empty buildings. Howard was the first to cease speaking entirely, but as he talked

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little at the best, the others did not notice immediately that he was asleep. An hour passed; then Andrew roused himself from a doze to realize that the other two were slumbering shamelessly, that the wind was rising, and that the great bare room was growing very cold.

He slipped from between the blankets to close the shutters at one side of the room and shut out the sweeping wind. The poplar trees were bowing and blowing before the gusts, while the stars and a pale moon showed at times in the cloudy sky. Andrew lingered a minute to look across toward Pierre Lebeau's cottage, where a light was still burning. The old man must be working late, perhaps mending Job Herron's broken lock. But no; as the boy watched, the light moved: it bobbed and jerked as though it were a lantern swinging from some one's hand, and no very steady hand at that. He saw the bright speck move slowly down the hill, hidden now and then by a tree or a

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turning of the road, but progressing steadily toward the valley where the camp lay.

He had a moment's wild suspicion of the old Frenchman's honesty, but he dismissed it quickly, for even short acquaintance was enough to make it plain that Pierre Lebeau was honorable as the day. But what was he doing? What was he looking for? The lantern had come back as far as the branching of the ways, where the steep road turned upward to Seven Bays Hill, and there it remained stationary for a long time. At last it moved again, slowly though very wearily, back to old Pierre's cottage. But a light in the window still burned as Andrew closed and fastened the heavy shutter.

From his lawyer father he had inherited a quick intuition for the putting together of facts, so that after a little reflection, as he sat in the dark on the side of his bed, the purpose of Pierre Lebeau's journey seemed plain. The Frenchman had hinted to the boys that

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a night spent at the old tavern would be of interest: it had meant so much to him to know whether or not they had really gone that he had toiled down into the valley at midnight to see. The light from the boys' candle could not be plain enough in the windows to show him that the tavern was occupied. Why was he so anxious to know? Why had he stood so long by the sign-post, as though meditating a journey even as far as the house on the hill? Had he regretted his vague hints? Did he think that danger might come to the boys in the undertaking to which he had persuaded them? That, Andrew could not understand.

He shook Howard and Christopher each by a shoulder.

"Fine watchers you are!" he exclaimed, as they sat up together and declared that they had not really been asleep. Andrew told them what he had seen, but they could make little of it. Both vowed that they would keep broad

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awake now, and that Andrew should not again outdo them in watchfulness.

Even among the three of them, however, they made a very bad business of it. It is so easy to decide to sit up all night and so difficult to accomplish it, when the very will to do so becomes paralyzed and the purpose of the whole plan is lost in a drowsy haze. The place was so quiet except for the soothing rustle of the wind in the poplars that the idea that anything astonishing could happen seemed to slip farther and farther away.

It was never to be known which one gave in first. Andrew only remembered that he half awoke after a long time, searching sleepily in his mind for a recollection of the sound that had roused him. He heard it again in a moment, the hoof-beats of a galloping horse. They were not very near. He listened, but all was still again and sleep rose and swept over him in an irresistible tide. Just as he was drifting off, he thought he heard another sound

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—a snort, and the stamping of a horse's feet on the road outside, then stealthy steps on the grass below the window. He must rouse himself; he must awaken the others. So he would—in just a minute. Then he was fast asleep again, with only faint footfalls sounding through his dreams.

It was vague daylight when he awoke again and sat up quickly with a sense of shame that he had slept so soundly and of keen disappointment that the night had passed and nothing had happened. Yet as he rubbed the drowsiness from his eyes he noted that Howard's bed was empty and that his friend was standing by the window looking out over the seven bays.

"Come quickly!" ordered Howard, in an excited whisper. "I know now why Pierre Lebeau sent us here."

CHAPTER III

THE CROOKED MILE

ANDREW stood by his comrade, peering out through the window, unable at first to see anything, at all. The half-circle of the seven bays below was full of white mist which had risen at nightfall from the little rivers emptying into the harbor, and which was now blowing away before the morning wind. Through it he could discern dim, moving shapes upon the water, but could not make out what they were.

“The mist lifted when that last puff of wind blew,” said Howard, “but it came down again. Wait—there, look!”

The cloud of fog, beginning to shine white with the sun upon it, opened again like the cur-

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tain of a theater going up at a given signal. Andrew saw a white sail and another, a smoothly gliding white sloop, three cat-boats, and a number of clumsy French-Canadian boats, all moving toward the wooded island that stood at the center of the seven bays.

“Why, it is just a fleet of fishing-boats,” exclaimed Andrew, “that have been out all night and are coming in with the—”

He was about to say “with the morning tide” when he realized that this was a fresh-water lake, where tides did not exist. And boats did not fish in fleets on Lake Champlain; nor was the little lonely island a probable place for fishermen to land. The shores of the seven bays were densely wooded and the land between them was so low and swampy that even the thrifty Vermont farmers had not attempted to cultivate it. As Andrew looked around the whole circle of the scene below him he could see but one column of smoke to show an inhabited house. This rose from the woods

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below the hill, but the house itself was out of sight among the trees. An old windmill with a squat, round top and spreading arms still stood on the flat ground at the mouth of one of the streams, but a broken sail and the outline of the ruined roof showed, even from this distance, that it was abandoned. There was no sign of any other building.

It was on the wings of a steadily failing breeze that the fleet of little boats—in desperate and indecent hurry, so it seemed—were slipping in toward the shore. They made no magnificent show, for they were, for the most part, clumsy craft, and even the white sloop, although its trim lines stood for grace and speed, showed dull-colored and dirty sails. There was something dark and furtive about them all.

“Ugh! they remind me of scuttlebugs!” said Howard.

Both boys leaned out of the window to watch more intently, but the fog shut down as

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suddenly as it had lifted and there was nothing to be seen through the dense white of the shifting cloud. Suddenly their former acquaintance the eagle appeared through the mist and went winging away across the forest.

“What does it all mean, anyway?”

Christopher had awakened and stood behind them, asking the question through a belated yawn as his sleepy eyes squinted out into the light.

They discussed what they had seen, thoroughly and in all its aspects, while they were having breakfast. Howard went to the window several times, his bread and bacon in his hand, but the mist in the curved basin below them refused to blow away and he strained his eyes in vain, trying to pierce the baffling cloud.

“I know this is what Pierre Lebeau sent us up to see,” he declared as he came back to help clean the frying-pan; “what he probably saw, himself, yesterday before we came. It was only by sleeping here that we could be early

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enough. Now, the question is, what did he want us to *do*?"

The other two boys were rolling up the blankets, fifteen minutes later, when Howard, with an excited cry, brought them hurriedly to the window again.

"Quick!" he exclaimed. "She's lifting."

The mist had grown thinner under the sunshine and was now, at last, drifting away. Slowly the tiny island came into view again, then the headlands and the bays and the old windmill twirling its sails fitfully, but there was no boat of any kind. The little fleet that had come skimming in through the first daylight had disappeared as completely as though every vessel had gone to the bottom. The boys looked at one another in bewilderment.

"I believe I see something like a mast over there behind the pines, near that windmill," Andrew said.

All three used their eyes and their imaginations with energy and did decide that it might

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be possible for a boat to be lying at anchor in the little bay. In fact, all of them might be hiding in the various harbors, so high were some of the headlands and so thick the screening woods.

"If we should walk down to the shore at the foot of this hill," Chris suggested, "we might be able to see into some of those bays and find out if the boats are at anchor there. It looks as though a road ran along by the water: I can see it here and there among the trees."

The unused highway that led up to the old tavern did not cross the hill, so that the boys were obliged to plunge straight down through the woods to reach the shore below. They made quick time in their eagerness to find out more about Pierre Lebeau's mystery, and very shortly reached the road at the water's edge. It was deep in sand and quite the crookedest road that they had ever seen. It curved and twisted, running out along the headlands, or

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turning to plunge through thickets of juniper and alder curtained with wild grapes. Again and again it afforded views of the little island and the waters of the lake, but showed no glimpse of any boat.

"Have you ever seen such a road!" cried Christopher, in exasperation, as they passed turning after turning. "I am just going on out of curiosity, to see if it leads anywhere. The fellow who lives at the end of it certainly does not have many visitors."

Almost as he spoke the road twisted again and ended at a gate in a crooked rail fence. Beyond, in a clearing, was a house built facing the lake, a house with deep eaves and low windows and long grass growing up to the very door.

"It doesn't look very hospitable. I wonder if it is empty," said Andrew.

"No," Howard pointed out; "there is smoke in the chimney, the same that we saw from the hill."

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"I'm going in to see who lives there, and to ask for a drink of milk," Chris announced. "I'm hungry and thirsty and my throat is full of sand."

A door at the rear of the house stood open and thither they took their way, for they had already learned that the front doors of farm-houses were not for everyday use. A gray-haired, gray-faced woman dressed in the shabbiest of black calico was standing by the well, drawing a bucket of water.

"We will pull it up," Andrew offered, and pull it up they did, with much squeaking of the rusty old windlass and spilling of water when the dilapidated bucket came over the edge. They carried it into the kitchen, a service which appeared to be most unusual to the woman, for she stammered and protested and did not seem to know how to thank them.

"Yes, certainly," she said in answer to Christopher's request for milk, but she hesitated a little and seemed uneasy and disturbed.

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"Come in, but," she cautioned, "step as softly as you can. *He's* asleep."

She jerked her head to indicate the front part of the house. The boys filed in on tiptoe and gulped down the milk she offered them, feeling no desire to linger. Chris, however, had a few questions to ask.

"What is the name of that little island?" he inquired.

It lay directly in view from the house, with perhaps three quarters of a mile of water separating it from the shore.

"It is called the Isle of the Four Winds," she answered. "It is a stormy place, for the wind comes roaring down between these hills, some seasons, so fierce you would think it could sweep the whole island away. It is a great place for sudden storms, is Lake Champlain."

"Does anybody live out there?" Chris pursued.

"Oh, no," she replied hastily, "no one at all.

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No one would go there. Don't mention it, sir," as Howard put down his glass and tried to thank her. "It is nothing. Good morning."

She gave them no time for gratitude or leave-taking, but swept them out of the kitchen almost before they knew it. The shortest way back to the road, she pointed out, was through the barn-yard and they "need n't trouble to go around by the front of the house." So anxious and distressed did she seem that they followed her directions without comment.

"I should have liked to ask more about the island," said Chris as they walked away. "She got rid of us so soon I had no chance. And I should like to know who 'he' is." He stopped suddenly and stood looking over the fence toward the water. "Do you see there?—'he' has a boat, a green dory down there, with a landing-stage and a boat-house. I have a mind to go back and ask if we can borrow it to pad-

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dle out to that windy island and see what is there.”

Before the others could protest he had run back to the house. As they stood waiting for him they glanced up at the barn whose gaping door stood wide open in the sun. Inside they could see a row of farm wagons and the hind-quarters of several big horses—heavy gray Percherons they seemed to be—that stood in stalls to the right and the left of the entrance.

“For such a little rocky farm this man seems to have a good supply of horses and wagons,” Howard observed idly. “The place must have more to it than it looks.”

Andrew had been thinking the same thing, but before he could agree, Christopher came running back, looking both disturbed and crestfallen.

“What did she say?” demanded Andrew.

“Never a word, but turned as white as a sheet and shut the door in my face. Hullo, have n’t we seen that horse before?”

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A black horse that had been grazing near the fence had raised its head to stand looking at them.

"Why, it's Storm!" exclaimed Andrew.

The creature winced and trembled when he patted its neck, for it seemed quite unused to the touch of a friendly hand. As he stroked its mane there flashed through Andrew's mind a vague recollection of the night before, of galloping hoof-beats on the hill road and a stamp and a snort outside the tavern door. He looked reflectively at the horse, now nuzzling him softly. What had some one said? "He is from Morgan stock, and Morgan horses always will gallop up hills."

"So!" he said aloud. "So this is Job Heron's house. And we had to step softly because he was asleep!"

They were just turning into the road when they heard the sound of a banging shutter and looked back, to see one of the windows of the house flung open for a dark face to stare out at

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them. They did not stop to look long, but went on, through the sandy ruts of the crooked shore road, and up the hill. Having gathered up some of their belongings at the tavern, they went swinging down to the camp, all three abreast, in the hot sun of high noontide. Andrew looked up as they passed the sign-post and saw Pierre Lebeau standing before his cottage, watching them intently. Whatever the old man saw or thought, he made no sign, but went quickly in and closed the door behind him.

Later, in the afternoon, the boy went up to the Frenchman's house to talk over with him the things they had seen. But Pierre Lebeau was not to be found. Andrew's knock at the door was unanswered and, when he peeped inside, he saw Pierre's tools lying on the table where he had been working, saw the kettle singing on the hearth, but never a sign of the old Frenchman. The boy waited long for him, but in vain.

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"He must be near," he kept thinking. "He would not have left things like this if he had been going out for long. Perhaps he does n't want to see us, or have us ask him questions. Perhaps he has told us all that he thinks he can."

He walked back to the camp, thinking very deeply.

The next day was a warm and lazy one, with little to do after they had cooked and eaten their dinner. They had slept once more at the tavern on the hill, but Andrew and Howard had made the mistake of sitting up very late together, trying to peer through the darkness, with the result that they had slept heavily through the early morning hours and had seen nothing. As for Christopher, he had slumbered soundly all night. It had been thoroughly proved that his usefulness as a watchman was small.

Possibly it was on account of the sleep they had lost that Andrew and Howard felt like

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lounging so indolently in the shade while only Christopher had energy to perch on a willow root and fish in the quiet river. He seemed, for some reason, to have been much annoyed by the woman's refusal to lend him Job Heron's dory for the exploration of the windy island; he had spoken of it several times and was evidently thinking of it now as he jerked his line irritably, or sat inattentive to his task for long minutes at a time. Finally he drew in his hook and got up.

"There are nothing but minnows in this stream," he announced, "and I am hungry for real fish for supper. I am going down to the lake. Caleb Bucksall said I could borrow his boat any time I wanted to go out after bass."

"It's late to be starting," Howard objected, "and it's a mile and a half down to the lake. Wait until to-morrow."

"Oh, there is plenty of time!" Christopher exclaimed, a little impatiently. "Come on.

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You know we have been talking about bass-fishing for a week.”

The idle two arose reluctantly from their pleasant resting-place, got their fishing-tackle, and set out along the foot-path that led to Caleb Bucksall's, both still protesting feebly. They were tired, but their appetites were un-failing, and bass cooked before a camp fire are surpassingly good.

Caleb Bucksall had driven over to the blacksmith's at the Four Corners, but his wife readily consented that they should take the boat.

“Do you boys know how to sail her?” she asked anxiously and was vehemently reassured by Christopher. “You want to look out for bad weather,” she added, “the boat is small enough to pull up on the beach, but there are n't many landing-places on the shore of Two Heroes, in case of a storm.”

“Bad weather?” echoed Howard. “Why, there could n't be a more perfect day!”

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"Storms can come mighty sudden on Lake Champlain," she answered. "Don't you hear that steamer whistling across the lake? When it sounds as near as that, it is usually a sign of rain."

They hoisted sail and got under way, eager, all three of them now, to get to the fishing-grounds.

"She handles mighty well," remarked Christopher, who was at the tiller, "and I like the way she will sail into the wind." After a reflective pause he asked: "How far do you think it is around Hyde's Point to Seven Bays?"

Hyde's Point was the long rocky cape that divided this broad stretch of water from the region of Seven Bays. It was no great distance through the woods and over the hill, but to skirt the shore meant a good many miles of sailing. Christopher's cheerful imagination seemed determined to estimate it as no distance at all.

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"It would take hours and hours," said Howard, "and you would have to beat against the wind most of the way."

He looked quite threatening, but Chris seemed obstinate. He was evidently still clinging to his purpose of exploring the Isle of the Four Winds.

"Ready about," was all his answer, as he swung the tiller over, and would not speak again until they had straightened out on the next tack. Then, "I am going," he announced firmly. "I meant to fish, but now that I see what a good wind we have and a good boat, I have decided that it is not the sort of chance to lose. If you don't like it you can just swim ashore."

There were threats of mutiny from his crew, but at the best rather half-hearted ones. All three wished to investigate further the mystery of Seven Bays, Howard's doubts being due only to the late hour of their start. But Chris-

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topher assured them blithely that they could "make it," and they were, finally, willing to be convinced.

The wind, however, became fitful and the voyage along the wood-crowned granite cliffs of Hyde's Point proved longer than any of them had imagined. Yet the breeze finally strengthened. They doubled the cape and came out into a new reach of water with the Isle of the Four Winds beyond them, but looking very small and far away.

"There is no use in talking of turning back when we have gone so far," Chris said quickly, as though to forestall any suggestions. "We are going to have a great wind now."

"I don't exactly like the color of that water," said Andrew, a little uneasily. "Does it often look purple like that on this lake?"

"Nothing in the world but a little more wind," Chris assured him; nevertheless he altered his course a trifle as they sped along the new shore.

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A forbidding shore it looked, with high black cliffs everywhere and never a sign of sandy beach. The "little more wind" arrived indeed and became heavier and heavier; it whipped around so as to be dead against them; it turned the blue, shining lake into a choppy gray sea. The tiny boat tossed and staggered, but struggled on gallantly into the gale. Under Christopher's shouted directions Andrew and Howard reefed the sail, but they were slow and awkward at the task, while every wave threatened to swamp them.

"There is a bit of sand beyond Herron's house. I saw it yesterday," Chris called to them. "I will fetch it if I can."

It seemed their only hope of a safe landing. But how slow was their progress—back and forth, one tack, a shuddering moment as they came about, and then another, with certain big, jutting boulders of granite seeming to hang long and hungrily in sight! They made appreciable headway toward Seven Bays, but

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nevertheless time was passing quickly and it would soon be dark.

"Look!" shouted Howard, suddenly, in Andrew's ear.

A white wall was advancing straight toward them, a squall of wind and rain such as they had never before seen. A line of black, angry water showed at the foot of it; beyond there was nothing to be seen, for it blotted out cliffs, woods, water, everything. Chris shouted a warning from the stern, but they could not hear what he said as the stinging rain swept over them and the tempest broke. Christopher admitted afterward that he handled the little boat by instinct only and not by reason; that he realized but vaguely that he could not reach the landing-place near Job Herron's shore, had a flashing vision, through the rain, of the lower end of the Isle of the Four Winds, and somehow managed to come about at the right second and run the cat-boat ashore, full tilt upon the soft beach.

CHAPTER IV

THE ISLE OF THE FOUR WINDS

IT was three very wet and breathless boys who tumbled out of the little boat, struggled to drag her as far as possible up the beach, and fastened her painter to a stump. Christopher was explaining volubly how they came to be there, but the fact was that even he did not quite know how it happened.

“I would have tried to get on the leeward side of the island, but she had so much way on her that I just ran for it,” he kept saying, although the others did not even pretend to listen. The roaring wind among the pine-trees gave them, indeed, little chance to hear.

When they had left the boat and had got up into the woods, they found that it was quieter and that there was some shelter from the rain.

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They could find no paths among the twisted roots and drifting pine-needles, and they stumbled, ever and again, into tangles of wild blackberry that scratched their hands and tore their clothes without mercy. Yet they struggled on, hoping to discover some overhanging rock or bank that would shield them from the storm.

“That ought to give us some shelter,” said Howard, at last, pointing to a dark mass rising in the dusk before them; “there beyond that big, dead tree. It must be a rock. Why, no, it is a house!”

A house it assuredly was, a low cabin built of logs, with a single door and with a lean-to shed behind it. A pair of great lilac bushes stood by the doorstep, so old and huge that they resembled trees. Even in the half-dark the boys could see that it was a tumble-down little place and they tried the door with confidence, certain that they could get in. It was locked.

“Now, that,” observed Howard, standing

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off to stare at the immovable iron latch, while the rain dripped off his hat and ran down his nose, "that is the queerest thing yet. Since I came to Two Heroes, I had forgotten that people ever did lock doors."

"I don't suppose it would be right to break in," began Andrew in some doubt, but Chris solved the question without debate.

"We are cold and half-drowned," he said, "and that woman vowed that no one ever came here. I, for one, am going in. There is a window in that shed that I think we can pry open."

It required some effort and much squeezing to creep inside, but it was finally accomplished, so that they all three stood dripping in the little shed, that seemed to be full of hay.

"It's not much of a house," declared Andrew, peering about him, "but, thanks be, the roof is sound and the place is dry. Brr-r! how cold and wet I am!"

The main room of the cabin was bigger and

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lighter than the shed and possessed a wide hearth and rough stone chimney. As they found it impossible to open the clumsy lock of the door—"It must take a key three feet long," Howard remarked—they climbed out through the window to gather some branches and pine-cones for a fire. They felt better when the slow flame began to creep along the sticks and to light the darkness of the little cabin. But Howard, who had kindled the blaze, had a surprising observation to make.

"It seems to me," he said, "that those ashes on the hearth are still warm. Yet the place does n't look as though any one had been here for a year."

The cabin had an earth floor, a few wooden benches, a great mass of dusty cobwebs, and very little else. The wide opening into the hay-filled shed contained no door, so that the whole of the tiny building seemed like one room.

"That fire feels good," sighed Chris, stretch-

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ing his legs to the blaze; "but how I wish we had some supper, too!"

They were, in truth, a hungry crew, as they began to realize more and more when the growing warmth of the fire had made them forget a little how cold and wet they were. To comfort the others Andrew took an observation from the window and reported that the weather was clearing.

"These storms seem to go as quickly as they come," he said. "The rain has stopped and the clouds are breaking; there may even be moonlight before long. Then, if we can haul down our boat, we can be starting for home."

For a long time they sat about the fire, saying very little. They could have reproached Chris for getting them into such difficulties, but Andrew and Howard both knew that they had been little less eager to come than he. Had they fallen to arguing the matter, with tempers made sharp by hunger, they might have quarreled. As it was, they were either

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too wise or too weary to talk at all. The silence was at last broken by a sound outside. Andrew, who sat nearest the door, heard it first, and went to the window to look out. He saw that the sky was quite clear now and that the moon had come out. The wind was still high, for he could see the pine-trees bowing, and could hear the branches of lilac bushes lashing against the roof.

The sound caught his ear again. He did not recognize it at first. The cabin was so surrounded by trees that he could not see far in any direction; yet he knew they must be near the shore, for he could hear the water splashing against the rocks. Amid that sound there was another; he heard it once more and could identify it at last—the noise of a boat's keel grating on a gravel beach. The others, listening intently now, heard it also.

“There will be somebody coming here in a minute,” said Christopher, excitedly, “and we shall find out something about these mysteries

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at last. Back into the hay in that shed! That is the place for us!"

Breathlessly they tumbled into the shed, climbed up the mound of slippery hay and straw, not without some smothered laughter, and rolled down into the hollow against a wall.

"Stop your pushing, there; I am smothering!" gasped Chris, who had landed wrong side up, and "Hush!" warned Andrew. "There is some one at the door."

With a most prodigious rattling the iron bolt shot back and the door swung open. It was difficult to see in the flickering shadows, but Andrew, who was peering over the top of the haymow, thought it was four—no, five men that strode into the cabin. There was a gleaming of firelight on white teeth and on sharp, dark eyes, and a rumbling of deep-voiced talk.

"You left the fire burning, Joseph," cried one voice, angrily. "See how the wind has fanned it into flames. You might have burned down the cabin—and all there is in it."

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"Such a storm as we have had," came the answer, "would blow dead coals into burning. It was no fault of mine."

Joseph went on vindicating himself in a sing-song whine with a French-Canadian accent, but no one seemed to listen. The men sat down heavily upon the benches and the boys could hear the water drip from their clothes and patter on the floor.

"Shall we go down to unload the sloop when we are dry, Jean?" asked another big voice from the darkness. The same person who had spoken to Joseph answered him:

"Not now; she is safe enough under the lee of the island and we may as well wait until daylight. Come, Joseph, stop that muttering and blow up the fire; we are like to perish where we sit. Make some haste."

"That wind looked ugly for a minute," commented one of the others. "I wondered, when we were passing Dunder Rock, if we were not

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all going to the bottom. I am not surprised the other boats turned back."

"Cowards, all of them," returned Jean, briskly, "to be afraid of a bit of wind like that! It is on such weather that our trade thrives."

"No, no," insisted the other; "that was too big a wind for me. The Indians used to say that there was an evil sprite that haunted this lake, the Spirit of Patowbok they named it, that used to hide behind Dunder Rock to sink all vessels that it did not wish to pass. And, my faith! I thought it was Patowbok to-night that was whirling us about between its two hands!"

"I prayed to the saints for all of us as we doubled the point," declared another, at which Jean laughed.

"Surely the saints will listen well to an honest man like you, Baptiste," he said.

Other voices joined in the talk and in a moment all were joking and laughing together.

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Under cover of the noise, Andrew ventured to move a little from his uncomfortable position in the hay and to lift his head. He could see that the firelight cast a deep shadow across the doorway of their hiding-place so that, for the present, there was little danger of being seen. The men sat some in the light, some in the darkness, but the one they called Jean was established in the chimney-corner, where Andrew could see his face plainly outlined against the red of the fire. He was struck, even at that tense moment, with the odd resemblance to old Pierre Lebeau; there was the same thick hair, the same straight brows and big, curved nose. The man was young, and a handsome fellow; he talked much and laughed often, showing a row of very white teeth.

Howard and Chris had tumbled into the hollow of the hay, where they were comfortable enough, but could see nothing. There was no room for Andrew, so that he clung to

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the slope above, a most uneasy and uncertain resting-place. As the noise about the fire grew louder and louder he dared to shift again, burrowing more deeply into the hay. Something hard and sharp was pushing against his shoulder so persistently that he ventured to put out a cautious hand to shove it aside. It seemed solid and therefore with exploring fingers he investigated it further and found it to be a small box, bound with iron, its lock an ornamental one with metal scrolls at each side. It needed no very long or careful feeling to prove that it was the same one he had seen Job Herron leave with Pierre Lebeau.

Joseph, in the farther room, was cooking supper, and oh, what tantalizing smells were wafted inward to the hungry boys! Although grease and garlic seemed to burden the perfume heavily, they all three sniffed longingly and felt more acutely starved than before.

"I can't stand it. I'm going to invite myself to join them," whispered Chris, cau-

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tiously, but Andrew kicked his shoulder as a warning to be still.

After the men had eaten and had filled the room for half an hour with clouds of tobacco smoke, they began to stretch out upon the benches and the floor, evidently disposed to sleep. One voice after another died away so that at last all was silence. Andrew kept wondering what it was best to do, how long they must wait. Must it be until the coming of daylight, or should they try to slip away while their strange neighbors were asleep? He put out his hand to feel about again, for he was conscious that there were other things besides the strong-box buried in the hay beneath him. His fingers touched a rough surface of bur-lap that was torn a little at one corner, so that he could slip his hand inside and discover that here was a bale of silk. Other round, hard bundles, rolled up in canvas and tied in bags, were ranged in rows below him as far as he could reach. The shed was a storehouse for

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some strange wares, with the hay and straw only for a covering. With the morning, the men were to go out to fetch in further boxes and bales, which, unloaded from the sloop, must be hidden in this very place.

How fortunate it was, after all, he thought, that their boat had driven ashore on the stormy side of the island and that the sloop's crew, anchoring to leeward, had not discovered it. Sometime, at the darkest hour between midnight and morning, when the men were soundest asleep, they must all three slip away and attempt to reach their own little vessel unnoticed.

While he was so planning, Andrew heard one of the company in the cabin stir, get up, and go to the window. The moonlight was very clear, showing the broad shoulders and dark, curly head in silhouette against the white world outside, so that Andrew could see that it was Jean. The man stood for a moment, staring out, whistling a little tune softly

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and sharply between his teeth. Then he turned and unceremoniously kicked into wakefulness one of his comrades, slumbering noisily upon a bench.

"You snore as loudly as a man whose conscience is quite at peace, Baptiste," he said. "Get up and go through these papers of lading before we begin to unload. The moonlight is so bright we need not stir the fire again."

There was a shuffling of papers as the two opened the roll and spread it out upon the bench.

"The cord around this bundle is knotted and sealed," said Baptiste. "Give me your knife to cut it."

The room was so quiet that Andrew could even hear the sharp blade sever the string.

"It is a plagued big knife of yours, for such a use, Jean Lebeau," remarked Baptiste as he returned it, "good for cutting ropes—and other things—but awkward at breaking a seal.

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Now we can count: Ten bales of furs, fifteen of Shantung silk— What was that?"

"Only a mouse in the straw," returned Jean. "Five boxes of carved ivory—"

They went on computing, their voices reduced to such a mutter that Andrew could no longer understand. He could see that the men were seated exactly opposite the shed and, on turning his head, he noticed something else that filled him on the instant with tingling excitement and dismay. The square of brilliant moonlight, dropping through the little shed window, was traveling upward and would, in no very long time, move precisely across the spot where he was lying. The men would have only to look up, to see him plainly.

CHAPTER V

THE TOWN CRIER

AS Andrew lay upon the hay, watching the moonlight creep so close that he could reach out and touch it with his hand, the situation seemed a desperate one. There was no room for him to crouch down between the other boys, for the hollow where they lay was only sufficient for the two of them. Above him, the rafters of the sloping roof were so low as to be within reach, but could he climb into them without attracting attention? What a hideous rustling the straw seemed to make when he stirred even so very little! To lift himself to the beam above with one motion, so as to make the least possible sound, would be a more difficult feat than any he had ever attempted in the gymnasium. The men in

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the farther room were helping him to his decision, for they were quarreling over some item in their papers and speaking louder and louder. When their tempers and their voices rose a little higher still, he would make the attempt.

But the noise of the quarrel died away and still he lay hesitating. Just as he made up his mind that the thing would have to be risked at all hazards, help came from an unexpected quarter. The door flew open, some one in a big black coat came in on the wings of a gust of wind, and the voice of Jean exclaimed:

“Job Herron! And are you abroad in this storm? We think of you always as hugging the land in a wind like this. Here, Joseph, wake up and stir the fire for Monsieur Herron.”

More than one sleepy head was lifted, with rough voices raised in a tumult of laughing greeting. It was Andrew's opportunity and it came none too soon, for the moonlight was touching his knee. He reached up, caught

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the beam above him, and swung himself clear of the hay with no more rustling than would be made by a rat scuttling away to cover. One man turned his head, but no other heeded. Rats in the shed probably were no uncommon visitors. Andrew felt safe for a moment, but not for longer. The beam was a very light one, a mere bark-covered pole that bent beneath his weight. He stepped noiselessly across to another, feeling along the roof for support to maintain his balance. The second beam was no better than the first; it gave a creak that brought his heart to his mouth. He moved again and felt his hand pass over a covered opening in the roof, a scuttle, to whose edge he clung desperately, supporting enough of his weight on his hands so that the rafter below could hold him.

Very cautiously he thrust a finger into the crack of the scuttle and edged it open. The wind blew so strongly against the front of the cottage that no very noticeable draft of

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air came through this hole in the sloping roof at the rear. He thrust his head through the opening and felt it very good, after the cramped quarters in the dusty hay, to breathe the fresh air and to see the stars. The clouds were racing across the sky and the wooded island seemed full of voices, friendly voices of bowing birch tree speaking to shivering poplar and maple sighing to thundering pine. The noise within was loud also, laughter, big voices and the clinking of cups and bottles. There was no danger of his being heard as he crept out upon the roof.

The broad chimney seemed to offer him shelter where its black shadow fell across the shingles. He tiptoed across to it, taking his steps only when the noise beneath him was at its loudest, and curled up against the rough stones, that were a little warm from the fire below. There he sat, shifting as the shadow shifted, squeezing close when it grew smaller, and stretching out as it grew long again. He

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had no notion yet of what he was to do when daylight came; he merely sat and waited. It seemed to be a whole year rather than a few hours before the sharp edges of the black shadow began to blur and fade, to show him that morning was coming. Looking up, he saw that the sky was gray above the tree-tops and that even the biggest stars were shrinking to mere pin-pricks of light. Everything was very still below him, as though the men were once more asleep. Andrew stood up against the chimney and stretched himself luxuriously, for he was cramped and stiff from his long vigil. Some little sound, he did not quite know what, caught his attention and he looked down, to find himself staring into the upturned face of Jean Lebeau.

It would have been difficult to tell which of the two was the more startled. For a long second they stood, transfixed; then Lebeau, with a quick gesture, leaned back and flung upward at Andrew something that sang as

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it spun through the air and struck with a wicked "snick" against the chimney before it fell, rattling and sliding, half-way down the roof. Seeing that he had missed his aim, the man threw himself against the door, calling loudly to the others; yet his shout was drowned by a sudden roar from within, since there, too startling discoveries were being made. There was a crashing of broken glass, and out from the windows on each side of the shed, Howard and Christopher came tumbling and disappeared into the woods. Andrew slid hastily down the roof, snatched in passing at the knife Jean Lebeau had thrown at him, and thrust it into his belt, then dropped over the edge of the shed into some especially thorny blackberry bushes and made off after his companions. Pursuing footsteps and the loud shout of a voice he took to be Job Herron's made him flee all the faster. The other two boys were running ahead of him and he did not really catch up with them until they had crossed the

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island and were struggling frantically in the deep sand to launch their boat.

"We knew you were behind us, so we did n't stop," panted Howard, with his shoulder against the bow. "Now, all together; one, two—"

"Stop!" cried Andrew, suddenly, and held up his hand for them to listen.

The pursuit behind them had died away and there was nothing to be heard but the wind in the trees and the waves on the beach. Then came again the sound Andrew had caught; coming faintly from the other side of the island, the unmistakable thump of oar-locks.

They launched the little boat at their leisure and got up sail, for here on the shadowy side of the Isle of the Four Winds it was still dark. They waited a little before they got away and saw, creeping past the head of the island, the white sloop under full sail. She plunged and careened in the heavy wind, but stood out to-

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ward the open lake, evidently making all the speed she could.

"Now, does n't that beat everything?" cried Chris, slapping his knee where he sat by the tiller. "They are running away from us faster than we can run from them."

"But it looks as though she had only two men aboard her," Howard observed thoughtfully. "She handles awkwardly, too, as though she were heavily loaded and did n't have a full crew. The others must have stayed to guard the cabin."

"I suppose, in the dark, they could n't tell who was really in the cottage with them, or how many," Andrew remarked. "I wonder what they thought we were—an army?"

It was while they sat, watching the sloop sweep farther and farther away, that Andrew learned how Howard and Chris, whispering together in the hollow of the hay, had decided desperately that their only course was to make

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a dash for the boat the moment it was light enough, relying on the men's momentary bewilderment to give them a start. Andrew realized, too, that when Jean Lebeau had seen him on the roof, it must have been impossible to tell whether he was man or boy, or if more than one stood there in the shadow of the chimney.

"But, just the same, they must have something very valuable in that cabin, and consciences very tender as to how it got there, to be so afraid," Howard said. "I wish I could understand it all."

"That Jean Lebeau must be the grandson that old Pierre Lebeau was telling us about," speculated Andrew.

They crept out from the shadow of the island unmolested, and set their course for Hyde's Point and home. The sloop was far away, dwindling to a white speck; the green shores slid by them as they sped before the wind. They returned Caleb Bucksall's boat

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to him by mid-morning and were glad to hear him say that he had not been greatly concerned for its safety.

“I told my wife you would have sense enough to land somewhere, but she has been just going on about you,” he said. Mrs. Bucksall insisted on giving them a roll of fresh butter, a jar of honey, and a basket full of crusty new rolls to take home for breakfast, as a thank-offering, it seemed, for their having come home safely. They lay down wearily on their camp beds, after they had got home and broken their long fast, but for some time they kept awake, talking over their experiences of the night and passing from hand to hand the knife that Andrew had brought home as spoils of battle.

Andrew's nap did not last as long as the others, for he felt restless and excited still. He sat before the tent, examining the knife once more and finding new cause for speculation in the problem of whence it could have

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have come. It was of foreign make: that seemed evident in every line of the smooth curved blade and the ivory handle set with bands of silver and carved with flowers and fishes. So fierce had been the force with which it struck the chimney that the point had broken off, leaving the tip blunt and jagged.

“The blacksmith over at the Four Corners ought to be able to grind that off for me and make it sharp again,” he thought; and, impatient to have his treasure made perfect at once, he set out forthwith to have the thing done.

The road led past daisy-white fields, under avenues of great, round, green maples, past comfortable farm-houses with their deep porches and wide eaves, and so to the Four Corners, where the little church was sleeping in the sun in week-day ease and the blacksmith shop was plying a busy trade.

A row of horses stood inside the big, shadowy place, waiting to be shod, and a row of men

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sat on the bench opposite the forge where the leaping flame shone so bright. There were rather more men than horses, for Thaddeus Strong's smithy was a great place for talk and the blacksmith himself was said to be the best retailer of gossip in Two Heroes County. Although a semi-weekly paper went the rounds in the evening in the hands of the rural postman, the real news of the day came out in an earlier edition by way of Thaddeus Strong. As Andrew came in, a man was just departing, a tall man with an energetic, kindly face who seemed to have left a buzz of talk behind him.

"That 's Sheriff Thompson, who lives up on North Hero," was the information of Caleb Bucksall, who was at the end of the bench and beside whom Andrew sat down. "He 's the most up-and-doing man anywhere around here. There 's talk of running him for the legislature, next election."

"He 's not had any real chance to show what he can do, so far," observed the man beyond

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Caleb. "Two Heroes is no place to keep a sheriff busy."

Thaddeus Strong was holding forth on the same subject as he pounded away at the horse's hoof held in the lap of his leather apron. It was a restless hoof, that kicked and jerked, but that interrupted the flow of his words not at all.

"And I said to Willetts," he was recounting, "'What are you Deputy Sheriff on this island for if, after being twenty years in office, you have n't arrested any one yet?' and he said to me, puffing up his face the way little Willetts does: 'Why, there 's the sheriff himself that lives upon North Hero; he 's arrested just one man, five years back, and he was a French-Canadian.'"

A roar of laughter greeted the end of this anecdote, for Willetts was evidently a well-known character, after which one of the men spoke up emphatically:

"It is those French-Canadians who will get

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us into trouble yet. They are the discontented ones and the trouble-makers who can't stay at home. It would be a pity if, after a generation of our being the most law-abiding county in the state, we should be getting talked about at last and people saying that we were no more honest than the next one, after all."

"Oh, well," replied another, easily, "you may hear about things going wrong, and this or that being not just what it should be, but I'll trust Two Heroes County any day. After all this time I would be mighty slow to think that any one would dare to commit a crime right here amongst us. It just could n't be."

He seemed to voice the general opinion, for there was much nodding of heads and murmuring of agreement. Andrew had often heard from his father how fiercely proud these people were of the upright reputation of their little community. The Two Hero Islands made an out-of-the-way corner of the world where no railways, or even telephone or telegraph lines,

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had yet penetrated, and where the roads were too narrow and rough for the use of automobiles. The district had also this peculiarity, that it had for so long been free from crime, large and small, that the very possibility of such a thing seemed almost forgotten.

"That young Jean Lebeau was our only real mischief-maker," said Caleb Bucksall. "I was thankful when he went to war."

"He is back," Thaddeus reported. "He tells great tales, they say, of what he has seen and done over there. But I'm wondering myself, whether he left the army in good standing or bad. The only warrant that was ever sworn out on this island, since I can remember, was against Jean Lebeau for pulling a knife on one of his neighbors. But Thompson and Willetts let the matter drop when Jean enlisted. Yes, I'm sorry he came back here, sorry for his old grandfather. Pierre has lived here so long and cares as much for the place as we do. If that grandson should bring him

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to disgrace it would come near to killing him."

He set down the horse's foot, upon which the shoe was fastened at last, and dusted his hands on his shiny apron.

"Now, young fellow," he said to Andrew, "these men are n't in a hurry from the way they sit here and talk and waste my time; suppose we attend to your business next."

Andrew handed him the knife and explained merely that the point had been broken and that he would like to have it ground sharp again. He hesitated a moment, wondering whether he ought to go on, and tell where he had got it and how. If he did, the news would be all over the island in an hour, for no town crier with bell and proclamation at the cross-roads could spread the tidings faster than could Thaddeus Strong. No, he would be silent for a little while until he understood the whole affair better.

"Now that 's a queer blade," the blacksmith

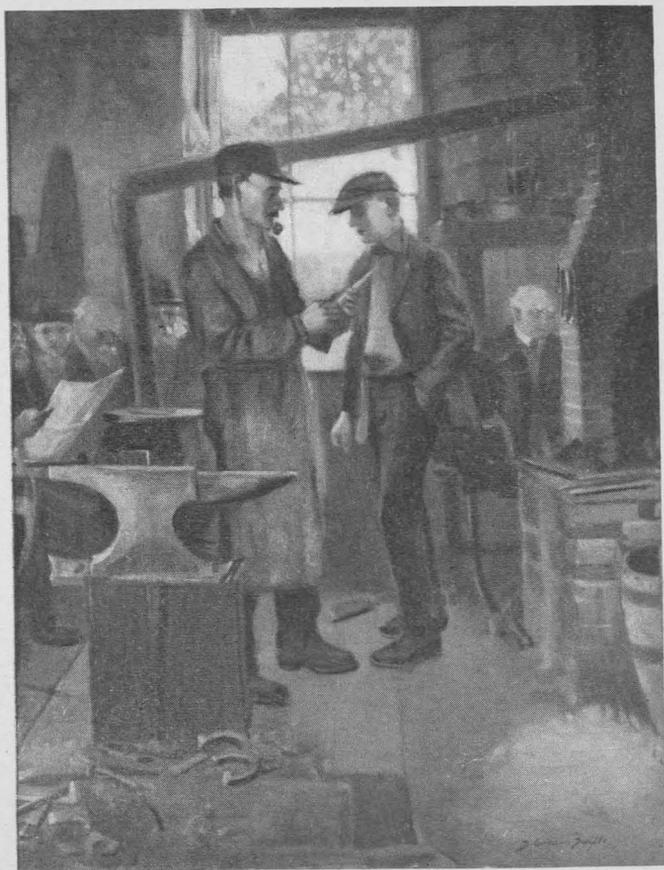
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was saying, turning it over in his hand. "Came from foreign parts, I'll be bound. You did n't buy it anywhere around here?"

"No," returned Andrew, lamely; "a—a fellow gave it to me. He did n't tell me where he got it."

"It's a nice bit of carving, that ivory hilt," said Thaddeus, "and the blade is good steel. I'd like to know what workman made it. Knew his trade, he did." He set his heavy stone to whirling and began to grind the blade.

"My grandfather used to have a lot of those curious things," he went on. "They used to come into his hands now and then, for there was a great deal more coming and going about here in this day than now. The Gateway to the Country, they used to call that gap in the mountains into Canada, and a strange number of things came and went through it, from soldiers and ships and cannon down to smuggled rum. My father had an old map—I've got it still—that showed where the biggest kind



"Now, that's a queer blade. Came from foreign parts,
I'll be bound."



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of ships, for those times, could come into our bays and harbors and drop anchor."

"This shop must have stood here a long time," Andrew said.

"Ever since Two Heroes was settled," was the reply. "It stood here before the Revolution: the Green Mountain Boys have camped in that field there by the brook, while my great-grandfather worked at this forge, thirty-six hours at a stretch, shoeing their horses and mending their swords and guns. Ethan Allen and his brother would lodge in the tavern on the hill, making plans to drive the British out of the Lake Champlain forts. They would come down to get the news at the blacksmith shop and maybe pull the bellows, even, when the smith was ready to drop. There now," he held up the knife and tried its edge on his hard palm: "that's as good again as when it was new."

"Look," said one of the men, suddenly, "there's young Jean Lebeau now."

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Andrew turned with the rest and saw the Frenchman standing at the door. He was younger than the boys had thought, not more than twenty-one. His red cap was on the back of his head, his rough clothes were worn with a smart swagger, and his white teeth showed in a wide smile.

"How you welcome me, messieurs!" he cried, laughing. "How eagerly you greet a poor soldier returned from the wars!"

"Where is your uniform, Jean?" asked one of the farmers, dryly. "All our other boys were wearing theirs, even after they had been discharged."

"My uniform, it did not become my beauty," returned Jean, undisturbed. "I have put on my own clothes and am myself once more, and need never do any one's bidding again."

"I 'm thinking you had your uniform taken from you," one of the others put in, but Caleb Bucksall interrupted him.

"Don't pester him," he said good-naturedly.

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"If Jean has come back to make a fresh start, we 're all ready to welcome him. What do you suppose these boys at the camp did, Thaddeus?" he went on, laying a friendly hand on Andrew's shoulder and changing the subject quickly. "They borrowed my boat, yesterday, all three of them, and were off in her overnight in all that storm. Pretty good sailors they were, to get her back safe. Where did you land? I forgot to ask you?"

"We—we got shelter on an—*island*," Andrew stammered.

He saw Jean's black eyes going from him to the knife in the blacksmith's hand. He felt his wits suddenly whirling.

"Three boys," exclaimed Jean Lebeau, softly; "three boys only? That was indeed a bold cruise."

"Here is your knife," said Thaddeus Strong. "No, I won't charge you anything for grinding off that break. I've been talking more than working on it. I like to have such a nice

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piece of work in my hands once in a while.”

Jean Lebeau spoke no word, but his eyes glittered as he saw Thaddeus hand the knife to Andrew. The boy could hardly get out his thanks, he was too bewildered and confused to know what to do or say. He walked slowly out of the shop without further words and went off down the road. Once he looked back and saw Lebeau still standing in the doorway, looking after him.

CHAPTER VI

THE GREEN MOUNTAIN BOYS

ANDREW did not go directly back to the camp, but crossed the slope below old Pierre Lebeau's cottage and lay down on the grass at the edge of a clump of trees. He wanted to think out the whole perplexing matter. It was late afternoon now. His comrades were awake and he could see the smoke of their camp fire rising lazily in the still air from between the willows. He could even hear their voices sounding faintly below him and the splash and gurgle of the river as it slid away over the shallows. Quite without moving he lay down there for a long time, thinking deeply.

Jean Lebeau and Job Herron had fled from the cabin on the Isle of the Four Winds, think-

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ing they had been discovered by grown men, seeking to save the precious cargo of their sloop, lest it fall into the hands of authority. Now that the young Frenchman knew that the invaders were only three boys, how angry he must be, how he must already be plotting his next move! But what were the men doing on the island? What was it they carried in their fleet of boats, and why? Andrew was beginning to have a vague inkling, but he was not yet certain.

As he lay staring out at the little valley below and at Seven Bays Hill rising to the left, he saw something moving above its wooded shoulder, a black speck that circled and hovered and finally flew swiftly out of view beyond the hill. It was the eagle again. Of a sudden, as though the appearance of the bird had supplied the last bit of evidence, all the pieces of the puzzle in his mind seemed to go together with a click and the thing was finally plain to him. The confusing facts that had been drift-

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ing through his head seemed to take order: first the old Frenchman's desire that they should sleep on Seven Bays Hill; then his troubled hints of something wrong, his chance words, "The taste for smuggling was in our very blood." There was also what Thaddeus Strong had said—"The Gateway to the Country, they used to call that gap in the mountains, and a strange number of things came and went through it, from soldiers . . . to smuggled rum"—and even words that he had heard his father speak months ago: "With all this unrest and high taxes and enormous prices paid for luxuries, I should think there would be a great temptation to slip things in over the border."

All the unimportant things seemed to fall away as his mind worked swiftly to its conclusions; the significant details began to stand out almost alone. So it was smuggling that was being carried on wholesale in that cabin on the Isle of the Four Winds, by Job Herron, Jean Lebeau, and the rest. Silks from China

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and Japan, furs from the far North, luxuries from India and all the Orient, they were passing in from Canada without duty, to be sold, at the present high prices, for a profit great enough to make the danger worth while. What would the people of Two Heroes think—those farmers whose pride in their community's honesty was so high—to find this crime carried out at their very doors? And old Pierre Lebeau, the only one who knew of it—how tortured had he been between love of his adopted country and love of his scapegrace grandson! He had discovered it either by chance or through young Jean's invitation to join the project. He could not betray the wrong directly, but he could not keep entirely silent.

"Whatever happens," Andrew thought, "whatever we do, we won't bring him into it. He has done the best he could."

It was strange that no one had ever noticed the real betrayer of the secret, the eagle. For how many years—eagles grow to be very old—

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had he roosted in that same tree? Perhaps before the cabin was built, certainly before these dishonest intruders came. Stubbornly he had refused to give up his chosen perch, although each time the men arrived, with so much noise and confusion, he would spread his mighty wings in wrath and soar away across the woods. It was an unmistakable signal to any one who was watching and who understood.

Now that he saw it all, what was Andrew to do? There was a question harder still to answer. He rolled over on the grass and thought so intensely that he almost spoke loud.

“It is a tough nut for three boys to crack alone, but who is to help?”

He propped himself up on his elbow and peered across the valley once more. It was twilight now, with so little wind that the smoke of the camp fire had spread out for miles, lying like long wreaths of gray fog over the hollows, trailing across the hills. One pale, white-yellow star was shining above the sunset and,

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on the opposite horizon, a silver sheen on the sky showed where presently the round, full moon was to rise.

The boy got up and walked through the clump of trees toward the path. Led by sudden impulse, he turned his steps upward toward Pierre Lebeau's cottage. The door of the little house was shut, but voices came through the window, speaking in French so rapidly and excitedly that Andrew's untrained ear could not follow.

"Non, non, non!" he heard the old man cry in a moment, his voice followed by a deeper, younger one, angry and protesting, that must be the grandson's. Andrew turned and went back down the path, hurrying through the gathering dark until he reached the camp.

How long they talked around the fire that night they never knew. Andrew explained; the others listened, wondered and questioned. Then they all fell to planning and arguing. Christopher wished to carry on open warfare

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against the smugglers, single-handed, and drive them at once from their stronghold on the Isle of the Four Winds. Andrew was inclined to report the matter to the authorities, as he felt that they could not do much without help. Howard's advice was to wait a little and collect more proof.

"These people about here will be very slow to believe that anything is wrong," he insisted, "and while we are trying to convince them, the smugglers will get wind of it and clear everything out, and in the end make us look foolish. After all, what is there to go on? A fleet of boats coming in through the fog, a crowd of men in the cabin, some bundles under the hay that felt to you like fur and silk and velvet. There is not much real proof in all that."

"There is n't," admitted Andrew. "I believe you are right. And it will be hard to fasten blame on a man like Job Herron."

Christopher was more difficult to win over, but he finally gave up his rash and headlong

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plans. They packed up enough provisions for several days, put out their fire, and set off up the hill. Everything at the old tavern was just as they had left it. This time, however, they decided to sleep in one of the upper rooms, so as to have a better view, when morning came, of the little island below. They took some trouble to establish themselves comfortably, for now they were planning to stay for more than one night. Late as it was, they sat talking for a little around the fireplace in the big lower room.

"I think we shall be like the Green Mountain Boys," Christopher said. "Did n't they band themselves together, in the first place, to keep law and order, when Vermont was first settled? We all of us had great-great-grandfathers in one company or another of them; we have a right to try to carry on their work."

"And we'll wear a sprig of evergreen in our caps, as they did," Howard added. "We will fight those lawbreakers down there as

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fiercely as if we had old Ethan Allen himself to tell us how." He went over to look at the portrait of the two Allen brothers, where it hung against the wall. "See," he exclaimed, "here are the iron rings at the top that go into those hooks we noticed on the beam above the door. Let's hang out the sign of the Two Heroes again."

The suggestion was received with enthusiasm. By dint of much tugging, lifting, and grunting, the three boys carried the big wooden sign outside, climbed up by means of the bench and one another's shoulders, and hung it in its place. The moon was high now and shone full upon the two faces of those men who had done so much and fought so untiringly for the honor and safety of their own little corner of the world. The boys stood staring up at the sign as it swung gently in the rising night wind. Big clouds were sailing slowly overhead: one might almost believe, in their changing shapes, that the cohorts of those hardy old

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warriors, with their flags flying, with their rifles shouldered and their faces turned steadily toward victory, were marching past across the sky.

"I hope," said Andrew, rather solemnly, "I hope they won't be ashamed of us. We are going to do the best we can."

As they turned to go in, Howard was feeling in his pockets.

"I am a good camper," he announced with bitter sarcasm. "I have come away without any matches. How about you?"

The other two had used up, at supper-time, all that their pockets contained.

"I am going down to the camp to get some now," Howard said. "I don't care how late it is: I would rather go to-night than when I am sleepy and hungry in the morning."

They all felt so wide awake and full of energy that the three of them went scampering down the hill together. It seemed to Andrew that he saw something move behind the third

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tent as they came near, but the moonlight was deceptive and he could not be sure. When he entered the tent, however, and stumbled over an upturned box, he knew at once that something was wrong.

"Come here, look!" he called to the others.

When at last they had kindled a light they found that everything was in the utmost confusion. Bags and boxes were emptied, clothes thrown here and there; even their cooking-utensils were turned out upon the ground. Some unknown person, in desperate search for something, had set the whole of their possessions upside down.

"It was Jean Lebeau," said Howard, at last, after staring at the scene of ruin before him.

"He came for his knife."

"It is in my pocket," Andrew answered.
"Much chance he had of finding it!"

"I wonder," Howard went on reflectively, "if he heard what we were saying by the camp fire. We did n't think of any one's being near,

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nor trouble ourselves to speak very low."

"There is nothing stolen," reported Christopher, who had been searching for the matches and had at last found them. "Well, I don't suppose we can clear up this mess to-night; we shall have to let it go until morning. Yes, he must have been after his knife. He seems to have wanted it badly."

They were somewhat thoughtful and silent as they wended their way up the hill again, entered the tavern, and climbed the stairs. They peered out at the window, but the shadows were deep about the wooded seven bays, and they could see nothing distinctly. Only the old windmill, rising amid the trees on the more level ground, stood out, a sharp outline of black and white with lazily twirling sails.

"We can't make out anything in this light," said Christopher, yawning. "We may as well go to bed."

It must have been that Andrew had the

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affair more to heart than the other two; for certain it was that, although he needed sleep as much as they, he was the least drowsy now. He lay thinking for almost an hour, then at last dozed off to dream that the cloud-born legions of the Green Mountain Boys that he had fancied in the sky, were marching again before his vision, so that he could actually see their bulging packs, their swinging rifles, their intent, shining eyes, and the rough fur caps, each with its sprig of evergreen. They were coming up the road, they were thronging into the house, they were marching up the stairs.

He awoke with a jump, the dream still too vivid to have faded from his mind. Surely he heard a faint creaking on the steps outside the room, a long pause, then the same creak again. He got up softly, stole to the head of the stairs, and peered beyond the corner of the sheltering wall. For a moment he saw nothing; he was still too much confused, and perhaps expecting the army of his dreams to come pouring up the

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stairs. He smelt the hot odor of burning oil and heated tin, the smell of a smoky lantern. Then he saw, finally, the gleam of red light shining on a face with dark brows, thin cheekbones, and glittering black eyes, as some one came creeping up the steps. It seemed that Jean Lebeau was determined to have his knife.

CHAPTER VII

THE SMUGGLERS' ROAD

AS he watched that dark shadow moving up the stairs, Andrew could hear his own heart beating so loud that he thought surely Jean Lebeau must hear it too. Not that sound, but some other seemed to have disturbed the Frenchman, for he stopped, listened, then set down his lantern and began to descend the steps to reconnoiter. It was then that Andrew made his great error in judgment. Perhaps he had lost so much sleep and had been awakened so suddenly that he could not think clearly; perhaps it was only because excitement and surging anger took sudden possession of him. He ran down the steps and caught up the lantern.

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“He threw his knife at me; now it is my turn,” was his half-formulated thought as he flung the lantern crashing down the stairs toward his enemy. He regretted it almost as the missile left his hand. The quick-witted Frenchman seemed to have guessed what was happening behind him, for he flattened himself against the wall so that the blow passed him by. With a splintering of glass, the lantern smashed upon the stairs and rolled down, leaving a pool of flaming oil swiftly spreading from step to step.

“Do you wish to burn yourselves in your beds?” cried Lebeau, shouting upward through the darkness. “This dry old wood will catch fire like powder. Bring a blanket, for the love of Heaven!”

It was ignominious to obey the order of an enemy, but Andrew saw that there was nothing else to be done. He dragged the blankets from his bed, roused the other boys, and ran again down the stairs. The circle of fire had

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widened further, and when he flung the woolen cover down to smother it, the effect seemed only to be that the fire spread the more. He and Jean Lebeau knelt upon it, shoulder to shoulder, beating at the flame, with spatters of burning oil dropping on their hands and faces. Howard and Christopher, stumbling down the stairs, only half understanding what had happened, arrived to lend their aid, but added even more confusion. It was not longer than a few minutes, perhaps, that they struggled there, getting in one another's way, running back and forth to bring water and more blankets, the red sparks burning their fingers and blinding their eyes. Finally the last flame went out with a hiss and they sat down exhausted.

"Where's Lebeau?" Andrew asked suddenly, realizing blankly that the number of fire-fighters had, without his noticing it, been reduced to three.

"He—why he's gone, is n't he!" Christopher exclaimed. "It seemed to me that I heard him

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laughing here at my elbow not a minute ago."

Howard was sitting on the step above, slowly wiping the soot and water from his face.

"If he came for his knife, perhaps he has it by now," he remarked calmly. "You had better go and see."

Andrew's feverish search through the pockets of the coat he had hung on a nail, and then through all his garments, proved only too plainly that Jean Lebeau not only had come for his knife but also had gone away with it. And no one had thought to interfere.

"I will say for him that he stood by us until we had got the fire in hand," said Christopher. "Without him I don't believe we could have put it out."

"Without him it would not have been lighted," returned Andrew, sourly.

With helpless rage he remembered now his last sight of the Frenchman's face, laughing over Christopher's shoulder. The knife was probably in his pocket then.

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"He has certainly taken a great deal of trouble to get it," Howard said. "Now, I want to know who set this house on fire, you or he?"

"He has n't taken any more trouble than I will, to get it back again," Andrew growled. "Yes, I was the one that set the place on fire."

It was very bright daylight when Andrew awoke the next morning. Possibly on account of his disappointment, the others had let him sleep and were downstairs preparing breakfast.

"Did the boats come in this morning?" was his first question.

"Yes," answered Howard, "and we noticed something new. Three of them went straight to that bay near the windmill and we could almost believe we saw men going back and forth on the shore. We are going over there to see about it, later."

Very soon after they had finished breakfast, Howard departed on an errand of his own.

"I was thinking last night," he said, "about

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that old map that you said belonged to Thaddeus Strong. I am going to walk over and borrow it, for I am not quite certain of how the ground lies beyond the windmill. I can see how the smuggled stuff gets in here, but I don't understand where it goes. We shall have to find that out."

It was a hot morning for June, so that Andrew and Christopher felt no very great inclination for the long, dusty walk to the Four Corners. They watched Howard depart down the hill and then returned gladly to the cool quiet of the big room, where they lounged about, working a little, talking a great deal, and finally, as the hours passed, wondering why their comrade did not return.

"He has had time to go there and back, surely," Andrew said. "Probably Thaddeus Strong got to gossiping with him and would n't let him get away."

At last, ashamed of their own laziness, they went down to put the disordered camp to rights

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and spent a good two hours sorting out their scattered possessions.

"I don't understand Jean Lebeau," Christopher declared as the last box was repacked and put in its place. "You would think he might have stolen something. Here is my hunting-knife and there is Howard's rifle; there are no end of things he might have wanted. But it was his own knife or nothing."

"And it is going to be my knife again," Andrew asserted stoutly. "He need not think he is going to get away with it. But I do wonder at his not taking anything else."

It was noon when they had finished, so that they hurried back to the tavern, feeling certain that Howard must be awaiting them. But the big room was empty, with no sign of his return.

"Thaddeus Strong is surely a great talker," Andrew said, but he spoke uneasily. It was hard to imagine what could have kept Howard so long.

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At two o'clock, the hottest moment of the hot June day, they saw him at last come toiling up the hill.

"Where have you been?" they shouted together, while one glance at his flushed, tired face told them that the time had not been spent merely in conversation with Thaddeus Strong. A wide red welt ran across his cheek from his ear to the bridge of his freckled nose. But his blue eyes were snapping and his dusty face was lighted with a grin of solid satisfaction.

"I've learned a lot," he announced as he sat down and pulled the map out of his pocket, then struggled to draw out something bulkier that seemed to have caught in the lining of his coat. "And Andrew isn't the only one to get a present from the smugglers: I've brought home a souvenir myself and I mean to keep it. It is a pretty thing, but I don't know what it is made of—green glass, I suppose. Yet glass would have got broken."

He held up a small, round bowl made of

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some cool green substance quite unfamiliar to the boys. Its outer surface was carved with grotesque animals and its edge was rimmed with chased silver.

"Glass?" said Chris, turning it in his hand. "No, you can't carve glass like that. I know, my mother had some in a necklace: it is jade."

Howard seemed inclined to spin out the pleasure of telling how he got it. He spread the map upon the table and began pointing out the different places.

"Thaddeus Strong was willing enough to lend me the map and to tell me all about it. But it is queer how little these people move around. He has hardly ever been off Two Heroes and has n't climbed Seven Bays Hill for fifteen years. Most of what he told me he just knew by hearsay. Now, look here."

The three heads bent eagerly over the old map, that was yellow and tattered and discolored at the edges. Three brown forefingers

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searched out the places as Howard named them, one by one.

"Here are the Four Corners and the blacksmith shop," he began, "and here is the river where the camp is. Up here is this hill and the seven bays in this big half-circle below. And look, here is the road running along the shore. Just see what it is called."

"S—m—" spelled Andrew, studying the quaint, crooked print. "Why, it is called the Smugglers' Road!"

"Yes," returned Howard, "and I asked Thaddeus why. He said that long ago, mostly right after the War of Eighteen-twelve, when all sorts of trading was forbidden, a lot of smuggled stuff came down the lake and was supposed to be landed along here. 'You see that crooked sort of track,' Thaddeus said to me. 'I don't know whether the smugglers chose it because of its crookedness or whether they cleared it themselves through the brush and sand, with all these turns and twists so that

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they could double and hide if any one came after them. Anyway, it is just a name and a story. It is so long ago that I don't know for sure whether such things really happened here. They could n't now.'

"'And why not?' I asked him right out. 'With all these taxes on luxuries and customs duties to help pay for the war, I should think it would be just the time for smuggling to begin again.'

"He laughed like anything at that. 'It shows you are a stranger hereabouts,' he said, 'if you think there is any one on Two Heroes dishonest enough to lend a hand to such a thing. We have taken pride for three generations that there is n't a stricter, straighter community anywhere.'

"I wanted to tell him that they might get too sure of such a thing, but I was afraid to say too much. So I had him show me the other things—the road up to North Hero and the bridge across to the other island. And look,

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here is the Sandbar Bridge from the foot of South Hero over to the mainland, made on a bar right through the lake, you see, with trees growing all along it. Those poplars must be very old, because the fellow has drawn them in on the map. Thaddeus says some of the farmers haul their stuff over to the railroad that way instead of sending it out by boat."

"Well," said Andrew, studying the paper, "I see all that. And here 's our Isle of the Four Winds; and look, even the windmill here on the flat land by that stream. But all this does n't tell us how you got that red mark across your face."

"I 'm coming to that," Howard replied, with provoking delay. "Thaddeus told me all he knew and rather more besides and at last I tore myself away, put the map in my pocket, and started home. Then I thought I would just cut across and look at the Smugglers' Road again, to find out where it went. The map is not very plain, but I thought the track kept

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right on through the woods toward the Sandbar Bridge. I found that it did, but I found out something more."

He was tantalizingly slow about unfolding the tale of his adventure, but the other two, with eager questions, and finally by threats of force, succeeded in wringing it from him. It seemed that, as he was tramping along the crooked way, finding it heavy going in the sand and the hot sun, he came upon a load of hay, stalled in a deep rut, immovable despite the struggling efforts of the two big gray horses. The farmer to whom it belonged was down in the road, pushing at one of the heavy wheels and shouting roughly at his poor willing steeds.

"Here, I'll help you," Howard offered promptly, and he ran around the wagon to put his shoulder to the other wheel. Just as he stooped down he recognized the man, notwithstanding his rough clothes and straw hat. It was Job Herron.

"I had seen him in black broadcloth before,"

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Howard remarked, "and I did n't quite take him in as a farmer."

Their combined efforts, with the straining of the horses, managed to bring the wagon out of the rut, but it rolled forward only a few feet, slipped into another hole, and threatened to stall again. Job Herron, seeming to be in great haste and much excitement, fell upon the gray Percherons with a rain of blows and a storm of oaths.

"I stood it for a minute," said Howard, "but after I had watched him beat those poor straining beasts and pour out a stream of filthy talk, it was all of a sudden more than I could bear. I was too angry, myself, to know much what I was doing; I ran at him and tried to snatch the whip from his hand, his big hat rolled off in the road and I never saw such a face as it showed—cruel and so angry that it was all wrinkled and twisted and purple. He was as strong as a bull, so I could n't get the whip away, and he gave me this welt across the face,

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whether by accident or not I could n't say. But the horses started up, the wagon began to move, and he had to run to catch the reins and climb up to the seat. One wheel went over such a big jolt that the whole thing nearly upset and something rolled out of the hay and tumbled into the sand. I ran to pick it up and it was this." He put his hand on the bowl.

"I shouted to him to stop, but he could n't understand why, at first. He came to a smoother bit of road and pulled up his horses to tell me what he thought.

"'You three boys come sneaking and peering about,' he said, 'but what do you think you will find? How much will these thick-witted farmers, with their precious honesty, believe when you try to tell them some tall story of what you have discovered? If you ask the constable on this island to arrest anybody, you will only hurt his feelings; he does n't know how to do it. And I can tell you'—his eyes got little and sharp and his ugly jaw shot out when he

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said that—'I can tell you, in this case you are spying on men who will bring you into real trouble.'

"I did n't answer much to that, for some of what he said may be true. I just held up the bowl and said, 'Is this yours?' You should have seen his jaw drop. He did n't know whether to own it or not. He just sat there, staring, and we neither of us said a word.

"Then all of a sudden I heard someone laugh in the bushes beside the road. Jean Lebeau had come out of the woods and was standing watching us. He seemed quick enough to take in the whole thing, and it must have been that Herron had made fun of him for losing his knife, for he stood there chuckling and laughing and slapping his knee every time he looked at Job's glum face. Then he ran and climbed on the wagon. Herron whipped up the horses and they started off, Lebeau swearing at him in Canadian French for beating the Percherons so, and still laughing until he nearly fell off

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the seat. They went rumbling away in a cloud of dust."

The other two had listened in silence until Howard had come to the end of his story; then they sat thinking for a time, without speaking.

"I always thought Job Herron was a mean, cruel, bullying sort of person," Christopher observed at last; "but that Jean Lebeau—somehow I—I can't help liking him a little!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE KIDNAPPING OF SHERIFF WILLETTS

IT was at supper-time, while Andrew was broiling a chop before the fire, that he turned about to offer a suggestion to the others.

“I have been wondering whether or not Job Herron was right when he said no one would believe us,” he said. “Suppose we go over to see Deputy Sheriff Willetts: he is the man who has the affairs of this island in charge. We saw him once at Caleb Bucksall’s—a sandy-haired little man; don’t you remember? I should like to have some one, who knows something about the law, tell us what we ought to do. Probably we could get him to promise not to talk about it, even if he did n’t want to do anything. I am not sure of his knowing a great deal, but I can’t think of any one else. The

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real sheriff who lives up on North Hero, I heard him say, is going away for several days. And he is almost too far off to reach, anyway."

This, as the others agreed, was good advice in the light of what had happened that day. Job Herron's threats had been vague, but they had the effect of making the boys wish for an older ally. It seemed obvious that Deputy Sheriff Willetts was the man. Next morning, therefore, found all three of them on the road to his house. It was a little place, with a smaller barn and steeper, narrower fields than those of the farms around it. Apparently Willetts had been elected to office for all these years on the principle that he had less land to care for than the others, and so could give more time to the duties of his position.

They found him a mild little man, as Andrew had described him, with a big nose and forehead, but a very small and receding chin, and with gentle, watery gray eyes. He was dressed in faded overalls and was busy culti-

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vating in the bean patch. He greeted them in the friendliest way and heard their story through without comment. When at last Andrew, who had been the spokesman, had finished, he did not, even then, speak for some time. Astonishment, disbelief, but most of all dismay, seemed written plainly on his sun-burned face.

“Well!” he observed finally, appearing to realize that something must be said. “Well, I want to know!”

It was an exclamation that the boys had heard often before in that region, but it did not seem to shed much light on the present difficulty.

“Now, can’t you do something?” Christopher insisted. “Can’t somebody manage to get this smuggling stopped?”

“Why, I could n’t tell,” Willetts replied doubtfully. “How am I to know if it’s true or if”—he threw them a quick, suspicious glance—“if you boys are n’t just making it up for a

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joke. There was a smart newspaper fellow up from the capital that did that once, told me a great lot of stuff that never happened, and I came near believing it."

"We certainly are n't making a joke of it," Howard declared rather grimly. "It is beginning to look like something very different from that. We don't know how to go on and we thought you might help us."

"Does n't appear to be just my business, somehow," replied the cautious Willetts. "A public officer has got to be careful who he goes after. It has to be somebody that's really broke the law. And people don't break the law around here."

"You have a warrant against Jean Lebeau right now for threatening somebody with a knife. Can't you use that?" Andrew demanded.

"Yes—I could," returned Willetts, unhappily; "but we sort of thought we would let that blow over on account of Jean's going

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to war. Although they do say, over at the blacksmith shop, that maybe Lebeau was thrown out of the army. Yes, I suppose I could arrest him if I had a mind to. But how do I know if there's anything to arrest him for?"

"We will leave it this way," Andrew said desperately: "we think they have some of their stuff stored in the old windmill near the seven bays and we are planning to go over and see. If you go with us and we find there are smuggled goods there, then will you believe that something wrong is going on and that we are not joking?"

"Well, I don't know but that's fair," Willetts admitted. "When would you want me to go?"

"Right now!" cried all the boys together, with such emphasis that the little man jumped.

"Good gracious! I was calculating I could get around there next week, perhaps, and talk it over with Thaddeus Strong first, maybe."

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With much energy they assured him that such a plan would not do at all. In the end they overbore his objections and led him away toward the barn. As befitted his dignity as deputy sheriff, he was possessed of an official automobile, one of the very few on the island. It was a shabby, old-fashioned little car, with much dingy brass-work and an engine that roared and labored when Andrew turned it over.

"I don't know a great deal about driving her," Willetts confessed, "but—"

"We all know about this make of car," the boys chorused, and hustled him without ceremony into the back seat. Andrew took the wheel, backed the machine out of the barn, and was turning to the gate, the dawn of a triumphant grin upon his face, when they were stopped abruptly.

"Abner! oh, Abner!" called a strident voice from the farm-house door. Buxom Mrs. Willetts, wiping soapsuds from her hands with her

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apron, came out upon the step. Andrew slowed down the car while Willetts replied:

"I'm just off on a little business, official business, with these gentlemen," he explained.

"You're not going in those clothes," was Mrs. Willetts' ultimatum.

"But, Amanda, I won't be long. These boys are in a hurry," her husband protested, while the three boys voiced loud explanations:

"He has n't time to change. He's just going into the woods with us."

"Not in those clothes," she repeated in a tone that made it plain there was no more to be said.

Very obediently Willetts climbed out of the car and trudged into the house, while the boys fussed and fumed and tried unwonted experiments with the machinery of the battered little car. At last the sheriff reappeared, his face shiny with soap, his hair very wet and smooth, his wife giving a final twitch to his best coat as he went out at the door. The car went

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tearing away down the road, with groans and creaks and clashing of springs that showed how unused it was to such speedy travel. Andrew was wondering, with an inward chuckle, whether the deputy sheriff would dare to arrest him for speeding, but he soon found that the sharp turns, the granite boulders in the road, and the hysterical horses they met from time to time prevented deep thought on any subject. Down the main highway, up a narrow, hedge-flanked cross-road, into the sandy, stony track that was evidently an extension of the Smugglers' Road, they went at a good pace. Then, where the woods were densest, Andrew came to a stop.

"We are somewhere near the windmill now," he said. "And we had better not give too much warning of our coming. We will cut through the woods the rest of the way."

Mrs. Willetts would have shuddered for the safety of the best clothes could she have seen the undergrowth of juniper and blackberry,

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the stretches of swamp with pools of black water, through which the boys were leading her husband. The old windmill was approached by a grass-covered road that led up to its great, blank, closed door, but by this way they did not dare come near lest some eye might be watching through the tiny windows. They crept very softly through the bushes that grew up to the very walls, finding no need to enjoin caution upon the little sheriff, for he was apparently less anxious to be discovered than were they. For a long time they lay silent under the shade of a great alder bush, listening for any sound from within, but they could hear nothing. At last Christopher got up.

“I am sure there is no one there,” he whispered. “At least I am going to the window to see.”

They saw him climb up the rough stones of the high foundation, and push aside one of the bars of wood that had been nailed across the

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window, but that had rotted away, and watched him peer inside. Then he looked back, motioned to them to follow, and dropped within. The others came after him, the little sheriff clambering up manfully by the aid of some boosting from below, and to the final ruin, by means of a rusty nail and dusty cobwebs, of the best clothes.

Inside it was dark at first to their sun-dazzled eyes, and very quiet. A great room with enormous beams and a tall ladder going up through a trap-door in the ceiling seemed to be all they saw. But presently vague masses and heaps of things upon the floor began to be evident, with rows of black casks and kegs that covered half the wide space.

The smell of hot earth and fresh, growing forest came in through the window to mix with the dusty odor of cloth and gunnysacks and pungent whiffs of spilled alcohol. Andrew was going about through the half-dark, peering and poking here and there.

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"Bales of woolen cloth," he announced; "hundreds of them there must be; and kegs of—I don't know all their smells, but there must be a dozen different kinds of drinks."

The little sheriff went forward and sniffed above the shiny brown steams that had leaked from some of the casks and trickled across the dirty floor.

"This ain't right," he said regretfully; "this ain't right at all. I'll have to do something about this, I do declare!"

"They keep their bulkier and heavier stuff here, I suppose," Howard observed; "things too big to carry over to the Isle of the Four Winds, and things that they don't so much mind losing. They bring it up from the water and Job Herron drives it away down the road. Shh! what's that?"

It was a scrambling disturbance in a corner, a scratching and running, and presently, on a low beam, an apparition of shining green eyes in the dark.

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"It's just a cat," Chris said, going close to investigate, "a big gray one. They must keep her here to drive off the rats. Here, kitty!"

He tried to go near, but, with an explosion of growls and spitting, the creature ran from one beam to another, finally jumped down, dashed into a corner, and disappeared.

"Now, where did she go?" wondered Chris, following into the dusty shadows. "Why! look here!"

A beam of light suddenly illuminated the dark as he opened a narrow door in the corner. They could see a long path, cut like a green tunnel through the thick forest and leading down toward the lake. At the end, like a framed picture, was a strip of shore with a stretch of shining blue water beyond and three boats drawn up on the shingle, one a big clumsy one that must have been there for some time, the other two of smaller, trimmer lines, and with their sails still partly hoisted. A group of men stood about the smaller boats,

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talking, laughing and utterly unconscious, as they leisurely unloaded the various bales and boxes, a few of which lay piled up on the beach. Jean Lebeau, his hands on his hips, and his gay smile lighting his brown face, was standing in the stern of one boat, looking around at Job Herron, who stood on the shore with his back turned to the boys, but whose broad shoulders and wide hat were unmistakable. They could even hear the rumble of Herron's deep voice and the laughing retort that Lebeau hurled back at him.

Almost as he spoke, however, the Frenchman's eyes glanced past Herron, seemed to peer up the green path, waver in surprise for a second, and then become fixed upon the faces in the open door. His quick exclamation drew the attention of the others, who also turned about to look. What Job Herron cried out they could not tell: it seemed to be a roar of rage and a quick succession of peremptory orders. The boxes and bundles were tumbled

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pell-mell back into the two boats, which they pushed free, while a man in each began frantically hoisting sail. Lebeau seemed to be disputing the commands, to Herron's evident anger, for he raised his voice higher, so high that those in the doorway of the mill could catch broken snatches of what he said.

"Don't care how few there are up there! Go on, get away with the stuff anyway! Go on, I say!"

Lebeau shrugged his shoulders, took the tiller, and, by a gesture to the two men with him, ordered them to shake out the sail to catch the wind. The three boys and Willetts had stood transfixed for a moment, at first with surprise, then waiting to see what the smugglers would do. Realizing at last that they were really about to make off despite their greater number, the four plunged out through the door and ran down the path. Lebeau, in his boat, got well away at once, the three others with the second vessel were slower. They got

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up sail clumsily, but pushed off and were heeling over and catching the wind just as the boys, with Willetts panting behind, came out on the beach. All of the goods on the shore had been safely loaded and the two boats had got clean away. For a minute the pursuers stood, blinking in the sharp sunshine and glitter of the water, completely nonplussed.

“Don’t let them get off like that!” cried Andrew, at last. “They have left one boat; we can still go after them.”

“Oh, no, no!” protested Willetts in loud alarm, but with words that fell on utterly deaf ears. The shores of the seven bays were steeply shelving and most of the smugglers’ boats were built on such shallow lines that they could land directly on the beach, but this vessel they had left behind was a heavy, awkward tub, with the inappropriate name *Swan* painted on her stern. Deep in the sand though she was, she was launched headlong, the little sheriff was tumbled aboard, still crying out that

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he would not go, the sail was got up and the center-board dropped, and off they sped in pursuit. The two smuggling boats, one well in advance of the other, had tacked and turned and were standing well out from the Isle of the Four Winds. It was plain that the chase was to be a long one.

Both the fleeing vessels were better craft than the *Swan*, as the boys saw at once, but there was a great difference in the way that they were manned. The three most skillful sailors had got, by accident, into Jean Lebeau's boat, so that they dipped and tacked and came about with the best of speed, but the other was poorly handled. It hung awkwardly in the wind more than once as it turned, and lost way over and over again. In spite of the unwieldiness of their own vessel, the boys were beginning to gain perceptibly on Job Herron, for Chris, while not as good a sailor as Jean Lebeau, was easily a better one than the skipper of Herron's boat. Presently, however, Le-

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beau seemed to realize what was happening, and dropped back to pass near his comrades and shout directions so that they could handle their craft to better advantage. Under his advice the second vessel also began to draw away from the pursuers, so that all three swept out, in line, into the open lake, and turned northward together.

It was a long pursuit and an exciting one. Sometimes the smaller boats were far ahead; sometimes, through renewed mishandling, one delayed the other until the *Swan* came close; once the wind failed completely and the three lay, with flapping sails, easily within hail of one another. Lebeau caught the breeze first, but would not leave his companions, so the ill-assorted three still sped northward, never a great distance apart. Seven Bays and the little island dwindled from sight behind them; the green shore with its hills and valleys and occasional white farm-houses among the trees

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passed them, mile after mile. Howard drew out his map and began naming the places as they passed, although Christopher's frequent orders to his crew did not give much time for extended study. They were beyond South Hero now and past the bridge that connected it with North Hero Island.

"That is called the Fiddler's Elbow," said Howard at last, pointing to a long point that ran far out into the lake ahead of them.

"I'll not be surprised if Herron's boat comes to grief there," Chris observed. "See how Lebeau is dancing around them, trying to tell them what to do."

Howard pocketed his map and hung over the side of the vessel, watching delightedly the awkward manœuvres of one boat and the swift grace of the other. Fiddler's Elbow certainly seemed to threaten destruction to the unskilled sailors, for it looked more than once as though they would never clear the last trail of rocks

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at the outermost end of the point. Chris doubled the cape skilfully and rounded into the free water with a cry of triumph.

"Look!" he exclaimed; "there 's a deep bay beyond and they have delayed so that we can crowd them into it, if we manage things right."

The two smaller boats were, indeed, hugging the shore and had let him pass beyond them on the side toward the open lake. Chris came about and pursued them in, the bay becoming narrower as they progressed, with denser woods on each side. They were so close that they could see Jean Lebeau looking back at them over his shoulder, laughing and waving his red cap at them. An inner point of rocks concealed the boats for what the boys felt sure could be only a moment.

"We have them now," cried Chris, exultantly, "they are bottled up in the harbor and can't possibly get out!"

He circled the point gaily, then suddenly came near to dropping the tiller with an ex-

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clamation of unbelieving astonishment. For the round basin of the inner harbor was quiet and empty; its wooded shore showed no vessel either beached or at anchor. The boats they had pursued so far had utterly disappeared!

CHAPTER IX

THE CARRYING PLACE

THE four occupants of the *Swan* stared at one another, completely mystified. The quiet water seemed to have swallowed up the little vessels that they had been following. Their boat lay rocking in the spent ripples of its own wake, while the boys' wondering eyes searched the circle of rocky shore, broken only by a narrow strip of sand just before them. It was Howard who had a sudden illumination. He dived into his pocket, brought out the map again, and spread it on his knees.

"Oh, dear!" he lamented. "Why could n't I have seen this before?"

Beyond the F'iddler's Elbow the map showed the deep bay into which they had pursued the smugglers' boats, but it showed something

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further. On the opposite side of North Hero Island another inlet ran in almost as far, leaving a very narrow neck of land between. They spelled out the faded letters of the name, "The Carrying-Place."

"Not more than two hundred feet wide, I suppose," commented Chris; "and low and sandy, too. Could they have dragged their boats across?"

"I remember now about such a place," said Willetts. "The fishermen sometimes pull their boats over to save going around the whole island. Those men must be launched on the other part of the lake by now."

On landing to investigate, they found that it was too true. The reach of low sand extended between the trees, over the narrow road, and down to the water on the other side of North Hero Island. It was marked deep by the prints of hurried feet and the trail of the laden boats, dragged across under the impetus of desperate haste by six pairs of stout arms.

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Where the small vessels had gone with such difficulty, it was plain that the ponderous *Swan*, manned only by three boys and the little sheriff, could not follow. They stood helpless on the shore, watching the little boats dwindle away, smaller and smaller as they sped off unpursued. Andrew declared that he could, even at that distance, make out the mocking gesture of Jean Lebeau, waving his red cap.

"We can sail around the island and follow them still," Chris proposed. "I am ready to chase them all the way to Canada."

But to take part in this reckless enterprise Sheriff Willetts resolutely declined. They had come far enough, he declared, and had done all they could. Besides, so he carefully pointed out, they were in the position of having stolen the other men's boat.

"No," he said firmly, "it won't do. We saw this, we saw that, but what can we prove? They can swear we took their boat and we can't

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swear to anything at all. I'm for taking the *Swan* back where we got her and for going home."

The voyage back to Windmill Bay was a long and tedious one, for the wind had failed almost entirely on this side of the islands and the *Swan* seemed a hundred times heavier, slower, and more unmanageable than before.

"Amanda will be wondering where I've got to," remarked Willetts, nervously, more than once. "I had no notion we'd be gone so long."

It was almost in silence that they completed their homeward journey.

"If you are not going to do anything about the wool and silk they are hiding," Andrew said at last, as they saw the top of the windmill rise among the trees and knew that their landing-place was near, "you must surely take some steps about those barrels of whisky and kegs of brandy we saw. Can you claim that they had a right to be there, too?"

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The little sheriff sighed deeply.

"That is a different matter altogether," he said. "Yes, I 'll have to do something, but it is n't the same sort of offense as smuggling goods in from Canada. I must talk it over with Sheriff Thompson, but he won't be back on North Hero for several days. He's attending court at the capital. I sha'n't make a move until I hear what he says."

They landed finally, made their way through the woods, cranked the wheezy and reluctant car, and set forth for home. The silence of a summer afternoon lay over the hot, deserted road and over Willetts' house and barn-yard as they turned in at the gate. No one was in sight, no one came to greet them, much, it seemed, to the sheriff's relief.

"You 'll not talk to any one about what you have seen? You understand why people had better not know of this just now?" Andrew questioned as they got out of the car.

"Indeed, I will not say anything, not a

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word," the little man assured them with feverish eagerness.

He bade them good-by very abruptly and walked slowly toward the house, appearing to hesitate a moment on the step. Then, as he opened the door and went in, a voice they had heard before was raised in shrill dismay:

"Abner! your clothes!"

The deputy sheriff disappeared inside, shutting the door hastily behind him.

The boys felt weary, discouraged, and more and more uneasy, as they walked home, talking over their adventure. They had made an open move against the smugglers and had lost. Would the men wait for them to move again, or would they plan some definite step of their own?

That evening, while the long June twilight still held, they went across the hill to see old Pierre Lebeau. Often they had gone there lately to find the cottage empty or at least to knock unanswered. But to-night he was

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there, sitting on the bench near the door-step, his big rough hands lying idle on his knees and his black eyes, under their heavy white brows, staring straight ahead of him at nothing. He looked older than when they had seen him last, for his straight shoulders drooped and his weather-beaten face seemed more furrowed and wrinkled than ever. He scarcely answered their greeting and said nothing at all when they sat down in a solemn row upon his door-step. At last, however, he turned toward them and caught Andrew's eye.

"Well?" he said, in a tone that held, somehow, both curiosity and despair.

"Well?" returned the boy, shrugging his shoulders with a gesture very like the Frenchman's own.

Again they sat in silence while the minutes passed. Chris broke the quiet impatiently at last.

"We slept at the Two Heroes Tavern," he said. "We sleep there every night, and we

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have seen a lot of things. But we don't know what to do."

The old man answered, again staring straight across the lake to the mountains disappearing in the dusk.

"If you do not know what to do," he said, "think how little I know. What is there to do?"

"The smuggling ought to be stopped," Howard remarked.

"Yes, but who is there to go through the toil and danger and pain of stopping it? Not the people hereabouts: they would not believe. Not the public officer: he does not wish to believe. Not I—oh, dear Heaven!—not I!"

"But you seem to know more about it than any of us," Howard objected, "and have known it a long time. How long?"

"Could n't you—could n't we just let it go on a little while, until it all comes out of itself?" Christopher suggested rather weakly.

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“Those men are bound to be found out sooner or later.”

“So I had thought,” returned the old Frenchman wearily; “but still the wrong goes on and on, and nobody sees. Shall a man stand by and see his country robbed and her laws broken, the country that has given him freedom and happiness? No, he cannot. But can a man stand before the judge and swear to the evil-doing of his own flesh and blood? Can he see one whom he loves sent to prison on his testimony?” Lebeau spoke thickly, the words in his throat seeming to choke him. “My duty seems to stand first on this side and then on that,” he sighed. “I have worn out my wits and broken my own spirit, trying to decide what I should do. I am a citizen of this country, and there is more in being a citizen than just to vote. Your country cares for you; then you in turn must care for her. If only one did not so love one’s own children.”

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He groaned and buried his face in his hands. The boys stood about awkwardly, not knowing what to do or say. They were not used to seeing any one give way to such grief and despair. Finally Andrew, too much troubled by the sight of the old man's pain to be silent longer, went forward and touched his shoulder.

"Don't—don't worry so," he begged. "We three are going to see you through; we promise it."

The Frenchman looked up at him gratefully, his eyes dim and perhaps even a little wet.

"You are good," he said. "You cannot know how I have suffered, wondering what I should do. He is not a bad fellow, my grandson; he is in this affair more for his mad love of adventure than to do wrong. I know well what it is; that same taste for danger is in us all, fathers and sons, who bear the name of Lebeau. Job Herron pays him to sail the boats and carry the goods; it is Herron who is

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the brains and the evil spirit of the whole affair.”

He sat up straighter and spoke more cheerfully already. He seemed to have a pathetic belief that the boys could make everything right, a confidence that they, alas, did not share. As they bade him good night and went down the hill, they felt such a weight of responsibility as made them very sober. Each one had shaken Lebeau's hand and promised to help him, but not one of the three had the faintest idea of how it was to be done.

As they approached the old tavern that had become their permanent quarters now, the wind was moving the branches of the big poplars and swinging the sign of the Two Heroes above the door. They stopped to look up at it.

“I wonder,” said Andrew, reflectively, “if those two—Ethan and Ira Allen, and the rest of the Green Mountain Boys—if they did n't think sometimes that what was wrong might

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just go on being wrong, and that it would be so much more comfortable to hang their muskets on the wall, sit down by the fire, and not march and struggle and fight any more. I wonder if they did n't."

"Perhaps they did," replied Howard, "but I don't believe they ever let such a feeling last for long. No, they filled up their powder-horns and stuck a sprig of evergreen in their caps, and off they went to fight for freedom and law and order. Not much hugging the fireside for them."

Andrew and Christopher went inside to light the candles and make things ready for the night. But Howard sat long on the doorstep, the creaking sign aswing above his head and the thick pattern of the stars beginning to show behind the high, slim trees.

"Why don't you come in?" Andrew demanded, going to the door at last. "What are you thinking about, sitting out here alone in the dark?"

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"I was thinking," Howard answered slowly, "how this place was once all bustle and business and people going and coming, and great plans being made in there by the fire of great things to be done. And now it is empty, no one living here for sixty years, Thaddeus Strong says. They found it was dull at last, I suppose with nothing happening; so they all went away to make their fortunes and look for adventures somewhere else. And now we come, not looking for adventures especially, but finding so much happening that it is more than we bargained for, a great deal more adventure than we want. I don't understand it; I don't understand it at all!"

CHAPTER X

THE WARNING

TO the great relief of the boys, and to their even greater surprise, the next two days passed without any event. They slept and ate, set their affairs in order, and slept again, beginning to feel suddenly how great had been the strain of hurried excitement throughout the last week. Their early morning lookout did not even show the usual fleet of little boats, bearing in toward the Isle of the Four Winds, so that it did seem as though Job Herron and his comrades had taken alarm and had desisted, for a time at least, from their lawbreaking. There was not one of the boys, however, who dared believe that this period of quiet was to be lasting, or that their troubles and re-

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sponsibilities had come permanently to an end.

Three days after, when Howard and Christopher had gone to Four Corners in the afternoon, and Andrew was working in the camp alone, he received a visit. He had gone to the tent door and, glancing up, saw an unfamiliar figure crossing the stile from the road and coming along the path through the meadow. It was a woman, a tall, spare person with a shawl on her bent shoulders and a basket on her arm. He studied her curiously as she came near, wondering where he had seen her before, but it was not until she had come close enough to speak to him that he recognized her as the woman they had seen that day when they had the boldness to visit Job Herron's house. They did not know very much then, he was thinking. Would they dare to go there now? Would Chris find it possible to ask so easily to borrow Job Herron's boat? He almost laughed aloud at the thought of Job Herron's being asked to lend anything.

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"I am glad to have found you," the woman said abruptly. "I—I have something I want to say to you."

Andrew fetched her a camp-stool from the tent and when she pushed back her shawl and wiped her flushed face, he saw how hot she was, and brought a tin cup of cool water from the spring. She drank it gratefully.

"You are very kind," she said. Her voice shook suddenly and he began to be in panic lest she were going to cry, in which case he would not know what to do at all. He wished the other boys were there, and looked wildly across the meadow to see if they were not coming. But no one was in sight. The woman, however, seemed to realize his distress, for she smiled faintly and spoke more steadily.

"Ever since you came to our house that morning and one of you asked for the boat—do you remember?—I have been wanting to tell you something. I wanted to tell you then, but I was afraid Job would wake, and I did n't

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dare keep you. And now there 's more to tell. I have heard him talking about you lately, and it makes me afraid."

"Talking about us?" repeated Andrew.

"Yes, about you. Job and I live all alone, you see; I am a relative of his and not well off; he keeps telling me I should go to the poor-house if it were not for him. Anyway, I keep house for him just for a place to live, and he, while he 's a silent man with others, talks to me a great deal. He knows I have no friends to repeat things to. This is the first time I have ever told anything he said."

Andrew wondered greatly why she had come so far to tell all this to him, but he could not wonder aloud, so he kept silent.

"I know all about what he does over on the Isle of the Four Winds," she stated frankly. "He has been doing it for years in a little way; and now, since the war, when there is so much money in it, he is going in deeper and deeper. Once in a while they bring some of the stuff

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to our house. I have seen that dark kitchen with the floor piled so high with scarlet silks and rugs, with blue and crimson and gold embroideries, that I had to rub my eyes to make sure it was n't a fairy story. And there are more precious things, too—jewels and uncut stones—that he keeps locked up in his iron box before it is all carried away to be turned into money for him. They used to bring them there fairly often, they felt so sure no one would see them, but they don't come at all now."

"Why?" Andrew asked. He remembered those bales of silk he had felt under the hay and he was seeing, in his mind's eye, that dark, low-raftered farm-house kitchen, full of the glitter and gleam of brilliant colors and of firelight reflected back from precious metals.

"Something has made them uneasy," the woman rejoined, "although they are not really troubled. Now and then Lebeau warns Cousin Job, laughing, that they are in great

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danger of being found out, but Job laughs too—his hard, harsh laugh that makes me afraid—and says, 'What can boys do?' Lately he has begun to add, 'And those boys will be glad to give up their game when I have really begun to play mine.'"

"What does he mean by that? When did he begin to talk that way?" Andrew asked excitedly.

"Only within the last few days. I am used to his coming and going suddenly, but the last journey he took seems to have been something special. He was gone two nights and came back before the dawn, dirty and tired and sullen. He has kept muttering and talking about you. He does n't think I understand; he hardly cares if I do. He does n't think much of me."

She spoke bitterly; nor could Andrew greatly wonder at that. Job Herron's housekeeper, dependent on his bounty, forced to bear with his cruelty, selfishness, and ill-

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temper—what a dreary, hopeless life she must lead!

“But I don’t understand why you came to tell us all this,” he began.

She leaned forward and spoke intensely.

“I have come to ask you to give up what you are doing,” she said; “to make you understand that against a clever, unscrupulous man like Job Herron you can do nothing. You will never succeed in proving anything. Let it go: don’t go near the Isle of the Four Winds, or the windmill or our house again. Do more than that: make some excuse, pack up your camp, and leave Two Hero Islands. He won’t be content now if you simply let the matter drop; he is going to act against you. You will be sorry, more sorry than you can believe, if you stay. That is all.” She got up hastily. “I must go now.”

“But wait,” Andrew protested. “Why did you come to warn us? What will Job Herron do to you if he knows?”

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“Turn me out, or worse, maybe,” she answered indifferently. “Sometimes I think I don’t much care. But he won’t find out. He’s smart and shrewd, but I have lived with him too long not to know where his wits are a little dull. No, he won’t find out. And—perhaps you can understand—when a woman lives like a drudge and is never spoken to except with a surly growl, why, to have three boys come to her door and greet her with the sort of good manners that remind her of the time when she called herself a lady, to have one of them carry the bucket that was always too heavy for her—why, then she feels like warning them when they are in danger. And it’s real danger, you are to remember,” she repeated. “I have come a long way and risked something to tell you.”

She gathered her shawl about her again. Andrew had wondered why she wore it on such a hot day, but he realized now that it was to hide the extreme shabbiness of her calico dress.

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Then she took her basket and, without a word more, went abruptly away across the meadow, over the stile, and down the road. She left a very thoughtful boy behind her.

“She may not know what she is talking about,” Andrew argued with himself, perhaps to drown his consternation. “She says such queer things one can hardly believe any of them. I wonder if living all alone with Job Herron has n’t made her brood about things until she believes they are worse than they really are. I should like to know what the people around here think about her.”

It would be a good plan, he thought, to stroll over to Caleb Bucksall’s, appearing to be on an errand, and to lead Mrs. Bucksall’s talk to the subject of Job Herron’s housekeeper. He set off without more ado, for the seeds of disquiet that had been sown in his mind were beginning to grow quickly. Somewhat to his disappointment, he found, when he knocked at the door, that Thaddeus Strong was there

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before him. Anything that he said before the blacksmith must be of a guarded nature, if he did not wish to have it spread abroad over the island. He sat down to wait until the other's errand was done, but found it no small thing to wait for Thaddeus to finish anything.

The blacksmith had, on the table before him, a green felt bag that he was slowly opening.

"I am glad that you are here to see this," he said to Andrew. "It is something that belongs to the Two Heroes community, and we are very proud of it, for it was Ethan Allen's. He left in his will a sum of money and 'such of his personal property as remained at the Two Heroes Tavern' to the village here. They built the church with the money, but the personal property—it was some clothes and a sword and pistols and one thing and another—was mostly given, a few years ago, to the historical museum up at the capital. We thought more folks than just ourselves could

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see them there, but we kept the sword and this.”

He opened the bag and showed Andrew a big silver tankard, so heavy and solid that, when he took it up, it was a definite effort to lift it from the table. The initials E. A., in Old English characters, were engraved upon the side.

“He always had his own cup, up there at the tavern, and he would drink his cider and spiced ale out of it as he sat by the fire with his men. We keep it and the sword at the parsonage, over at the Four Corners, and the minister’s wife keeps them polished and shows them off to strangers. One of the children knocked the cup off the shelf the other day and made that dent in it. They felt dreadfully bad about it, but I told them not to mind, such things would happen once in a hundred years or so. Caleb Bucksall, I knew, was going over to Harmsworth to-morrow, so I just brought it for him

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to take along and get it mended. It's too dainty a job for a blacksmith."

Andrew admired the cup, set it down again for Thaddeus to stow away in the bag, and tried, very gently, to lead the conversation in the direction of Job Herron's housekeeper. Yet Thaddeus's tongue seemed possessed: he talked of everything and everybody else on earth and had so much to say that no one else could talk at all. After nearly an hour of vain effort, Andrew finally abandoned hope and rose to go. Outside, however, he met with better fortune; for Mrs. Bucksall, in a pink sunbonnet, was picking new peas in the garden and called to him to stop and get some for the camp.

"We have plenty; don't stint yourself," she said. "I gave some to Mrs. Durfee, too, this afternoon. She went by with a basket and I called her in. She said that over on their side of the island gardens were not nearly so well forward."

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"Mrs. Durfee?" questioned Andrew.
"Does she live with—with Job Herron?"

"Yes, keeps house for him, has done it for ten years, I guess. We all think Job is a smart man and we respect him, but there's not many of us think he would be easy to live with. He has hard ways, they say. Mrs. Durfee is some kind of cousin to him, a clever, sensible woman we all think, though she keeps so much to herself."

She had told Andrew quite as much as he needed to know, so he thanked her and turned away. But she called after him.

"You must come over for some more peas, later, and some beans, too, when they are ready, if you are still here. How long are you going to stay?"

"Oh, some time," he answered. "We like it too well to leave."

A sound on the road beyond him made him turn his head quickly. What accident—or was it accident?—had made a rider who was

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passing the gate stop a moment as though to listen? Job Herron himself was riding by on the highroad, but he had paused at the head of Bucksall's lane as though thinking he would come in.

Mrs. Bucksall, whose hearing was none too good, repeated her question:

"How long? A month, did you say?"

"Maybe all summer," he replied.

The black horse did not turn in, after all, but went clattering off down the road.

Andrew did not go directly homeward. The strip of red-trunked arbor-vitæ woods, the wind-break that Bucksall's great-grandfather had planted along the shore of the lake, seemed to invite him, in its cool darkness, to come and walk there for a little and think over all that he had heard that day. He strolled along, through the patches of sunshine and dim shadow, listening to a squirrel chattering overhead, a woodpecker drumming on a tree trunk, and the hollow thunder of the water breaking

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against the rocks. The woods ran out to the very edge of the cliffs here; twenty-five feet high at least was the straight wall of rock that dropped to the lake below. The wind was up to-day and the swells came rolling in with a splash and spray that were almost like that of the sea.

How much there was to think of! Pierre Lebeau and their promise to him; Mrs. Durfee and her warning; the news that the smugglers were disturbed, even if not seriously, by the boys' efforts!

"They will be more disturbed yet before we give up," Andrew thought, clenching his hands inside his pockets as he walked along.

What a clever fellow Job Herron was, and how he managed to be everywhere at once! It was not a coincidence that he was at Caleb Bucksall's gate when Andrew came out. The boy had seen a rider, a far-off dot on the high-road, as he walked across the fields from the camp. Evidently Herron had been lingering

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on the road, waiting for Andrew to emerge, perhaps wishing for an answer to that same question that Mrs. Bucksall had called after him—how long were they going to stay? Well, he knew now that the boys would stay all summer if necessary; they were not to be driven off by any hostility of Job Herron's.

Andrew was standing at the edge of the cliff, with his arm flung about the trunk of a young pine, looking down into the breaking water. He heard a rustle in the underbrush that might have been a squirrel or a rabbit, but that sounded like neither. He turned to look, but what it really was he never saw. Something—a stone or a club—came hurtling across the clearing and struck him full upon the back of the head, making him stagger and see a million stars. He stumbled, caught at the pine but could not find it, missed his footing, and plunged over the rock wall. Dimly he saw the flashing blue water which seemed to rush up to meet him.

CHAPTER XI

WINDMILL BAY

ANDREW'S mind, while he was struggling in the water, seemed to his after memory to have been like a door swinging open and shut, with alternate intervals of light and knowledge of what was going on about him, then darkness and complete oblivion. He knew himself to be trying to swim, but in a stunned, ineffectual way, as though he had forgotten how. Then he was sinking helplessly in the dark, with the water pulsing and gurgling in his ears.

Then he was out in the light and sunshine again, with a face rising close to his own, a dark face that was laughing even then, while a voice said:

“Courage, monsieur! He is not to have the satisfaction of drowning you, the brute!”

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Then Jean Lebeau's arm—it felt like a bar of iron, so strong and firm was it—came around him and they were treading water together, with the waves slapping their faces and a blinding glare of sunlight in Andrew's eyes.

"Bring the boat," Lebeau was shouting to some one above them, whom he called by an unflattering French name that accorded ill with Job Herron's pompous dignity; "bring the boat unless it is your desire to be rid of us both. Bestir your great self."

Andrew closed his eyes, too weak and weary to pay much more attention, or to care whether he sank or not. After what seemed a very long time, he heard dully the creak of a tiller and the sound of the bow of a boat cutting the water, while the cool shadow of a sail shut off the blinding light. Lebeau was urging him to make an effort to climb over the gunwale. He did attempt it, but slipped back and lost consciousness entirely.

When he opened his eyes again he was lying

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in the bottom of the boat, while above him Lebeau at the tiller and Herron, leaning against the rail, were talking angrily.

"I was hired to sail your boats and to see that the cargoes came safe," the young Frenchman was saying. "You have paid me well to break the law, but to stand by and see murder done—that does not come within the price!"

"I did not mean murder," growled the other; "how was I to know that he was standing so near the edge? You risked a great deal to jump over and save him, but what we are to do with him now I do not know. I only wanted to teach him a lesson."

"A lesson that has nearly made it so that he need never learn another," said Lebeau. "Still, I think a living boy is easier to dispose of than a dead one."

He let out the sheet a little and shifted the boat's course.

"Where are you going?" Herron asked. Provokingly, and probably with intention to

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annoy, Lebeau did not reply. "Where are you heading for?" Herron was forced to ask again.

"When we are ashore," the younger man replied shortly, "you are the master and I am the man, but in a boat it is different. Could you sail this craft even on such a familiar little voyage as from here past Dunder Rock up into Canada without capsizing her? No. Then it is I who must take charge, and it is I who will go where I choose."

Herron made no answer other than an inarticulate growl. They sailed on in silence for a time, while Andrew lapsed into something that was more like sleep than unconsciousness, for he was aware through his stupor of voices now and again and of the constant gurgle and rush of water against the side of the boat so close to his ear. There was a dull, thumping pain in his head that grew and grew, confusing his ideas when he tried to rouse himself, and giving him strange, bewildered

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dreams when he dropped to sleep again. He did not know how long afterward it was that he felt himself being lifted out of the boat.

"Easy there!" directed Lebeau. "You are rough-handed enough to bruise an ox!"

He himself took Andrew deftly under the arms and swung him over the side.

"Can you stand?" he asked, and the boy tried manfully to do so, but the effort made him so sick and giddy that he was forced to give it up. He felt himself carried up the cool green path down which he had run so excitedly three days before in pursuit of the smugglers. He was lifted over the threshold of the door into the windmill and laid down upon a pile of empty sacks. Jean Lebeau bent over him, anxiously examining into the extent of his injuries.

"The sun has already dried his clothes," he announced, "and he is not much hurt, although there is a lump like an egg on the back of his head where your stone hit him. He will be

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quite himself again in an hour or two, and able to go back to his comrades. Faith, he will have a tale to tell them—how a proper citizen of Two Heroes Island undertook to commit murder in the broad light of day!”

“Cease your impudence, Lebeau! Your talk is past a joke,” snarled Herron. “Yes, the boy will be right enough and we have work to do. Come on.”

They went out together and closed the door, leaving Andrew lying stretched out in the middle of the great empty floor. He was able to observe that all the goods he had seen before had now been removed, leaving behind only a faint odor of alcohol and the more distinct smell of wool and leather. Jean Lebeau had made him a fairly comfortable bed upon the boards, with a sack rolled up under his head for a pillow, so that he lay there almost at his ease, feeling the pain diminish and his strength came back. He could see the big

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gray cat sitting on a beam, glaring steadily at him with hostile green eyes. He lay very quiet for a long time.

A gentle sound at the back door, through which he had been brought in, caught his wandering attention. Jean Lebeau had left it a little ajar, but now some one, very gently and stealthily, was closing it. Andrew was to remember long that face he saw for a mere second, looking in—the background of gold and green of the forest outside and that dark, lowering countenance peering in at him. When he had first seen Job Herron his fancy had been that the man looked like a survival of the old Puritans, but with such a difference! No Puritan had such furtive eyes as he saw now; no such thin, cruel mouth; or that look of hatred, of greed, and, in a strange way, of fear. The door closed; Andrew heard the latch click and then the shooting of a bolt. It was odd that Job Herron should have taken so

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much trouble to lock him in. When he was ready to go he would have to try one of the windows.

He sat up after a time and found that, although his head still throbbed, he was no longer dizzy. He walked across the floor and back, his steps somewhat unsteady at first but gradually growing firmer. In a short time he would feel as well as ever. His only companion, the gray cat, seemed to view his growing energy with disapproval and suspicion. She spat at him, arched her back, and swelled her tail, and finally, spurning his society altogether, ran up the long ladder that stood in the middle of the room and squeezed through the trap-door at the top. Andrew, with more and more confidence in his strength, went over to try the big door. It was immovable.

"Well," he said to himself, "there are the windows."

When they had achieved entrance to the windmill before, Christopher had pried loose

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a rotted bar from the window by the door. Even since their visit three days before, this had been made fast again with strips of new lumber, while the white wood barring some of the other openings showed where the smugglers had replaced several of the fastenings that time had weakened. He tried one window and then another, but the bars were firm and the spaces between too narrow for him to squeeze through. It was plain that Job Heron had, after all, closed up his only possible way of escape. He shook the little door, beat upon it, and shouted. There was no answer except the wind in the trees and the water washing on the shore.

Then he remembered by what route the cat had fled and seemed to recollect too, from his former view of the windmill, that the little loopholed windows high up in the sides of the building had been left unbarred. He stood at the foot of the ladder and looked up. Yes, he could see the light above, and even

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some russet-breasted barn-swallows flitting and darting about as though the way in and out were quite unobstructed. He shook the ladder and tested the first step warily. It was old and shaky, but perhaps it would hold him. Very slowly and carefully he mounted from one rung to another. He had climbed, perhaps, to the ninth or tenth before the ladder gave way with a crash and flung him heavily to the floor.

He sat up, somewhat dazed, his head ringing again as he surveyed the ruins about him.

"Gone to bits, like the one-hoss shay," he commented ruefully on seeing the shattered remains of the ladder. It was, indeed, so ancient and rotten that it had been broken to pieces by its own fall and lay, a mere heap of chips and crumbled wood, all about him. Its upper end must have been what held open the trap-door, for this, with the smashing of the ladder, had jarred shut. Andrew sat very still, wondering what he should do.

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He tried many things. With loose pieces of board he hammered at the locks of the doors and pried at the strips across the windows. But the locks and the wooden bars were new and the material in his hands was old, so that his implements fell to pieces under his efforts without bringing him nearer to freedom. He shouted—to no purpose. He raged with equally small effect. At last he grew very tired and lay down to rest on the pile of sacks. If he was to stay there long he might as well wait patiently for something to happen. It could not be that he was to remain in the windmill forever.

As the day passed into evening, however, he began to wonder whether or not release would ever come. No one knew of his being a prisoner there except Job Herron, and upon Herron the responsibility would rest very lightly. Andrew's comrades at the camp would, of course, begin to wonder by now where he was; but how could they guess, after

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they had left him by the river, that he was shut up in the windmill miles away? It became duskier and duskier in the big room. He was very weary; at last he fell asleep. He woke once to find that night had come completely, and that the place was so dark that he could see nothing. Indeed, he scarcely realized where he was as he turned over, wondered vaguely at the unwonted hardness and chilliness of his bed, and slept again.

Later he opened his eyes again to more complete understanding, for he saw the moonlight dropping in long bars across the floor and realized that it must be very late, as now the moon did not rise until after midnight. He had been dreaming of escape and the fact of waking to imprisonment filled him with despairing rage. He went to the window and peered out. He could see the forest mysterious in the vivid black and white of moonlight and darkness; he could hear the myriad whisperings and stirrings of the busy

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night life. Anger seized him again; he shook at the bars and kicked them; he shouted and beat upon the door. But it was of no use. The only result was a sudden quiet outside, for the bats and birds and wood animals that had been moving so stealthily now seemed to be holding their breath in terror at the tumult within. Rather shamefacedly he stumbled back to his couch and presently was dreaming once more.

The third time he opened his eyes it was beginning to be morning. A noise above had aroused him, a dull thud and the creaking passage of footsteps across the floor overhead. With a groan of rusty hinges the trap-door lifted, showing a blot of gray light from the less dark room above. Some one whispered:

“Andrew, is it you? Are you safe?”

It was Christopher's voice!

Sleep fell from Andrew completely, so that he sat up on the instant, broad awake and with all his senses alert.

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"I'm all right, but don't, don't try to come down!" he cried. "Whatever you do, don't drop through that hole. If you do, you can never climb out again."

He ran to the spot below the trap and, looking up, could see the dark round of Christopher's head against the light.

"They locked me in," he explained quickly. "There is no possible way out down here. Don't come down."

"All right," assented Christopher, then was silent, apparently thinking deeply. "I know a way," he said at last. "I may be gone some time, but I will be back."

His creaking footsteps crossed the floor again, there was a pause, then prodigious rustling as though the big tree beside the windmill was being swept by a gale. It was not hard to guess that Christopher was using it as a ladder to get to and from the upper window. Andrew went back to his bed, but this time with

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no idea of sleeping. He sat there wide-eyed, smiling to himself in the dark; for now his friends had found him and certain help was near.

CHAPTER XII

THE SPIRIT OF PATOWBOK

FOR more than half an hour Andrew sat waiting before he heard footsteps again and the opening of the trap-door. Then a length of rope appeared in the opening, uncoiling slowly and dropping lower and lower until it reached the floor. After it had hung swaying for a moment, a form like that of a gigantic spider began to climb down it, swinging round and about in the gray dusk. Christopher had not come alone the second time; for no sooner had his feet touched the floor than a second figure came through the trap and a second spider, less long as to arms and legs and also less nimble, came scrambling down. It was surely a good and a heartening sight

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to Andrew to see the faces of his friends again.

They squatted in a row on the floor in the dim light, like a row of owls, while Andrew, in the intervals of devouring the sandwiches they had brought, told of his visitor at the camp, of his going to Caleb Bucksall's, of his walking on the edge of the cliff, and all that had followed.

"I want to know how you found me," he concluded; "but, first, where did you get that rope?"

"Simple enough," returned Christopher, easily. "The smugglers had one of their boats moored down at the end of the path; there was only one man aboard and he was dead asleep. I had to be pretty quiet, that was all. The only hard thing was to tie the rope to the beam up there; it was new and stiff and wet besides. Howard tried to help me, but he ties knots like an old maid."

"But how in the world," Andrew persisted, "did you think of my being here? It is the

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last place in the world where I should have expected to find myself."

"We met that queer woman when we were coming back and we guessed, when we did n't find you, that she had been at the camp, and that the whole thing somehow had to do with Job Herron. So we came to look for you on his part of the island and we had been prowling around all night. We finally thought we heard shouting and pounding inside the windmill, but we were n't very near and we took a long time thinking up a way to get in. We were afraid to shout outside, for fear it was n't you. I surely was glad to hear your voice."

Andrew and Christopher talked very busily of their night's adventures, but Howard sat quiet and a little apart.

"He is thinking of something deep again," commented Christopher. "Tell us what you have conjured up this time."

"I was just thinking," Howard answered

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thoughtfully, "that unless something happens, we three are in a bad way."

"Why?" demanded Andrew. "We are all together again. We can get out. There will probably be no one to stop us when we want to go home."

"Yes," Howard assented, "it is not that. It is Job Herron I am thinking of. That woman was right; he is going to keep on trying to do us harm. He is a crafty man, but he has a raging bad temper, too, and that makes him lose his head and do things even worse than he had planned. There is what he did to me," he laid his finger on the red welt that still showed across his cheek. "That was when he was bothered and impatient because we were interfering with his plans. And here is what he has done to you. He was angry and worried and he had begun to see that his business might really be stopped by what we had found out. And now,"—Howard's voice dropped and he spoke with intense earnestness

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—“he is not only impatient and angry; he is frightened. What he did on the cliff to Andrew looked too much like trying to do away with him; Herron must know that if it gets out it will lead to serious trouble. When he thinks of your going off whole with a story like that to tell, he will hate us and be afraid of us, too. And unless I miss my guess Job Herron angry is only about half as dangerous as Job Herron frightened. There is no knowing what he may do now.”

“Listen to the wiseacre,” Christopher scoffed, but Howard’s statement of his reflections had none the less the effect of causing an uncomfortable and thoughtful silence. Then,

“Let’s get out of here,” Christopher suddenly suggested, as though the ideas that their comrade had put into their minds were unpleasantly like ghosts in that place of dark corners and dim shadows. With speed and alacrity the boys set themselves to making their departure by the way that Christopher

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had got in. They all breathed freer when they stood outside in the forest, where the birds were beginning to sing and the cheerful red of morning was showing behind the trees.

There was no great amount of light, however, among the big trunks and dense underbrush, so that it was not easy for the boys to keep their bearings and decide which was the nearest way home. They tramped forward through the forest, knowing vaguely that they must keep the crimson dawn behind them and must go forward until they found the road. Christopher, who was still openly scoffing at Howard's theories, kept coming back to the subject.

"I don't believe Herron is so dangerous," he said, "or even frightened. If he is, I should like to scare him a little more."

They argued the matter so persistently that presently they found they had paid no attention to the way and had missed it entirely. Christopher said that the responsibility of

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losing them was his and that he would make a detour of a few hundred yards to where some rising ground could give him a view over the wood and show him where they were.

"The road is n't far," he reported when he rejoined them. "If we go on past that big beech and travel straight, we shall strike it in fifteen minutes or so. Come on."

It was not until afterward that he confessed to them the truth—that the road was at one point much nearer than he had told them, and that he had wished to come out upon it in a certain place. For he had seen something moving on the crooked highway and had guessed quickly that it was Job Herron with his wagons, taking his unlawful wares to market, setting forth at dawn in the hope that Andrew was still a prisoner in the windmill and that the errand could be carried out unobserved. Christopher's idea was to confront the smugglers on the highway and "throw a

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scare into them," but of this the other two were quite unconscious.

It was not, indeed, part of his hastily adopted purpose to have the meeting take place at just the spot it did. The Smugglers' Road ran fairly level for the most part, over rough and sandy ground, with trees and marshes on each side. There was, however, a certain portion that crossed a stony ridge, slanting down steeply to the marshland again and bordered by high rocks. It was a narrow way, with scarcely room for two wagons to pass, and it was, so Christopher thought as they began to climb the steep ascent, no bad place for the encounter. But Job Herron was quicker-witted than he and knew, in the instant of meeting them, that the advantage of position was his, not the boys'.

He came across the top of the ridge with two heavily loaded wagons, driven by two of the French-Canadians, while he himself rode

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the black horse, Storm. Christopher stood by the side of the path, regarding them with a mocking and triumphant smile, as though he could actually see through the hay and sacks that concealed the real burden; as though Job Herron need hope to have no secrets from his three tormentors.

But there was one thing that they did not, could not understand until that moment revealed it—the reckless fury of the man's high temper. One second, so it seemed to Andrew, they saw the wagons with the heavy toiling Percherons silhouetted against the pale morning sky; the next, a wild whirlwind of plunging, galloping horses came thundering over the ridge to ride them down. The black horse was darting in and out between the wagons, the rider, with the face of an enraged demon, was laying his lash across the wide gray backs of the Percherons, driving the horses headlong, four abreast, down the narrow rock-walled way. Andrew made an effort to climb the

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rocky bank, found it impossible, and rolled into the shallow ditch at the side of the road, lying there safe as the thundering hoofs went by. Howard managed to flatten himself against the wall on the opposite side, but Christopher fared less well. They found him lying in the ditch, his face and hands covered with bruises and his forehead badly cut. He sat up slowly as the other two hung over him.

"The joke is on me," he managed to say. "I thought we would frighten Job Herron a little more. I shall know better another time. He is a good hater when he once begins!"

He could walk, although somewhat uncertainly, and seemed glad of the support of a shoulder on each side.

"It must have been the shoe of one of the horses that cut me," he remarked as they trudged toward home. "One big gray elephant ran right against me and I saw his hairy hoof, looking twice the size of a cart-wheel, about two inches from my face."

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It was a long and weary tramp for them, along the crooked road, into the main highway, and past the Four Corners. It was still early when they came to the blacksmith shop and found Thaddeus Strong, yawning, standing by the big door he had just pushed open.

"You're out early. Been fishing?" he questioned, then looked alarmed when he observed Christopher's white face, with the blood still running down his cheek. "How ever did you do that?" he inquired anxiously, but went so quickly for water and bandages that he had no time to press the question. "I have everything here that you need: we have accidents at the forge often enough to need them," he explained as he washed the cut and helped to bind it up.

"I knocked my head against a piece of iron," was the rather lame explanation that Chris volunteered when the first-aid measures had been taken. "It was all my own carelessness and does n't amount to anything, anyway."

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Thaddeus nodded slowly and looked very knowing.

“Boys must have their good times,” he observed. “Maybe you’ve been fishing or hunting on somebody’s land where you were n’t as welcome as you expected to be. I’m an open-minded man, myself, but some that live around here are rather set in their ways and don’t know just how to do the right thing by strangers. You sit still there on the bench and rest a while. Don’t fear that I am going to ask questions.”

He gave them a very astute wink and went over to the forge to start the fire. The three boys sat down, a battered and woebegone row. They found themselves in no very happy plight, for they were possessed of an uneasy secret and were at open enmity with a man who was willing and anxious to do them great harm. Andrew, thinking it over, came to the desperate resolve of trying the effect of a hint on Thaddeus Strong. On the pretext of help-

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ing to blow the bellows, he went to stand beside him at the forge.

“Do you think,” he began huskily, then cleared his throat and repeated his opening a little louder, “do you ever think that Job Herron is a—a little crooked?”

Thaddeus stopped with a hot horseshoe poised between his tongs and stared in amazement.

“Crooked? Job Herron? Why, no, he could n’t be! His father was one of the best and the biggest men these parts ever knew.”

“But I ’m not talking about his father,” Andrew insisted wildly. “I ’m talking about him. There are things about him that we—we don’t like.”

“Maybe so, maybe so,” returned the other. “Some of us don’t like his manners any too well, and that Mrs. Durfee who lives with him—she carries written on her face what he is like at home. But all that has nothing to do with a man’s honesty. We ’ve known Job Herron

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all our lives and never saw anything wrong about him. His father and his father's father, they all did this neighborhood credit. It is true that there is some wild blood in Job's veins: His father married a Portuguese wife that he brought home from Heaven knows where, and Job gets that dark face from her, and his hard temper. But I've never seen any real harm in him. No," he concluded severely, "we would n't take much stock in any one who told us that a man who has lived here so many years could have been fooling us all along. Such a thing would take a lot of proving."

He plunged the glowing horseshoe, hissing, into a pail of water, then drew it out and fell to hammering again. He seemed both disturbed and annoyed by Andrew's insinuation, and quite unbelieving. The boy could hear him muttering indignantly to himself as he thumped away at the iron.

"I believe we will be going now," Andrew

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said wearily. "Thank you for all you have done."

He felt dispirited and very tired, full of a great desire to give up the whole of the unfortunate business. The other two seemed to be in the same mood, for they arose without a word and walked heavily after him. Chris voiced their feelings after a long silence, when they had nearly reached home.

"Well, Howard has thought up his great idea and now I have gone and proved it for him. He said we were in a bad way and we are. What are we going to do?"

"I said we were unless something happens," replied Howard. "Don't let's give up yet. In a thing like this no one can know what is really coming. There are a lot of things that might turn up."

"For my share, I don't care for much more to happen," retorted Chris. "There has been enough for a little while, I think. And two

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broken heads are all that we have got from the smugglers so far."

Andrew said little, but through all the rest of the day, even until late afternoon, when they climbed the hill to pass the night at the tavern, he was turning their difficult situation over and over in his mind. Looking up at the sign above the door, he stared long at the unchanging face above him and wondered what the stout old hero would have counseled could he have spoken.

"Unless something happens," kept running through his tired mind, "unless something happens."

But what could happen except Job Heron's final and most desperate move against them? So he thought despairingly, although even at that moment events were crowding on one another's heels to bring their affairs to the great crisis. The something that was to happen could already be felt in the air, but he

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did not know it, did not even guess at it as he gazed up at the sign and saw it slowly begin to swing.

He went inside and sat down with a heavy sigh. Howard was standing by the window, for he had been on watch at the tavern for most of the afternoon. As Andrew entered he said, "I think there is going to be a storm," but his words were scarcely heeded. Presently, however, he spoke again:

"There is a bigger blow coming than any we have ever seen before. Come here and watch."

Andrew was very slow to get up and cross to the window. He felt that storms, in such a time of perplexity, were matters of little importance. Yet as he leaned out of the window, on Howard's insisting that he must look, he uttered a sharp exclamation and changed his opinion all in a breathless second.

It was a wonderful and terrible sight to watch the mad tempest come riding down the broad blue highway of the lake. Thunder

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muttered in the distance; black clouds hung on the slopes of the mountains; a dull roar, like nothing he had ever heard before, rose slowly and came nearer and nearer. The tavern sign swung more and more wildly to and fro, while the poplar trees bowed lower and lower to the coming gale. A blinding flash of lightning suddenly lit the whole heavens with a brilliance that seemed to sear their eyes. Christopher, upstairs, could be heard running back and forth, slamming windows and banging shutters in that mad haste that always seizes people when a storm approaches. But Howard stood very quiet, staring steadily down at the water.

“What is the matter?” cried Andrew, suddenly, for an expression that he could not fathom had crossed his comrade’s face.

“Don’t you see?” Howard almost whispered.
“Don’t you see?”

And in a moment, Andrew did see. The swooping gale had caught the Isle of the Four

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Winds and was lashing the trees with frenzied fury. Whirling broken branches blew hither and thither above it, and among them the eagle was tossed and flung about, flapping stormily, trying to regain his perch in the dead tree. What Howard was watching, however, was not the eagle. Five boats—four small ones and the bigger sloop—were drifting outward from the seven bays. The sudden storm had come from a quarter not readily seen from the little island, and had broken with a fury bound to tear loose the moorings of any vessel not doubly secured. Away they went together, staggering and pitching, now gathering close, now drifting apart, dancing a mad, wild dance across the raging water. The spirit of Patowbok, the sprite that, so the Indians had said, dwelt behind Dunder Rock and breathed wind or calm across the lake, had betrayed the smugglers at last. It had let them pass unharmed a hundred times; it had even

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seemed to lend favorable breezes to waft them on their lawless errands, but it was only waiting—and waiting. Howard's hopes had suddenly come to fulfilment: something had happened.

"I watched the whole fleet come in, heavy and low in the water, two hours ago," Howard said. "All the men are there and probably no end of smuggled goods. They have lost their boats and in this wind they can never get away. They are trapped and all the proofs of their lawbreaking with them, on the Isle of the Four Winds."

Christopher came clattering down the stairs and was called to the window. They stood silently watching the boats. One had already been swamped; the rest were fleeing wildly before the wind, lurching and bobbing and growing smaller and smaller.

"They were a careless lot," said Christopher. "Jean Lebeau was the only real sailor among

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them. Such a thing was bound to happen to them some time. The wind certainly caught them fairly."

"Yes, they're trapped," said Andrew, gravely. "I think we have them at last."

CHAPTER XIII

STORM

“WE shall have to know beyond question whether or not Job Herron is with the rest,” Andrew insisted.

“I feel certain he is,” Howard declared. But Andrew, who had learned caution by a more severe lesson than had the others, vowed that they must make sure before they took any further steps.

There seemed to be but one way to find out and that was to go down to his house and reconnoiter. In the storm and the early-falling darkness it seemed that this could be done without unreasonable danger. It was absurd, however, to hear the boys warning one another to take care, as they went down the hill.

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"No more daredevil business for me," Christopher vowed solemnly. "I nearly got us all killed by being so cock-sure. I'm going to creep up like an old cat this time. Now, don't you do anything reckless, Andrew."

"I'm not the one to be tempted," Andrew said. "One more knock on the head would destroy what wits I have, and I think we shall be needing all we have among us to-night."

Even while they made their way down the forest-covered slope of Seven Bays Hill, the roar of the wind was almost deafening. The storm was not like the others they had seen, a furious squall that blew itself out in an hour. This one rose steadily, blowing fiercer and fiercer as every moment passed. They came through the edge of the wood and out upon the shore path, having no need for caution; for an army of horse, foot, and dragoons—if there still were such things—could have marched down the Smugglers' Road and no one have been the wiser. It was beginning to rain now,

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in flying gusts that blinded them and took their breath away if they turned to face them. They walked more carefully as they came near Job Herron's gate, but here again they found no danger nor difficulty in discovering what they wished to know; for Mrs. Durfee was standing in the middle of the road with her eyes strained toward the island, making it clear whither the master of the house had gone. The wind was whipping her skirts and blowing her hair about her gaunt face as she turned to them with evident relief, seeming to have forgotten her warning and to feel only comfort at having some one to whom to speak.

"Such a storm!" she exclaimed. "And Job's gone over to the Isle of the Four Winds in only the little green dory. I saw him round the foot of the island just before the first squall struck. I do hope he got safe ashore. No boat of that size could live long in a wind like this, and Job is none too good a sailor."

It was excellent news to hear that Job Her-

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ron was with his comrades, but it was a blow to find that they were possessed of even such a craft as the green dory, the most unseaworthy boat they had. Howard made a feeble effort to show his gratitude by attempting to comfort her.

"Perhaps the storm will blow itself out by and by," he said.

"We don't have such storms as this often; but when we do have them they last a day and a night at least," she answered. "I—I wish I could be sure he had landed safely."

Her tone held such real suffering that Andrew also tried to reassure her, although inwardly he wondered why she should grieve much, even if Job Herron failed to come home again.

"No, no," she repeated, shaking her head in reply to all that he could say, "I can't help worrying about him. Maybe you wonder why it makes so much difference. Boys would n't understand. He is the only flesh and blood

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that belongs to me. He is my own kin and I would n't have harm come to him."

"You had better go inside," remonstrated Andrew. "You are getting soaked with the rain and you can't help him. The one thing certain seems to be that he is on the Isle of the Four Winds and, until the storm is over, he will have to stay there."

In spite of himself he could not keep the ring of triumph from his tone. It meant so much to them that Job Herron was on the island and that there he must abide. Andrew had made a manful effort, but his voice betrayed him. The woman had actually turned back to the gate, but at his last words she wheeled to face him.

"And what is that to you?" she cried with sudden suspicion. "Why are you so glad?"

Upon each of the three boys she turned her keen black eyes. They looked sheepish, they glanced away, but they could feel her reading

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their thoughts none the less. She took a step toward them.

"You think you have caught them," she screamed, her voice lifting with the lifting of the wind. "You came to see if he was here, and now you are going back to give the whole affair away. But you won't! you can't! I will stop you."

She looked like a witch, with her black hair streaming and the rain running down her face.

"I warned you, I treated you fairly when I thought you were in danger," she cried. "Wasn't that enough? Would you turn against me now? But I won't let you give him up."

"We won't turn against you, but if we choose to give Job Herron away, how can you stop us?" asked Chris, bluntly.

"You will have to arouse the people hereabouts," she replied. "They will be slow to believe, at the very best. And I will go with you, I will follow you, and whatever you tell,

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I will have an answer for it. I won't let them believe. Oh, I have lain awake, many's the night, and thought, if the thing really came out, what I could do and say to save Job. For every truth you could tell I have a lie ready, a good lie that I know our people will believe. He's been hard to me, but, he's all I have—I'll stand by him."

The boys stood staring at her helplessly.

"But—but—" stuttered Chris, feebly. She had come close to him and was shaking a thin finger in his face.

"We've none of us been afraid of you," she cried.

Andrew made a frantic gesture to him behind her back. "Keep her talking," he signaled, he had a plan. Christopher caught his eyes and read his meaning quickly. He grasped Mrs. Durfee by the arm and turned her toward the lake.

"Look out there toward the island," he directed, "where that biggest tree is bending.

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Don't you see something like the green dory beached beyond it?"

She hesitated, turned to look, and their purpose was gained. Andrew slipped through the gate and ran past the house and up through the barn-yard. It was not for nothing that he had admired Job Herron's black horse and noted the possibilities for speed in those powerful shoulders and slender legs. The barn was dark when he entered it and seemed warm and sheltered after the tumult outside. He could hear the horses munching in their stalls, but at first he could make out very little. There beside him was a big Percheron; beyond stood another, stretching its halter to look at him with big, mild eyes. Perhaps it was the very horse that had been driven so wildly down the hill to trample Christopher in the road. He ran down the row—ah, there in a box-stall at the end was a black head thrust over the gate, and a nervous stamping and snorting showed where the Morgan horse was to be found. As

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Andrew entered the barn he had noticed the saddle and bridle hanging from a peg on the wall.

Storm flinched and backed when Andrew drew near, so it took several precious minutes to get the bit between his teeth and to fling the saddle upon his back. It seemed to the boy that he was an hour struggling with the girths, but it was in reality only a moment before he had led the horse outside and had swung himself into the saddle.

He cut through a field, opened a gate, and came out on the road a whole turn beyond where the others were standing. It was no time to think of the unhappy task to which he was leaving his comrades. He bent his head to face the stinging rain and set out at full speed for the Four Corners.

The usual group of congenial talkers had gathered at the blacksmith shop that afternoon and had been caught by the rising storm.

“Better drive your horses under the shed and

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sit it out, boys," Thaddeus had advised when the first drops fell. But the drops became torrents and the torrents flying sheets of water that drove viciously against the windows and swept under the crack of the door, while the row of storm-bound farmers sat upon the bench and prophesied variously as to when the tempest would pass. Caleb Bucksall, caught out on the road, came in dripping and bringing the news that he had seen three boats adrift on the lake.

"Thought at first there were four," he said, "but one must have gone down while I was squinting my eyes against the rain trying to count them. Hope there were no folks aboard!"

He sat down with the others and began comparing guesses as to the amount of damage already done by the storm.

"It will hit the apples hard," began one, "and as for—hark!"

He broke off to listen, for through the drum-

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ming of the rain on the roof and the roar of the wind, there came the sound of horse's hoofs flying up the road.

"Some one wants mighty bad to get in out of the wet," observed Thaddeus.

The big door was thrust back and Andrew, dripping, breathless, pale with excitement, came rushing in, the black horse following close behind him so that the two stood together on the threshold.

"Come in, for mercy's sake, and close the door!" exclaimed Thaddeus like a querulous housewife. "Yes, and bring the horse along, too, if you 've a mind to. Why, it 's Job Herron's Morgan!"

"Yes, it 's Storm," assented Andrew, still panting. He came through the darkness, the horse at his heels, and stood in the circle of red light cast by the forge fire.

"I have come to tell you about Job Herron," he said.

Tell them he did, with all the force and

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energy of which he was master. At first the words came tumbling forth in a flood, in spite of his breathlessness; but as he went on, watching Thaddeus's jaw drop and a slow change of expression come over the faces of all his hearers, his speech became slower and more stammering.

"Don't you see?" he kept repeating lamely. "Can't you understand?"

No, they did not understand; nothing he could say seemed to move them at all. The moment Andrew stopped they began a tremendous arguing among themselves, paying but scant attention to him. He began to have a detached feeling, as though he were looking on at a play, as he watched the rows of faces in the lights and shadows of the fire. The men were working out the success or failure of his great undertaking; yet he seemed to stand powerless, unable to urge or to convince them.

"I don't make nothing out of such a story," proclaimed one old fellow, thumping with his

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cane. "Boys' talk is all it is, just boys' talk. It's likely, is n't it, that all this could be going on right here and we never see it?"

"Boys might see more than we," put in Caleb Bucksall, meditatively; "and there's always been something queer about Job Herron. His farm is n't big, and it's rocky and wooded, but he always hauls lots of stuff to market over the Sandbar Bridge. We've all spoken of that."

Andrew flashed him a quick look of gratitude, but his heart was growing heavier and heavier. He already understood these people well enough not to judge them harshly, even in his present impatience. They were honest and faithful and upright to the last breath; but, oh, how difficult they were to convince of anything new!

He laid his hand—it was trembling with excitement—against the black horse's neck and stood waiting. How he wished he were a man, gifted with eloquence and force sufficient to make these people do his will! An old white

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mare, waiting to be shod, turned in the shadows with her long, melancholy face and gazed at him. Andrew thought bitterly that hers seemed the only sympathetic look that had been granted him in the whole company. Thaddeus, however, came close and put a hand upon his arm.

“You’ve stirred up a hornet’s nest,” he whispered, “and they’ll argue here until doomsday unless something’s done. If you can get Deputy Sheriff Willetts to look into this thing—”

“But there’s no time to lose!” cried Andrew, desperately. “If you wait until the storm is over and they can get boats, the smugglers will all be gone. But if you act now, get men and a boat or two on the shore near the island, to cross over as soon as the wind drops a little, you have everything—men, proof, smuggled goods, the whole affair right in your hand.”

“You get Willetts,” Thaddeus repeated. “That’s the only way. If he will believe you

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and come, he can swear in a posse from these fellows here and I promise you they will stop talking and do something then. But they can't and they won't take any action for themselves."

"Yes," assented Andrew drearily. He had small hopes of persuading the timid Willetts more successfully than before. However, it was better to try than to stand, helpless, listening to these men argue. He took the horse's bridle and turned to the door. Thaddeus followed him.

"You say to Willetts," he whispered in Andrew's ear, "you say to him, 'Remember Silas Rose!' Maybe that will fetch him. If it won't, nothing will. Good luck to you."

Bareheaded and in his shirt sleeves, he stood at the door, peering out into the darkness to watch the boy ride away. Night had fallen now, and the floods of rain had turned the gravel road into a running stream in which Storm splashed and floundered. Yet Andrew

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felt vaguely cheered as he galloped off, since Thaddeus's interest and his whispered advice had aroused a faint spark of hope again. For the first time he realized what an amount of thinking went on behind the weather-beaten masks of these farmers' faces and how little an outsider could guess what the final judgment would be. With a little less despair, but with no very cheery expectations, he rode, finally, through Willetts' gate and knocked at his door.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SPRIG OF EVERGREEN

ONCE Andrew thumped on the panels of the door and again, with no result.

“There is no one here, perhaps,” he began to think, forgetting how early country people go to bed. At last, however, he saw a light shine from an upper window and then begin to move slowly and jerkily down the stairs.

“I believe—I do believe he will have a nightcap on,” Andrew thought, suddenly; “he is just the sort that would!”

After long fussing and fumbling the door was unbarred and cautiously opened, showing the disheveled little sheriff, who wore a few hastily assumed garments and—yes, Andrew had not guessed wrong—not merely a nightcap but a red flannel one that tied under his chin.

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The candle in his hand revealed that much, before it flickered and went out in the fierce gust of wind that fairly blew Andrew inside the door.

“What do you want?” inquired the sheriff, testily. “This is no time to be getting people out of their beds.”

Breathlessly and briefly Andrew explained his errand. Before he was half-way through, however, he began to have that same baffled, helpless feeling that had come upon him in the blacksmith shop, the knowledge that his words did not carry conviction. He had the sensation, as in a bad dream, of trying to move or speak or attract attention and being utterly unable to do so. Oh, why would no one understand or listen when the need was so great? He cut his explanation short; nor did Willetts press him for details.

“I have been thinking the whole thing over,” he said slowly, “and I have just about come to the conclusion to let it alone. It would

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mean a heap of trouble if we started after these fellows—trials and appeals, most likely, and some smart lawyer from down the state coming up to make a fool of me in court. Job Herron won't give in easy, and he will know where to look for help. I did have a warrant for Jean Lebeau's arrest, but I can't find it; Amanda thinks she burned it up last housecleaning time. No, it's not the kind of thing that I had better mix in. Let somebody at the place where those fellows get their stuff, or where they sell it, find out what is going on. That is bound to happen some time."

Andrew was just beginning a vain protest when a voice sounded from upstairs.

"Abner," it called, "are you standing in that open door catching your death of cold?"

"No, Amanda," replied the deputy sheriff meekly, and to Andrew: "It's my judgment that it would be best to do nothing right now."

Andrew had some cynical wonder as to whether Amanda upstairs had not helped him

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in that decision. In utter despair he fired his last shot.

"I was told to remind you," he said carelessly, as he made a move toward the door, "of Silas Rose."

"What, what?" cried the other excitedly, catching him by the sleeve. "Now, who told you anything about that?"

"No matter who did," Andrew answered. "I was just to tell you to remember; that was all."

"Silas Rose was a bank robber," Willetts said slowly. "He was wanted in five states and all the police in the country were looking for him. He spent three weeks here on Two Hero Islands; he even worked for me part of the time, and we none of us thought of who he might be. When some chickens disappeared off Caleb Bucksall's farm I did have a suspicion that the man was n't just what he should be, but I talked it over with Amanda and she—we concluded to let well enough

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alone. The man was a famous criminal. I'd have had my picture in all the papers if I had been the one to arrest him. But I let him go!"

"And is n't this the same kind of thing, exactly?" cried Andrew. "Will you let another chance go by?"

The little man looked up at him pitifully and heaved a deep sigh.

"That was ten years ago, when I was a younger and a quicker man and I—I did n't let Amanda have quite so much say. I'm old now, and I'm not fit for my office—that is the real truth of it—for I can't, I dare n't go with you. When election time comes around again, I'll tell the boys I'm through, that I don't deserve the office for another term. I'll be honest with them; that is the best I can do."

Once more Andrew turned to go, dejection and despair hanging heavy at his heart. But Willetts stopped him again, he had a faltering suggestion to make.

"There is one thing you can do if you think

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it's worth while. You can go after the sheriff himself. He is back on North Hero now, I happen to know. I believe he would come back with you. But even in good weather it is a long ride and would take you until midnight; you would have a time of it getting there through a storm like this."

The boy opened the door and looked at the black clouds scudding across the windy sky. The storm had not abated; it gave every sign of continuing for hours still. Even if he did not get back with the sheriff until morning, the move against the smugglers might still be in time.

"I'll go," he said briefly. "But if you would lend me your car I could make it much quicker."

"She's broken down," returned Willetts, ruefully. "There's no hope of her going until a man comes from Harmsworth to fix her."

"All right; I have a good horse, anyway,"

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Andrew said with forced cheerfulness; "but I would be grateful if you would give him some water and a feed of corn. That ought n't to commit you to anything."

He was ashamed, a moment after, for the bitterness of his last words.

"I deserve everything you can say," said the deputy, dispiritedly, hanging his head. "I was going to ask you, if Sheriff Thompson does come back, to let me go along with you after the smugglers. But if I don't dare to do it on my own responsibility, I don't deserve to be in the thing at all. Come right out to the barn and I'll attend to your horse."

Storm was not the only one who had supper in the barn that night, for Andrew himself, seated on an upturned bucket in the light of a smoky lantern, devoured a feast of cold meat, pie, and fresh milk. From the thickness of the great slices of bread and the nervous glances the deputy sheriff kept casting at the door,

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Andrew suspected that Amanda had no share in the hospitality of which he was partaking. The little man sat on another bucket, under the swinging lantern, staring at the boy with round, troubled eyes, the tassel of his nightcap still nodding above his forehead.

“You can’t mistake the way,” he was explaining. “The straight road goes the length of this island, across the bridge, and just as straight along North Hero. You go until you come to a church at the cross-roads with a big oak-tree by it; there you turn to the right down the first lane, with willow trees on each side, go up a short hill, and you will find Thompson’s house.” He heaved another deep sigh. “I wish I could go with you!”

He made a ridiculous figure, sitting there in the light and shadow, but somehow a pathetic one. Andrew caught himself as often feeling sorry for his spiritless host as wishing to laugh at him.

He rode away at last, down the main high-

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way toward the Four Corners. He had hoped that he might meet Howard and Christopher, for he was anxious to know how they had fared. It was so dark, however, that not until his horse shied did he realize that he was almost upon them, plodding along with their necks drawn into their collars and their shoulders hunched under the lashing rain. Hurriedly dismounting, he stood nearly ankle-deep in the swimming road while they held rapid and troubled council. When asked what Mrs. Durfee had said and done when she found Andrew was gone, the other two merely shook their heads and refused to give any account of it.

"We persuaded her to go back to the house after the worst of it was over," Howard narrated, "and Christopher tried to make her some tea because he had heard it was soothing. He let it boil over on himself and she got a little calmer putting some stuff on his burns to take the sting out."

"I made it out worse than it was," put in

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Christopher. "She seemed to get some good out of thinking I was scalded and that she could do something for it."

"We got her quiet at last," Howard went on, "and we came away after a while. She did n't offer to come with us, as she had before. The spirit seemed to have gone out of her. We were glad to leave her, I can tell you. When we came past the blacksmith shop we did n't go in, though we stopped a minute at the door. Such shouting and arguing and contradicting, you never heard. They must be going to keep it up all night and you can hear the din a mile away."

Andrew told them of his visit to the deputy sheriff and of his last forlorn hope that Thompson, at North Hero, would help them.

"I saw him at Thaddeus Strong's once," he said, "and one could know at once that he was a different sort from Willetts. One of you had better take the horse and go after him. It was a shame for me to ride away and leave you

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at Job Herron's, though it could n't be helped. But one of you should go now."

"No, no!" the others protested, both at once.

"I ride just like a sack of potatoes," Howard confessed, "and Chris has never even been on a horse, except a three-foot Shetland pony, when he was still in petticoats. We were talking about it as we came along. No, you are the one to go; you can get the most out of the horse. There is not another beast in the neighborhood that can keep up with Storm, so you will have to go alone. What a place this is, with no automobiles or telephones even! They are n't very well fixed for catching criminals on Two Heroes Islands."

"There is something more we have to tell you," said Chris, rather reluctantly. "We got worried after we left Job Herron's house and went back—oh, from a long way down the road—to see if Mrs. Durfee was really all right. We looked in through the window of the kitchen and we saw some one with her, a

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man, talking to her with his back toward us. We felt almost sure it was Jean Lebeau."

"What?" cried Andrew, startled. "That is n't possible. They had no way of leaving the island."

"They had Herron's green dory and he must have crossed in that. No one but he could handle it in such a storm, and probably none of the others dared come with him. I don't like to think of how Mrs. Durfee must have been telling him of what we meant to do."

"He might guess that we have n't succeeded in doing anything," returned Andrew, bitterly. "Well, even if he does warn them they can't all get away in the dory without drowning. And he would have to beat against the wind to get back to them. I don't think he could make it in this gale. Anyway, I am going to North Hero for help."

He remounted and splashed away, his two comrades waving their dripping caps after him.



It was a wild ride



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It was a wild ride. Trees rocked above him as he rode through stretches of woods, and threatened to fall and crush him. Blinding sheets of lightning seemed to descend upon the very roadway in front of him, so that the black horse tried to wheel and bolt in the opposite direction.

It was a long way, longer than he thought, for the night wore on, midnight came, then the hours of morning approached nearer and nearer, as he still struggled onward. Once, when the road ran along an open bluff above the lake, a lightning flash showed him something that he could scarcely believe. On the stretch of storm-tossed water, lit for an instant, he seemed to see a staggering sail. He could not be sure, so he stopped a moment to let his horse breathe and to wait until another bolt should let his eyes pierce the darkness again. When it came he was even yet not certain, for the tremendous waves rose and fell with something between them, but how could it

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be a boat? Blackness dropped again and he went on.

It began to grow lighter, morning was at hand. Andrew had missed the way at a confusing cross-roads and had lost much time before, in the growing light, he found the right direction again. He rode out of the woods and felt the full force of the wind sweep upon him with such power that his exhausted horse faltered before it. They were coming to the inlet that ran between the two islands; they were in sight of the bridge that crossed to North Hero. Again, and quite plainly now, Andrew saw the sail riding the tumultuous flood and veering inward toward the shore. With the gale behind it the little boat flew like a seagull, making for the bridge and the quiet water below it. The road made a turn and it vanished from his sight.

The horse was nearly spent, but it stumbled on gallantly, though very slowly. They came to the top of the hill down which the road ran

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steeply to the bridge. Andrew could see that the boat was moored in the sheltered water and that some one was standing at the bridge head, waiting to stop his crossing. The light was clear now; not even the boiling, racing clouds could obscure the morning. The man's lithe figure, his red cap, even his face showed plain. It was Jean Lebeau.

Through all the night that Andrew and Storm had been struggling through the dark, the French sailor with reckless skill had been racing to beat him to the bridge, and had won. No message was to reach North Hero unless it passed despite him. He had much at stake—his own safety, and that of his whole company, who had not dared to seek escape by so desperate a route.

It was to be the last struggle now, a fair fight, with only the whirling gulls and the sweeping winds to witness. A moment before, Andrew had felt himself reeling in the saddle, so weary that he had wondered if his strength

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would last to his journey's end. Now he seemed suddenly to become a new person, calm, clear-headed, ready for anything that might come. The Green Mountain Boys of old could not have ridden to the fight with a higher spirit than his. Passing a pine-tree that spread a long branch over the road, he reached up, on sudden impulse, and plucked a green twig from the lowest bough. He carried no weapon, for he had never thought of such an encounter. His only preparation was a mere act of defiance, as he stopped for a moment to set in his rain-drenched cap the sprig of ever-green.

CHAPTER XV

AT COCKCROW

THE crossing to North Hero had once been a toll-bridge, as the faded old sign fixing the rate for "a man and a beast," a yoke of oxen or a flock of sheep, still testified. The old toll-gate, a bar of heavy timber, still hung from its big iron hinges at the head of the bridge. This, Jean Lebeau had swung across the way, making it impossible for the horse to pass, and had shot the great rusty bolt. Andrew dismounted slowly, turned the reins of Storm's bridle over his head, and left him to graze beside the road. Very deliberately he went forward, wondering how he had better make the first attack, speculating as to what sort of fighter the Frenchman would prove to

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be. There were no words exchanged, no time was given for parleying, for each one understood fully the purpose of the other and was grimly determined not to yield. The young Frenchman's black eyes followed every move intently as Andrew drew near. It was perhaps the first time that the boy had ever seen him when he was not smiling.

They engaged finally, with a rush, Andrew leaping to fling himself over the gate, Jean Lebeau wrenching his hand away as it fell upon the bolt. The Frenchman struck out instantly and heavily with a force that made Andrew stagger, but with a reckless want of aim and precaution.

"He does n't look or think," the boy reflected quickly as he countered the second blow. He himself was growing cooler and quieter as he realized more and more the other's hot-headed fury.

There was no sound for a little except their heavy breathing and the thud of fierce strokes

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getting home, while the two slipped back and forth upon the wet road, sometimes with Andrew, who was over the gate now, driven back against the heavy bar, sometimes with Lebeau forced to retire as far as the low rail of the bridge, while the pebbles that were ground beneath his heel dropped over the edge and splashed in the water below. The black horse stopped its grazing to watch them with wide, startled eyes; the circling gulls, swept hither and thither by the wind, wheeled and screamed overhead. It grew steadily lighter and beyond the next hill some farm-yard cock was lifting his voice to herald the morning.

They stopped to breathe at last, Andrew leaning back against the gate, both panting with the fierceness of their first encounter. Weight and size were on the side of Jean Lebeau, but judgment and coolness were with Andrew. With every blow that reached the Frenchman, his temper seemed to grow more blind and headlong. The fury of his fighting

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had rendered him much more breathless than Andrew.

But time was passing and the wind that was holding the smugglers prisoner was sure to drop presently. If only, Andrew thought, he could get the gate open, he might ride forward upon his errand. His hand slipped along the bar behind him, and fumbled at the big bolt, and awkwardly—for the hand was his left one—wrenched the lock from its rusty socket. The gate swung forward behind him almost before Lebeau realized what he was trying to do. But once perceiving, the Frenchman threw himself at the gate, dragging it shut again by force of the superior weight that fairly swung Andrew off his feet. The bar came crashing back against its heavy post, catching the boy's arm as the gate closed. Andrew felt an odd throb of pain and heard a snap as of the cracking of something brittle, but he did not connect the sound with himself. One arm felt singularly limp and useless, but

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despite the fact, he rushed forward upon Lebeau, caught him about the waist at the supreme instant, and forced him back through the rail of the bridge. The Frenchman had lost his balance from the force with which he had swung the gate. He staggered back under Andrew's sudden attack, lurched against the rail, which parted under his weight, and was pushed out, still struggling, upon one of the big supporting beams of the bridge itself.

For a moment they battled precariously on the narrow footing and above the water. Andrew had presence of mind sufficient to thrust one knee and one arm behind an upward-slanting timber, anchoring himself firmly, although the effort cost him a stab of pain that was real agony. Lebeau at the outer end of the beam stood suddenly still. His black eyes narrowed and his hand slipped inside his coat. So far he had fought fairly, but now—so Andrew divined in a flash—he deemed the time had come to use his knife. The hands of

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both of them went under the coat at the same time and closed together over the familiar ivory hilt. They staggered and rocked to and fro, striving for the possession of the weapon, until suddenly Lebeau missed his footing and dropped to his knees on the beam, with Andrew's knee pressed against his chest, able at any moment to send him spinning into the water. They stopped struggling and waited, their breath coming in heavy gasps, as they stared at each other.

"He is younger than I thought," Andrew was thinking. "His cheek is bleeding where I struck it. I wonder why my arm aches so!"

Whatever Jean Lebeau was thinking cannot be known. His hand, that was clutching the knife, slowly relaxed and dropped at his side.

"I think this little affair is over," he said. It was the first time that either had spoken.

Andrew, also, loosened his hold and leaned back against the broken rail.

"Yes, I believe it is over," he agreed, sur-

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prised at how choked and husky his voice sounded, "and now what are we going to do?"

Lebeau altered his cramped position and seated himself on the end of the beam, swinging his legs easily above the water.

"As for me, I will drop from this bridge and swim to my boat yonder," he announced after a little thought. "I will get up sail and clear away for Canada. There is a ship to sail from Montreal, with a friend of mine on board her, going to a certain port in a foreign land, a newer land and a less crowded one than this, where one can still find adventures without running foul of the law. My friend has been asking me to go with him and last week I would not listen, but in this last hour I have changed my mind. I have left the employ of Monsieur Job Herron forever."

"And your grandfather—what will he say?" asked Andrew.

"He will be sorry for a little, and I will grieve for him too, for we love each other, we

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Lebeaus. And how he has stood by me! I was put out of the army, as I believe some of you suspected, and I found it hard to get employment with such a record against me. So then came Job Herron with his plan. 'They will never suspect, these farmers; I have been doing it for years,' he said, 'and now the profits will be beyond counting.' But for the profits I did not care, nor for himself; he has been no friend of mine. But there was sport and excitement in it, our little business that has now come to an end."

He stood up on the end of the beam as though to take his leave immediately. But Andrew stopped him.

"Don't go that way," he said. "Climb over the rail and get to your boat from the shore. The water below is too angry for swimming. You saved me once; why should I not save you?"

Jean Lebeau turned a little, but only to look at Andrew over his shoulder.

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"Where I stand now," he said, "you have me at great disadvantage and can do with me what you will. But were I once on the bridge again, I would be the master, for I am stronger and heavier than you, and you are hurt besides. Your arm is broken; did you not know that? I heard it smash when the gate closed upon it. What could you do, should I choose to take your horse and ride away?"

"You said that the fight was over," replied Andrew, steadily. "I am going to believe that you meant it."

An odd, pleased look came into Lebeau's black eyes.

"There are not many who would so trust me," he said. "I would not wrong you now, but I cannot tell how you know it. But should you have to tell our friend the sheriff that you had willingly let me go, there might be trouble for you, so it is better this way. Make my farewells to Monsieur Herron. Do not let them be too hard on little Joseph. He is no

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more than a child and has done no very great wickedness. Good-by."

Andrew tried to move forward to prevent his leaping into the water, but the sudden motion sent such a wave of pain through his stiffening arm that he turned sick and giddy. He was obliged to close his eyes and lean back against the timber of the bridge, so that he was only aware that Jean Lebeau hesitated a moment, stooped down, and then leaped, with a clean, straight dive, into the water below. The boy watched his head bobbing up and down among the waves, saw him reach the boat, climb aboard, and get up the rag of sail that was all the vessel would carry in such a wind. The boat sped away, now high on the crest of a wave, now nearly out of sight, as she struggled in the trough. Now she was rounding the point and disappearing, with Jean Lebeau turning back to wave his red cap for the last time.

It was not until the boat was gone that An-

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drew noticed something lying on the beam at his feet, something that Lebeau had stooped to lay there just before he plunged into the water. It was the knife that he had lost and recovered and now gave back, an acknowledgment of defeat and a token of friendliness and farewell. A strange mixture was Jean Lebeau, of light-hearted rascality, courage, loyalty, and unexpected chivalry.

“Wherever he goes, whatever he does, I wish him luck,” said Andrew aloud, as he stooped with difficulty to pick up the knife.

How he freed his arm from the timber behind which he had wedged it, how he caught Storm and clambered into the saddle, how he finished his journey, he could never have told very fully. There were stretches of road that he remembered vividly forever after, a hill that he crossed and from which he could see the little boat dwindle away to a dot, a ravine with a bank of fern that looked so cool and soft that he longed to lie down upon it and rest

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forever. But for the most part the journey was a dull blank of jarring pain, when the jerking of the broken arm seemed to be the one real thing on earth and all the rest—the horse, the road and his errand—nothing but an unimportant dream. There ran mechanically through his weary brain the directions that little Willetts had given him: “past a church and a big oak-tree, down the lane with willow trees, up a short hill.”

Somehow he found the way and felt, at last, the tired horse gather all its strength, true to its Morgan blood, and gallop gallantly up the final slope. He found himself standing at a door, knocking. He recognized the man who opened it, as the sheriff he had seen at Thaddeus Strong's. The story of why he had come and what was needed rose to his lips, although he could never recollect what he said. He did, however, always remember the heartiness of Thompson's reply:

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“Of course I will go! Come in. Good heavens, boy! don't tell me you have ridden over that rough road with a broken arm!”

CHAPTER XVI

ALL 'S WELL

ANDREW sat in Ethan Allen's big chair by the tavern fireplace, stiff and sore, with his broken arm in splints and bandages. As he leaned back comfortably he could see out through the open door, could see the white road winding down the hill and the faded old tavern sign hanging above the worn door-step. How long it seemed since they had first come up that road! How long since he had stood on the hearth and had looked up the broad chimney to see the stars. And since they had carried out the wooden sign and hung it in the place from which it had swung a hundred years ago, how much had happened, how much they had seen! Howard had been directed to send off a message summoning Andrew's father; for some

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one older than the boys and wise in legal lore would be needed during the proceedings that were to follow, with the introduction of Job Herron and his friends to the county jail. What a great deal the boys would have to tell him when he came! How far back their tale would have to go—to the day when Andrew lay on the grass of Pierre Lebeau's dooryard and watched the eagle flying above Seven Bays Hill.

The end of the adventure had been denied him, for when he came back in Sheriff Thompson's automobile, Andrew had been sent up to the tavern, where the doctor and Mrs. Bucksall had attended to the setting of his arm, while Caleb and Thaddeus Strong, Willetts, and all the rest had gone with Howard and Christopher to Job Herron's house. Messages had come back during the course of the morning and early afternoon, telling how Thompson had gathered a posse from the debaters at the blacksmith shop, how they had

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collected on the shore opposite the Isle of the Four Winds, how two boats had been taken overland for crossing over the moment the storm would allow, how the wind was dropping at last, and that the final move was about to be made.

Andrew had no doubt as to the outcome of the raid. The smugglers, with Jean Lebeau gone, lacked the one vigorous spirit who might have led them to make a bold dash for safety. This was no time for Job Herron's clever craftiness to be of any avail; only such reckless courage as the French sailor's could help them now. Andrew could imagine just how the first boat would put off, Christopher steering, Sheriff Thompson in the bow talking to Howard, little Willetts with them, tremulously excited; how they would land and push into the woods toward the cabin. He heaved a deep sigh. If only he could be there!

Mrs. Bucksall had felt obliged to go home to see about her butter and the doctor had hurried

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off to the seven bays in case he might be needed. Yet Andrew had not been left long alone before old Pierre Lebeau came slowly up the hill to ask falteringly for news of his grandson. It was pitiful to see the old man's joy, relief, and sorrow on hearing that the scapegrace Jean was safe, but had gone far away forever.

"I never felt that he was so greatly to blame as some of the rest," Pierre said, as he sat on the bench opposite Andrew; "but it nearly broke my heart, just the same, to know what he was doing. And he sailed away in all that storm?"

"Yes, he sailed away, after he had risked a great deal trying to save his friends," said Andrew. His heart felt very kindly toward the generous enemy who had once saved his life, and he had no regrets that, among the smugglers to be captured, Jean Lebeau should be missing. "You should have seen how he handled that boat," he went on. "She would go down into the trough of the waves and I

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could n't believe my eyes when she came up again. There never was such a sailor as he."

"He has sailed Lake Champlain since he was a little boy," the old Frenchman answered, "and that means that he has weathered many storms. It will perhaps be punishment enough for him that he will never sail it again. He loved his own home, did my poor Jean, for all he was so ready to leave it to look for adventure. Ah, I know only too well how that love of excitement runs burning in his veins!"

He would not stay long, but presently got up and went slowly toward the door.

"My heart was very full when I first spoke to you of this matter," he said; "to you and your two friends, and asked you to come to this place on the hill. I had dropped other hints to other people, but they were not interested or were too busy and would not understand. And now that the affair is over and the wrong has come to an end, my heart is too full again. I—I cannot speak my thanks."

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He went out abruptly and off down the hill without saying another word or stopping to look back. Andrew sat staring after him, wondering how it would feel to be old and lonely and disturbed, to stumble along through the world leaning on a stick, like Pierre Lebeau. Yet the old man was strangely full of spirit and determination still; he had resolved that the smuggling on Two Heroes Islands should be stopped, and stopped it had been. The boys had undergone the hard work and the danger, but more than once they would have given up had it not been for Pierre. They had been driven onward by the knowledge that if all else failed, the old Frenchman would feel obliged to betray the wrong himself and hale his own grandson to court and to prison. Pierre Lebeau's frail old body might be nearly burned out, but the fire of his loyal citizenship was still fiercely ablaze.

The boy got up and walked over to the window from which they had first looked down

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upon the seven bays. Yes, the wind had fallen and boats were going back and forth between the shore and the Isle of the Four Winds. What had happened? Had Job Herron come to the end, at last, of his twisted trail of wrongdoing? It seemed as though Andrew could never wait to hear.

The tidings, however, came very quickly. There was one in that company below, who, having news to tell, could not possibly bear delay in relating it. In half an hour Thaddeus Strong came puffing up the hill, his face purple with heat and excitement, the words fairly bursting from him before he had even come near enough to be heard.

“And we got every one,” he was saying as Andrew met him on the door-step, “except one sailor who, it seems, got away last night. But Job Herron is there and all his goods. I tell you, we stood with our mouths open while Thompson was cutting the burlap covers and dragging out those bales of silks and velvets.”

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He paused and wiped his forehead. Andrew noticed for the first time that his face was discolored by a great bruise and that his sleeve was torn. But of these things Thaddeus made no mention, evidently feeling that it was a mere matter of course that there had been fighting and that the men who had refused the responsibility of the undertaking should be ready enough to follow in the end. He was busy opening a bundle that he had laid on the table and, during a moment of unexpected silence, seemed to be fumbling for words at the same time that he fumbled at the knotted string.

“We talked nearly all night at the forge after Willetts came over and told us you had gone to North Hero, in all that storm, to fetch the sheriff,” he began to explain. “We decided that either you boys were telling us something that was all nonsense or moonshine, or that we were a set of obstinate thick-heads, and we left it to Thompson’s coming to decide. Well, it’s proved now which was right! We

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have felt too secure here on Two Heroes and we have n't seen a dishonest man for so long that we don't know how to recognize one. Job Herron did n't learn any of his tricks around here. He was away from the island for a long time when he was a young man, and when he came back there were some that did say he was changed. But for his father's sake we tried to like him still, and to shut our eyes to the things we did n't want to believe."

He had got his parcel open now and produced a green felt bag that Andrew thought he had seen before.

"The minute Thompson came he called us every kind of name for not backing you boys up, and we all hung our heads and saw the right of the matter then. We were willing enough to share in what was to be done, but that could n't make up for our hanging back when you asked us for help. We were talking it over while we all sat around waiting for the storm to go down, and we decided that with all

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you boys had done—because of—after—thought you should have—”

His flow of talk became halting and confused and finally stopped. He unfastened the strings of the green bag and pulled out the big silver cup that Andrew had seen that day at Caleb Bucksall's.

“It was Ethan Allen's. We wanted that you should have it.”

Thaddeus ended his speech with simple directness and pushed the cup across the table to Andrew.

“The others will be up here before long, with your two friends, and there will be speech-making and presentations to the three of you. But I—I thought, somehow, I would like to be the first one to tell you about it.”

“We—we shall like having it,” Andrew stammered in reply. “We think a lot of Ethan Allen.”

He looked up, through the open door, to the stern old hero's face upon the tavern sign.

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"Somehow," he added, "without Ethan Allen, I don't think this thing would ever have been done."

Thaddeus looked somewhat mystified, but did not stop to ask questions. As he hurried away down the hill, it occurred to Andrew that perhaps he did not wish the others to find him there, or to know that he had been before them in his haste to tell the news.

He strolled about the room for a little, after his visitor had gone, then went back to the window. The eagle was dropping to his perch in the dead tree, settling down for a lengthy period of quiet and peace after the coming and going that had disturbed him for so long. His return must mean that Sheriff Thompson and all the rest had left the island, so that soon they would be here, Howard and Christopher coming back to tell him the scores of things he longed to know. He fell to imagining again—little Joseph's squeak of terror when the knock came at the door, the bewildered surprise

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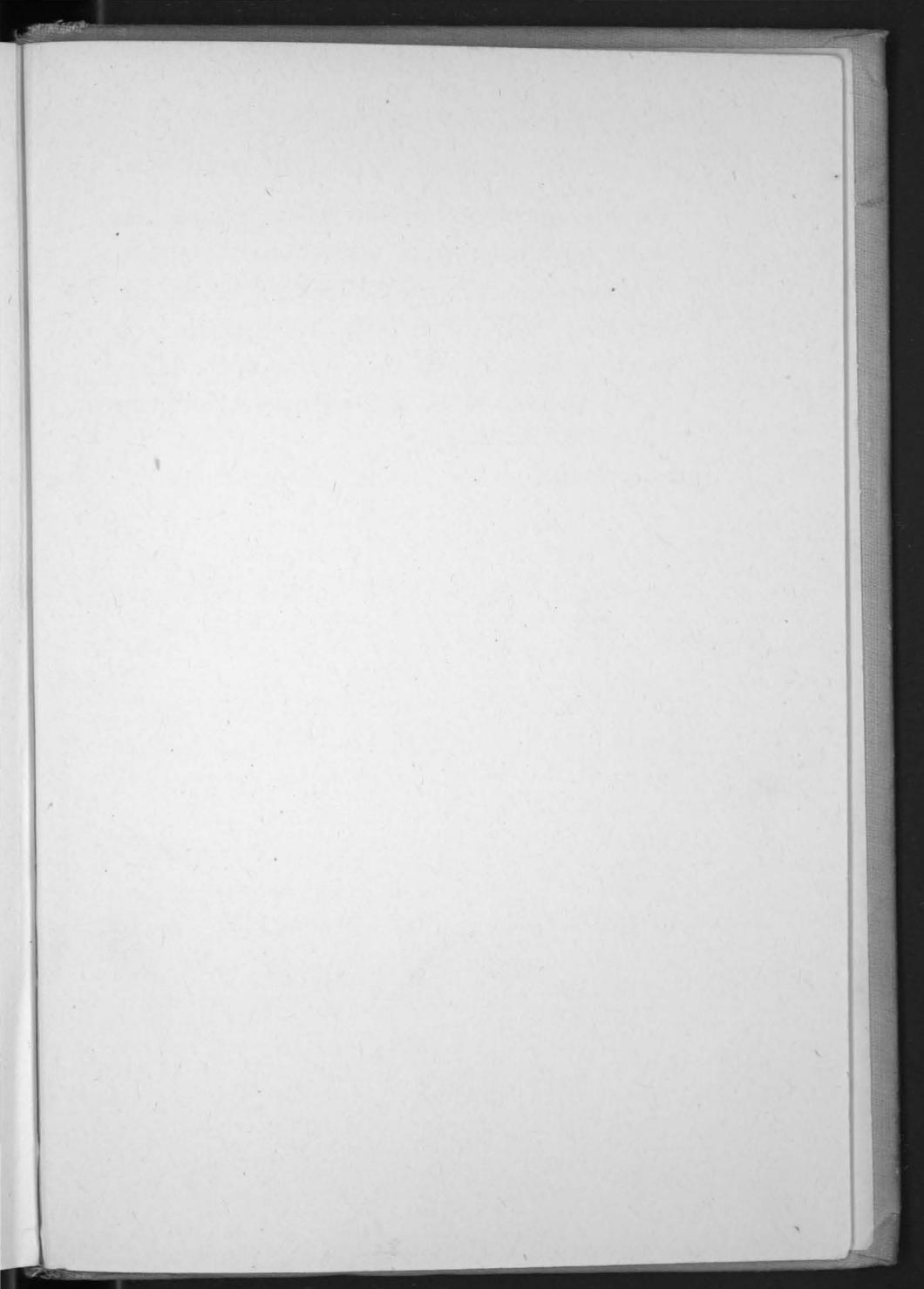
of the sailors, Job Herron's heavy blustering when he found himself caught at last. They would have to take the whole company of prisoners over to the jail at Harmsworth. There was no place on Two Heroes Islands capable of holding them.

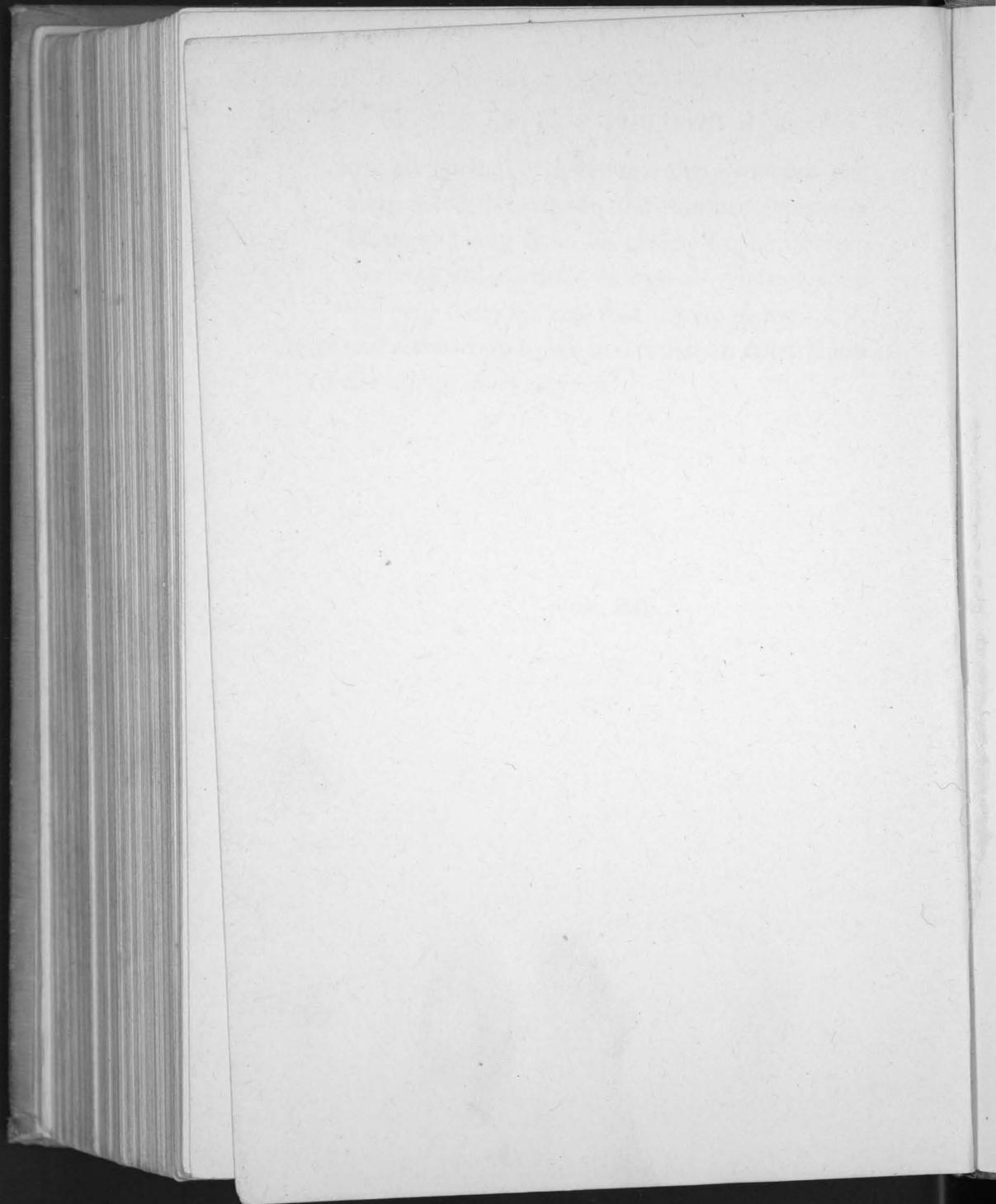
He sat down again in the big chair to wait. Yes, they would be coming soon and the old quiet taven would be full of people, of voices and trampling feet, just as it had been in the days of the Green Mountain Boys. But now, for a little, it was very still. Andrew had set the silver cup on the mantel, beside the jade bowl that Howard had picked up and the knife that had belonged to Jean Lebeau. The level rays of the late sun came slanting through the open door, touching the sign, glinting from the steel blade of the knife, making a sparkling circle of light where it shone through the transparent green of the bowl, shining back in winking glory from the polished side of the great cup. They made a brave show, those three

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trophies that they had won; there was but one thing needed to make the number complete. Without rising from his chair—for he was too lazy and comfortable to move—Andrew took the twig from his cap that lay upon the table, and reached up to lay beside Ethan Allen's cup the sprig of evergreen.

THE END









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