The Boys of the Wireless

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TOM SPEEDILY GAVE THE CALL TO THE STATION AT THE DIXON PLACE.

THE BOYS OF THE WIRELESS

Or

A Stirring Rescue from the Deep

BY

FRANK V. WEBSTER

AUTHOR OF "AIRSHIP ANDY," "COMRADES OF THE SADDLE,"
"BEN HARDY'S FLYING MACHINE," "BOB THE CASTAWAY," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

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BOOKS FOR BOYS
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ONLY A FARM BOY
TOM, THE TELEPHONE BOY
THE BOY FROM THE RANCH
THE YOUNG TREASURE HUNTER
BOB, THE CASTAWAY
THE YOUNG FIREMEN OF LAKEVILLE
THE NEWSBOY PARTNERS
THE BOY PILOT OF THE LAKES
THE TWO BOY GOLD MINERS
JACK, THE RUNAWAY
COMRADES OF THE SADDLE
THE BOYS OF BELLWOOD SCHOOL
THE HIGH SCHOOL RIVALS
BOB CHESTER'S GRIT
AIRSHIP ANDY
DARRY, THE LIFE SAVER
DICK, THE BANK BOY
BEN HARDY'S FLYING MACHINE
THE BOYS OF THE WIRELESS
HARRY WATSON'S HIGH SCHOOL DAYS

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THE BOYS OF THE WIRELESS

CHAPTER I—TOM BARNES' WIRELESS

"What's that new-fangled thing on the blasted oak, Tom?"

"That, Ben, is a wireless."

"Oh, you don't say so!"

"Or, rather the start of one."

"Say, you aren't original or ambitious or anything like that, are you?"

The speaker, Ben Dixon, bestowed a look of admiration and interest on the chum he liked best of all in the world, Tom Barnes.

Tom was reckoned a genius in the little community in which he lived. He had the record of "always being up to something." In the present instance he had been up a tree, it seemed. From "the new-fangled thing" Ben had discovered in passing the familiar landmark, the blasted oak, wires and rods ran up to quite a height, showing that some one had done some climbing.

Ben became instantly absorbed in an inspection of the contrivance before him. He himself had some mechanical talent. His father had been an inventor in a small way, and anything in which Tom had a part always attracted him.

"Tell me about it. What's that thing up there?" asked Ben, pointing directly at some metal rods attached to the broken-off top of the tree.

"Those are antennae."

"Looks like an—twenty!" chuckled Ben over his own joke. "There's a whole network of them, isn't there?"

"They run down to a relay, Ben, catching the electric waves striking the decoherer, which taps the coherer and disarranges a lot of brass filings by mechanical vibration. That's the whole essence of the wireless—otherwise it is no different from common telegraphy—a group of parts each for individual service in transmitting or receiving the electric waves."

"Thank you!" observed Ben drily. "How delightfully plain that all is! You rattle those scientific terms off good and spry, though."

"So will you, as soon as you do what I've been doing," asserted Tom.

"And what's that?"

"Getting a glance at the real wireless outfit Mr. Edson is operating down at Sandy Point."

"I heard of that," nodded Ben.

"He's a fine man," said Tom enthusiastically. "He's taken all kinds of trouble to post me and explain things I wanted to know. This little side show of mine is just an experiment on a small scale. I don't expect any grand results. It will work out the principle, though, and when I get to taking messages——"

"What! you don't mean to say you can do that?"

"Just that, Ben," declared Tom confidently.

"From where?"

"Well, mostly from Mr. Edson's station at Sandy Point, and maybe some stray ones that may slip past him."

"Say!" cried Ben, on fire at once with emulation and optimism, "what's the matter with me starting a station, too, down at my house? Then we could have all kinds of fun over our line."

"It isn't much work nor expense," said Tom. "You can get an outfit cheap for a home-made apparatus—you need some coarse and fine wire for the main coil, a glass tube, a bell, sounder and a buzzer, some electromagnets——"

"I see," interrupted Ben with a mock groan, "just a few things picked up anywhere. Oh, yes!"

"You won't be discouraged once you get interested, Ben," assured Tom. "We'll talk about your starting a station later. Just now you can help me quite a bit if you want to."

"Sure!" returned the enterprising Ben with vim.

"All right; I want to string a coil of new wire I got yesterday," explained Tom, going around to the other side of the tree. "Why, it's gone!" he cried.

"What's gone?" queried Ben.

"The wire. Now, isn't that a shame!" cried Tom indignantly, fussing around among the grass and bushes. "That coil couldn't have walked away. Some one must have stolen it."

"Don't be too hasty, Tom. Some one passing by may have picked it up. You know the fellows are playing ball over in the meadow just beyond here. Some of them may have cut across and stumbled over your wire."

"Couldn't they see that I was putting up a station here?" demanded Tom with asperity.

"Station?" repeated Ben with a jolly laugh. "See here, old fellow, you forget that we scientific numbskulls wouldn't know your contrivance here from a clothes dryer."

"Well, come on, anyway. I've got to find that wire," said Tom with determination.

In the distance they could hear the shouts of boys at play, and passing through some brushwood they came to the edge of the open meadow lining the river.

Half a dozen boys were engaged in various pastimes. Two of them playing at catch greeted Tom with enthusiasm.

There was no boy at Rockley Cove more popular than Tom Barnes. His father had farmed it, as the saying goes, at the edge of the little village for over a quarter of a century. While Mr. Barnes was not exactly a wealthy man he made a good living, and Tom dressed pretty well, and was kept at school right along. Now it was vacation time, and outside of a few chores about the house morning and evening Tom's time was his own.

The result was that usually Tom had abundant leisure for sports. The welcome with which his advent was hailed therefore, was quite natural.

"I say, Tom," suddenly spoke Ben, seizing the arm of his companion in some excitement, "there's Mart Walters."

"Ah, he's here, is he?" exclaimed Tom, and started rapidly across the meadow to where a crowd of boys were grouped about a diving plank running out over the stream. "I'm bothered about that missing coil, but I guess I can take time to attend to Walters."

The boy he alluded to was talking to several companions as Tom and Ben came up. His back was to the newcomers and he did not see them approach. Mart Walters was a fop and a braggart. Tom noticed that he was arrayed in his best, and his first overheard words announced that he was bragging as usual.

Mart was explaining to a credulous audience some of the wonderful feats in diving and swimming he had engaged in during a recent stay in Boston. With a good deal of boastful pride he alluded to a friend, Bert Aldrich, whose father was a part owner of a big city natatorium. Tom interrupted his bombast unceremoniously by suddenly appearing directly in front of the boaster.

"Hello, Mart Walters," he hailed in a sort of aggressive way.

"Hello yourself," retorted Mart, with a slight uneasiness of manner.

"I've been looking for you," said Tom bluntly.

"Have?"

"Yes, ever since I heard some criticisms of yours yesterday on my bungling swimming."

"Oh, I didn't say much," declared Mart evasively.

"You said enough to make the crowd believe you could beat me all hollow at diving."

"Well," flustered Mart desperately, "I can."

"Want to prove that?" challenged Tom sharply.

"Some time."

"Why not now? We're all here and the water is fine. We'll make it a dash for the half-mile fence and return, under water test, somersaults and diving."

Mart had begun to retreat. He flushed and stammered. Finally he blurted out:

"I'm due now at Morgan's with a message from my folks."

"You haven't seemed in a hurry," suggested Ben.

"Well, I am now."

"Yes, might muss your collar if you got wet!" sneered a fellow in the crowd.

"All right," said Tom, "when will you be back?"

"Can't say," declared Mart. "You see, I don't know how long I may be."

He started off, flushed and sheep-faced under the critical gaze of the crowd. As he did so Tom noticed that he had something in his hand.

"Here!" he cried, "where did you get that?"

Tom had discovered his missing coil of wire. His hand seized it. Mart's did not let go. The latter gave a jerk, Tom a twist.

"That's mine," Tom said simply. "You took it from where I was stringing up my wireless."

"I found it," shouted Mart, thoroughly infuriated in being crossed in any of his plans. "It was kicking around loose. I'll have it too—take that!"

He came at Tom so suddenly that the latter, unprepared for the attack, went swinging to the ground under a dizzying blow.

It looked as if Mart was about to follow up the assault with a kick. Tom offset that peril with a dextrous maneuvre.

Seated flat, he spun about like a top. His feet met the ankles of the onrushing Mart.

Mart stumbled, tripped and slipped. He tried to catch himself, lost his balance, fell backward, and the next instant went headlong into the water with a resounding splash.

CHAPTER II—STATION Z

A yell of derisive delight went up from the smaller youths of the crowd as Mart Walters went toppling into the water. Mart did not have a real friend in Rockley Cove, and the little fellows Welcomed an opportunity for showing their dislike.

Tom, however, promptly on his feet was making for the spot where Mart was puffing and splashing about, when two of his friends in bathing attire anticipated his helpful action, reached Mart, and led him, blinded and dripping, onto dry land.

Mart was a sight. All the starch was taken out of him, and out of his clothes. He did not linger to renew the conflict. He only shook his fist at Tom with the half Whimpered words:

"I'll fix you, Tom Barnes, see if I don't! This will be a sorry day for you."

"Who started it?" demanded Tom bluntly.

"I'll get even with you for this treatment," threatened Mart direfully, sneaking off.

"You've made an enemy for life of that fellow, Tom," declared Ben.

"Well, he never was very friendly towards me," responded Tom. "Where's the wire? I've got it," and he picked it up from the ground where it had dropped. "I'm sorry this thing occurred, but he brought it on himself. Come on, Ben."

"You're going to stay and have some fun, aren't you, Tom?" inquired one of the swimmers.

"Can't, boys—that is, just now. I've got something to attend to. See you again."

Tom and Ben had not proceeded fifty feet, however, when a hurried call halted them. Tom's younger brother came running towards them.

"Oh, Tom!" he hailed breathlessly, "I've run all the way from the house.

I've got a message for you."

"What is it, Ted?"

"Mr. Edson was passing the house and told me to find you and ask you to come down to the tower as soon as you could."

"All right, Ted," replied Tom. "I wonder what's up?"

"Why?" questioned Ben.

"I saw Mr. Edson early this morning down at the Point, and thought I'd got him to talk himself out for a week to come asking him so many questions about the wireless."

"Are you going to drop rigging out your plant at the old oak till you see him?"

"We'll have to. It may be something important Mr. Edson wants to see me about. You come too, Ben."

"Had I better?"

"You want to, don't you?"

"Well, I guess!" replied Ben with undisguised fervor. "I've envied the way he's posting you in this wireless ever since I first saw his outfit."

The boys pursued their way to Sandy Point, passing the old blasted oak. Here Tom took pains to stow the coil of wire safely in a tree. Resuming their walk they neared Sandy Point twenty minutes later.

The Point was a high but level stretch of shore with one or two small houses in its vicinity. It was really a part of Rockley Cove, but the center of the village was half a mile inland.

A high metal framework designated the Point, and could be seen from quite a distance. This, however, was no recent construction nor a beacon point, nor originally erected for its present use as a wireless station.

It had served as a windmill for a farmer who once operated an eighty-acre tract of land. One night his house and barns burned down. For years the spot was abandoned. Recently, however, the Mr. Edson Tom had alluded to had come to Rockley Cove and established "Station Z" at the old windmill.

He had built a room or tower as he called it midway up the windmill structure. This was reached through a trap door by a fixed iron ladder. The height and open construction of the windmill enabled the setting of upper wireless paraphernalia in a fine way, and the whole layout was found especially serviceable in carrying out Mr. Edson's ideas.

The operator was at the window of the little operating room he had built, and waved a cheery welcome to his two young friends. Tom and Ben were up the ladder speedily and through the trap door.

"Did you send for me, Mr. Edson?" inquired Tom.

"Yes, Tom," replied the operator, "and I'm glad you came so promptly. I've

got to leave Rockley Cove on short notice."

"Oh, Mr. Edson, I am very sorry for that!" declared Tom.

"I regret it too, especially so far as you are concerned," admitted Mr. Edson.

"I was getting on finely," said Tom in a disappointed tone.

"No reason why you shouldn't continue," declared the operator encouragingly. "You have been strictly business all along, Tom. I want to commend you for it, and I have sent for you to make you a business proposition."

"A proposition?" repeated Tom wonderingly.

"Yes. You have got so that there is very little about the outfit here that you do not understand. The transmitting and receiving end of it is old history to you. In fact I am going to leave you here in entire charge of the station."

"Oh, Mr. Edson!" exclaimed Tom, "I am afraid you rate me too highly."

"Not at all. You have got sense, patience, and you want to learn. As you know, my starting the station here was a private enterprise, but it was no idle fad. I expected to work something practicable and profitable out of it. You can carry on the work."

"Why are you giving it up, sir, if I may ask?"

"I received a letter only an hour since, with an unexpected offer of a very fine position with one of the operating wireless companies in Canada. They expect me at a conference in New York City Friday, and I do not doubt that I shall close an engagement with them. As I have told you, I have very little capital. In fact, about all my surplus has been invested in the station here."

Ben was looking around the place with his usual devouring glance. Tom felt that some important disclosure was about to be made and was duly impressed.

"There is a good chance for a live young fellow in a business that can send a message hundreds of miles in a few seconds," continued Mr. Edson. "The business is now only in its infancy, and those who get in first have the best chance. The only hope here of the international circuit is to make a killing."

"What do you mean by a killing, Mr. Edson?" inquired the big-eyed, interested Ben.

"Catching a stray message and making a home shot with it. The fellow who saved an ocean liner last week by sending help quick, just when needed, got more pay in one hour than many people earn in a lifetime. Now then, Tom, as to my proposition."

"Yes, sir," nodded Tom, eagerly.

"I want you to buy me out."

"To buy you out?" repeated Tom slowly and in a puzzled way.

"That's it."

"You mean with money?" put in the ever-attentive Ben.

"It's got to be money, I am obliged to say," replied Mr. Edson. "I shall need

all the ready cash I can get hold of in taking my new position, for I have a lot of debts to clean up. Between you and me, Tom, I can sell the outfit here to certain people, but it would throw you out. Of course, I don't expect you, a boy to have any great amount of money to invest, but I had an idea that some of your relatives or friends might help you."

Tom was silent, deeply thoughtful for a minute or two. His eyes wandered wistfully over the apparatus that so fascinated him. Then, very timorously, he asked:

"How much would it take, Mr. Edson?"

"One hundred dollars to you, Tom," said Mr. Edson.

Ben squirmed. Tom's voice was quite tremulous as he inquired:

"How soon would you have to have the money?"

"By next Tuesday."

"Will you give me till then to—to try?" asked Tom.

"Surely. I hope you can make it, Tom. I like you very much. You are the right sort, and I think you should be encouraged in your interest in the wireless. I'll show you just what the equipment here is."

Ben voted the hour that followed the most interesting of his life. For the first time in his career he began to get a faint conception of spark lengths, spark voltage, condensers, circuits, vibrators, grounds, concentric radiations, wire cores and armatures. He had been dabbling for over a week with both Morse and the Continental alphabets, and when Tom mentioned the possibility of establishing a sub-station at the Dixon home instead of at the old blasted oak, Mr. Edson was quite encouraging, and offered to contribute some of the equipment necessary to carry out the idea.

The expert operator engrossed the attention of the boys. It was a ramble in a field of rare delight as they passed from one part of the wireless mechanism to another.

"Now then, sit down, boys, for a few minutes," said Mr. Edson at length. "I don't want you to buy a pig in a poke. There are a couple of attachments that go with the station, and you should know about them."

"Attachments?" repeated Ben.

"What are they, Mr. Edson?" inquired Tom with curiosity.

"Spooks," was the ominous reply.

CHAPTER III—"SPOOKS!"

"Spooks?" repeated Tom, with a stare of wonder.

"Spooks," echoed Ben, edging a trifle away from the open trap door.

"Call it that," said Mr. Edson, with a quiet smile. "Perhaps I had better say—mysterious happenings."

"What may they be, Mr. Edson?" inquired Ben, always interested in any sensational disclosures.

"Well, first—let me see," and the speaker reached over for a slip of documents held with others in a paper clip on the table; "yes, here it is—'Donner.'"

"Who's he?" inquired Tom, puzzled.

"Say rather what is he?" corrected Mr. Edson. "Frankly, I don't know."

"It's a name," observed Ben; "a man's name, isn't it?"

"I don't know that," responded Mr. Edson.

"Neither do the other fellows on the circuit. Perhaps I'd better explain, though, so when this Donner comes along you will be prepared for him."

"Yes, you have excited our curiosity and we'll be on the lookout," said Tom.

"Well, for nearly three weeks, at odd and unexpected times, with no sense or reason to it, no call or 'sine,' abruptly and mysteriously zip! the wires have gone, and in floats a jumbled, erratic message."

"As how?" propounded Ben.

"'Donner.' That always, first. It may be an explanation, it may be a name, it may mean nothing, but all the same splutter—splutter! on she comes. At first it was spelled out slowly, lamely, sometimes wrong, and then corrected as if an amateur beginner was at the other end of the line."

"And that was all—'Donner'" questioned Ben, aggravatingly consumed with curiosity.

"Not after a few days. Then 'Donner' began to add something of a message. That, too, was a jumble, wrong dots and dashes and all that. Finally, though, this queer crank of a sender began to say something about a boy."

"A boy?" murmured the engrossed Ben.

"It looked as if he was trying to describe some one. However, as I say, his sending was so faulty that not much could be made out of it. It got clearer, but no more coherent and enlightening. I tried to trace the sender. So did others on the circuit. I got in touch with Seagrove."

"What did they say? Mr. Edson?" asked Tom.

"They confessed themselves fully as much puzzled as I was. The last three or four days 'Donner' has gotten into action trying to tell something about money. First it was a hundred dollars, then two hundred, then five, and about an hour since the same old string of jangled talk came in over the receiver: 'Donner boy—a thousand dollars.'"

"How strange," commented Tom.

"Oh, you'll get some of it," declared Mr. Edson. "Early in the morning about daylight, always at noon, sometimes just about dusk, the message comes through the air."

"How do you explain it?" submitted Tom.

"Why, I have to think it is some person who has rigged up an old station somewhere in range, and is trying to tell something he is too ignorant to express clearly. Pay no attention to it as a serious circumstance. It is only one of the freaks of the wireless experience."

"That's one of the spooks you told about?" inquired Ben.

"Yes," nodded Mr. Edson.

"Any more?"

"Something more tangible this time," observed Mr. Edson. "For about a week some one has invaded my den here nights regularly."

"Maybe this same mysterious 'Donner'" suggested Ben.

"Hardly. You see, I am pretty regular in my hours here. I have come on at about eight in the morning and leave at six in the evening always."

"And the second spook you speak about?" interrogated Tom.

"Puts in an appearance after my departure in the night time. Here's the gist of it: Every morning when I come down here, the ground under the windmill for a space of about fifty feet is swept as clean as a ballroom floor."

"Yes, I've noticed that," observed Tom.

"I leave the den up here in some slight disorder evenings, preferring to put it in shape in the morning. Well," declared Mr. Edson, "I find it all cleaned up for me."

"You don't say so!" ejaculated Ben.

"Nothing is touched about the apparatus, my papers are not disturbed. One night I carelessly forgot my pocketbook. I found it placed carefully on the paper tab with the contents intact."

"Well, that's a helpful, honest, useful kind of a spook, isn't it, now?" cried Ben.

"I think this harmless intruder sleeps on the floor here nights," said Mr. Edson. "Anyhow, I've apprised you of the mysteries as well as the excellencies of Station Z. I must be going, Barnes," added Mr. Edson, consulting his watch and arising and taking up his satchel from a corner of the room. "Think over my proposition."

"I certainly shall," declared Tom, quickly.

"It's a dandy chance," remarked Ben.

"Use your best intelligence and judgment in running the business here until I come back," added Mr. Edson. "You can come down to the house with me if you like and get some stuff that will help you rig up your home-made wireless."

"All right," assented Tom, "I'd like to do that."

The professional operator followed his young guests down the ladder, locking the trap door padlock and tendering the key to Tom.

"You're in charge now," he said in a pleasant way.

Tom's finger tips tingled with pleasure at the possession of the key, and Ben's eyes brightened with glowing anticipations.

The boys waited outside on a bench on the porch of Mr. Edson's boarding house when they reached that place. He went up to his room and soon returned with an oblong box.

"You'll find the stuff in there I told you about," he explained.

"Many thanks," said Tom.

"I'm in that, too!" echoed Ben. "I only hope we can really rig up a plant at my house like you talk about," he added eagerly.

"That will be easy," advised Mr. Edson. "And now good-by, my young friends, and good luck."

Mr. Edson shook hands in a friendly way with Tom and Ben. The boys started down the village street in the direction of the Barnes home.

Ben walked as if he were treading on air. His comrade, carrying the box, was thoughtfully going over the great fund of information he had obtained in the preceding two hours.

"I say!" he spoke suddenly, coming to a halt.

"What's up?" challenged Ben.

"I was thinking it would be handier to leave this box at the station."

"I'm sure it would. You see, it's nearer our place," counselled Ben eagerly, glad of any excuse that would take them back to the fascinating influence of Station Z.

They faced about and proceeded back over the course they had come.

"Look here, Tom," broke in Ben on the thoughts of his comrade, "are you going to try and raise that hundred dollars?"

"Yes, if possible."

"Wish I could help you. Going to ask your father?"

"No," replied Tom. "In the first place, I don't think he would let me have it. You know he calls my craze after wireless, as he terms it, all a fad,—says I'd better think of getting through school before I take up outside things."

"Yes, I know."

"Then again," continued Tom, "I have a sort of pride of starting in business life on my own resources."

"But you've got to have some money help."

"I've thought of that, and I'll tell you what I'll do. You remember my Aunt Samantha?"

"Down at Westport?"

"Exactly. I have always been a favorite of hers. Many a time she has hinted at all the money she is going to leave me in her will some day. Many a time, too, after a visit to our house, she has reminded me that any time I need help to write her."

"And you're going to?"

"Yes," replied Tom, "just as soon as I get home this evening. I'm going to offer her my note, and I mean to pay it, too."

"Say, Tom," cried his loyal companion, "I'll endorse for you."

Tom had to laugh outright at the proposal.

Then, seeing that he had hurt Ben's feelings, he said kindly:

"That's all right, Ben; you mean well, but if Aunt Samantha won't let me have the money alone, she won't give it to the two of us."

It had been growing dusk as the chums proceeded on their way. They passed through the village and beyond it, and finally approached the wireless station. Tom was fumbling in his pocket for the key to the trap door when Ben suddenly caught his arm.

"Tom, hold on!"

"What's the matter?" questioned Tom.

"Look yonder!"

Ben pointed directly at the old windmill framework. Both stared intently.

Climbing up one of the outer girders was a boy. As he reached the level of the window of the little aerial room aloft, he swung towards it, in some deft way lifted or pried up the sash, and disappeared suddenly from view.

[image]

BEN POINTED DIRECTLY AT THE OLD WINDMILL FRAMEWORK.

CHAPTER IV—"DONNER"

"Well!" ejaculated Tom in startled amazement.

"Don't you see?" gasped Ben.

"What?"

"One of the spooks Mr. Edson spoke about!"

"That's so, it must be," assented Tom. "The nightly intruder, as sure as fate!"

The window was lowered from the inside. In a minute or two a faint light showed. Tom started forward, joined by Ben, who was in a quiver of excitement and suspense.

"What are you going to do, Tom?" he inquired.

"Find out who this mysterious trespasser is. Don't make any noise, Ben, but keep close to me."

Tom gave the box into the possession of his companion, and started up the ladder. Very cautiously he inserted the key into the padlock. He managed to turn it and remove the padlock without making any alarming sound. Then very slowly Tom pushed up the trap door.

A glance across to one corner of the room interested him. Upon the floor lay the intruder. He had upset a chair, and he was using its slanting back as a pillow. On another chair he had set a lighted piece of candle. In a posture of ease and comfort he lay reading a well-thumbed book, while gnawing away at a great hunk of dry bread. His face was turned away from the trap door. He was so engrossed in eating and reading, that, unobserved, Tom was able to get up into the room and Ben was half way through the trap door before the trespasser was aware of it.

"Well, we've caught you right in the act, have we?" spoke Tom suddenly.

With a slight cry and starting up into a sitting posture, the intruder stared hard at his unexpected visitors. He seemed to scan their faces searchingly. His own, at first startled, broke into a pleasant smile.

"That's just what you've done," he admitted.

"Pretty cool about it," observed Ben.

"Not so cool as I've been, sleeping in the damp grass a few foggy mornings lately. What are you going to do with me, fellows?"

The speaker rose to his feet with something of an effort. Then Tom noticed that he limped on one foot. The lad was thin and pale, too. He righted the upset chair and sat down on it. Ben placed the box on a table and leaned against it, regarding the stranger with curiosity. Tom sank into another chair.

"We're not judges or officers," he said, "but we are in charge here now."

"Then I'd better get out, I suppose," said the boy.

"What did you come in for in the first place? That's what we're interested in knowing," remarked Ben pointedly.

The stranger shrugged his shoulders in a way that was quite pathetic.

"See here," he said soberly, "if you had a foot pretty nigh cut off by a scythe right on top of a hard spell of the typhoid fever, and no place to eat or sleep, you'd burrow in most anywhere lying around loose, wouldn't you?"

"Does that describe your case?" questioned Tom.

"Just exactly," responded the lad, a quick dry click in his throat. "I'm not able to do my old work, and you might call me a roving convalescent, see?" and he chuckled. "I manage to pick up enough food. I spotted this place, tried to keep out of anybody's way, and tidied it up to pay for wearing out the floor boards. Then, too, I frightened off two tramps one night, who would have ransacked everything in sight if I hadn't made them believe I was a private watchman."

"But where do you live?" asked Ben.

"Here, if you'll let me," was the prompt reply.

"We'll do better than that," said Tom, who had been studying the boy's face and manner closely, and each succeeding moment was attracted more and more by his honest eyes and frank ways.

"Will you?" questioned the lad wonderingly.

"Yes," assured Tom. "To be plain about it, you are homeless and friendless."

"To be plain about it, you've just hit the nail on the head."

"All right; when we leave here you come along."

"Where to?"

"My home. You shall have a good supper, and I'm sure my mother will let me rig up a comfortable bed for you in the garret."

"Mattress?" queried the stranger with a grin.

"Of course."

"Pillow?" he asked additionally

"Yes."

The boy chuckled.

"Say," he spoke in a half sad, half gloating way, "it's so long since I saw such things I can hardly realize it. I suppose you want to know my name?"

"We'd like to," said Ben.

"Then call me Ashley, Harry Ashley. If anybody asks what I am, just tell them a poor lonely fellow in hard luck, but mending as fast as he can, and not afraid to tackle any job that means pay for work."

"That rings true," said Ben.

Tom got busy shoving the box he had brought from the village under the table. He had lighted a lamp. About to extinguish it, he glanced around the room to see that everything was in shape for the night.

"Come on, Ben, you too," directed Tom. "Blow out your candle, and we'll make a start."

The boy calling himself Harry Ashley limped over towards the chair hold-

ing the candle. At that moment there was an interruption. With a sharp tang the receiver began to pop out dots, dashes and echoing clicks.

"Some one on the line!" pronounced Ben quickly.

"Yes," nodded Tom, hastening over to the instrument. "Hello!"

Tom gave a vivid start. For over a month he had been acquiring the Morse code alphabet. Novice as he was, he was able to translate the rapid furious dots and dashes that sounded in the earpiece of the apparatus.

"The spooks!" Ben gasped.

"Yes," assented Tom quite stirred up himself—"'Donner!'"

"What's that?" exclaimed Harry Ashley. He turned as white as a sheet, and began trembling all over, and stood staring askance at Tom, the instrument and Ben.

CHAPTER V—A BOY WITH A MYSTERY

Tom did not take much notice of the strange conduct of the refugee. He was intent on learning what further the receiver would immediately tap out. Ben noted particularly the excitement of their new companion. His attention, too, was instantly diverted through his eagerness to catch the message coming all strange and jumbled by wireless.

"Just as Mr. Edson told us——" he began.

"Ah!" commented Tom.

The big distended eyes of Ben Dixon devoured the instrument with its shining coils and connections. He stood now rooted like a statue.

Finally the message ended. A queer smile crossed Tom's face.

"Well," he observed, "Mr. Edson certainly described it perfectly."

"Yes."

"And two thousand dollars this time."

"What else was the fellow trying to send?"

"It was gibberish to me. Oh, we'll have to pass it up, Ben, just as Mr. Edson said."

"Yes," assented Ben, "it's some novice or joker or crank experimenting, or

trying to be smart. What's the matter?" challenged Ben, turning now upon the boy calling himself Harry Ashley, hoping for some explanation of his queer startled actions of a few minutes previous.

But whatever the refugee had on his mind he evidently was not disposed to impart it to his questioner.

Harry Ashley had somewhat recovered his composure. He still looked disturbed, but he said with assumed carelessness:

"Oh, nothing. I get a pretty sharp twinge in my lame foot every once in a while."

"I see," observed Ben, drily and unbelievingly.

The boys were soon on the ground and on their way towards the village. Tom kept up a casual conversation. He did not ask the strange waif who had drifted into their keeping any leading questions, however. Much as he was interested in knowing more about Harry Ashley, there was something in the lad's manner that repelled curiosity. Furthermore, Tom did not wish to embarrass a comrade he had invited to become his guest.

Ben was quite silent. He stole many a furtive look at Harry as they proceeded on their way. He was half satisfied with the lame explanation of his actions the boy had made in the wireless tower. He forged ahead a few yards with Tom as they came to the road leading south towards his home.

"I say, Tom," he remarked in a low tone, "there's some mystery about that fellow."

"Well, if that's true," returned Tom, "let the future work it out. He strikes me as a poor unfortunate who needs some help, and I'm going to give it to him."

"That's natural," retorted Ben, "you're always helping somebody."

Tom rejoined Harry. The latter became more chatty now. He did not say much about himself, but from what he did impart Tom surmised that he was practically a tramp, picking up a living at odd jobs.

"See here," said Harry, as Tom indicated the cheery lights of the old Barnes homestead, "it won't put you in bad with your folks, will it?"

"What do you mean?"

"Lugging in a ragged stranger like me."

"My mother will answer that," replied Tom with a smile, leading the way around the house.

His companion halted outside the kitchen door, as Tom sang out to a portly bustling lady directing the operations of a hired girl.

"Mother, I've brought some company home to supper."

The kindly glance of the hospitable Mrs. Barnes swept the forlorn refugee, clearly reviewed in the light streaming out across the door-step.

"Come right in," she said, with a genial smile of welcome.

"It's Harry Ashley," explained Tom. "He may stay all night."

"You arrange where he shall sleep, then, Tom. Go into the dining room, boys. Father seems to be delayed in town, and we needn't wait for him."

Tom did not regret the kindness he was showing to his new friend. When he went to bed that night he felt that he had never passed a more satisfactory evening. He had never seen a boy enjoy a meal as Harry Ashley did that supper. It was enough to warm the heart of a stone, he decided, to witness the happy comfort of Harry, as in the cozy sitting room he showed the stranger his books, and some of the electrical toys he had made for his young brother Ted.

Harry looked around the airy attic with a smile of pleasure as he noted a mattress filled with clean straw in one corner, a white coverlid and a pillow.

"Makes you think of home, doesn't it?" questioned Tom.

"No, it doesn't," sharply, almost rudely, snapped out Harry, and then, a slight moisture visible in his eyes, he added apologetically, "you've touched a sore spot, Barnes."

"I won't again," promised Tom gently.

"That's all right," replied Harry in his usual offhand way. "When you know me better I'll explain some things. I'll dream like a prince in a palace to-night."

Tom went to his own room. His head was pretty full with all the varied and exciting events of the day. Of course wireless details predominated. He went to sleep building in fancy the station for his friend, Ben, down at his home. He woke up to the lively sound of whistling outside of the house. Tom went to the window and looked out.

Bright as a cricket, cheery and clean faced, Harry was surveying what had been a jumbled-up mass of kindling the night before. He had piled it up symmetrically and had swept up the last stray sliver of wood on the ground. Over towards the vegetable beds was a five-foot heap of weeds which his industry had collected.

Suddenly the happy whistle ceased. Tom saw his father come out of the house, stare at the strange boy, then at the evidence of his enterprise, and smile grimly. Mr. Barnes hailed the boy.

"You're the lad my wife told me about, I reckon," observed the farmer.

"If you mean the boy she was so kind to, yes sir," promptly responded Harry.

"Who hired you?" demanded Mr. Barnes.

"Who hired me?" repeated Harry in a puzzled way.

"Yes, to do that," and Mr. Barnes' hand swept the woodpile and the weed heap suggestively.

"Oh, that's to pay for supper and lodging," explained Harry brightly.

"Well, we'll count breakfast into the bargain," stipulated Mr. Barnes, "and if you get tired doing nothing there's five hundred weight of grain in the barn I'll

pay you to grind."

"You will?" cried Harry, his eyes sparkling. "Show it to me, will you, please?"

"Good for him," commented Tom. "He's the real sort, and he's got father on his side all right."

Kindness, attention and the prospect of work seemed to have wrought a marvellous change in Harry. He little suggested the homeless forlorn refuge of the previous night as he sat at the breakfast table. He was lively and chatty, acting the pleasant chum with Tom, the grateful guest to motherly Mrs. Barnes, and narrating comical experiences with amateur farmers he had worked for to Mr. Barnes, keeping the latter in rare good humor throughout the meal.

About an hour later Ben arrived on the scene.

"Say, Tom," was his first sprightly hail, "Father says I've been hopping about like a chicken with her head cut off ever since I got up—and that was five o'clock."

"What's the trouble, Ben?" inquired Tom with a smile, guessing.

"Fever—the wireless kind," chuckled Ben. "I've got five fellows down at the old oak ready to give all day to helping me get the outfit in down at my house. Say, Tom, give me the key to the tower and let me get that box of trimmings Mr. Edson gave us, will you?"

"I shall have to go on duty at the station soon, Ben," explained Tom, "but here's the key. Get down to the oak right away, and I'll instruct you how to dismantle my unfinished plant and start you in at your house. Then at noon I'll give you another hour."

"You'd better come right up to our house for supper, Tom," suggested Ben, "and we can have two full working hours by daylight after you quit work."

"Very well," agreed Tom gladly.

Never did a boy spend a more entrancing day than Ben Dixon. His helpers at the blasted oak were delighted to climb like monkeys to remove the spirals and wires from the old tree, and handle the queer contrivances contained in the box Mr. Edson had donated.

Harry Ashley spent the day between working about the farm, visiting the scene of activity at the Dixon place, and limping up to the tower.

Only some exchange test calls came to Station Z that day. Tom was encouraged to find how quickly he could read them, and send the necessary replies.

Nearly every lad in the neighborhood was on hand that evening, when Tom arrived at the Dixon place, and began to connect the various devices of the wireless outfit. It took into the next day fully to adjust the various parts.

Ben was in a rare fever of excitement and expectancy the second evening about seven o'clock, when Tom announced to him that the finishing touches of the experiment were in process.

"She's all there, Ben," he said triumphantly, as he drew smooth the tinfoil tongues of the setts of the coherer. "I'll run down to Station Z and give you a call to see if she works all right."

Ben Dixon stood staring fixedly at the apparatus rigged up in a shed running up to the spirals strung to tree tops near the old barn. Six ardent watchers sat astride a bench, mouths agape and eyes bolting from their heads, resembling lads awaiting the touching of a match to a powder mine.

Finally a thrill ran instantaneously from the metallic poles through the vibrating parts of the apparatus. As one after another the boys listened at the telephone-like receiver, they heard the tell-tale dots and dashes.

"Hurrah!" shouted Ben Dixon in a frenzy of wild delight.

CHAPTER VI—A TIP VIA WIRELESS

"This means business!" exclaimed Tom.

What Mr. Edson had predicted had happened—a stray message that meant something, the accidental discovery of news perhaps of vast importance to the person for whom it was intended.

The young wireless operator was a quick thinker. The call was for O-17. Tom knew from hearsay where that station was located.

Mr. Morgan had a large stock farm a little outside of a small hamlet called Deepdale. That settlement had no telephone or telegraph service. It was located nearly twenty miles from a railroad station and any stranger sojourning there was temporarily outside of civilization so far as communication with the world was concerned.

Tom was aware of all this. He readily figured out as well why the message had been sent per wireless to Station O-17. This was operated on a high point of rocks directly on the coast outside of Deepdale. It was one of a regular chain in the coast service.

The sender in New York City had some reason for believing that Mr. Morgan was at his stock farm and not at his home at Fernwood, near Rockley Cove. It was imperative that he get in communication with him within an hour. He had

risked all on the message finding Mr. Morgan at Deepdale.

"Why, I met Mr. Morgan this morning in his automobile coming from the direction of Deepdale," soliloquized Tom. "He must have changed his plans. No delay now. This must be important."

Tom trusted to his memory as to the subject matter of the wireless message. As he hastily descended from the tower, however, he repeated it over mentally to make sure he would not forget any salient point.

"The message mentioned 'U. Cal.'," breathed Tom. "I can guess what that means."

To his way of thinking it meant "United Calcium." Only two days previous in the Rockley Cove *Weekly Clarion* Tom had read a bit of current gossip about the present subject of his thoughts.

The item had referred to some late investments of the retired capitalist. It specifically cited the fact that "our esteemed townsman," Mr. Walter Morgan, it was rumored, was negotiating for the control of the stock of the United Calcium Company. The investment, it was stated, would involve nearly a quarter of a million dollars of capital.

Now it appeared the partner or business representative of Mr. Morgan in New York City had discovered a flaw in the proposition, and had anxiously and urgently wired for instructions.

Station Z was just two miles from Fernwood, the summer home of the Morgans. It lay directly on the ocean, and was a straight course. Tom thought of Grace Morgan as he braced up for a vigorous walk. That was quite natural, for they were good friends. He lamented that he was not in very dressy shape to meet the dainty little miss, whom he would probably find in the pink of perfection as to garb and appearance, as she generally was.

"Can't help it, this is business," decided Tom grimly. "Maybe I won't meet her," he added hopefully.

Tom undertook a big spurt of speed. As he came to Silver Creek, two school chums getting ready to start fishing yelled at him.

"Hey, Tom!" cried one mandatorily.

"Yes, we want you," piped the other.

"Can't stop," panted Tom, waving his hand, and speeding on as if he were entered for a Marathon.

"I've lost no time, that's sure," he decided as he passed the boathouse at the end of the private pier belonging to Fernwood.

Tom came to the terrace in front of the Morgan mansion. A fluttering white dress attracted his attention from the front porch of the house, and Grace came into view.

"Why, Tom!" she said in a genuine friendly welcome. "Come up and sit

down. You look tired out."

"Yes, been running hard," explained Tom, short-breathed and excited. "Must see your father."

"Father?" repeated Grace, quite surprised.

"Yes, Mr. Morgan, is he at home?"

"Why, no, Tom."

"Where will I find him, then?"

"Why, you are so excited, Tom!"

"Reason to be," gulped Tom. "Please don't delay. It's important."

"Papa just left in the automobile for Springville. There is a meeting of bank directors there, he told me. There's the horn now."

"Excuse me," said Tom hastily, and bolted unceremoniously around the side of the house where the announcement from the automobile had echoed.

Pretty Miss Morgan looked amazed, and tapped her daintily slippered foot in a vexed way at the ungallant disappearance of her acquaintance. Tom, however, did not wait for explanations. He had caught sight of the Morgan automobile. It was just passing upon the roadway leading west from the rear of the grounds.

"Hold on—stop!" yelled Tom irrepressibly.

The puffing of the newly-started machine apparently drowned out his hail. The hood of the tonneau shut Tom out from sight of Mr. Morgan and his chauffeur.

Tom ran no farther after the rapidly-gliding car. He saw in a flash that his only chance of stopping it was by a sharp swift dash diagonally to a point where the circling road cut south. He speeded reckless of flower beds and fences on his mission, flew heedless of mud and water through an obstructing swale, and, breathless and pretty nearly exhausted, gained the main-road.

Honk! honk!—not a hundred yards distant the chauffeur sounded a warning as Tom sprang into the middle of the highway, waving his arms violently to call a halt.

"What's this?" demanded Mr. Morgan sharply, as the chauffeur perforce let the machine down to a dead stop.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Morgan——" began Tom.

"Young Barnes?" observed the capitalist, with a surprised stare at Tom.

"Yes, sir," hurried on Tom. "I have some important news for you."

"Important news for me?" repeated Mr. Morgan vaguely.

"Yes, sir."

"Who from?"

"Your partner, sir, or agent in New York City."

"What?" cried Mr. Morgan. "How does it come through you?"

"By wireless," reported Tom promptly.

"Oh, I've heard something about your dabbling in that."

"Can I speak before your chauffeur?" inquired Tom.

"If you have anything to say, go ahead."

"Well, sir," said Tom, "I caught a message sent to wireless station O-17, up at Deepdale. It seems that the sender expected to reach you there. His name appears to be Dunbar."

"Yes, yes," urged Mr. Morgan impatiently, "I sent word I would be at Deepdale until to-morrow, but changed my plans."

"It was fortunate that I knew you were back," said Tom. "The message seems important."

"Out with it," ordered Mr. Morgan.

"I think I can repeat it word for word."

"Do so, then."

"'Have a tip that U. Cal. cannot prove up on patents. News will be public before night. Order your subscription cancelled before afternoon session of Stock Exchange, or there will be a heavy loss.'"

"Thunder!"

Mr. Morgan jumped up fully a foot on the cushioned seat of the tonneau. His face went white as chalk. He seemed about to spring from the automobile. Then he jerked out his watch, fell back, and, trembling all over, gasped out to the chauffeur:

"Drive for your life to the telegraph office at Rockley Cove. Don't lose a second!"

CHAPTER VII—GRACE MORGAN

Tom stepped aside quickly as the chauffeur set the power, and the machine made a sharp jump. As it flashed around a curve bound townwards Mr. Morgan leaned over the back of the tonneau.

"I won't forget this, Barnes," he bawled loudly.

"Good for the wireless!" exclaimed Tom, with a genuine flush of delight.

He felt well satisfied with the exploit of the moment. He was flushed, bedraggled and exhausted, but there was the thrill of a big action accomplished and the utility of Station Z established.

Tom glanced longingly in the direction of Fernwood and then at his soaked shoes, and shook his head dolefully.

"It won't do," he ruminated. "Grace is probably offended at me for bolting away so unceremoniously, and I'll wait until I can make my apologies in better trim."

Tom kept a patch of timber between himself and the Morgan place, and reached the beach road on a detour. He was summarily halted as he passed the flight of steps leading up to the terrace. A silvery but peremptory voice called out:

"Stop there, Tom Barnes!"

Grace Morgan came tripping down the steps a minute later. There was a pretty pout of pettishness on her winsome face, and her eyes did not look altogether pleased.

"What do you mean by running away from me, sir?" she challenged, gaining the side of Tom, and regarding him as if she was never going to forgive him.

"Business is my only excuse," explained Tom meekly.

"You mean with my father?"

"Yes——"

"Did you overtake him?"

"I am glad to say I did," replied Tom, "and I think your father is, too."

"What was it about?"

Tom laughed evasively,

"You must ask him that yourself."

Miss Morgan looked mild daggers at Tom.

"I never met such rude, unfriendly boys!" she declared.

"Oh, there are more offenders than my poor humble self?" interrogated Tom archly.

"Yes, there are," declared the indignant miss. "Mart Walters has a friend from Boston visiting him—Bert Aldrich. He made an engagement to be here an hour ago with his gasoline launch. Gentlemen keep their engagements!" concluded Grace with emphasis.

Unconsciously Grace had walked along with Tom, much to his personal pleasure.

"Well, I'm glad," he observed.

"Glad of what?" demanded Miss Morgan suspiciously.

"Oh, everything," replied Tom bluntly, with a significance that caused Grace to blush. "As to my own transgression," he went on, "as I told you, I can't explain

details, but I do not think your father would mind my telling you that I brought him an important message from my wireless."

"Your wireless?" exclaimed Grace in a sprightly tone. "Oh, Tom, I heard about that. Is it really true that you know how to telegraph all over the world, and rescue sinking steamers, and catch fleeing criminals, and—and all that?"

Impetuous Miss Morgan had gone off in a rhapsody over the great enthusiastic theme of Tom's mind, and he was truly delighted.

"Well, hardly," he said. "You see, I haven't reached that yet. It may come—I hope it does. That's why I'm sticking to it."

"Can I come and see you do it?" implored Grace excitedly. "Can I come into the tower and watch the messages come in, and see everything?"

"I shall feel honored if you do," replied Tom proudly. "Ah, there's another of those shells."

Tom's foot had kicked up a pearly odd-shaped shell in the sand. He stooped and secured it.

"Oh, how odd and beautiful!" cried Grace. "Oh, Tom, can I have it for my collection? I haven't one like it."

"You certainly can," answered Tom gladly. "We call that the peach blow, and it's pretty rare. I didn't know you were interested in shells."

"I dote on them," declared Grace. "Oh, Tom!"

From his pocket he had taken a handful of exquisite specimens of star pebbles and shells he had gathered up within a week, and tendered them for a choice to his pretty companion.

They strolled on for nearly half a mile. Tom explained that he must get back to the wireless station, but he could not resist lingering when Grace sat down to rest on an upturned boat on the beach. She occupied the time between admiring the pretty shells he had given her and inquiring into the details of his work at the wireless tower. Tom was in the midst of a description of some of the methods employed in sending wireless messages, when he paused and glanced seawards.

"There is your friend, Grace," said Tom.

A natty gasoline launch was approaching the pier up-shore. Tom made out two passengers, both of whom he recognized. One was Mart Walters. The other boatman was at the wheel. Tom had seen him twice on the street of Rockley Cove and knew who he was—young Aldrich, the friend about whom Mart was so continually boasting.

Grace Morgan glanced in the direction of the pier. Then, as if totally uninterested in what was going on there, she turned her back upon it and led an animated conversation with her companion. Tom kept facing the pier. From the launch Aldrich finally leaped ashore, evidently made them out, and leaving Mart in charge of the launch walked rapidly up the beach.

"I think I had better be getting back to the tower," said Tom, as the newcomer neared them,

"Don't be in a hurry, Tom," advised Grace, with a slightly malicious twinkle in her eye. "Oh, you, Mr. Aldrich?" she added, arising with a formal bow to the young man, who, arrayed in fancy yachting costume, was quite a "swell" sight, indeed.

She introduced them, but Mr. Aldrich was not inclined to make any friendly advances towards a boy in common working clothes. He deliberately turned his back on Tom, and began a conversation with Grace.

"Had we not better start out on our cruise?" he asked.

"Why, I had forgotten all about it, quite," declared the wilful miss, with an encouraging smile at Tom, which quite nettled the newcomer.

"The water is very smooth," observed young Aldrich. "I am sure you will enjoy it."

"I regret it very much," replied Grace, "but I was ready an hour ago. It is my time for musical practice now, and you will have to excuse me. Don't hasten, Tom," she added, crossing over to Tom.

"I think I had better be getting back on duty at the wireless station," said our hero.

"Wireless, eh?" young Aldrich condescended to observe at this juncture. "In with that fad, eh?"

"I am trying to make something more than a fad out of it," replied Tom pleasantly.

"Wire repairer or something of that sort?" intimated Bert Aldrich with a supercilious stare at Tom's working clothes.

"Indeed, no," flashed out Grace resentfully. "Tom is quite an expert, aren't you, Tom? He has been telling me the most delightful and fascinating things about the wireless. Oh, there is papa!"

There was an abrupt lull in the conversation as the Morgan automobile came down the beach road from the direction of Rockley Cove. Mr. Morgan gave the chauffeur the signal to stop and leaped from the machine in an excited way.

The politic young Aldrich advanced to meet the capitalist, all smiles and ceremony. Mr. Morgan almost brushed him aside, not even noticing the extended hand.

He went straight up to Tom, and his eyes glowed with friendly interest. Mr. Morgan caught both of Tom's hands in his own and gave them a hearty shake.

"Barnes," he said, "I stopped to say just a word to you. I must get to the city at once, but when I return I want you to come down to Fernwood. I have something important to say to you."

"Thank you, Mr. Morgan," bowed Tom courteously.

"You have saved me much of my fortune," declared the capitalist in a tremulous, grateful tone. "How shall I ever repay you? Going up to the house, Grace?" he inquired of his daughter.

"Yes, papa, it is my practice hour."

With a bewitching smile for Tom and a crisp little nod to Bert Aldrich the miss sprang airily into the car.

"Oh, Tom," she called back to the young wireless operator, as she mischievously noted the discomfited look on the face of young Aldrich, "I won't be like some people—I'll be on time to-morrow to have you show me all the wonders of that delightful wireless tower of yours."

CHAPTER VIII—QUICK ACTION

"Whew!"

"Some storm, Tom!"

"I shouldn't fancy many gusts like that last one."

Station Z quivered like an eggshell in the hand of a giant. A loose piece of wood from the roof of the operating cabin struck a sash, demolishing two panes of glass, and the iron framework rocked to and fro in the heaviest wind storm that had struck Sandy Point in years.

Tom Barnes glanced anxiously at the delicate wireless apparatus which shared sensitively in the pervading disturbance. His companion, Harry Ashley, was looking around for something to fasten over the broken window to shut out the driving rain.

It was three days after the Morgan incident, and Tom was now fairly in the wireless harness. It had been lowering weather all day, and Tom had been glad that the rain had held off until Grace Morgan, who, with her music teacher, had spent a delightful hour going over the wonders of Station Z, had gotten home before the tempest broke.

Tom had obtained his mother's consent to his remaining all night at the tower. It was the current conviction among all coast wireless men that a stormy night usually brought urgent and important service. A storm generally meant

distress of some kind at sea, and Tom wanted to be on hand in case of emergency, as he had promised Mr. Edson.

It was agreed that Harry Ashley should remain with him, and Mrs. Barnes had put up a fine lunch. About five o'clock when the wind began to rise with low rumblings of thunder in the distance and fitful gusts of wind, Tom held eye and attention close on the apparatus, ready for what might come.

Within an hour, however, his thoughts, as well as those of his companion, were mainly concerned in their own immediate environment. The storm was not accompanied by very vivid lightning, but the wind had risen to hurricane force.

Just before dusk a particularly severe gust broke down a large elm tree in sight. A little later a boat shed near the beach toppled over, and the fragments were carried like kindling wood out into the hissing, boiling surf.

About half an hour after dark, Harry, at the window, had sounded a quick alarm.

"Tom!" he had shouted, "every light in the town has shut off in a second!"

This meant that the storm had carried down the electric supply line from Springville. Tom thought uneasily of the folks at home. Then the assaults of the high breeze on their aerial perch caused him to center his attention on their own position, and be ready to save themselves if collapse came.

"Here, Harry, use this," ordered Tom, as his companion picked up a coat to stop up the hole in the broken sash.

Harry took the square piece of matting Tom tendered. He picked a hammer and nails to secure it across the sash. About to set it in place, however, he interrupted proceedings with a violent:

"Hark!"

"What's the matter, Harry?" questioned Tom.

Harry held up a hand, warningly. He bent his ear keenly towards the aperture. Then he turned to Tom.

"Did you hear it?" he demanded.

"Hear what?"

"That shout—a cry?"

"Wasn't it the wind?"

"No, I am sure not. Come here. There it is again!"

Tom ran to the window. Both held their breath in suspense. Both started with intelligence and certainty now.

A fearful echoing cry rose far above the whistling, shrieking storm—the echo of a human voice.

"Help! help! help!"

"That's no imagination," declared Harry.

"No, someone is in trouble," acquiesced Tom.

"It's right down on the road running to the beach," said Harry.

"Come on," urged Tom definitely, "we must investigate this."

He seized a lantern and threw open the trap door. Harry was at his heels promptly. A gust of wind and a forceful dash of rain nearly swept them off their feet as they reached the ground.

"Which way?" asked Harry quickly.

"Hark!" interrupted Tom.

Again the cry rang out. It was fainter, less emphatic than before, but nearer. Tom could trace the point of the compass from which it came. He ran in that direction, holding the lantern before him.

"There he is!" cried Harry suddenly. "Don't run over him, Tom."

Coming to an abrupt halt, both boys stared in startled excitement at a human being on hands and knees making his way from the side of the road. Near to him was a tangled mass of wreckage which had been a bicycle. Its shattered skeleton covered a big flat rock, into which it had run to be completely demolished.

The recent rider was bareheaded, and from a wound in his temple the blood trickled down over his face and hands. One arm was helpless, and doubled up under him at every futile attempt at forward progress.

"Why," shouted Tom, swinging the lantern forward so that its rays covered the man, "it's Mr. Barton."

"Tom—Tom—" quavered the man, looking up through half blinded eyes, "quick—the doctor!"

"What's that?" Tom challenged, keenly alive to the fact that Mr. Barton's presence and condition signified some important circumstance.

But the man with a groan fell flat, rolled over on his side, and lay like one dead in the road.

"Say, Tom, what shall we do?" inquired Harry in an awesome whisper.

"We mustn't let this man die here, exposed to the storm. He may be seriously injured."

"It looks that way. I suppose he ran or was blown into that big rock yonder."

"Yes," nodded Tom.

"What was he doing, though, out such a night as this on a bicycle?"

"He said something about a doctor. Help me, Harry, we must get him under shelter."

"We can't carry him up into the tower."

"There's the old tool shed. Ready?"

"Yes, Tom."

They managed to convey the insensible man to the dilapidated structure Tom had mentioned. Its roof was like a sieve, and several boards were missing

from its sides, but it afforded some security from the tempest.

Tom placed a pile of old bags under the man's head and set the lantern near.

"Do you know him, Tom?" asked Harry.

"Oh, yes, he is almost a neighbor of ours. He runs a small truck farm and has quite a family. Wet this, Harry, soaking."

Tom gave his handkerchief to his companion, who went outside and saturated it in a deep puddle. Tom washed the dirt from the face of the injured man and tried to staunch the flow of blood.

He listened at his heart and to his breathing, and lifted the limb that seemed to have lost its natural power.

"He breathes all right," reported Tom to his anxious companion. "His arm is sprained or broken, though.",

"We must get him home, Tom."

"In this storm—with no conveyance?"

"That's so. He might die, though, if we don't get a doctor."

"He's coming to," said Tom suddenly. "Mr. Barton! Mr. Barton!" called Tom gently. "Don't you know me?"

The man opened his eyes, stared vaguely, and then tried to arise. He fell back again instantly, however, with a moan of weakness.

"No use!" he gasped. "My head is splitting and I've got no strength left in me at all. It was a fearful shock, a header full force, and—the doctor!" he shouted suddenly, almost in a scream.

"What doctor, Mr. Barton?" inquired Tom solicitously.

"From Rockville."

"What about him?"

"My child—dying!" wailed the man. "Dr. Burr, the only one in Rockley Cove, is away."

"That's so, I remember hearing of that," assented Tom.

"Lights in town shut off, telephone lines all down—the doctor, quick!"

With these last words pronounced in a painful gasp, Mr. Barton succumbed and fell back unconscious again.

"Tom, we've got to do something!" cried Harry, greatly worked up by all that was happening.

Tom's face showed the greatest anxiety and concern. The situation as revealed by the disconnected utterance of the injured man was serious and critical.

Tom pictured the storm-swept village in his mind's eye—the lights out, telephone service disrupted, and a father despairingly endeavoring to get word to the nearest doctor, five miles distant.

"Wait here, watch him," ordered Tom sharply, making up his mind what he would do.

"Can you do anything?" questioned Harry eagerly.

"I'll try," replied Tom, starting in the direction of the tower.

"The wireless!" cried Harry, his eyes snapping animatedly.

"Yes."

Tom was up the ladder and through the trap door in a hurry. He had his plan, but its success depended on two circumstances: first, if Ben Dixon was in reach of the amateur wireless outfit at the home nest; and second, if the telephone circuit the Dixon home was on, which belonged to a different system to that at Rockley Cove, was in working order.

Tom speedily gave the call to the station at the Dixon place. He did not wait for any response. He repeated the call briskly. Then he flashed off the message he had in mind. Then he repeated the message twice. Then—Tom waited.

There was a lapse of nearly ten minutes. Tom began to consider that Ben was not on duty. Suddenly there was a spitting crackle in the receiver.

"O.K.," came the slow message. "Telephone all right. Reached doctor. On way to Rockley Cove now."

"Good!" cried Tom.

CHAPTER IX—STRICTLY BUSINESS

Tom's face was hopeful and pleased as he descended through the trap door to the ground with his good news.

"How is he?" was his eager inquiry, as he stepped inside the doorway of the old tool shed.

"He's just begun to move again," reported Harry, "but he has been twisting about and moaning terribly."

"Mr. Barton! Mr. Barton!" shouted Tom in the ear of their patient, as the eyes of the latter opened and stared wildly at him.

"I remember now," spoke Mr. Barton weakly. "It's Tom Barnes?"

"Yes," assented Tom. "That's better," he added, as the man sat up. "Don't give way again, Mr. Barton, it's all right."

"What's all right, Tom?"

"Good news. The doctor."

"Yes! yes!"

"I sent word to him."

"How could you? The telephone lines are dead."

"By wireless, to my friend, Ben Dixon, who runs a small station. He got my message. Their telephone service is all right. The doctor is now on his way to your home."

"Oh, thank you, Tom, thank you!" cried Mr. Barton fervently.

"That's great, Tom," commented Harry heartily.

"I noticed a light in the nearest house yonder," proceeded Tom. "The wind has gone down a good deal. Could you make it, do you think, Harry?"

"You mean get to the house?"

"Yes."

"Why, of course."

"Take your lantern so you won't run into anything or lose your way."

"All right. What then?"

"An old fish peddler lives there. Tell him of the fix Mr. Barton is in."

"I understand."

"And ask him to hitch up and try and get him home."

"I'll do that," said Harry promptly, as he picked up the lantern and put for the door.

Tom urged hope and patience on his charge. The announcement that he had succeeded in getting a doctor started for Rockley Cove had worked a great change in the patient. He forgot his sufferings in his joy at the knowledge that help was on the way to his dying child at home.

It was about ten minutes later when there was a rattle of decrepit wheels and a resounding call:

"Whoa!"

"We're here," reported Harry, springing from the peddler's wagon.

Its owner had spread some blankets on the floor of the vehicle, making a comfortable bed for the injured man. They lifted him into the wagon box as carefully as they could.

"How shall I ever thank you, Tom?" asked Mr. Barton gratefully.

"Don't try," said Tom. "Just get home and get mended up, and I hope the doctor is in time to save your child."

Tom, left alone, returned to the tower. He felt well satisfied with the way affairs were progressing. He had been able to demonstrate some practicability to Station Z, and the fact encouraged him greatly.

The storm had subsided considerably. The rain had ceased entirely, and the wind came only in occasional gusts, diminishing gradually in their violence.

It must have been an hour later when Tom, almost dozing in his chair before the operating table, gave a great start as a cheery signal whistle rang out from below.

"Ben," he soliloquized, quite glad to welcome a companion in his loneliness.

"I've come," announced his chum, appearing through the trap opening. "Ugh! but it was a tough fight part of the way! I was nearly blown into the surf once or twice."

"What brought you out such a night as this?" challenged Tom.

"Just what is keeping you here," retorted Ben; "the chance of something exciting happening. Say, that message of yours has just stirred me up."

"You got it all right?"

"The first time. I expected there might be business such a night as this, and kept watch for it. Our 'phone was all right, and I got the doctor at once. He said he would start without delay for Rockley Cove."

"I hope he made it," said Tom.

"He must have, for he had the smooth sheltered turnpike to take, and the storm is nothing much now. Our folks were delighted to think that our toy telegraph, as they call it, did something really useful, and they let me come down to stay all night."

"I'm glad of it, Ben," replied Tom. "Harry will be back soon. We've got a lunch mother put up for us, and we can make a pleasant night of it."

"That's just famous!"

Ben removed his wet jacket and took up a comfortable position in a chair. Tom told of the injured Mr. Barton and what he had done for him.

"I say, Tom," suddenly asked Ben, during the pause after they had discussed current topics, "heard anything from Mr. Edson lately?"

Tom's face fell instantly, as though the remark suggested some unpleasant and disturbing subject. He looked quite anxious.

"Yes, Ben," he replied, "I got a letter this morning. He will be here tomorrow."

"How's that?"

"It seems he has made his arrangement to go into paid service on the North Atlantic coast."

"And he wants his money?" questioned Ben uneasily.

"That's about it," answered Tom in a subdued tone.

"Too bad!" murmured Ben. "You can't reach it any way, Tom?"

"I'm afraid not," responded Tom. "As you know, my aunt wrote me yesterday that she had everything invested. She said that the first of the month she had some interest money coming in, and would send me a hundred dollars as soon as it did."

"But that's too late to do any good."

"Yes," admitted Tom reluctantly.

"Then you'll have to give up the station here?"

"I'm afraid I will," answered Tom with a sigh. "I'll tell you frankly, I felt pretty hopeful of getting the money from another source, but I'm disappointed in that, too."

"What source, Tom?"

"Mr. Morgan."

"Oh, yes! Well," declared Ben, "he ought to."

"I am sure he would help me if he were at home," said Tom.

"You did a big thing for him, Tom."

"Mr. Morgan thinks that way himself. I am sure of it, from what he said."

"Maybe he will return to-morrow," suggested Ben.

"Grace says he has business in New York until the end of the week."

"Too bad!" exclaimed Ben.

"Well, it can't be helped," said Tom philosophically. "I'll just have to start in a more modest way. Mr. Edson is poor, and has got to realize right off from his investment here, he wrote me. Just think of it," added Tom, gazing about the room with longing enthusiastic eyes, "we've got to give it all up, maybe the chance of a lifetime, because we can't raise the money."

"How much do you need?" challenged a sharp voice suddenly, bringing both boys to their feet with a shock.

CHAPTER X—A YOUNG CAPITALIST

Harry Ashley stuck his head up through the trap opening, and climbed into the room with the announcement:

"Overheard what you said, so—how much do you want?"

Tom only smiled. The idea of a money offer from Harry was amusing. Ben assumed a mock gravity of manner with the words:

"Give us a check right on the spot, I suppose?"

"About that, if you don't want too much," answered Harry seriously.

"We won't call on you just yet, Harry," said Tom. "What about Mr. Barton?"

"We got him home all right."

"And the child?"

"You've done a big piece of work with your wireless this night, Tom Barnes," replied Harry, his eyes brightening. "We found the doctor at the Barton home when we arrived. He got there just in time. Said half an hour more and the patient would have been beyond help."

"That's grand!" voiced Ben.

"He's fixed up Mr. Barton's bruises. Says his arm is only sprained, and that he'll be around as well as ever in a week. I wish you'd heard that mother speak when they told her about what you had done in saving her child."

"With your help, remember that."

"H'm," said Harry with a wriggle, and blushing like a school girl. "The peddler has gone out into the country to bring a sister of Mrs. Barton to the house, and I wanted to get back here. Now that Ben is here, it seems jollier than ever. I must go to the peddler's house, though, and tell his wife that her husband won't be home for an hour or two. I promised him I would."

"All right, Harry," said Tom briskly. "Then we'll have a little lunch."

But Harry tarried. About to descend the ladder, he turned around with the pertinent query:

"About that money that had to be paid, or you'd lose the station here."

"You heard about it, did you?" questioned Tom.

"Didn't I tell you I did? Come, Tom, how much do you want?"

"Supposing you knew, what good would that do?"

"I may help you."

Ben looked skeptical and grinned. Then, sobering down, he said:

"Don't make fun of us."

"I'm not."

"It's serious enough as it is. Tom needs a hundred dollars."

"Does he?" exclaimed Harry with animation. "Well, he can have it."

"Who from?"

"Me. One hundred? Oh, that's easy—awfully easy," declared Harry, as if very much pleased.

"I suppose you are ready to supply the amount, cash down?" said Ben.

"On the nail head!" cried Harry, a ring of genuine confidence in his tone. "See here, you fellows, you've been the truest chums I ever ran across. I've got a hundred dollars, yes, nearly double that, and all you've got to do is to take it."

"I only want to borrow—until my aunt collects her interest money," said Tom, half hopeful, half doubting that unexpected good fortune was about to materialize.

"Six months, a year—it's all the same to me," declared Harry gaily. "I'd give it to you outright if—if I could," he stammered rather blunderingly. "There you are."

Ben in his stupefaction and Tom in wonder regarded the strange boy who had so warmly won their friendship during the brief period of their acquaintanceship. Harry had drawn off his rather threadbare coat. Then he reached inside the shirt he wore.

"Well, what next?" interrogated Ben, watching the movement curiously.

"The hundred dollars, of course," pronounced Harry. "Think I'm fooling?"

He had been fumbling with one hand inside his shirt. Something clicked like a snap of a buckle. Then he drew into view a long snake-like object.

"A belt," murmured Ben.

"That's right," nodded Harry.

With a clang he landed it on the table. He beckoned to Tom and Ben to approach.

"I made that belt myself," he went on, with some pride in his tone. "Looks like a sectional rattlesnake, eh? It's made out of snakeskin. See, it's got pockets. This one," and Harry unsnapped a button—"pennies."

A dozen cent pieces rolled out. He gave them a peep into five other similar pockets.

"Nickels, dimes, quarters, half dollars," recited Harry. "Then this one at the end—ten, twenty, forty, sixty, eighty, one hundred. There's your money, Tom. I'll take your note when it's convenient."

From a last compartment in the belt the speaker had produced a goodly roll of banknotes. He counted off the bills with the flippancy and skill of a bank cashier. Tom sat staring at the little heap that meant his business salvation, fairly agape.

"The mischief!" giggled the petrified Ben. "It's real money!"

"Yes, and hard earned, and mine," said Harry.

"But how, where——"

"Did I get it?" smiled Harry. "Work, hard work, fellows," and there was a mingled pride and fondness in Harry's voice. "That little heap means over a year of hard knocks and close scrapings, before I had the typhoid fever."

A strange silence fell over the trio of chums. Harry had come into the life of Tom and Ben in a strange way, and had won their confidence and friendship from the start. He had become quite a fixture at the Barnes homestead. Mr. Barnes had come to depend on him for an hour or two of pottering around at odd tasks on the farm, and felt that his young helper amply paid for his meals and lodging. At length Tom spoke, his face flushed with pleasure.

"You're a queer fellow, Harry," he said heartily, "and you are a good fellow.

You are willing to lend me this money?"

"Willing?" repeated Harry. "Glad, honored, delighted. Is a hundred enough?"

"Yes, indeed."

"All right, there it is. Don't you look at me in that leery way, Ben Dixon," said Harry, with a chuckle. "I haven't been stealing anything. That money is mine, all mine, and honestly mine. There is this much I will tell you about it, though: it is a part of a certain amount I am hoping to reach to pay a certain person."

"Money that you owe?" ventured Ben, consumed with curiosity.

"Yes, and no. I'm to save five hundred dollars,"

"Whew! that's a heap."

"I'll reach it," declared Harry confidently—"in time. It's money that I must repay."

"That you borrowed?"

"No."

"Oh, that you took?" insinuated Ben, in his blunt, straightforward way.

"No, sir! Do you take me for a thief?" cried Harry indignantly. "I'll tell you this much more: I was living with a man I didn't like so very much. I made up my mind to cut out from him. I wanted first to find some papers of mine I believed he had in his possession. When he was away from home one night, I took a lighted candle and made a tour of investigation. I came across a pile of banknotes. A strip around them said 'Five Hundred Dollars.' I went on searching for what I was after, but didn't find it. When I turned around to take up the candle, the drawer in which I had placed it was all ablaze. The banknotes were a heap of crisp cinders."

"Well!" ejaculated Ben.

"I tell you I was scared," confessed Harry. "He was a close-fisted, mysterious old fellow, and—well, I decided to get out. I left a note telling the circumstances of the accident, and said that I would work my finger nails off to earn that five hundred dollars and bring it back to him, some day. I've been doing it ever since."

"That's a remarkable story, Harry Ashley," said Ben, in earnest admiration.

Harry pushed the bills over to Tom, restored the belt to its place, and, with the indifference of a millionaire, started for the trap door.

"I must tell the peddler's wife about her husband's delay," he said. "Glad to oblige you, Tom. I'll be back soon."

Tom grasped the banknotes thoughtfully, and with an expression of gladness and relief on his face.

"What luck!" commented Ben.

"I am awfully glad to get the money," said Tom, with deep feeling. "Harry

is a splendid fellow. It's only a loan, but think what it means to me just at this time!"

"There's something!" exclaimed Ben suddenly.

"Hello!" said Tom, all attention at once to the clicks. Then his face broke into a smile.

"'Donner' again!" cried Ben.

"After a lapse of two days," observed Tom. "Listen."

The mysterious "spook" of Mr. Edson was in evidence once more.

"He's getting along better," said Ben.

"'Donner' tapped that out pretty fair. 'Lost boy.' What's that? 'Money' again. Thousand dollars.' He's getting extravagant. 'Donner.' H'm!"

There was a lapse. Tom laughed and Ben chuckled. "Donner" was a standing joke now.

"There, he's at it again," announced Ben a moment later. "'Donner. Lost boy.' Yes, we've heard that before. Hello! here's something new."

"Yes," nodded Tom, translating the message: "Lost boy named Ernest Warren. Look out for sun, moon and stars on his left shoulder."

"Wonder who the lost boy can be?" said Ben in a ruminative tone.

They were soon to learn that—in a startling and unexpected manner.

CHAPTER XI—A GREAT STEP FORWARD

"Mr. Barnes, I believe?"

"Yes, I am Tom Barnes," said the young wireless operator of station Z.

Tom was in the old windmill tower, and had been tidying up generally. He had just come from dinner, and was alone in the operating room.

He had checked himself in the middle of a whistling tune to survey a head and then the shoulders and body of a stranger, coming up through the trap door.

The intruder was a keen-eyed, sharp-featured man of about thirty, very neatly dressed, and very erect and soldierly in his general appearance.

He nodded briskly to Tom, crossed the room, and, uninvited, sank into the nearest chair.

"Glad I found you," he said, and then took a close survey of Tom and of the furnishings of the room. "Heard about you at the town, and being somewhat interested in these new-fangled wireless ideas, I thought you wouldn't mind a casual visitor."

"No, indeed," answered Tom readily. "I am only too glad to meet anybody who is interested as to our little station here."

"It's quite a plant," declared the stranger. "Tell me something about it, will you?"

An enthusiastic boy like Tom was only too ready to enter into a general description of the parts and utilities of the apparatus. The stranger listened intently, approbatively too, it seemed to Tom. He followed the indication of Tom's finger as it pointed out this and that attachment of the general operating device; and arose and looked closer as Tom explained in detail and very clearly some intricate features of the mechanism.

"That's pretty interesting," voiced the man at length, "and you seem to know your business."

"Oh, I'm only a novice, a mere amateur," insisted Tom modestly.

"What's that now?" inquired the visitor, reaching a careless hand very near to the coherer.

"Look out!" shouted Tom warningly.

"What's the trouble?" calmly interrogated the man.

"Danger. You'll get a hard shock if you touch that."

"I'll be careful," pledged the stranger, and to Tom's amazement with a deft expert touch he dislodged the cap of one of the glass tubes. "I say, my friend," he added, gazing down into the cup critically, "you'd get much better action if you'd mix in some fine brass filings here. The old stuff is pretty well corroded."

"I had noticed that," said Tom, "and have sent to the city for new material."

"There's another point worth your attention," resumed the man, pointing up at the secondary circuit. "A double coil to that condenser would strengthen your current."

Tom stared at the speaker in a vague way. He was a good deal surprised and also suspicious at the facility with which this avowed seeker for information exhibited a profound knowledge of the very subject under discussion.

"You seem to know something about it," observed Tom.

The man did not reply. He busied himself with a fixed and calculating glance through the roof skylight up at the metal nets and spirals.

"Very good," he said, half aloud, "and kept in very fair order, too."

"I'm glad to hear you say it, Mr ——?"

"I am expecting a friend who will introduce us," said the stranger, with a peculiar smile. "Ah, there he is now."

He moved to the window, and in quite a friendly fashion waved his hand to an occupant of an automobile that had just driven up from the beach road.

Tom at once recognized it as the Morgan machine. Its owner alighted, and a minute later came up the ladder.

"Glad to see you, Barnes," he hailed cheerily, shaking hands with the young wireless operator. "You didn't wait for me at the village as agreed, Mr. Mason," he added, addressing Tom's guest.

"I fancied I had better come on ahead and get an unprejudiced view of the proposition," observed Mr. Mason.

"Strike you all right?" intimated the magnate pleasantly.

"Capital," answered the stranger with emphasis.

"That's good. Barnes, this is Mr. Mason, inspector for the International Wireless Company, of New York."

"Oh," said Tom, a little dubiously and a trifle flustered.

"I knew how you were interested in this wireless business, Barnes," resumed Mr. Morgan, "and I spoke to my friend here of the independent station you were running."

"Which I wish to take into the service, you included," broke in Mr. Mason in a clear, straightforward way. "I hear of some good work you have done here. The location can be made an important one, and, if you are ready for it, I'll talk business with you."

"There is not much doubt about the utility of the station here," observed Mr. Morgan. "Barnes saved me half my fortune through an intercepted wireless. He has my unqualified recommendation and support, Mr. Mason."

"So you told me," returned the wireless professional in a brusque, business-like way. "Practically you own the apparatus here, Mr. Barnes?" he questioned.

"Yes, sir," announced Tom.

"Is there any lease on the site?"

"You mean the old tower here?"

"Yes."

"No, sir. It belongs to the house that burned down about a year ago, and is entirely out of commission as a windmill."

"I see."

"The man who owns the place gave Mr. Edson full permission to use the old wreck free of charge as long as he liked."

"The company would like a formal lease for two years. Do you think you could arrange that?"

"Oh, yes, I am sure of it," replied Tom.

"Very well. Offer him a trifle—say fifty dollars for the term. Now then, as to your outfit here. Would you be willing to turn over your right and interest

here to the company at a fair price, in consideration of a contract for two years establishing you here as their accredited operator?"

Tom's face changed to all colors. His eye sparkled.

"Mr. Mason," he said frankly, "you take my breath away!"

The wireless professional smiled indulgently. Mr. Morgan rested a friendly, encouraging hand on Tom's shoulder.

"The equipment here," continued Mr. Mason, making a swift mental calculation, "is not worth a great deal. The installation, however, cost something. I shall recommend the company to offer you five hundred dollars for the outfit."

Tom gasped now. Business was business, and he realized that the keen-faced man of affairs who was talking to him was too shrewd to throw anything away or buy a bad bargain. For all that, he was fairly stunned at the good fortune that had come to him.

"I will be glad to do as you suggest," he said, choked up from varied emotions.

"Good!" cried Mr. Mason. "The papers will be sent to you soon as I can report to headquarters. In the meantime, you can negotiate for the lease we spoke about I will have a contract forwarded to you, accompanying full instructions as to your duties as our representative."

"What will you pay Barnes?" inquired Mr. Morgan, a practical business man on all occasions.

"Sixty dollars a month," was the reply.

"Don't fall off your chair, Barnes!" laughed Mr. Morgan, "You're going to reach bigger things than that in the wireless line, I predict."

"There was one thing," said Tom a little anxiously; "I have a friend, a chum, who knows almost as much as I do about the business."

Mr. Mason took out his memorandum book.

"What is his name?" he inquired.

"Ben Dixon."

"Very good. We'll start him with a commission as substitute and relief man. I intended to send one of our men for the shift, but if you think this young Dixon can do the work, I will recommend him."

"I am sure of it," declared Tom.

"Good-bye, Barnes," said Mr. Morgan, as he and his companion prepared to leave the tower. "I have a little something I wish to add to your bank account when you come up to the house again."

"Please don't mention such a thing, Mr. Morgan," pleaded Tom.

"And, remember, call on me as a ready friend whenever I can help you in any way," went on the gentleman; and then he and Mr. Mason went away.

"My!" was all Tom could say when he returned to the tower, and flung

himself into a chair in a dazed, overwhelmed way. "My! it all seems like a dream!"

CHAPTER XII—"SUN, MOON AND STARS"

"The Mercedes in the lead," announced Ben Dixon.

"All right," returned Tom Barnes.

The buzzer was going merrily; Tom was on his professional mettle and thoroughly enjoying himself. He was tallying off the information shouted down in sections through the tower skylight by his faithful assistant.

Ben, astride a cross arm beam of the old windmill, balanced an elongated telescope seaward focussed on several yachts engaged in a race.

It had been part of the day's instructions received that morning from headquarters for the operators at Station Z to watch out and announce the order in which the yachts passed Rockley Cove. The information was wanted for newspapers and persons interested at the starting point of the race. The names and pennant colors of the various craft had been furnished to Tom, and Ben was able, with this basis to work from, to report like an expert.

"*Druid* second," he announced sharply two minutes later.

The entire flotilla had passed within half an hour, and Ben descended into the operating room.

"That was easy and pleasant," he observed.

"Say, Tom, we've got a dandy plant here, and no mistake."

Tom replied by nodding in a gratified way, and glancing with pride and approval at the well-ordered equipment about him.

Tom was now a duly authorized operator in the service of the International Wireless Company. Mr. Mason had carried out the plans outlined during his original talk with Tom, and that rising young wireless operator was now working on instructions and a liberal salary, and had over five hundred dollars in the bank.

Mr. Morgan had insisted on Tom accepting a check for two hundred dollars as a slight recognition of his service in respect to the United Calcium securities.

What pleased Tom most of all, however, was that he was given the privilege of employing extra help when in his judgment the same was required, and Ben

was put in a way to earn many a welcome dollar.

Station Z was not in the regular service. It was maintained by the International Wireless Company as a sort of demonstration station. The object was to do little commercial business, but to pick up important messages sent in cases of emergency. The purpose of the company was to demonstrate to the general public the chance utility of an isolated station.

Tom had paid Mr. Edson the hundred dollars, he had secured the lease of the station site, had returned to Harry Ashley the money borrowed from him, and was a happy, hopeful enthusiast, every day learning more and more concerning the wonderful wireless.

He sat back in his chair now, comfortable and at ease, with the satisfaction of a person understanding his business and doing his duty. Ben swung back luxuriously in a hammock they had rigged up in one corner of the room. The sunshine was bright, the air balmy, the sea refreshingly blue and cool looking, and both boys enjoyed the acme of comfort and satisfaction.

"I say, Tom," began Ben lazily, after a spell of indolent rest, "what about that letter? Did you bring it?"

"Oh yes," answered Tom, feeling in the pocket of his coat. "Here it is."

Ben took a mussed-up envelope from the hand of his chum. It was directed in crooked, printed letters: "mister tom barns."

"I found it stuck under our front door last night, as I told you," recounted Tom, and Ben perused the enclosed sheet covered with straggling words and sentences, and read it aloud:

"Warnin to tom barns, keep yure own turtory,
or it'l be the worst fer you and yer frens.
sined: the Black Kaps."

"Sort of blood-curdling, eh, Ben?" mused Tom.

"It don't scare you one little bit?"

"Not a particle."

"What does it mean?"

"Why, Ben, the only way I can figure out, is that the so-called Black Caps are in active operation again."

"Phew!" observed Ben, and fell into a prolonged fit of musing. Both he and Tom were quite familiar with the past operations of that sinister concern. Like all country communities, Rockley Cove had some undesirables. Over the village line, in fact, between it and the residence of the Morgans, was a little community of fishermen whose social condition was not very high.

One particular family with numerous branches was quite notorious. The

name was Barber, and the younger members of the family constituted an uncouth and troublesome set. They and some neighboring lads formed what they called a secret society called the "Black Caps." They soon became the terror of adjoining communities.

Out of pure perversity they stole fishing nets and tackle, robbed farmers' hen roosts, and dismantled yachts and yawls. When these pilferings were brought home to them, they destroyed fishing outfits, scuttled boats, and burned down several haystacks. Six of them were finally arrested, and among the witnesses against them were Tom and Ben. The young desperadoes, who had established a dead line over which few Rockley Cove boys dared to venture, were locked up in the county jail for thirty days and in addition their parents had to pay fines for them.

All this had happened about a year before Station Z was started. The Black Caps had been disrupted, it seemed, and Tom had heard little of the Barbers for some time. If they continued their former marauding course, it was in some new territory, for they neither noticed nor molested any more Rockley Cove boys or property.

Now, however, the old-time tactics so common in the past had been revived, it seemed, as witness the warning note Tom had received. It was over this that Ben was cogitating. Finally Tom expressed an opinion.

"I can't account for any fresh antipathy on the part of the Barbers," he said, "unless it is because they see me going down to Mr. Morgan's once or twice a week."

"I'll bet that's it," exclaimed Ben. "You generally take the cut inland near the settlement, don't you, Tom?"

"Nearly always."

"That must be it, then. They think you are sort of watching them—invading their territory, as they call it. I don't think, though, they would cut up very rough with you."

"Why not?"

"Well, Bill Barber said before he got out of jail you had made up for telling what you had to tell against him, by pleading with the judge to let them off light for a first offence."

"I shall not lose any sleep over the terrible warning," laughed Tom lightly.

"I'd take the beach road when I went up to see Grace Morgan, though, if I were you," suggested Ben. "Talking of something else, Tom, have you said anything to Harry along the 'Donner' line?"

"Not a word. Our mysterious spook seems to have given up his erratic messages."

"That name, 'Donner,' struck Harry all of a heap, just the same."

"Well, he's a fine fellow, and I'm not going to pry into his secrets."

"I wonder what old 'Donner' was after, anyhow?" observed Ben, "with his mysterious 'messages,' and his 'thousand dollars.'"

"And the boy with the sun, moon and stars on his left shoulder," smiled Tom.

No orders had come to Station Z for work that night, and at five o'clock the boys locked up the tower. They parted when they reached the village, Ben taking the road south and Tom proceeding homeward alone.

He was up in his room changing his working clothes, when his mother appeared at the bottom of the stairs to tell him that Ben Dixon was on the telephone.

"Ben wants you to call him up before you go out to-night," advised Mrs. Barnes.

"All right," sang down Tom.

He forgot all about Ben when he came downstairs, full of his plans for the evening. Grace Morgan had invited him down to Fernwood, so Tom had asked his mother to give him an early supper. Then, in the bustle of getting a lift as far as the crossroads in a passing rig, he left the house in a great hurry, and never thought of his chum again until he left the wagon.

"I won't go back," decided Tom. "It can't be anything very particular Ben wants to see me about. I've got plenty of time, too, and can stroll around his way before I go to see Grace."

Tom passed down the winding road, but on the way ringing boyish shouts beyond a thicket caused him to deviate from his course. As he came to where a fringe of shrubbery lined the banks of Silver Brook, he nearly ran into a man who stood peering past them at a merry group of boys sporting in the sparkling waters of the stream.

There was so much that was ill-favored in the face of the man, something so sinister in his pose, that it suggested to Tom the lurker with a purpose. Tom halted and regarded the man closely. Then he peered past him at the group sporting in the water.

Their leader was Harry Ashley, and he was in great evidence. At just that moment he was giving them a specimen of rapid hand over hand water climbing. His admiring friends cheered as Harry made a marvelous dash of some fifty yards, described a disappearing dive with wonderful dexterity, and, coming to the surface, landed on a rock not twenty feet away from the observing stranger and Tom, and stood shaking the water from hair and face.

"Ah-h!" suddenly exclaimed the strange man, craning his neck, losing his balance, falling flat; and then, discovering Tom, he scowled at him, and suddenly disappeared in the underbrush.

"The mischief!" ejaculated Tom, as he too glanced at Harry.

The back of the latter was towards him. Tom experienced a queer thrill as he saw what the stranger had also seen.

Upon Harry Ashley's left shoulder, plainly tattooed, was a sun, a moon and some stars!

CHAPTER XIII—THE BLACK CAPS

Harry Ashley, all unconscious of the fact that he was under inspection from others than his aquatic comrades, gave a yell and dove away from the rock.

"Here's something to think about!" said Tom in startled wonderment. "Ben was right—Harry is a boy with a mystery, just as he said."

Tom's first impulse was to advance among the noisy crowd of swimmers, or linger under cover and intercept Harry when he started for home, and challenge him for some explanation.

Then it occurred to him that he had no right to pry into Harry's secrets. At first the case looked strange and grave. At second thought, however, it occurred to Tom that the discovery of the fact that a man whom they called "Donner" was supposedly seeking a certain Ernest Warren, and that Harry Ashley fitted into the affair because he had tattooed marks on his back, was not such an important circumstance after all.

Presumably this wireless operator was the man whose five hundred dollars Harry had accidentally burned up. This set Tom thinking on a new tack.

"'Donner' is certainly very anxious to find Harry, if he really is this Ernest Warren," mused Tom. "He seems willing to pay money to find him. What for—to punish him? Hardly. Then something of importance may have happened to change the face of affairs, and if this would be of any benefit to Harry he ought to know about it. I know what I'll do—I'll get down and tell Ben what I have discovered, and we'll decide together what is best to do in the case."

Tom started to leave the spot. He glanced all about for some trace of the sinister appearing lurker he had seen watching the swimmers, but found none.

"Maybe I am just imagining that fellow was particularly interested in Harry," ruminated Tom. "He is probably some strolling tramp, and was casually

watching those antics in the water."

Tom glanced at his watch. It was two miles over to the Dixon place. It was fast getting on to dusk. Tom calculated that he would reach the farm by dusk, have half an hour to spare with Ben, and reach the Morgan mansion by eight o'clock. He had changed his plans since leaving home, his original purpose being to arrive before nightfall at the Morgan home while there was enough daylight left to play a game of tennis with Grace.

It was a short cut to the Dixon place by taking a road through the woods, and Tom kept on planning how he would utilize the moments until he reached Fernwood, and anticipating the usual pleasant time he always had with pretty Grace Morgan. He was just thinking how happily and usefully life was rounding out for him, when there came an abrupt interruption to his pleasing reverie.

Just as he was passing a thick copse where the road turned and high trees on either side shut the highway into dimness and obscurity, there was a rustle in the underbrush.

"Halt!"

A form stepped into view suddenly. It was that of a boy. In his hand he poised a long pole sharpened at the end. This he directed straight at Tom.

"Halt!"

A second figure came quite as magically into view. Then a third, a fourth, a fifth and sixth, and the astounded Tom stared vaguely at a perfect circle formed about him by the sextette.

"Why," he began, turning in a ring and discovering that each one of the group wore a sable-lined hood over his head with slits cut in for eyes, nose and mouth, "I understand now—the Black Caps."

"That's right," responded a voice from behind one of the masks, disguised into great gruffness. "March!"

"March where?" demanded Tom, a half amused smile on his face.

"Don't fool," spoke a second voice quickly. "Get him under cover."

"Yes, someone may come along," spoke another of the masked crowd.

"Now!"

The leader of the gang gave the order. His coterie was well trained. To a man they dropped their spears to the ground, and made a general rush for Tom.

"Hold on, Bill Barber!" said Tom, as he was seized by five pairs of sturdy hands.

"Bill Barber isn't here," declared the former gruff voice.

"What do you want of me, whoever you are?" demanded Tom.

"You come along and see."

"I will not," retorted Tom.

He struck out with his fists and laid two of his assailants low. They were

promptly on their feet. Then the united strength of the group was exerted to seize and throw our hero down. He found his arms and feet securely bound by strong ropes.

"Someone is coming," spoke one of the crowd sharply.

"Rush him," ordered the leader.

Tom set up a loud shout.

"The gag," came the quick command.

Tom's outcry was hushed in an instant by the application of an elastic band fastened to a padded stick, which was tightly pressed between his lips. He was lifted bodily and carried away from the road just as a wagon rattled past the spot where he had been confronted by the gang.

The members spoke not a word as, bodily lifting their captive, they bore him helpless on their shoulders through the woods. They proceeded a quarter of a mile, finally halting at a low structure which Tom recognized.

It was the abandoned hut of a man who had passed a hermit-like existence in the densest part of a thicket. Tom was carried inside and placed on the broken floor of the hut, which was covered with dead leaves.

"What's the orders, chief?" asked one of the crowd.

A whispered reply that Tom could not over-hear led to five of the party filing out of the hut like trained soldiers. The sixth, the leader, remained behind for half a minute.

"We're coming back soon," he said. "We'll bring a skull and cross bones when we do. If you'll swear on 'em never to cross our dead line again, maybe we'll leave you go this time. If you don't——"

The speaker aspirated a long low hiss and ground his teeth tragically. Then he, too, disappeared.

Tom had ample time for reflection as he lay alone in the darkness. He could not figure out what the Black Caps were up to. The whole proceeding was freakish, and carried along in the most heroic style of juvenile roysterers aping pirates and outlaws; yet Tom believed there was some definite motive underlying it all. What it was he could not at the moment decide.

A half hour passed by. The Black Caps had apparently retired to a distance. Then the crackling of dry twigs outside the hut announced the approach of someone.

"Hello, there, Tom Barnes!" spoke the owner of a head thrust past the open doorway.

Tom at once identified the tones. They belonged to Mart Walters.

CHAPTER XIV—TURNING THE TABLES

"This is getting interesting—I think I am beginning to understand this affair," murmured Tom amid his helpless discomfort.

Mart Walters stepped into the hut. He felt about with his feet, and even groped with his hands. As one toe touched the prostrate Tom the visitor came to a stop.

"We'll have a little light on the subject," he observed, drawing out a cigar lighter. Mart fancied it was "mannish" and grand to exhibit this appurtenance when he lit a cigarette. He snapped a light and held the flame over Tom. Then he extinguished it, and stooping unsnapped the gag from the captive's lips, letting it drop under his chin.

Mart had not spoken to Tom since the day of the ducking at the creek. Twice Tom had met him in Rockley Cove, and had nodded to him pleasantly. This courtesy had been rewarded with a malevolent scowl. It was evidently still in the mind of our hero's enemy to "get even" with him.

More than once Tom had seen Mart on the Fernwood pier or in the powerful launch with the elegant young swell, Bert Aldrich. Several evenings Tom had passed at the Morgan mansion at little social gatherings of Miss Grace and her friends. On these occasions, however, Aldrich and his satellite had made a point to cut Tom direct. Tom had not minded this in the least, for Grace had laughed outright at such ridiculous manœuvres.

Tom now instantly made up his mind that the present episode had something to do with his visits to Grace. Mart was not above mean plotting, and his supercilious friend, Bert Aldrich, had always struck Tom as an unpleasant cad.

"There's only just about five minutes to spare, Tom Barnes," spoke Mart smartly.

"For what?" demanded Tom.

"For me to save you."

"What from?"

"The Black Caps."

"You train with them, do you?" interrogated Tom.

"Who, me? No, indeed!" answered Mart. "It's this way: I'm your friend."

"Go ahead, Mart."

"The Barbers don't like you any too well. They think the best way they can beat your game is to keep you from coming here."

"Coming where?" challenged Tom specifically.

"Well, down to the Morgan place. They don't want you sneaking around anywhere near them."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" observed Tom.

"I overheard their talk. They've gone to get some tar and feathers. They're going to muss you up bad. I know them pretty well."

"I see you do," remarked Tom, significantly.

"Oh, I don't mean that I chum with them, or anything like that," corrected Mart, in a flustered manner. "But, I have—why, well—influence, that's it, with them. Then again, I'm interested personally."

"How are you interested?" inquired Tom.

"Well, I'll just be plain with you. My friend, Bert Aldrich, is sweet on Grace Morgan, and you've spoiled it."

"Indeed," said Tom simply.

"He thinks you have prejudiced Grace against him, and he's mad as a hatter about it. See here, she isn't your class. You know she ain't—half a million, classy family. Why, you're poor. Then again, she's going south soon, and when she gets into society she'll have to meet Bert and his family, and take up with him again—see?"

"Get along, Mart," railed Tom, "you're progressing finely."

"I'll save you from the Black Caps if you'll agree to keep away from Grace Morgan. There's the straight of it. What do you say?"

"I say no," responded Tom promptly.

"You won't do it?"

"Hardly."

"You'll be sorry."

"All right."

"Suppose—suppose Bert gives you fifty dollars, will you keep away?"

"Say, Mart," observed Tom, quietly, but with force, "you're too cheap. Grace Morgan is worth a million, if she is worth a cent. You can't scare me off nor buy me off. She's a dear little lady, my good friend, and I wouldn't give up her company under any circumstances as long as my coming seems to please her."

"Rot you!" shouted Mart, fairly infuriated at the failure of his cherished schemes. "I've a good mind to kick you. I'll do it, yes, I will——"

"Stop there, you miserable scamp!"

"Let go!"

"Speak another word, and I'll half choke the life out of you!"

"Ben!" murmured Tom gratefully.

A form had flashed through the doorway. There was the sound of a struggle, a thud, as Mart Walters' body struck the floor.

"I'm sitting on him, Tom," announced the newcomer. "Lie still, or I'll knock you silly. Where's that gag, Tom? I've got it."

Tom felt the hand of his friend grope in the dark and remove the gag from under his chin. Then, from the squirmings and splutterings of Mart, he knew that Ben had silenced him effectually. Next, Ben whipped out his pocket knife, and the ropes holding Tom a prisoner were severed.

"Trim and tidy," reported the diligent Ben as he helped Tom to his feet. "I've gagged him and tied him for keeps. Come outside."

"Why, how in the world did you happen to come along in the nick of time?" propounded Tom, wonderingly.

"Never mind that now. You do just what I tell you to do. You were bound for Morgan's?"

"Yes."

"Get there, then. I'll come along a little later. I've got something else to do hereabouts."

"But Mart, here?"

"He'll be taken care of, never fear," retorted Ben with a chuckle.

"And the Black Caps?"

"You forget all about it till I see you later," insisted Ben. "There will be quite a story to tell. Don't spoil it by hanging around here. I know my business. Go along."

Tom did as directed. He could guess that there was some motive in his chum's insistence. He rearranged his disordered attire, left the spot, and half an hour later had followed Ben's directions, having indeed forgotten everything except that he was seated on the Morgan porch with charming Grace as his companion.

"What is that?" exclaimed Grace suddenly.

Tom arose quickly to his feet at the startling inquiry. The light from the front rooms illumined the porch, but beyond the shadows were vague and dim. Amid these, Tom, peering, discerned some bustling forms.

He moved towards the button controlling the electric lights at either side of the pillars at the steps. Just as he pressed it, ear-splitting sounds rang out.

"The Black Caps!" exclaimed Tom, as he recognized his recent persecutors.

"Oh, what are they here for?" cried Grace, timidly clinging to Tom's arm.

"Fire him, men!"

A struggling form in the grasp of the six young outlaws was forcibly propelled forward, landed on the porch steps and rolled over on the gravel walk.

"Cut for it!" came the sharp mandate.

The Black Caps vanished as if by magic. Tom stared hard. Grace, trembling with excitement, gazed vaguely at the figure arising to its feet.

"Why," she faltered, catching sight of the terrified face of the unwilling visitor, "it is Mart Walters!"

It was Mart, indeed, and he was a sight. From head to foot loose fluttering feathers waved ghost-like in the night breeze. Mart was not bound now, but the gag was still in his mouth. He cast one appalled glance at Grace and Tom, tore the gag loose and uttered a shrill yell of rage and chagrin. Then, throwing his hands above his head, he, too, disappeared.

"What does it all mean, Tom?" quavered Grace with a bloodless face. "There—there is somebody else!"

She shrank back anew with the words.

"It's all right," Tom reassured her. "It is Ben Dixon."

Ben, smothering a laugh, came up the steps, lifting his cap and smiling, his eyes twinkling.

"The biter bit, the tables turned, Miss Grace," he said.

"Ben, explain what it all means," pleaded Grace. "Tom won't."

[image]

"WHY," SHE FALTERED, "IT IS MART WALTERS!"

"It's like him not to," declared Tom's staunch chum. "I got a hint from a friend early in the evening that the Barber boys were on the rampage. I missed Tom by 'phone and started to intercept him on his way here, when I ran across the crowd talking with Mart Walters. I learned the whole scheme, and followed Walters to a hut where the gang had imprisoned Tom, and—well, I set Tom free and tied and gagged Walters in his place."

"What for?" questioned Grace.

"To give him a needed lesson," answered Ben promptly. "When the crowd returned I suppose they had arranged if Walters didn't come back to them they were to 'fix' Tom, as they called it. Two of them carried a feather bed. Two others carried pails of soft soap. It seemed they intended to use tar, but couldn't get any. They ripped open the bed, deluged Walters with the soap, mistaking him for Tom, rolled him in among the feathers, and—you saw him. They never got onto the

fact that it was the fellow who had hired them who got the dose they intended for Tom."

"Why did he hire them?" inquired Grace.

"Because that Aldrich cad plotted with Walters to scare Tom away from coming here to see you," explained Ben bluntly.

Grace Morgan's eyes flashed. A flush of real anger came into her cheeks.

"Mart and Mr. Aldrich did that?" she cried. "Oh, they shall never come into this house again." And on hearing this Tom Barnes felt rewarded for all the tribulation he had gone through that night.

CHAPTER XV—AN UNEXPECTED RESCUER

"Have you spoken to Harry yet, Tom?" inquired Ben, two days after the overturning of the plots of Mart Walters and his city friend, Bert Aldrich.

It was the middle of the afternoon, and things wireless had been slack at Station Z ever since morning. Tom turned from his chair at the window where he had been dreamily surveying the open sea.

"No, Ben," he replied a little gravely. "I came near doing it last night, but I didn't know but it might worry him, or make him think I was trying to pry into his personal business."

"I tell you, Tom, I think Harry ought to be told about the mysterious 'Donner' messages, and asked to explain about the tattooed sun, moon and stars on his left shoulder."

"I fancy he's about through with his task in the pasture by now," said Tom. "Supposing you go up to the house, get him down here, and we'll try to introduce the subject so it won't frighten or bother him."

"All right," assented Ben with alacrity, and was forthwith on his way.

Tom resumed his place at the window. His back was to the road running up from the beach to the village, and he was not aware of an unexpected arrival from that direction until a man's voice sounding within the room hailed him.

"Hey, boy, who's in charge here?"

"I am," answered Tom, turning to confront two men who in turn entered

the tower by way of the trap door. They were strangers in Rockley Cove, and Tom did not at all like their looks. The man who had accosted him had a sharp, hard eye. His companion was furtive-faced, and suggested a person constantly on the watch.

"We want to send a message," the former proceeded. "In cypher."

"Where to?" inquired Tom.

"The man pointed seawards."

"To a ship?"

"Yes, to the *Councillor*, bound for Canada."

Tom shook his head discouragingly.

"You will have to go to Station O at Deepdale. This is only a demonstration plant, and I have no orders to take commercial business," explained Tom.

The man drew out a pocketbook.

"See here," he said, "I'll give you ten dollars to send the message."

"I'm sorry, but it's against the rules."

"Jackson, do it yourself," spoke the other man quickly, pressing close to his companion's side.

"I'm out of practice."

"Oh, you can manage it."

"Hold on, there. I can't allow any interference with the apparatus here," said Tom, stepping in front of the first man as he started over towards the operating table.

"Can't, eh?" sneered the man. "Well, you'll have to. Keep him quiet, Griffin."

"I've got him," announced the man addressed.

He had caught Tom by the wrist. As the latter struggled to free himself, his captor dragged him toward a closet in one corner of the room.

Its door stood open. The closet was oak framed, built into the wall of the room, and had a stout door with a small circular slit in it. Mr. Edson had utilized it to lock up things he did not wish to leave lying around loose, when he left the tower at night. Tom had used it as a storeroom for surplus parts of the wireless outfit.

It had a strong padlock. The man threw Tom in roughly, secured the padlock, and then went up to the table. His companion was closely inspecting the apparatus.

"I'm at home at the regular key," he said. "I don't know whether I can work this, though."

"Of course you can," urged the other. "Get ready. I've got the cypher key and the message right here," and he took two sheets of paper from his pocket.

Tom was helpless. He could not possibly force the heavy door of the closet

from its fastenings. Shouting would do no good. If he attempted it, his jailers would probably treat him roughly, for they were vicious-looking fellows. Tom hoped for the return of Ben and Harry, or the arrival of someone else to interrupt the man at the table. Meanwhile he was on the keen alert as to all that individual was doing.

The minute this man got his bearings, he started in with confidence. Tom learned that he was flashing a message to the steamer *Councillor*, bound from New York to Halifax. In plain English, the operator on the *Councillor* was instructed to deliver a message to a passenger answering to the name of Daniel Ritchie. The message itself was a lot of private code-words, utterly unintelligible to Tom.

The sender repeated the message and got up from the table.

"Hit or miss, that is the best I can do," he remarked.

"Hit or miss, you've done all that could be expected of you," remarked his companion. "What are you going to do with him?" questioned the speaker, with a shrug of his shoulders towards Tom's place of imprisonment.

"Oh, leave him where he is. We want a start, and someone will come along to let him out. So long, son. You might have made ten dollars if you'd saved me the trouble of showing you that I'm some wireless myself."

Both men laughed coarsely and left the tower. Tom knew it was futile to expect his liberty except through the accidental visit of someone. He contented himself by trying to recall what he could remember of the message sent. He tried also to figure out the motive for the men's actions.

"They have got word to someone aboard the steamer *Councillor*," mused Tom. "The trouble they went to to do it looks suspicious and mysterious, though. Hello!"

Tom stared hard at the trap door opening. Through it a head was protruded.

"Anybody here?" its owner called out.

"Yes, I am here," announced Tom, moving his hand through the slit in the closet door.

"Tom Barnes!"

"That's right."

And then Tom gave a start as he recognized his unexpected visitor as Bill Barber, head of the Black Caps.

CHAPTER XVI—KIDNAPPED

"Let me out," said Tom, rattling the closet door.

"Sure, how did you get in there?" asked Bill Barber.

"I was locked in."

"Who by?"

"I'll tell you later. The key is in the padlock."

"I see it."

There was nothing belligerent or threatening in Bill's behavior. On the contrary, he seemed anxious to please Tom and glad to do him a favor. This was so foreign to the usual attitude of the Barber boy, that Tom was both astonished and puzzled.

He noticed casually that Bill seemed more tidy than usual, and there was not so much of the hang dog look about him as in the past.

"Queer," spoke Bill, staring perplexedly at Tom as the latter stepped out into the room. "You didn't shut yourself up in there?"

"No, I'll tell you how it was soon. Thank you, Bill, you've done me a big favor in coming just when I needed help."

"I am glad," voiced Bill, sententiously but heartily.

"I've something to do, so just sit down till I get things to rights, will you?"

"I'll do that, Tom."

Bill sat staring wonderingly at the wireless outfit. He watched Tom flit about as might a wizard among his trick apparatus. Tom flew to the operating table. He knew that somehow irregular work had been done by his two recent visitors. He wondered if he could head off the design they had in view, and was intent on getting word to headquarters.

Just ready to flash the signal, however, Tom ran over to a corner of the room and picked up a crumpled wad of paper. As he opened it, revealing two sheets, and reviewed their contents, he knew that he had discovered something worth while.

"The cypher message and the key to it," exclaimed Tom eagerly. "Those fellows got what they came after and carelessly dropped these. Now to figure it out."

Tom ran his eyes first over one sheet and then the other. The cypher message dovetailed with words he had heard the surreptitious operator use. With a pencil he wrote the words out with the help of the key. This was the result:

"Leave the steamer before arrival at Halifax,
as New York police have telegraphed there to
arrest you."

"I see it all as clear as daylight," murmured Tom. "The two men who imprisoned

me are warning a friend, a criminal confederate. I'll block the game."

Tom was busy at the transmitter for the next half hour. He flashed a message to the *Councillor*, informing the captain that the passenger, Daniel Ritchie, had received a wireless message irregularly, and to prevent him from leaving the ship until he reported to the police at Halifax.

Then Tom sent a message to headquarters explaining the entire proceedings of the past hour, giving his construction of the episode, and advising an immediate report to the New York police authorities.

Pretty tired from his activities, he now sat down in a chair. He had to smile as he observed the face of Bill Barber. The latter sat like one entranced over the manipulation the wireless outfit had undergone.

"Say," he bolted out in mingled awe and admiration, "you know how to do things with that queer contrivance, don't you?"

Tom briefly explained some of the minutiæ of the wireless and had an ardent listener. When he had concluded he intimated pleasantly:

"And how did you chance to come along just when I needed you, Bill?"

The Barber boy at once looked serious. A furtive embarrassed expression came into his face.

"That's it," he mumbled, "I came to tell you, Tom, you see?"

"To tell me what, Bill?" asked Tom encouragingly.

"About that tar and feather business. I had nothing to do with it, Tom, honest Injun."

"Who said you did, Bill?" propounded Tom, smiling.

"I'll bet you thought it."

"Well, wasn't it quite natural I should?" inquired Tom.

"No, sir!" declared Bill, quite indignantly, "I wouldn't play a mean trick like that on you, Tom Barnes. I've got nothing against you. In fact, ever since you spoke up for me at the trial, I've—well, Tom," stammered Bill, a little sheepishly, "I've tried to remember what you said about giving me a chance to make a man of myself, and I—I hope I'm doing it."

"Good for you, Bill Barber!" cried Tom heartily. "I'm proud of you, to hear you talk like that."

"It was some of my old gang hired out to trim you. I've thrashed the whole kit of them for doing it, and they won't trouble you again, never fear."

"You're a good friend, Bill," declared Tom. "Did you say you were working?"

"Yes, but not steady," answered Bill. "I get odd jobs running small launches for the resorters down at Sea Grove. Had a trip or two for that young Boston cad, who is hanging around with Mart Walters. Huh! he brags about what lots of money he's got, and he hasn't paid me for my work yet. I'll get it, though, or take it out of his hide," declared Bill, ominously. "I say, Tom, he's a bad one, and

Mart Walters is worse. Look out for them."

"I shall, Bill, and thank you for your good wishes and help. Any time I can return the favor call on me as a real friend."

Bill Barber departed with a pleased face, and Tom was not sorry for the chance to help a fellow whom he decided had lots of good in him, if rightly encouraged.

In about half an hour a message came from headquarters. It had the "sine" of the superintendent.

"Good work," it commended. "Parties interested notified. Man on steamer fugitive forger wanted by the Government. Probably a reward case."

Tom felt that he was progressing finely in his work. So far, application and straightforward devotion to duty had enabled him to perform his duties without a censure, and to avoid snares set for his downfall.

He was glad when Ben appeared, for Tom was full of the theme of the hour, and his chum and assistant was a good listener. Something in Ben's face checked the welcome rising to Tom's lips, however, and he eyed Ben keenly.

"Something wrong," reported Ben, looking pale and breathing hard as if he had been running fast.

"Where—how?" propounded Tom quickly.

"At the farm—Harry."

"What do you mean?"

"Harry is in trouble of some kind. I hurried to tell you. Tom, Harry has disappeared."

"You don't mean for good?" exclaimed Tom seriously.

"I don't know, but he's been kidnapped."

CHAPTER XVII—UP TO MISCHIEF

"Kidnapped!" repeated Tom, quite startled.

"Yes," declared Ben. "That much is sure."

"Did you see Harry?"

"No, but others did. When I went after him your father told me that Harry

was grubbing out some brush in the old pasture lot. I went down there. The hoe he had been using was lying on the ground. His coat was hanging on the fence, but no Harry. I walked out beyond the fence to look around for him, and near the big gate was his cap, all tramped down in the mud. The ground looked as if there had been a scuffle."

"This all sounds pretty strange," commented Tom.

"I was standing wondering what next to do, when the old lady who lives near your house came over to me. She asked me whom I was looking for, and when I told her she said that about an hour before two men, strangers to her, had driven up in a covered wagon. They halted outside of the pasture lot. One of them stayed in the wagon. The other man went up to Harry and engaged him in conversation. He seemed to induce him by some argument or other to go out to the wagon. Once there, the woman said, the man tried to force Harry to go with them. He must have refused, for there was a scuffle, and the men threw Harry into the wagon and drove off with him."

"Did you tell my father?" inquired Tom, arising to his feet in a state of deep anxiety and excitement.

"I ran to a field where some men were working. They told me that your father had gone to Westport with a load of hay. Then I ran here to tell you about it."

"Ben, we must do something about this at once! You must stay here in charge."

"I will, Tom. What do you suppose those men carried Harry away for?"

"This is no time to lose in theorizing. I have my ideas, but never mind them now. I will hurry home and start a chase after him."

Tom lost no time. He gave Ben a few instructions, and then hastened homewards on a run. Within half an hour he was mounted on a horse, and following the main road west in the direction the kidnappers had taken. He had made a brief explanation to one of his father's field hands, and the man was started on horseback down the branching road.

Tom stopped at half a dozen farm houses and made inquiries, but found no one who had seen a wagon pass answering to his description. He reached in turn three small settlements, met with no success in his quest, and turned around and made for home, disappointed and concerned, but hoping that the hired man had met with better luck.

His messenger, however, had not returned, he found when he reached the farm. There was an hour of anxious waiting. Finally the man rode up.

"What news?" inquired Tom eagerly.

"I traced the wagon five miles," reported the man, "lost it at the crossroads, and couldn't get the trail again."

Tom hurried to the telephone and called up every exchange within a radius of twenty miles, explaining briefly but clearly what he wanted.

"About all you can do is to wait, Tom," said his mother, who tried to conceal her solicitude for the missing boy.

"It seems to me those men cannot get through the network of people watching out for them," spoke Tom. "I must do all I can, though, myself, for Harry."

Our hero started off again on horseback. He took another route this time. It was seven o'clock when he got back home again. No trace of the kidnappers had been reported.

Ben had locked up at the tower, and was waiting for Tom at the Barnes' home in a great state of impatience. Tom, after reporting to his mother, called his chum outside.

"Ben," he said, "I got a description of one of the men who drove the wagon, and I know who he is."

"You do?" exclaimed Ben.

"Yes—the man I told you about seeing, the day Harry was in swimming, and I discovered the tattoo marks on his shoulder."

"You don't say so!"

"I am pretty sure of it," declared Tom.

"That being true, it connects with the 'Donner' business!" cried Ben. "The sun, moon and stars message."

"Perhaps. If Harry is really the Ernest Warren they have been telegraphing about, someone was trying to find him."

"And they've done it, and gotten him!" cried Ben excitedly. "We'll never see him again, and we'll never know the mystery about him."

"You give up too easily, Ben," said Tom, and then he hastened to meet his father, who at that moment drove into the farm yard.

Mr. Barnes was a peculiar man. He was wilful and went to extremes where his likes and dislikes were involved. He had taken a great fancy to the busy, buoyant lad he had hired, and at once manifested the deepest interest in the particulars of the strange disappearance of Harry Ashley.

He turned his horses directly around and drove to the village. When he returned, he told Tom he had got a local constable to start at once and try to get some trace of the missing boy.

With that move all were forced to be content. Ben stayed at Tom's house all night, and the boys remained up late, hoping some word might come. The captors of Harry, however, seemed to have well planned their flight, for at the crossroads all trace of them had disappeared.

The next day went by with no report as to the fate of Harry. Tom and Ben took turns till late in the afternoon spelling one another in visits to the house,

anxious and eager to hear some word about their missing comrade.

"We'll just have to wait," concluded Ben, as they locked up the tower that evening. "You see——"

There Ben suddenly interrupted himself. He halted, drawing Tom also to a dead stop.

"What's the matter, Ben?" inquired Tom in some surprise.

"S—sh! Ambush."

"Don't be mysterious, Ben," began Tom.

Then, following the indication of the pointed finger of his companion, Tom became as much startled and interested as his chum.

There was a dense stretch of wild rose bushes on a sandy hill about fifty yards distant from the tower. Protruding from these, plainly visible, was a pair of human feet.

"Some one spying on us," declared Ben in a quivering whisper. The air had been so full of mystery the past few days that Ben traced its continuance in any unusual happening.

"More like a sleepy tramp," observed Tom.

"Find out, will you?"

"I intend to."

Tom picked up a heavy stick, advanced quietly to the bushes, and brought it down with a force of a policeman's club directly across the flat soles presented.

"Thunder!"

The owner of the shoes leaped to his feet with a vivid exclamation.

"Oh, it's you, Bill?" spoke Tom instantly. "What in the world have you got here?"

Peering past Bill Barber, Tom observed a double-barreled shotgun where he had been lying down. Ben looked dreadfully suspicious. Bill flushed and stammered.

"Oh, just hunting," he spoke evasively.

"In that bunch of brush?" laughed Tom.

Then, placing a rallying hand on Bill's shoulder, he added: "Out with it, Bill, what are you up to?"

Bill's lips came grimly together.

"You won't interfere with me, if I tell?"

"Why should I?"

"Well, then, I'm watching your station here."

"What for?"

"Visitors."

"Indeed?"

"Trespassers, vandals, I had better say," went on Bill. "See here, I'm laying

for somebody, partly for you, partly because I am interested myself. Tom Barnes, I want you to go straight home and leave me to my own affairs. You've got enough confidence in me to believe that I wouldn't harm you or your friends or your wireless, haven't you?"

"There's my answer," said Tom promptly.

As he spoke he extended the key to the trap door.

"No," dissented Bill, "I don't need that, but thank you just the same. The fellows I've got a tip about won't get as far as the tower."

"You won't hurt anybody, Bill?" questioned Tom gravely, with a glance at the shotgun.

"No, but I'll teach them a lesson they won't forget for a long time to come," was Bill Barber's significant reply.

CHAPTER XVIII—THE TOY BALLOONS

"There's another one—that makes six."

"Six what, Ben?"

"Balloons."

Tom walked to the window where Ben had been sitting, looked at the sky, made out a tiny blue dot sailing aerially seawards, and observed:

"Oh, you mean toy balloons?"

"Yes. There must be a picnic somewhere. Funny thing, too. I noticed they all had a card or a tag attached to the trailing strings."

"Perhaps it is some advertising stunt," suggested Tom.

He resumed the reading of a technical wireless book he had received from New York, while Ben continued idly looking from the tower window.

Affairs at Station Z had settled down to routine. They had learned no results as yet from the mysterious appearance of Bill Barber at the tower the evening before. Suddenly Ben broke out with the words:

"There comes Bill Barber, now."

Tom awaited the appearance of the former captain of the Black Caps with some curiosity. He pointed to a chair as the Barber boy came up through the trap

door.

"What's the news, Bill?" inquired Tom casually.

Bill's broad mouth expanded Into a grin. He chuckled serenely.

"Haven't heard anything about last night?"

"Not a word."

"You will if you go down Fernwood way."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, there's two fellows keeping themselves mighty scarce. When they walk they wobble, and when they talk they squabble."

"Do I happen to know the parties?" inquired Tom, but already guessing their identity.

"I reckon you do," answered Bill. "Making no bones about it, the fellows are Mart Walters and Bert Aldrich."

"I thought so," put in Ben. "They were up to tricks, were they?"

"They were up to queering you fellows," replied Bill, "and I learned of it. I knew yesterday they were coming down here after dark to wreck your wireless plant. I owed that cad, Aldrich, something, and I reckoned to pay off two scores at one and the same time. I lay in wait."

"And they showed up?" inquired the interested Ben.

"Yes, about nine o'clock. They tried to get up through the trap door, me watching them. They couldn't make it, and then they went down to the beach and got an armful of big flat stones. Aldrich was to go up that tree yonder and Mart was to pass up the stones to him. He calculated to throw through the tower windows and smash your outfit."

"I see you didn't let them, Bill," suggested Tom.

"Not I. Both barrels of the shotgun were loaded to the muzzle with pepper and salt. Just as they got under the tree I let both triggers go. It took them around the knees."

"I hope you didn't cripple them," said Tom.

"Oh, they could walk," replied Bill with a guffaw,—"just walk. I understand that Aldrich has thrown up his hands and is going to call the game closed."

"What do you mean?"

"He's going back to Boston some time between now and to-morrow night. I guess Miss Morgan has turned the cold shoulder on him. Well, he's a good one if he gets away with the eleven dollars and seventy-five cents he owes me for work on the yacht, and good hard work at that."

Bill Barber hung around for about an hour. He seemed to be glad of an excuse to visit the tower. He was mightily interested in the wireless outfit, and he seemed pleased to be in Tom's company.

"Bill is not so bad a fellow after all," remarked Ben, as their visitor departed.

"What a shame! that Aldrich, with all the money he brags about, cheating him out of his honest wages."

"I think Bill is likely to get it," said Tom. "He is a determined and a dangerous fellow, too, when he is once aroused."

"I can see that," replied Ben.

"He has proven himself a good friend to us," observed Tom.

"Grace Morgan doesn't seem to have much use for Aldrich. I suppose he'll try to break in and bid her good-by. I hear she is going away for a month or two."

"She has gone already," said Tom, with a conscious flush.

"Oh, is that so?"

"Yes, she left for Albion this morning, where her aunt resides. They take the steamer *Olivia* this evening down the coast. They are going to a Virginia Summer resort."

"You seem pretty well informed as to Miss Morgan's movements," observed Ben with a wink.

"Why, yes, I saw her last evening," replied Tom. "We are very good friends, you know, and I am naturally interested in her plans."

Tom did not tell his chum that in his breast pocket reposed a dainty little card bearing the southern address of Grace, nor that she had made him promise to write her often about the progress he made with "that delightful wireless."

"I say, there is another one of those balloons," exclaimed Ben suddenly; "a red one this time. She's lighting. No, she isn't. Yes, she is, but in the water. Tom, I'm curious about the tags all of those balloons seem to have attached to them; I'm going to make a try to get one."

Ben bolted from the tower. Tom went to the window to watch his manœuvres. Ben reached the shingly beach, and was reaching out into the water with a long tree branch, trying to hook in the now exhausted balloon without getting his feet wet.

"He's got it," tallied Tom, keeping track of his movements. "Well," he inquired a minute later, as Ben reappeared in the tower, "what does it amount to?"

"There has been some pencilled writing on the back of the tag," explained Ben, "but the water has blurred it out."

"Whose tag is it?"

"Tom," said Ben, "what do you think? It's one of your own cards!"

"Mine?" exclaimed Tom in surprise.

"Yes—look at it."

Tom took the soaked piece of cardboard. He regarded it in some wonder.

"Why, Ben," he said finally, "you are quite right. This is one of the cards I printed when I went into the amateur printing line last Summer."

"I knew I'd seen it or its like before," observed Ben.

"It's strange," ruminated Tom, turning the card over and over in his hand in a puzzled way. "Say, though," he cried with a quick start, "I gave a lot of those cards to Harry Ashley."

"When?" asked Ben.

"Last week. I was cleaning up my desk at the house, and threw away about two hundred of them as useless into the waste basket. Harry picked them up and asked for them."

"And you gave them to him?"

"That's it. He said one side was blank, and he liked to carry something with him he could scribble on when he took the fancy."

"Why, then," declared Ben, getting very much excited, "that card comes from Harry!"

"It looks that way," admitted Tom.

"Of course that is it," insisted Ben. "It's Harry who has been sending up those balloons."

"But how could he do that?"

"There's the mystery, like all the mysteries we've been running across lately," said Ben. "Don't you see, Tom, he had some writing on the back of those cards?"

"It's all washed out now."

"Yes, I see it is. See here, he is in trouble somewhere, and trying to send us word. Don't you think we had better get out and try and find some balloon that has dropped on land, or chase one and run it down?"

"Well, that might be a good way," replied Tom slowly, as though he was thinking deeply on some matter. "But perhaps we can do it easier."

"How?"

"By trying to decipher the writing on this card."

"But you can't!" exclaimed Ben half impatiently, as he held up the dripping pasteboard. "You can't read it. Try for yourself. Might as well try to read in the dark."

"I know you can't read it now," assented Tom, "for the water has about soaked off the black marks of the pencil. But there may be a way of bringing back the writing."

"How? Do you think Harry used some kind of invisible ink? I've read of prisoners sending secret messages to their friends written with some chemical that would not show unless it was heated, or something like that. Say!" he cried with sudden interest, "do you mean that way, Tom?"

"Well, no, not exactly. Harry didn't use ink. He used a common lead pencil, from all appearances, and the water has soaked the black marks off. But you know when you use a pencil on paper, it always makes little depressions in the

surface, corresponding to the shape of the letters. Did you ever put a piece of paper on top of another piece, and write on the top sheet?"

"Of course I have."

"Then you've probably noticed that on the second sheet there would be marks by which the writing could be read, even though the black pencil characters did not show."

"Of course. I see what you mean."

"I thought you would. I mean to dry out this card, and then, in a good light, we ought to be able to tell what the marks are. In that way we can decipher what Harry wrote even though the black marks are gone."

"Good! Let's do it. That's easier than chasing after a balloon. Here, I'll dry the card."

He reached for it, and approached the window on the sill of which the sun just then shone brightly.

"That's it!" cried Tom. "Meanwhile I'll get out a magnifying glass to use on the card when it's dry. With that we ought to be able to read what it says, even if the impressions are very faint."

"Say, there's class to us all right," observed Ben with a laugh. "Maybe we can get a job somewhere, reading secret messages for the government. That would be excitement, and——"

"Here's some new excitement," announced Tom, with a glance from the window.

"Wonder what's up now?" speculated Ben, as he too took a look. "It's Bill Barber come back, and he's making for here on the run."

CHAPTER XIX—A STARTLING MESSAGE

"I've come back again," announced the Barber boy, bursting upon Tom and Ben breathlessly.

"I see you have," said Tom pleasantly.

"Got something to show you. Maybe it's not important, but I thought it was, so I hurried here."

"You are doing me a lot of favors, Bill," said Tom.

"Glad to," declared Bill. "Here it is," and he extended a wrinkled-up object as he spoke.

"Why," cried Ben, peering curiously, "it's another of those toy balloons!"

"Yes," assented Bill. "They've been flying around half the morning. After I left here I ran across a crowd of youngsters chasing two sailing aloft. One of the boys had a bow and arrow, and was trying to hit one and bring it down. I'm some on shooting, and asked him for the bow. Missed the first time. Next time, though, the arrow went through the balloon, busted it, and sailed to the ground with it."

"And this is it?" questioned Tom.

"Yes. The little fellows ran after it and fought over it. I happened to see the tag, and was kind of curious about it. By the time I got it, though, the mob had trampled it in the mud, and their feet had torn away half of it. Here's what's left of it. Your name is on it, Tom, and that and the reward——"

"What reward?" inquired Ben quickly.

"It's on the back of the card," replied Bill.

"Ben," said Tom inspecting it, "this is another of my old cards."

"What's written on the back, Tom?" inquired Ben eagerly.

Tom held the card so Ben could read it as well as himself. A part of the card was gone, and some of the pencilled words it had originally contained were blurred and vague. What was left of it read:

"Take this to Tom Barnes and get ten dollars reward. Tom: I am a prisoner—two bad men—about thirty miles—in the—at—in lion's cage—*Harry Ashley*."

Tom scanned the card again and again. Ben noted his serious studious manner. Finally Tom turned to their visitor.

"Bill," he said, "you get the reward. I haven't the money with me, but any time to-morrow you call here and get it."

"Oh, I don't want any reward," declared Bill.

"You get it just the same," insisted Tom firmly.

"I'll have to be getting along," said Bill. "I'm watching that launch for Aldrich to put in an appearance. It's eleven dollars and seventy-five cents or a licking for him, I can tell you."

"I think I know where those balloons came from," said Tom to Ben, when Bill had departed.

"Where, Tom?"

"A circus."

"How so?"

"Those fragments of sentences on the card lead me to believe that the message should read about this way: 'I am a prisoner in the hands of two bad men

about thirty miles from Rockley Cove, in the circus at Wadhams, shut up in the lion's cage.'"

Ben was on his feet in a bound, his face flushed with excitement.

"I'll bet you've solved it, Tom. And there is a circus at Wadhams just now. Why, it's just the place where these toy balloons would be likely to be on sale. And the mention of a lion's cage! That fits to a circus, too! I don't understand, though, how Harry has managed to send the balloons aloft, if he was shut up somewhere prisoner."

"We won't try to guess that out now," said Tom. "Here is certainly a big clue. Harry is an ingenious fellow, and somehow has managed to float these messages. I want you to stay here alone for a spell."

"Where are you going?" inquired Ben.

"To report to my father instanter," replied Tom; and he was off speedily.

It was the middle of the afternoon before Tom returned. Ben was anxiously awaiting him.

"What's the program?" he asked eagerly.

"You are to go up to the house at once, Ben. My father has the team hitched up and is waiting for you. A hired man is going, too, and the constable. Telephone your folks from the house that you may be away till morning. When you do come back, report here right away."

"All right, Tom."

"Storm signals are out, and one of us will have to stay on duty to-night."

The sky had been overcast all the morning. Long before dusk the fore-warnings of a heavy storm were discoverable, and Tom realized an impending occasion when he was expected to exercise unusual vigilance.

At dark one of the field hands came to the tower with a warm supper sent by Tom's mother. He chatted with Tom for half an hour and left in a wild flurry of wind and rain.

By eight o'clock the full fury of the gale broke on land, already dangerous at sea, as Tom had noticed for some time previous. The wind arose to a hurricane, the rain came in sheets, and at times the thunder and lightning became terrific.

Tom was in constant readiness for service. His ear was close to the receiver. He knew from experience what these tempestuous nights meant for those at sea.

Suddenly there was a sharp series of sputtering, crackling sounds. Then the receiver gave: "y-3——y-3——y-3."

Tom thrilled. It was the first time in his experience as a wireless operator that the signal most dreaded had come into Station Z, for the quickly repeated letter and its accompanying numeral meant that some vessel at sea was in dire distress.

Tom clapped the receiver to his ear, and, even before it was in place he noted

the clicking of the diaphragm, which told that the electric current was operating through the magnets. Then came a snap, as when a central telephone operator accidently "rings the bell" into one's ear. It was as though all the powerful current had concentrated itself into the receiver.

"Great Scott!" cried Tom. "With this storm I may get a shock if I'm not careful!"

He looked to his instruments, and glanced at the connections. They seemed to be in perfect order, and he was as well safeguarded as was possible.

There was a silence, and then more of the pounding in the receiver. The lad was forced to move it away from his ear, for it nearly deafened him.

"This is fierce!" he cried, as a terrific clap of thunder, following a vivid lightning flash, seemed fairly to shake the tower.

The instrument acted incoherently for the minute succeeding, and Tom could not make out the message that was coming. He sprang to the ropes that connected a tackle with the aerials aloft and ran the netting up into tune.

"She's coming clear now," said Tom.

"Y-3, off Garvey Rocks," ran the message. "Machinery broken and drifting. Send help. Steamer *Olivia*."

Tom recoiled with a shock. The *Olivia*!! That was the steamer upon which Grace Morgan and her aunt were passengers!

CHAPTER XX—THE LAUNCH

Tom held his nerves steady, although he was somewhat shaken. His first business was to send a response to the ship in distress. He did not know what the facilities might be for receiving on board the steamer, but he followed usage. He had no means of knowing what other stations had caught the flying cry for help. The lifesaving station was twenty miles to the north. Station Z was the nearest wireless to Garvey Rocks by some thirty miles, and everything depended on him in the present crisis.

Tom ran to the window and looked out at the storm. It was truly a fearful night. The strong blast was bending the trees almost to the ground and sending the gravel scudding along the beach like hailstones.

Aloft the heavens were one constant glow of liquid fire, and the thunder crashes reverberated as in a hollow vault. The sea was lashed into a tremendous fury, the waves sweeping mountain high and breaking with a detonating roar that added to the babel of the night.

"I wish Ben was here," murmured Tom in deep concern. He could picture the disabled steamer vividly in his mind's eye, the more readily because his fond girl friend was in peril.

"Y-3"—again the call came, less distinct this time, but more frantic and urgent—"ship aleak and sinking."

"Will get help to you somehow," flashed back Tom.

He was in a tremor. Amid the strain of undue excitement Tom's thoughts ran rapidly. Only for a moment, however, did he remain inert and undecided.

"Something must be done!" he cried, in an excess of frantic anxiety and apparent helplessness. "But what? There is not a boat on the beach that could live in those waters—except the *Beulah*!"

The addendum was a shout. Tom sprang to his feet, electrically infused with a sudden suggestion.

Beulah was the name of the big pretentious gasoline launch in which Bert Aldrich had arrived in state at Rockley Cove. He had bragged mightily concerning its possibilities. Tom had seen him do things with it, too. The *Beulah* was a wonder as to speed and staunchness. A thrilling resolution fixed our hero's mind. He would arouse the people, reach Aldrich and influence him to loan the boat for an attempted rescue at sea.

Tom was down the trap ladder in one reckless slide. He ran down the shore buffeted, yet helped along by the powerful hurricane blast. Bert Aldrich was a guest at the home of Mart Walters and that was the prospective destination of the resolute young wireless operator.

Tom came in sight of the pier where the *Beulah* was moored. He could make out her outlines dimly. She was hugging the pier fitfully, tossing to and fro.

"Why," exclaimed Tom with a gasp of glad discovery, "some one is on board!"

Only for a moment to his vision, apparently inside the cabin of the restless tugging craft, a flicker of radiance showed. It suggested the lighting of a match and then its extinguishment. The indication of occupancy of the launch was enough for Tom. He diverged from the road, lined the beach, ran down the pier, and jumped aboard the *Beulah*.

Rounding the cabin Tom recoiled with a shock. Some one had leaped from the covert of a deep shadow and pinned his arms behind him.

"Got you at last, have I?" shouted a determined voice in his ears.

"Hold on," demurred Tom struggling violently.

"No, you don't! I've got you, Bert Aldrich, and we're going to have a settlement of that eleven dollars and seventy-five cents right here and now."

"I'm not Bert Aldrich! Don't you know me, Bill?"

"Tom Barnes!"

"Yes."

The Barber boy let Tom go as if he were a hot coal.

"Say, excuse me, will you?" he stammered.

"That's all right, Bill. What are you doing here in this storm?"

"Waiting. Can't you guess—waiting to nail Bert Aldrich."

"It isn't likely he will show up such a night as this."

"He's a coward, but he'd risk a good deal to get away without meeting me. And what are you doing here, Tom Barnes?"

Instantly Tom was recalled to the urgency of the moment. The discovery of Bill Barber aboard the launch suggested a change in his plans.

"Bill," he asked quickly, "do you understand running this craft?"

"Do I understand?" stormed Bill; "say, if anybody but you asked me that I'd knock him down."

"Something of an expert, are you?"

"Do you want to try me?"

"Just that, Bill," rejoined Tom seriously. "Listen."

Briefly but graphically Tom recited the cause of his visit to the launch. He had Bill literally on fire with excitement and energy by the time he had concluded.

"See here, Tom Barnes," cried Bill, "there's no time to lose!"

"That is certain, Bill."

"The steamer is in danger."

"Just as I told you."

"Off Garvey Rocks?"

"Yes."

"When we get afloat we can probably make out her lights?"

"Probably."

"You want me to help you get to the *Olivia*?"

"We've got to."

"I'm your man."

"I suppose Aldrich will resent our appropriation of his launch."

"Let him," said Bill with a laugh. "I'll take out that eleven dollars and seventy-five cents in the use of the *Beulah*. See? All aboard! Follow me!"

The Barber boy made a dash for the engine room of the launch followed by the young wireless operator.

CHAPTER XXI—BRAVING THE STORM

A violent gust of wind drove Tom up against Bill as the latter led the way through the cabin doorway. It was with difficulty that the door was forced shut after them.

"Stand still—hold on to something to steady yourself," ordered Bill. "I'll have things fixed up in a minute or two."

Tom heard his companion grope about the room. Almost instantly a match was flared and a lamp with a broad reflector illumined the place brilliantly.

"Now then!" added Bill, all vim and activity.

He threw open a locker, and from its depths he fished out two rubber coats and caps.

The two boys resembled old tars in their tarpaulin trim. The excitement of the moment was intense, but every move they made was progress, and their nerves and courage were as steady as steel.

"Can you manage the steering gear?" inquired Bill.

"I've tried it on some smaller boats than this," replied Tom.

"Well, I can do the rest—provided the storm let's us. Br—r!"

Even at anchorage the launch was swinging like an eggshell in a tempest. Bill set the lights. Then he pointed to the seat at the side of the craft next to the engine.

"She sparks automatically," he explained, touching a button, and there was a whistling whir. "You control with the lever—understand?"

"Perfectly," answered Tom.

"I can pilot anywhere inside of fifty miles," boasted Bill. "Garvey Rocks, you said?"

"Yes."

Bill took his place at the wheel. Tom released the shore tackle. Then he was down in his seat firmly planted. The *Beulah* made a leap like some marine leviathan bounding out of captivity.

Tom had never had much experience with a launch, but it was sufficient,

with Bill's constantly shouted directions, to enable him to run the engine. The thought crossed his mind that he would have the indignant ire of Bert Aldrich to face on his return. It flitted quickly as the peril of the *Olivia* and his loyal girl friend aboard of the steamer recurred to him with intensified urgency.

One plunge, obliterating all shore outlines, seemed to whirl them into a vortex of battling, unrestrained elements. The first splash of spray, dense and blinding, covered Bill like a veil. A great wave sent the craft hurtling along like an arrow. Tom realized that they were bent on a desperately dangerous venture.

"We can't line the shore; we must get out further from land," Bill shouted back.

Bill, once past danger of sandbars and breakers, had turned the course due southeast. On every calculation of knowledge of locality and distances, this it seemed would be sure to bring them in direct range of Garvey Rocks. For half an hour they drove ahead, neither speaking a word. Then Tom fixed his eye on some moving lights shorewards. They inspired a sudden thought, and setting the lever at steady speed he crept forward on hands and knees along the slippery deck.

"Bill!" he shouted hoarsely.

"Hello—what's the row?" challenged Bill, amazed that Tom had deserted his post of duty.

"Made out any lights ahead?"

"Not yet."

"Neither have I. There's some ashore, though."

"What of it?" questioned Bill.

"They are of the coaling station at Brookville. I am sure some craft is there."

"Suppose so."

"We had better advise them of our errand. It may be a big steam tug. Two are better than one, and the *Olivia* may be in a desperate fix."

"If she's really on the rocks she's stove bad long before this," was the discouraging rejoinder of Bill, sending a chill through Tom's frame.

"We could never pull the steamer off the rocks, but a larger craft might," suggested Tom.

"What are you getting at?" asked Bill.

"I think we had better make Brookville and get the boat there, whatever it is, in service."

"You're the boss, Tom," said Bill simply.

Tom made his way back to his seat. Soon the launch described a circle, which, masterly as was the manœuvre, sent the craft careening at a perilous angle. Then they headed straight for shore.

They came alongside a steam tug just through coaling at the dock at Brookville. The boat did not have steam up, and was moored safely for the night.

Men were moving about the deck with lanterns, making things trim and safe. Tom had caught a grapnel on the rail of the tug and secured it. Then he swung aboard the tug.

He ran up to a man arrayed like himself in foul weather costume, who stood steadying himself at a hawser post, and who was giving orders to the others. The man stared strangely at Tom's sudden appearance.

"Captain," shot out Tom tersely.

"That's me. Where did you come from? Oh, I see," and he caught sight of the outlines of the launch. "What's the trouble?"

Tom briefly, rapidly explained the situation. In an instant he realized that he was fortunate in finding just the kind of a man he needed. The tug captain listened to him in breathless interest. When Tom had concluded he rested his hand on his shoulder in a friendly way.

"You're a good one, lad, whoever you are," he said. "Sorry we're shut down, but we'll set about steaming up in a jiffy. Garvey Rocks, you, said?"

"Yes, sir—know them?"

"Like a book. We'll be on your trail inside of half an hour."

"It's all right!" shouted Tom, as he regained the launch. "Make straight for the steamer, now, Bill."

"No time to lose either," was the snappy response.

The fresh start gave Bill his bearings more clearly than ever.

"I can't miss it," he declared. "Speed her up, Tom."

The young wireless operator gazed anxiously and eagerly ahead as they dashed forward. No lights yet showed, but he knew that the shore line described a circular sweep just beyond Brookville. They might not be far enough out at sea yet to give them a clear view of the waters. His anxiety, however, grew to dismal forebodings as ten, fifteen, twenty minutes passed by, and the same blank unbroken blackness loomed ahead.

Suddenly Tom, who had been watching the motor, called out to his companion:

"Say, Bill, you'd better come back here a minute."

"What for? I can't leave the wheel, unless it's something important."

"Well, it's important all right. I don't like the way this machinery is acting. It doesn't seem to be sparking right, if I'm any judge."

"Great Scott! I hope nothing goes wrong in this blow. Wait a second. I'll be with you. I'll lash the wheel. I guess it will be safe for a little while to keep on a straight course."

Tom heard Bill tossing ropes about as he picked up some to lash the wheel. Then he staggered into the motor room, being tossed from side to side by the pitching of the launch.

Hardly had he reached the side of the young wireless operator, than, with a sigh and a moan—a sort of apologetic cough—the motor ceased working.

"Oh, my!" exclaimed Bill. "There she goes! I should say something *was* the matter."

"What is it?" asked Tom.

"Don't know yet. I'll have to take a look. It may be the ignition, or the carburetor, or any of half a hundred things that can happen to a gasoline motor. I'll have to take a look."

"Should I have called you sooner?" asked Tom. "It was acting queer for several minutes. First it would go fast and then slow."

"Well, I guess coming in any sooner wouldn't have done much good. I'll take a look now. You'd better help me. Get the lantern and bring it closer. We won't need any one at the wheel when we aren't moving."

The launch was now drifting about at the mercy of the wind and waves. She fairly wallowed in the water, and it was no easy task to keep one's footing, to say nothing of trying to get a balky motor back into commission. But the two set about their task bravely, while the storm raged about them.

First Bill tested the ignition system. Something was evidently wrong with that, for there came no responsive buzz in the coil when he threw the fly wheel over to make the connections.

"Maybe it's the make-and-break," he suggested. "I'll tinker with that." Which he did, tightening and loosening the spring, separating and bringing nearer the contact points. But it was useless. There was no buzz.

"Are the batteries all right?" asked Tom.

"I'll test 'em," was the laconic answer, and in a few minutes the announcement came: "They're good and strong. If I can get her to start on the batteries I can swing her over onto the magneto, and we'll be all right. But I can't get a spark."

"How about the plugs?" asked Tom.

"I'll try them next. Oh, there are plenty of things to try."

"And not much time to do 'em in," added Tom grimly, as he held the lantern where the gleam would fall best for his companion. "This is fierce, to be delayed this way when there are men and women—yes, maybe children, too—who need saving!"

"Can't help it!" cried Bill. "We're doing the best we can."

With a quick motion he unscrewed the spark plugs from the cylinder heads.

"Here's trouble already, Tom," he cried. "They're all sooted up. Now I've got to soak 'em in gasoline and——"

"Maybe there are some spare ones aboard!" suggested the young wireless operator. "Let's take a look. It's going to be hard work to clean these old ones in

this blow. Besides, I don't like the idea of fooling with gasoline in an open can, and with a lantern so close."

"Neither do I. We'll see if we can't find some extra plugs."

Together they began to rummage through the lockers of the boat. Tossed about as they were, slammed from side to side as the waves pitched the launch, they spent a hard fifteen minutes in the hunt.

"I don't believe there are any," said Bill despondently.

"Here's a box we didn't open!" cried Tom, as he saw a small one down in the bottom of a port locker. "Let's try that!"

In another instant he had the cover off. There, in the beams of the lantern, he saw the gleam of white porcelain.

"Spark plugs!" cried Tom.

"New ones!" added Bill. "This is great. Now we'll move!"

Quickly he adjusted the wires, but, before screwing the plugs in the top of the cylinders he tested them to see if there was no other break in the ignition system.

As the wheel was swung over there came a welcome buzz from the coil, and a tiny blue flame leaped from point to point of the spark plug, as it lay on top of the cylinder head.

"Hurray!" yelled Tom, above the roar of the wind.

"That's it!" shouted Bill. "Now to see what happens!"

The plugs were inserted, screwed tight, and then came the test. Steadying themselves as best they could in the rocking boat they turned the flywheel over, Tom having thrown in the battery switch.

There was the tell-tale buzz, which told of the working of the spark plug—a buzz and a hum, but there was no welcoming explosion. No hearty puff from the cylinders that indicated the gasoline mixture being set off by the spark.

"Hum!" mused Bill, as he paused to contemplate the silent motor.

"Something wrong, still?" asked Tom anxiously, gazing off across the dark expanse of water for a possible sight of a flickering light that would tell of the ill-fated *Olivia*. But he saw nothing.

"Well, we'll try once more," exclaimed Bill. "Hold the lantern closer, Tom, so I can see how the timer works."

The young wireless operator obeyed. Once more the buzz and hum told of the perfect working of the ignition system—and yet not perfect either, for the motor was still silent, and the launch was drifting about more helpless than ever.

"Suppose you try, Tom," suggested Bill. "Maybe you'll have better luck than I had."

Tom handed his companion the lantern, and grasped the wheel, for there was little use in trying the automatic starter in such a condition as was the ma-

chinery now.

But Tom had no better success, though he strained and tugged, giving the wheel many revolutions.

"Say!" suddenly exclaimed Bill. "The gasoline! Didn't we shut it off when we started to see what the trouble was?"

"We sure did," agreed Tom.

"And we didn't turn it on again, I'll wager. Look at the tank valve."

"That's right!" cried Tom. "Here she comes now."

Waiting a moment for the carburetor to fill, Bill once more swung the wheel over. They waited anxiously to see if it would continue, but with a wheeze it gave up as soon as the muscular impetus stopped.

"Carburetor troubles!" muttered Bill. "And that's the worst kind to have in a storm. Well, there's no help for it. Here goes to adjust it."

As is well known, many carburetors require a different adjustment in rainy weather than in dry. It was so in this case. Bill screwed and unscrewed the air valve and readjusted the butterfly automatic. He admitted more gasoline, then less, giving a richer and then a thinner mixture. After each adjustment he tried the motor, but it was not until after about ten trials that, when both were on the point of giving up, suddenly the motor started.

"Hurray!" cried Tom.

"It's about time," murmured Bill. "She's working better than ever now, though," he said, as he listened to the machinery. "I'll go take the wheel now. Watch her carefully, Tom," and he went to the helm again. Once more they were under way, and their anxious eyes peered through the blackness.

The storm had been bad, but now it was worse. The swift dash of the rain formed a kind of mist. Tom's heart sank as he heard Bill at the wheel utter a kind of impatient groan.

"What's amiss?" he shouted to the pilot.

"Something's wrong—no lights, and I may have missed my course. We'll have to strike shore again, Tom," said Bill.

"Can't we avoid wasting the time?" inquired Tom.

"There may be no chance for the ship to show lights," suggested Bill, in his broad blunt way. "Maybe the *Olivia* has gone down."

"Oh, surely not that!" cried Tom. "There—there!"

"Good!" chorused Bill, in a gladsome shout; "it must be the *Olivia*!"

Directly ahead, but high up in the air, a brilliant rocket had pierced the gloom of the tempestuous night.

CHAPTER XXII—THE RESCUE

Tom hailed the unmistakable signal of distress from the steamer *Olivia* with energy and hope.

"I think I understand why we saw no lights," he remarked. "The steamer must have driven into the breakers beyond what they call the North Sentinel."

"That must be it," assented Bill. "Now Tom, get to your lever."

Bill tackled the wheel with renewed vigor and Tom braced up magically. At all events, he reflected, the *Olivia* had not yet gone down. They would be in time for a rescue. The heavy wind, the pelting rain, the erratic gyrations of the launch, were as nothing to him now. The thought that he might be able to save precious human lives inspired him with courage.

A second rocket sailed through the mist-laden air a few minutes later. Bill, in high animal spirits, amid his excitement kept shouting out like a schoolboy driving a bicycle.

"Go it! Whoop-la! There's a dive for you! Beats automobiling!"

"Hurrah!" broke in Tom.

"She's there," echoed Bill.

"Yes, the *Olivia* at last," cried Tom.

Veering slightly to southeast, the launch came in sight of the bobbing ship's lights. One, a bulkhead reflector, was quite clear and guiding.

"Go cautiously now, Bill," warned our hero.

"I'll give you speed signals," responded Bill. "One—two, slow up."

"All right."

Tom knew from having visited the Garvey Rocks more than once in the past that they were nearing dangerous waters. Somehow, however, he had confidence in his pilot. Bill was daring, and more than once the keel of the *Beulah* grazed some obstruction. But Bill shouted back to Tom each time that he knew his route, and would bring about no disaster through recklessness.

They were now so near to the steamer that they could make out her situation quite clearly.

"She's stove in!" declared Bill. "Her fires are out, and there must be a leak.

Look at her now, Tom—she's rolling."

The condition of the *Olivia* was a precarious one—Tom discerned this at a glance. She had fallen over slightly on one side. The lights on deck showed a number of passengers huddled at a slanting bow, clinging to a cable which had been strung from rail to rail, to prevent them from falling or rolling when a particularly heavy billow would cause the once staunch ship to quiver and topple.

Another rocket went up. It was followed by a ringing cheer. The launch, slowing down, came directly into the strong central focus of the bulkhead reflector. Those working about the ship, clinging to this and that as they moved about, paused to stare at the staunch little craft of rescue. The passengers huddled together lost their terror and a babel of excited, hopeful, joyous voices sounded out.

"Oh Tom!—Tom!"

The young wireless operator thrilled with an emotion he could not analyze. In an instant he recognized the voice of Grace Morgan. Could she have been thinking of him, that the recognition was so prompt; or, despite his unusual garb and the clumsy oilcloth cap, did the powerful reflector glow bring out his features in strong relief?

"Ease her!" shouted Bill, and his very soul seemed centered in working the wheel to prevent both collision and retreat.

"Throw them a cable!" roared the trumpet tones of the captain of the steamer.

Tom caught the coiling end of the rope and secured it, allowing a play of a few feet between the two craft.

"Drop the ladder!" came the next order.

"The women first!" shouted one of the steamer officers. "Get back, there!"

There was light enough for Tom to see a portly, fussy old man press close to the rail, vehemently shouting out that he would sue the steamship company if they did not instantly get him to dry land. He uttered a howl of despair as he was ignominiously bundled out of the way.

"I can't—I won't, I shall faint!" shrieked a rasping feminine voice, as a staunch sailor was compelled to carry her down the swaying ladder.

She wriggled like an eel as Tom grabbed her and forced her into the cabin of the launch, going instantly into hysterics as she landed on a cushioned seat.

"There are only eight of the ladies," called down the captain.

"Hold tight, Aunt Bertha," Tom heard a familiar voice speak steadily.

"Oh, dear, I know I shall fall and be drowned!" wailed the second of the rescued passengers, whom Tom was sure must be the aunt in whose charge Grace had started on the present unlucky voyage.

"We won't let you, ma'am," assured the sailor at the rail. "Be speedy now.

[image]

"YOU BRAVE GIRL!" CRIED TOM IRRESISTIBLY.

There's more to follow."

The descent of seven of the ladies was accomplished. Tom had not caught a murmur of protest or fear from the plucky little maiden who had waited her turn till the last.

A shriek loud and ringing went up from the seventh lady, for just as Tom seized her both of them were nearly hurled into the water. A fearful gust of wind had driven the launch with a crash against the hull of the steamer. The same terrific force gave the steamer a lurch, and she threatened to turn turtle. As she righted, although the ladder was flopping about like a whiplash, Grace sprang past the sailor at the rail, slid one-half the length of the ladder, was swung out, and just caught in Tom's arms as the captain of the steamer roared out in thunder tones:

"Slip the cable, you lubber, or the launch will be crushed!"

"You brave girl!" cried Tom irresistibly.

"Oh, Tom, can I help?" inquired Grace.

"Yes, quiet those in the cabin."

Bill sounded the bell at the wheel and Tom with lightning speed made a dash for the lever. He reversed just as the giant hull of the steamer flung down with crushing force.

"Fire! murder! help! police!" yelled the frantic fat old man on deck, as his fond hopes vanished with the receding launch.

"Stand by!" shouted the captain of the steamer to Tom. "There's a dozen passengers left yet."

"There's room with crowding, if you can get them aboard," reported Tom.

"Life preservers, all!" roared the captain. "One more lurch like that, and she'll split in two! Lower the men passengers."

"No need," shouted back Tom just then, as a dazzling light rounded the North Sentinel.

"The steam tug!" cried Bill.

"That will serve us. We're all right now," declared the captain. "Get the women passengers ashore."

With a yell just then a great bulky form came shooting over the side of the steamer. It was the fussy old man. Tom barely managed to grasp something floating behind him, or the suction of the passing tug would have drawn him

under the swiftly revolving steam screw.

"I'm drowned! I'm dead!" bawled the man, half choked with salt water, as Tom pulled him to the deck of the launch, to find that as many as six life preservers encumbered his bulky form.

The steam tug had approached the *Olivia*, running her length as if to discover the real merits of her situation. Preparing to start the launch into the open sea away from the rocks and then to run direct for Brookville, Tom and Bill for a moment were awed into inactivity as a great shout went up.

The steamer again lurched to one side. A loud crash sounded above the howling gale, and the *Olivia* lay a shattered wreck on the rocks.

CHAPTER XXIII—"EVERY INCH A MAN"

"She's a-goner!" shouted Bill, at the wheel.

"Steady!" cried Tom, at the lever.

The sounds of excitement and alarm among the passengers still aboard the *Olivia* and her crew told of a state of new distress and terror. The launch, now at a safe distance from either tug or steamer, was instantly put about.

"She can't hold many more," declared Bill.

"We can't see those people drown," responded Tom, and shut off the power, while Bill tried to hold the launch steady.

Tom got a boathook and stood braced against the cabin, ready to give assistance to any of three or four men he had seen leap overboard immediately after the *Olivia* had scuttled. His services were required, however, only in the case of one who was driven by a wave directly up to the launch. The others managed to swim to the steam tug, and were lifted aboard readily by the crew over its low sides.

The captain of the *Olivia* shouted out some quick orders. A cable came whirling across the deck of the tug. It was caught fast at both ends, a pulleyed davit was rigged, and the remaining passengers of the steamer slid along this. When the captain came last, Tom knew that the steamer had been abandoned to her fate.

"It's all right," he called to Bill.

"Nobody lost?"

"I think not."

"Then it's Brookville for us."

"Yes, quick as you can make it, Bill."

The storm had somewhat subsided. The *Beulah* struck a straight course shorewards. Tom, glancing through the cabin window, observed that the lady passengers grouped there seemed quieted down and coherent.

The bulky man passenger with the life preservers had crawled to the shelter of the stern platform, and, wedging himself in between two rods, only occasionally shouted out some mad threat of a suit against the steamship company.

The dock at Brookville was crowded by residents of the little town as the *Beulah* drove into comparatively smooth water in the coaling slip. Men with lanterns, and some women too, had braved the rain and wind, alarmed, and anxious to be helpful when the rumor had spread that a steamer was aground on Garvey Rocks.

Tom expressed a great sigh of relief as willing hands caught the cable he threw to the dock. He shut off the power, and as he passed Bill, grim and business-like at his post of duty, he bestowed a hearty smack between the shoulders.

"Good boy!" he cried exuberantly.

Bill chuckled.

"Mean that?" he propounded.

"I certainly do."

"Some good, then, ain't I?"

"Bill Barber," cried Tom with genuine feeling, "you're pure gold all through, and every inch a man!"

The Barber boy thrust out his rough paw of a hand to grasp that of his comrade in a hearty grip.

"Tom Barnes," he said, choking up, and yet with the echo of a glad cheer in his tones, "I'd rather hear you say that than—than—yes, than even get that eleven dollars and seventy-five cents Bert Aldrich owes me."

The door of the cabin opened, and Grace Morgan stood on its threshold.

"Have we landed, Tom?" she asked.

"Yes, Grace, safe and sound."

"Oh, how glad Aunt Bertha will be! What are we to do now, Tom?"

"You are to be taken in charge by a lot of kind people, it looks to me," responded Tom.

"I will find out their plans, and let you know at once. Tell the ladies there is no need of their coming out in the rain until arrangements are made for their comfort."

Tom clambered up to the dock. He had to answer a dozen questions in one breath for as many excited persons eager for news.

Tom allayed the general suspense by expressing the conviction that all hands had been saved from the wreck. Then he gave full attention to a big man in a raincoat who seemed to be the spokesman of the community.

"Get the ladies to shelter," this individual ordered those at his side. "We can find room for a couple of them up at our house."

"I'll go and get the covered 'bus," suggested one of his assistants.

"A good idea."

In two minutes' time the proffers of shelter exceeded the demand of the occasion.

A fog whistle in the distance out at sea came floating in on the strong breeze.

"That is the steam tug with the other passengers aboard," said the big man.

"Yes, sir," responded Tom.

"How many, do you think?"

"Perhaps fifteen or twenty."

"They must be provided for," said the man. "There's the hotel. It's old and rickety and don't accommodate half a dozen comfortably; but it'll give them a roof, some kind of a shakedown, and a warm meal to brace them up."

"How much the cost?" broke in a sudden voice, and the fat man with the life preservers trundled into view.

"How much for what?" demanded the other, staring in astonishment at the odd figure the stout passenger made with his armor of cork life preservers.

"For lodging and meals. I won't pay much. Look at my clothes! All soaked,—and what of my baggage back on that pesky steamer? I won't be robbed! I'll sue everybody! I shan't pay a cent!"

"You won't have to," assured the man. "The hospitality of this town comes free, gratis, for nothing, on such an occasion as this."

Tom told Bill of the arrangements in order, and then reported to Grace. He had never admired the little lady as much as now, as he noted her kindly soothing treatment of her nervously-unstrung aunt, her pretty obliging ways in seeing to the care of an old lady with a crutch and a young woman with a frightened child in her arms, as the 'bus drove up.

"Aunt Bertha is dreadfully nervous," she said to Tom. "She says she will abandon the trip entirely now, will never venture on the water again, and wants to get to Fernwood right away, for she knows she is going to be ill."

"It is quite a trip to your home from here, Grace," explained Tom. "I might get a vehicle somewhere, but the roads must be almost impassable in places, and the storm isn't over yet. If I were you, I would try and induce your aunt to remain

at Brookville till morning. I know you will both be taken care of by these good people."

"I will try and console her to your opinion," responded Grace. She gave him a bright look. "Oh, Tom," she cried, bursting girl-like into tears of mingled pride and joy, "you have acted just—splendid!"

She seized both his hands in her own and smiled in grateful friendship at him, as he helped her into the 'bus. Just then those on the dock broke out into ringing cheers.

"The steam tug!" said Tom, noticing the craft approach.

There was the excitement of a new landing, eager questioning, rapid explanations; and Bill, who had left the launch and mingled with the crowd, approached Tom, smiling with good nature, his hands in his pockets, a certain element of pride and exaltation in his stride.

"Not a person lost," he reported in glad tones.

"The captain of the *Olivia* is looking for you, and——"

"That's the lad," sounded the voice of the tug captain, and the man with him who wore a cap with an official band of gold braid around it, seized Tom as if he feared he might run away from him.

"I want you," he said, his hearty grip catching Tom's arm. "Hey, where's that hotel you're going to stow us in?" he hailed to a villager.

"I'll pilot you there," was the prompt reply, and passengers and crew of the *Olivia* followed the speaker from the dock over to an old dilapidated building that had been in its palmy days the hotel of the place.

It was well lighted up, and warmed by two red hot iron stoves. It had an immense dining room, and into this the crowd was ushered, and gathered shiveringly about the great heater in the center of the room. Adjoining it was a small apartment which at one time had been an office. It had a light on a table and some chairs.

"Sit down," said the steamer captain. "My friend," he added, taking out a memorandum book and a pencil, "do you realize what you have done for my passengers and crew to-night?"

"How about my comrade, plucky Bill Barber?" inquired Tom, trying to evade the direct compliment.

"We'll come to him in the final settlement, don't fret about that," observed the captain definitely. "You got the message, you started the grand old ball rolling that saved twenty lives!" exclaimed the excited captain. "So the tug officer tells me. Now, then, a few questions. Name?"

Tom gave it, and replied in detail to other inquiries of his companion. In fact, before the captain had concluded the inquisition he had gathered from Tom and jotted down the main facts of a pretty circumstantial account of the start and

finish of the rescue.

"I shall telegraph the outlines of the case at once to headquarters," said the steamer captain. "I shall follow it up with the written report of your share in the affair. You will hear from the company in a very substantial way, count on that, young man. Wait here a few minutes."

The speaker left Tom and went into the big room beyond where the rescued male passengers and crew of the *Olivia* were gathered. He closed the door after him, but Tom caught the echo of many voices in animated discussion. He even made out the cackling, complaining tones of the man with the life preservers.

When the captain came out he placed in Tom's hands a roll of banknotes.

"Hold on——" began Tom.

"No, you do the holding on, young man," interrupted the captain cheerfully. "That's a little heart-to-heart acknowledgment from the crowd in there, who wanted to cheer you, but they might scare the natives. Oh, by the way—I came near cheating you. Here's a part of the contribution."

The speaker burst into a rollicking roar of laughter as he placed in Tom's hand a nickel. Tom smiled inquiringly.

"From the old fat fellow with the life preservers," explained the captain.

"Oh," said Tom, amused, "I understand."

"Good-by, Barnes," said the captain, grasping Tom's hand till he winced. "I wish I had a boy like you."

"You will thank those gentlemen for their kindness?" asked Tom.

"Oh, they're the grateful ones," declared the captain of the *Olivia*. "I say, Barnes," he shouted, after waving adieu to Tom from the door of the hotel, "look out for that nickel. It may be real."

Tom hurried to the dock. He found Bill getting the launch ready for the return trip. The storm had almost passed over by this time.

"Is it home, Tom?" inquired Bill.

"Right away," assented the young wireless operator, "and the sooner the better. I have some work at the tower before me."

"They are going to start back with the tug for Garvey rocks, I heard them say," remarked Bill, as the *Beulah* got under way. "They may be able to do something with her, at least save something."

Tom did not talk much on the journey back to the pier. His mind and his heart were both full. He had so much to commend his loyal comrade for, that he did not wish to spoil it by not choosing just the right time, and saying just the right words to impress Bill with a sense of his unaffected worthiness.

Bill insisted on taking him clear down to Sandy Point. When Tom landed, he remarked:

"If you're not going home, Bill, I'd like to see you at the station for a little

while."

"Oh, I'm not going home," responded the Barber boy. "There's that eleven dollars and seventy-five cents to get from that measly cad, Bert Aldrich, you know; and I'm going to stick till I catch him."

"Forget that, Bill," advised Tom. "We have about taken out that eleven dollars and seventy-five cents in use of the *Beulah*. You come down to the tower, as I say. I've got something better than eleven dollars and seventy-five cents to interest you in."

"Have?" propounded Bill, in his rough blunt way. "What is it, now?"

"You come and see."

"All right."

"That fellow has a grand streak in him," ruminated Tom, as the *Beulah* sped on its course and he made for the station. "He doesn't seem to have the least conception of his heroic bravery, and never thinks of reward. I'll give him a surprise."

Tom set at work the minute he reached the tower. He sent messages to the life-saving station, briefly detailing the event of the night, and a routine report to headquarters. Then he took out the roll of bills the captain of the *Olivia* had given him.

"One hundred and ninety dollars," counted Tom,—"and five cents. There, that's Bill's share," and he set aside one hundred dollars. "The nickel we'll nail up on the wall."

"Why, what's all that money?" inquired the Barber boy, when he came into the tower an hour later.

"This little heap," replied Tom, placing in Bill's lap a pile of banknotes, "is yours."

"Mine?" exclaimed Bill in a gasp, staring at the money in wonder.

"Yours—one hundred dollars! It is your share of a testimonial given us by the passengers and crew of the *Olivia*," and Tom explained the incident of his interview with the steamer captain at the Brookville hotel.

A pathetic look came into Bill Barber's eyes. He looked at the money and gasped. He glanced up at Tom and his lips twitched.

"One hundred dollars!" he said slowly, impressively; "a whole one hundred dollars, and mine! I can get a new suit—why, Tom, I can buy a bulldog now, a real bulldog. Oh, crackey!"

Bill looked again at Tom. His tone changed, a queer longing expression came into his face. His voice broke.

"Tom Barnes," he said huskily, "it's a heap of a fortune to me, but, more than the money is what you said to-night—that I was pure gold, that I was—was every inch a man! Tom, it's too much—oh, it, it's all come on me like a burst of

glory!"

And Bill Barber broke down utterly, and bawled like a baby.

CHAPTER XXIV—THE KIDNAPPED BOY

"Well, I see you have made it, Tom?"

"Made what, Dr. Burr?"

"A brave record. I compliment you on it, my boy. You deserve all they say about you."

"I don't understand what you are talking about, doctor."

"That will tell you, then," and with a friendly smile the Rockley Cove physician pressed upon Tom a newspaper he had been carrying when he met his young friend.

Tom was in a great hurry. He told the doctor so and hastened homewards. It was the morning after the rescue of those aboard the *Olivia.* Tom had remained on duty at Station Z all night, and Bill Barber had insisted on keeping him company.

There had been little of real business to attend to, but Tom had concluded it was the right time to look out for disasters, as witness the lucky reception of the wireless from the ill-fated *Olivia.*

Bill had relieved Tom in watching and sleeping, and Tom had dozed enough to keep him from feeling done out, despite the rigorous experience of the early evening hours.

Just an hour previous Ben Dixon had put in a dejected and disconsolate appearance at the tower. The minute Tom caught sight of his face he knew that his chum had failed in his search for the missing Harry Ashley.

"No use, Tom," was Ben's blunt report. "Your father and I reached Wadhams and visited the circus, but we were too late."

"How too late, Ben?" inquired Tom.

"Harry was gone."

"Then he had been there?"

"We found that out all right. Twelve hours earlier, and we would have

reached him. There were two kidnappers, all right, and one of them answered the description of the fellow you noticed spying on Harry the day he was in swimming with the boys."

"Were they holding Harry a prisoner?"

"A safe and sound one. The men had been circus peddlers once. They took Harry to an open, roofless canvas where a lot of truck was stored. It seems that an old friend of theirs had charge of it. From all your father could get this man to say, Brady and Casey—those are the names of Tom's kidnappers—made him believe he was a bad runaway boy they were authorized and paid for to return to his friends. I don't believe that myself. I think the three men were in cahoots, and that the circus tender was in on the scheme, whatever it is. Anyhow, in the roofless tent was a lion's cage. Its occupant had died a few days before Harry's arrival. It was a safe place to shut the lad in, and they did it. They sort of partitioned the cage off by itself, and kept close watch on Harry, so he wouldn't raise a rumpus. Brady was away for two days, I found out, so their plot was working."

"And what about the toy balloons?" inquired Tom.

"Why, the way I got it was that one of the circus peddlers who had a lot of them for sale, kept his surplus stock in the storage tent. In some way Harry must have been struck with the idea of using them as messengers to tell of his captivity. Anyhow, he managed to reach them with a stick or string, or in some ingenious way, and had all night to equip them with the cards. Brady and Casey let Harry out of the cage, and took him away in an automobile night before last."

"You couldn't find out their destination?"

"The circus keeper declared that he didn't know. Your father inquired around of others, though, and from what he heard he thinks they were headed for Springville. We weren't sure. We decided that Harry would be kept in closer hiding than ever, and we sort of got discouraged and gave it up."

"I won't give it up!" cried Tom, his eyes snapping; and preparing to leave the tower at once. "I'll find the man I saw at the river if I have to chase him all over the state."

"Well, you see, you'd know him by sight, and we wouldn't," submitted Ben.

"I feel it my duty to do all I can to find Harry," proceeded Tom. "At any rate, I am going to try. You stay on duty at the station, Ben. It simply isn't in me to remain quiet where we don't know what fate may threaten that poor boy."

Now, after leaving the tower, Tom had met Dr. Burr, and hurried homewards. He took a look at the newspaper the physician had given him. Its heading told that it was a daily print from a nearby city, received at Rockley Cove by a few residents early in the morning.

Tom, as has been said, was in urgent haste, but one glance at the printed sheet halted him as suddenly as if it had been a warrant presented unexpectedly

by an officer of the law.

In glaring headlines the feature of the news of the day, the rescue of the passengers of the *Olivia*, was indicated. In bold, broad type his name stood out as the hero of a grand occasion. Tom's eye lit up as in the same glaring type he read also the name of his loyal adherent, Bill Barber. It was "William Barber," the dignified way the paper put it, and Tom was unutterably glad.

He merely skimmed the three columns of details that followed. Then he crumpled up the paper and started on a run for home with the breathless exclamation:

"It's wonderful!"

Tom did not mean that the chronicled rescue was wonderful. He was too modest for that. What stirred and startled him were the remarkable evidences of journalistic ability displayed by the newspaper. He decided that after he and Bill had left Brookville the captain of the Olivia must have got in immediate connection with New York and other places by telegraph.

"He must have had a busy time of it, giving all those details," ruminated Tom. "They have made a big thing of it, sure enough. Well, it will please father and mother, and as for myself—I hope I deserve all they say about me."

Tom reached the house to find that the news of his part in the rescue of the *Olivia* had preceded him. When the newspaper was discovered, every member of the family, even the hired men, crowded about to stare in wonder at the printed page over the shoulder of Ted Barnes, who began to read in a tragic, breathless tone.

Mr. Barnes looked considerably stirred up, and there was a new respect for the "new-fangled" wireless in his mind, Tom felt certain. His mother tremulously clung close to him as she asked solicitous questions, to be sure that he had not suffered in limb or health from his hard battle with the waves.

As soon as things had quieted down somewhat, Tom took his father aside. He told his parents of his resolve to go in search of Harry Ashley, and his father encouraged him.

A hired man was to drive our hero over to Wadhams in the farm gig. Tom reached that town about noon. He went at once to the circus, to find it in confusion. They were dismantling the show to exhibit in another town, and the man who knew Brady and Casey had gone forward with the first contingent.

About to follow, Tom paused. A sudden thought came to his mind. The two kidnappers had left Wadhams with Harry in an automobile. It was scarcely probable that the machine was their own.

"They must have borrowed or hired it," reflected Tom, "most likely the latter. It's worth while trying to find out."

Tom made due inquiries in regard to the location of public livery garages

in the town. There were three, he ascertained, and he started in to visit them in turn.

At the first garage he received no encouragement; at the second one the result was more satisfactory. The call book of the garage showed that a machine had been sent to the circus two nights before, and had made a run to Springville.

"That's the one," decided Harry; and questioning the garage owner, he was soon in touch with the chauffeur who had made the run.

"I'm the man, and that's the bunch," declared the chauffeur, as soon as Tom had told the object of his mission.

"Where did you take them?" inquired Tom—"I mean where in Springville?"

"To the edge of a little city park," replied the chauffeur. "They made me stop there to hide all later trace, I surmised; but it was none of my business as long as I got my pay."

"Didn't you notice the boy they had with them?"

"I did," answered the chauffeur. "He was quite stupid like, as if he'd been doped. I suspected things weren't all straight and regular, but the man I heard called Brady kept telling me he was a runaway lad who had made all kinds of trouble and disgrace for his people."

Tom thanked the man for the information he had imparted, and at once took the trolley for Springville, which was about twenty miles distant. When he arrived he had no definite plan of action outside of going straight to the local police in an effort to interest them in his story.

"I'll look around a bit first, though," Tom decided. "I may accidentally run across some hint or clew that may help me."

Tom strolled about the place, his eye on the alert. He had a faithful mental picture of the ill-favored fellow he had caught spying on Harry Ashley at Rockley Cove, and was sure he would recognize the rascal on sight.

He put in two hours in a stroll into such parts of the city which he fancied a man like Brady would choose in seeking a refuge. He chased down two or three persons a view of whose backs suggested the man for whom he was looking. He had paused at a street corner as a great jangling of bells and the shouts and hurryings of the crowds suggested some pending excitement.

"It's a fire," someone shouted, and pointed at dense volumes of smoke a few blocks away.

Tom started to cross the street in that direction.

Just ahead of him he casually noticed the hurrying figure of a bulky clumsy-limbed man carrying a big, old-fashioned carpet bag.

"Hi! Out of the way, there!" shouted a sharp warning voice, as a fire engine turned the corner suddenly, bearing directly down upon the awkward pedestrian.

The man got flustered and made a forward spring. The satchel he carried

slipped from his grasp. He ran back to rescue it.

The ponderous rushing fire vehicle was fairly upon him. Tom instantly saw his peril. There was only one thing to do, and our hero did it promptly and effectively.

Making a forward dash at top speed, Tom fairly bunted into the stooping man. With all his force he struck him, sending him sliding head over heels into the gutter.

The feet of one of the horses attached to the fire engine just grazed Tom's heel, and, striking the carpet bag, lifted it ten feet in the air. It landed at the curb broken open, its contents scattering far and wide.

Tom slid against the prostrate owner of the satchel, picked himself up, and turned to ascertain the possible injuries of the man whose life he had certainly saved.

There was, however, no gratified expression in the face of the man. In utter concern and disgust he stared at his scattered possessions, wildly threw up his hands in a frantic despairing gesture, and bolted out the echoing word:

"Donner! Donner!"

CHAPTER XXV—TOM ON THE TRAIL—CONCLUSION

"Donneer! Donner!"

At the mention of that startling word, Tom Barnes was instantly convinced that he had made a great discovery; in fact, he was satisfied that he had at last discovered one of the "spooks" of Station Z.

Donner had been a mystery. The owner of the satchel was quite mysterious in appearance. As Tom tried to help him to his feet, he noticed that the man wore a wig and enormous whiskers. They were false, for the fall had sent them quite awry.

"Donner," Tom had learned, was quite a common word in Germany. It was equivalent to our own "Thunder!" Tom, however, had never heard the word used outside of his wireless experience. To hear it used now by a suspicious individual in the very city where Harry Ashley was supposed to be, suggested

strangely to Tom that the odd individual before him might be the erratic amateur operator, who had been sending out messages referring to a runaway boy, one Ernest Warren, with "sun, moon and stars tattooed on his left shoulder."

"Are you hurt, sir?" inquired Tom.

The man who had so narrowly escaped destruction seemed to be more frightened than grateful. He hurriedly adjusted his facial disguise and looked about him to see if he was especially observed. Then he shouted hoarsely, with a despairing look at the scattered contents of the satchel:

"My baggage—quick, get it!"

Tom hurriedly collected the articles. He was amazed at their oddness and variety. There were one or two articles of clothing, and besides these, two old-fashioned horse pistols, an ancient dirk, four or five wigs, and as many false beards and moustaches. The odd collection suggested an actor with a limited stage outfit.

The minute Tom handed the satchel to the man with its contents restored, the latter made a wild dash down the street. Tom was bound that he would not lose sight of him, and followed fast on his heels.

He came upon the fugitive posted in a doorway and anxiously gazing beyond its shadows along the street. Tom paused near to him.

"Can I be of any use to you, sir?" he asked, eager to keep up an acquaintance he felt sure would lead to some definite results.

"Is anyone following me or watching me?" inquired the man breathlessly.

"Not at all," responded Tom reassuringly. "Everybody is running to the fire."

"Ah, that is good, most good!" exclaimed the man in a relieved tone. "The troubles—all at once. I am all turned around. You are a good honest boy," he added, scanning Tom critically. "You would not bring troubles to a poor old man?"

"Not I," declared Tom.

"You would help him?"

"I would be glad to," said Tom, delighted at getting more closely into the confidence of his companion.

"Then you shall earn a dollar. See, I am a stranger in the city. You must direct me—to that address."

The speaker fumbled in a pocket and produced a card which he handed to Tom. It bore an address, and below it the words: "Go to section 4. Wait for Brady."

"What luck!" breathed Tom ardently. "This man is certainly the mysterious operator, and he is going to see one of the men who kidnapped Harry Ashley."

It took about twenty minutes to reach the address indicated on the card. Tom pointed out the restaurant to his companion, who gave him a dollar bill. Then with a brusque nod and a searching glance all about him, he entered the

restaurant.

Tom crossed the street and reached a sheltering doorway. His eyes were fixed on the restaurant. What should he do next? He had almost decided to recross the street, enter the place and attempt to get nearer to the object of his interest, when a man came around the corner.

"It's Brady—it is the man I saw at Rockley Cove," declared Tom.

Brady wore a hat pulled well down over his face. His manner was hurried and furtive, like that of a person suspicious of every passer-by. He bolted quickly into the restaurant.

"I must do something now—something worth while," breathed Tom hurriedly. "There can be no doubt in the world that those two men have met here to do something about Harry. They may go away by some other exit. I'll do it."

These last words announced a definite decision on the part of Tom, as his eye fell upon a policeman in uniform standing at the nearest street corner. Tom approached him, full of his plan.

"Officer," he said politely, "do you ever arrest a person without a warrant?"

"I'd arrest me own brother on suspicions if he deserved it," announced the man in uniform bluntly.

"I am in trouble," said Tom rapidly, "and I wish you would help me."

"Spake out, me lad," directed the big bustling officer.

"A friend of mine, a boy, has been kidnapped. One of the men who carried him away is in that restaurant yonder. If you will only take him and the man with him to the police station, I am sure I can convince you that they both deserve arrest."

Tom briefly narrated the story of the kidnapping.

"Come on, me lad," ordered the policeman. "It's a case for the captain. Sure I'll take them in the act. This'll get in the newspapers, and Officer Lahey's name along with it. Show me the rascals, me young friend, and I'll do the rest."

Tom entered the restaurant, the officer following him. At one side of the place there were half a dozen partitioned-off compartments. As they neared the fourth one of the tier Tom heard the man he had brought there speak out:

"I will only pay the five hundred, as I promised."

"It's five thousand, or you never see the boy again."

"I arrest both of yez!" here announced the policeman, stalking into the compartment, and placing a hand on the shoulder of each of the two men, who arose in alarm to their feet.

"What's this?" snapped out Brady.

"Resisting an officer of the law, are yez?" shouted the policeman, as Brady tried to escape his clutch, and he shaking the culprit till his teeth chattered,

"Donner! I am lost!" gasped the other prisoner.

"I say——" protested Brady anew.

"Shut up!" ordered the policeman. "You'll have a chance to explain to the captain at headquarters."

"Aha!" hissed Brady, as, pulled out into the main room, he for the first time observed Tom. Evidently he recognized him, for a sullen, surly look came into his crafty face.

At the door of the restaurant the policeman paused.

"Go to the second corner, lad," he directed Tom, "and tell officer Moore his partner needs his assistance."

Tom did as directed, and five minutes later the prisoners were led down the street, each in the charge of a stalwart guardian of the law.

When the party reached the station, the first policeman beckoned to Tom and led him to the office of the police captain. Tom told his story in a simple direct way. The captain came out and looked first at the grotesque figure and affrighted face of the big man, and then at Brady.

"Ah, it's you, is it?" exclaimed the police official, with a start of recognition. "Circus Jake."

"I think you are mistaken," muttered Brady, in a surly tone.

"Oh, no, I'm not. If you think so, I'll just send for your picture from the Rogues' Gallery, and go over a few records. Lahey, keep your eye close on this fellow till I need him. You two come with me."

The speaker led Tom and the man with the big satchel into his private office, and beckoned both of them to seats after closing the door.

"Now then, young man," he directed Tom, "tell your story before this man."

Tom began at the commencement of the Donner incident, and followed it up to its present climax. All through the recital, as reference was made to Harry Ashley, the old man started, ejaculated, grimaced and groaned.

"Ah, he was not Harry Ashley, he was Ernest Warren, the son of my benefactor, my friend! Did he ever say that I, Blennerhassett, abused him?"

"He never said anything about you, for we did not know that he was Ernest Warren," explained Tom.

"Now, then, for your story, Mr. Blennerhassett, if that is your name," spoke the police captain.

The old man looked flustered and frightened. He cast an apprehensive glance out at the street, an appealing one at the captain.

"The Czar of Russia shall not be told?" he at length articulated.

"The Czar of Russia?" repeated the official, with a mystified stare. "What has he got to do with it?"

"Everything," declared Blennerhassett, with a groan. "You will not advise the spies of foreign governments?" he persisted, very seriously.

The captain evidently concluded that he was dealing with a lunatic, for he said indulgently:

"Surely not."

"And no notoriety in the newspapers, so that I might be trailed down by assassins?"

"Not a word, provided you tell the truth."

The old man began his story, which was an interesting one. It seemed he had been a Russian spy, and a price was set on his head. A fugitive, he chanced to meet in Germany the father of Ernest Warren. The latter was very kind to him. Mr. Warren was a civil engineer engaged on some large public work. He took sick and died. He had learned to trust Blennerhassett as a loyal friend, and had given him all his money with directions to repair to the United States and take personal charge of Ernest.

The latter, it seemed, was one of the heirs to an estate in litigation. It was to the interest of others after the fortune to have him disappear. Not only to protect Ernest, but also because he was fearful the Russian government might hunt him down personally, Blennerhassett had made his new home in an isolated old house about fifty miles up the coast from Rockley Cove.

He never explained to Ernest the cause of this seclusion and mystery. The lad had rebelled against such a solitary life, had run away after accidentally destroying five hundred dollars by fire, and Blennerhassett, not daring to come out openly, had surreptitiously visited a nearby wireless station when its operator was absent, and under cover had tried to communicate with the outside world.

He had incidentally come across Brady, and had started him on a search for the runaway, promising a five hundred dollar reward for finding him. The day before the present one a demand had come from Brady for five thousand dollars to be brought to Springville at once, or the boy would never be returned.

"The five hundred dollars Ernest burned up was his own money," explained Blennerhassett. "I love him as my own son. All I ask is that I find him."

The police captain opened the door of his office and called out into the station main room.

"Bring that man in here," he directed; and Brady slouched into the private office.

"Now then," said the captain, "short and sweet's the word for you. Think we don't know you, eh? I suppose you're not the man who advertised a set of parlor furniture by mail for fifty cents, and a yard of silk for a quarter, and a plan to save your gas bills for a dollar, and how to kill cockroaches for a dime?"

"That's old," growled the discomfited Brady.

"Why," explained the police official, "he sent a toy set of furniture to investors, and a yard of sewing silk, told them to save their gas bills on a file, and

advised them to get a board and a club and whack the roaches. Now, sharp and brisk. You've kidnapped this man's charge. I'll send two officers with you to your partner to give him up. Produce him, and you go free. Otherwise I'll telegraph all over the country to find out your latest schemes, and lock you up for abduction and extortion in the meanwhile."

"I've done my work for this old man," blurted out Brady.

"Yes," assented Blennerhassett, "and the price was to be five hundred dollars, not five thousand dollars. I'll pay the five hundred."

"All right," muttered Brady, "I'll give in."

"And I'll go with him to see that the boy is all right," said Blennerhassett.

Brady was released later, for the old man returned to the police station within an hour. Harry Ashley, or Ernest Warren, as his real name was, came in his company.

There was a joyful meeting between Tom and his friend. It was made still more happy when Ernest was informed that the estate in which he was interested had been settled, and his share was some twenty thousand dollars.

The guardian and his ward accompanied Tom back to Rockley Cove as guests at the Barnes homestead. Tom at once repaired to the wireless station. He put his excitable chum in transports of delight when he announced the success of his search for the stolen Harry Ashley.

"Had some visitors here this afternoon," announced Ben. "Mart Walters and young Aldrich came along. Aldrich was hot and furious to know if you had used his launch. Just as I explained to them that you had, and thereby saved Grace Morgan's life, and they toned down a little, along came Grace herself. She overheard their squabbling, and turned her back on them and wouldn't speak to them. They sneaked away."

"Oh, Grace was here?" said Tom, trying to look only ordinarily interested.

"She was," replied Ben sprightly, "and spent a pleasant hour. She made me tell her all about the way we telegraph. She even made me teach her certain dots and dashes. Hello! why, there's a call from my home wireless outfit."

The receiver began to buzz and click. Tom looked suspiciously at his comrade.

"T-o-m B-a-r-n-e-s, y-o-u a-r-e m-z m-x m-y h-e-r-o. A-u-n-t B-e-r-t-h-a w-a-n-t-s t-o s-e-e y-o-u. G-r-a-c-e," came the message.

"H-m," commented Tom, flushing as his chum chuckled audibly. "Up to tricks, are you? What are you laughing at?"

"Why," smiled Ben seriously, "I was just thinking what a whole lot the Morgan family think of you, Tom!"

It took two full weeks for Rockley Cove and its vicinity to get over the courageous exploit of Tom Barnes in saving the passengers and crew of the *Olivia*.

Bill Barber shared in the general commendation. He appeared on the streets of the village, chipper, ambitious and well dressed, with the great desire of his life, a full-blooded bulldog, at his heels.

He boasted proudly that he had given Bert Aldrich a receipt in full for the eleven dollars and seventy-five cents, in lieu of the use of the *Beulah* the night of the big storm.

"I told him I could loan him a few dollars if he was so hard up he couldn't get along," chuckled Bill, jingling some coins in his pocket.

The steamship company sent a substantial reward to both Tom and Bill, and offered the latter a good position on their line, which he accepted promptly.

Bert Aldrich sneaked away from Rockley Cove with his crack launch, without being even permitted to say good-by to Grace; and Mart Walters remained in the back of the books of that offended little lady for a long time to come.

Tom became a regular visitor at the Morgan home. His ability as a wireless operator had attracted the attention of headquarters, where he was offered a good position.

Even his parents were willing that he should accept it, and for two years Tom worked his way up to an inspectorship, taking a technical evening course in a college at New York City.

A new expert operator was put in charge at Station Z, but Ben was still retained as a helper. Ernest and old Blennerhassett settled down at Rockley Cove, and after a year at school the old Harry Ashley got an appointment as a regular man at the tower. Blennerhassett gradually worked out of his foolish fears of foreign enemies.

Both Ben and Ernest were fascinated with the wireless business, and the frequent visits of Tom along the circuit encouraged them.

Tom spent nearly half his time at Rockley Cove. He was a regular visitor at the Morgan home. One morning Ben came into the tower with a happy smile on his face. He went at once to the instrument and called headquarters.

"Why so cheerful, Ben?" inquired Ernest.

"Message."

"Yes, I know, but what is its purport?"

"Mr. Morgan wishes me to send a society announcement to the New York press."

"Indeed?"

"Exactly—the engagement of our sweet little friend, Grace, to our old time chum, Tom Barnes, the young wireless operator of Rockley Cove."

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